



Book Review

Updating the early years from a United Kingdom perspective (Review of the book *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, by G. Pugh & B. Duffy)

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Contemporary Issues in the Early Years, co-edited by Gillian Pugh and Bernadette Duffy, has been written by highly acclaimed authors, with all contributors nationally or internationally involved in research and known for their contribution to the Early Years. This generalist early childhood textbook is very accessible, having been recently updated for the sixth time. First published in 1982, and last published four years ago, this particular edition captures the challenges facing the United Kingdom in light of the current economic climate.

The book comprises 16 chapters and is divided into three parts. Set out with the student in mind, this textbook provides a summary of key points at the end of each chapter, plus discussion points and reflective tasks. The inclusion of further reading references and useful web links, as well as specific web resources to accompany this edition are very helpful. In the introduction section we are told by the editors that the book “seeks to reflect the achievements and progress that has been made in the early years but also the changes and challenges that a deep economic depression and a new government with its own priorities have brought” (p. xix).

Part One focuses on Early Years policy provision in the United Kingdom. In this section are five chapters that focus on policy and research, giving us an overview of economic changes and the implications for early childhood education in the United Kingdom. Although well written and accessible, it is targeted at a very specific market and as such is of limited use for the New Zealand early childhood sector.

The one exception in this section is chapter three, in which Powell and Gooch present a series of international snapshots that set out to explore the ECEC international provision in the policy and practice area. They raise some universal questions for the reader to consider. Comparisons are made across a range of different continents – e.g., Asia - China, Europe, Pacific (NZ, Australia). The literature presented is heavily weighted towards the views of governments and agencies, such as UNICEF and the OECD. Whilst there is some merit in this approach, in-depth or case studies of the countries mentioned would have resulted in a more insightful and authentic point of comparison for the reader. Finally, in this section is a chapter on the elusive concept of ‘quality’ – once again critiqued, but in this case in respect to OFSTED within the United Kingdom.

Eight of the next nine chapters in Part Two are based in the United Kingdom and relate practice to the implementation of its policies. Specific focus is on the Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and includes recent developments in EYFS assessment, the specific impact of policy challenges,



health services, diversity and inclusion, as well the key role of parents within ECE.

A new chapter in this edition has been included in this section. Ward and Brown, write about safeguarding children in the early years, child abuse, neglect and early intervention. With children under one being cited as nearly three times as likely to be identified as suffering from physical harm or maltreatment as older children, the rationale for this chapter focuses on the role of Early Years' practitioners to detect and safeguard young children. In this way it is proposed they can assist the work of existing social services offered for these children through early intervention. The chapter has international relevance by including an excellent up to date precis on the latest research on the impact of abuse and neglect during children's development. However, once again any attempt to discuss preventative measures at the practitioner level, falls short due to its strong alignment with the *Uk Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. This seriously limits its applicability for those outside of the United Kingdom.

Finally, Part Three relates to workplace issues – the conundrum of government pressure to increase qualifications within the sector, whilst simultaneously reducing the funding for training by the Local Authorities within the United Kingdom. Overall, this book is clearly a relevant up to date book for early childhood practitioners working within a United Kingdom context, but adds little for those working within a New Zealand environment.

References

Pugh, G., & Duffy, B. (2013). *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years* (6th ed.). London, EC: Sage Publications.