



## Book Review

### **Early childhood education and care: An introduction by Sheila Nutkins, Catriona McDonald and Mary Stephen**

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As the title suggests, this book is an introduction to the care and education of young children, set in an English context. In four parts it covers a number of topics, all very relevant to the New Zealand context, from conception and the developing foetus to creative approaches to teaching and learning. Strongly supported by research, the book is clearly organised, highlighting key ideas, providing reflective activities, case studies, and useful websites, and suggesting further readings. Each topic has an introduction which gives an overview of the contents of the chapters featured within that topic. The chapters are designed to promote learning in clearly identified areas with clear links to the recent supporting research.

Part one is informed by the authors' strongly held belief that the early years of life are crucial and influence the rest of an individual's life, especially the first three years. This philosophical underpinning is evident in the five chapters within this section. The first chapter considers some of the more recent research of how the child develops and the importance of very early learning outcomes. Cognitive development supported by MRI scans, and the strong links to language acquisition in particular, is considered in terms of possible impact on practice and the provision of education and care for very young children. The importance of play from birth to five and how play-based learning or active learning could be extended beyond preschool is discussed, including outdoor play, which links to the New Zealand environment quite closely. The links to developing risk awareness and management strategies including risk aversion on children's experiences and learning are discussed in relation to recent evidence. Chapter four investigates creativity and draws on evidence from case studies examining the Kodály method of music education and how it promotes quality interactions between professionals, parents and children. Chapter five features 'transient' art projects (play dough, finger paint, etc.) and looks at the importance of nurturing creativity from birth.

Part two puts the child in their lived context throughout the next five chapters focusing on children's 'lived lives' in the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This socio-cultural approach identifies factors that early childhood educators should be aware of impacting on children's health, well-being, development and learning. The changes in family structures from the traditional views of the 1950s to the current role of women in society underpin the initial discussion in relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The discussion then moves on to considering the impact of the parental role, considering the influences of workplace, media and the values and attitudes that are modelled through parental values and experiences. The critical links between early childhood experiences in education and parental partnerships, including the role of the community, are extensively examined. Then, the discussion moves on to reflect on how IT is having an impact on learning and development and incorporating IT



into the changing needs of children, their learning dispositions and the nature of the curriculum.

Part three then shifts to look at international educational approaches including New Zealand's *Te Whāriki*, with a chapter devoted to each of five approaches. A model from Sweden is compared with UK practices considering such things as qualifications of staff, curriculum goals and timetables. Another chapter examines what can be learned from the Reggio Emilia approach and how it has been adopted into other countries and the United States in particular, where the child is viewed as competent and the involvement of parents is viewed as part of the "pedagogy of relationships" with the environment seen as "third teacher". The next chapter examines the introduction of *Te Whāriki* into the New Zealand early childhood environment with the discussion on the implementation of *Te Whāriki* concluding that there is the potential to provide answers for others working in culturally diverse settings. The subsequent chapter focuses on the experiences following a project's implementation in the 1960s in Michigan, USA, involving the development of a play-based approach to early childhood education. This longitudinal study examines long term educational attainment, employment and stable relationships in adulthood. It provides some specific practices that practitioners may like to explore and adapt in their own setting. The final chapter in part three looks at the work of Ferre Laevers as an educational approach from Europe and Belgium preschools' viewpoint. There is a particular focus on the emotional well-being of children and the model which emerged from an action research project undertaken by 12 Belgian preschool teachers reflecting critically on their practice. There are parallels being drawn between these differing models of curriculum, pedagogy and practice that can be accessed and adapted for any cultural context.

The fourth part and final five chapters of this book are dedicated to professionalism and continuing professional development within the early childhood sector. There is a complex debate drawing on research from Sweden, England and Scotland about early years professionalism in the first chapter. The next two chapters consider 'inter-professional practice' and 'the practising professional as a researcher'. The first of the two chapters considers reconceptualising the traditional construct of a practising professional, while the next considers using practitioner or action research as the next step on from reflective practice to make change. Working in a team, teamwork, team building and leadership are the topics next considered with professional autonomy rounds out the final chapter.

The wide ranging topics featured in this book are quite accessible and would lead a student or practitioner through a well thought through sequence of study. The chapters are cohesive and are well informed, supported by a very comprehensive array of research studies undertaken by researchers from a number of countries. Suggestions for further reading on each topic are made, with useful websites also being recommended. Although set in an English context the topics chosen are very relevant to current discussions within the New Zealand experience.



### **References**

- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa / Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Nutkins, S., McDonald, C., & Stephen, M. (2013). *Early childhood education and care: An introduction*. London: Sage Publications, Ltd.