

Miller, L. and Cameron C. (2014) *International Perspectives in the Early Years* (eds). Pp 192 (Pbk). London: SAGE 2014 ISBN 978-1-4462-5537-7

International Perspectives in the Early Years is the 4th book in the *Critical Issues in the Early Years* series, of whom Linda Miller is the series editor. This series of books reflects the growing priority given to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) by recent governments (both national and international) and aims to bring a critical perspective to this topic. The series is aimed at practitioners at various stages of their professional development and is suitable for both undergraduate and postgraduate study.

This book seeks to explore how ECEC is understood in Europe and beyond and to “shine a light” (p1) on practice in the UK. The book is mindful of the impact of the recent economic crisis on ECEC services and looks to consider ways in which service delivery can be improved.

After the introductory chapter, the book is divided into two parts, each containing five chapters by different authors. The chapters have a standard layout including an overview, final thoughts, a bullet-pointed summary, discussion questions and advice for further reading.

Part 1 is entitled “Care, Education and Notions of Intervention”: Chapters 2 & 3 explore overarching issues across different countries such as whether provision is private or public; how it is housed in Government Departments of Education and/or Social Care; and the relationship between Early Childhood provision and Primary Education. There is a particularly good discussion of the pros and cons of pre-schools focussing on getting children to be ‘school ready’ by providing lots of teacher-led activities focussing on (and testing) literacy and numeracy. This theme is returned to later in the book and it is shown how international comparisons such as the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment are leading even the Scandinavian countries to adopt a more standards-driven approach rather than the traditional holistic approaches to ECEC taken in these countries. Chapters 4, 5 & 6 look at specific cases of ECEC provision in Italy, France and the Roma population in central Europe. This part of the book works well and there is an effective integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

Part 2 is entitled “Children’s Spaces”: space here refers not only to physical space but also to cultural and familial spaces. This part of the book focusses on what happens both inside and outside ECEC settings and investigates children’s understanding of place and community. Chapters 7 to 10 all contain theoretical points relating to children’s physical, social and cultural environments and also give specific cases of how EC workers have sought to improve their practice: Chapter 7 describes how migrant children in Mexico were supported in their belonging and

participation in their community; Chapter 8 looks at schemes in Norway and Scotland that integrate ECEC into local community social and economic activity; Chapter 9 compares the use of outdoor space in nurseries in England, Hungary and Denmark and Chapter 10 compares the culture of play in several countries. The case studies in this part of the book offer some fascinating insights into practice in other countries and will make practitioners reflect on their own values and practices. Hopefully policy makers will read these chapters and also pause and reflect.

As expected by such a diverse book, different readers will be more interested in certain chapters than others. All of the chapters have something to offer and give insight into important issues such as including marginalised groups, recruiting more male workers and integrating ECEC into the community. The book is clearly written throughout and the chapters are placed in a logical order.

This book is not particularly suitable as an introductory guide to this subject area. It is not intended as a standard introductory textbook and does not cover the basics of this area such as the ideas behind Reggio Emilia, Te Whariki and Head Start. Rather, the book's chapters are more of a collection of writings and offer some specific cases of original research in this area. The book is suitable for somebody wanting to move beyond a basic understanding of the issues in this topic area.

The book has a largely European focus and uses very few examples from Asia, Africa or South America. Further chapters could give the book a more global focus, for example an investigation into the Chilean childcare reforms of the Bachelet administration or the current challenges for ECEC in Japan.

In conclusion, I would recommend *International Perspectives in the Early Years* to those studying and working in this area. The writers' passion for the welfare of children is obvious and the book goes beyond that which would be provided by an introductory textbook. The book is thought provoking and would be particularly useful to those looking for research ideas of their own.

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