
***A Critical Companion to Early Childhood* by Michael Reed and Rosie Walker. Pp327 (Pbk). London: Sage Publications (2015). ISBN 13:978-2-4462-5927-6**

'A Critical Companion to Early Childhood' is an edited book by Michael Reed and Rosie Walker. The book effectively focuses on quality as an ongoing process in the early years. The sections of the book are divided into areas that include developing critical reflection, the developing child, taking a holistic view, policy and practice and professional roles and responsibilities. Chapters have been written by a range of international and noted authors that discuss either their own professional practice, the practice of others, and/or research and theory that has been carried out in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The book has been designed to support undergraduate students and practitioners as a training companion. The contributors write to the reader throughout offering them not only important information for their studies or developing profession practice, but also providing moments of critical reflection. The approach to critical reflection means that the reader is actively encouraged to use the book's content to develop reflective critical awareness. Undergraduate students particularly would be challenged by reading the book as they critically consider the quality services for children in relation to their personal professional values and beliefs, their own developing professional practice and the views of others. Along with the use of case studies and recommended reading, the book also extends its aim of being a training companion as it is supported by a companion website. The website includes printable handouts of critical learning activities from the book, podcasts from the contributors, links to additional resources and power point slides for each chapter that can be used by students, practitioners and tutors.

The first section of the book is targeted at supporting undergraduate students to be aware of critical reflection in their practice. Chapter one for instance by Reed, Tyler and Walker provides a framework specifically for undergraduate students to support their critical reflections whilst reading the book and during their studies. It is likely that practitioners will opt to read specific chapters that are relevant to their developing practice. For instance, chapters in section two encourage the reader to explore their developing professional identities by detailing differing perspectives and philosophies and critically reflecting on this theory in practice. Chapters in this section include considering theoretical knowledge about the importance of play and creativity and how this relates to the child's own experiences and development in ECEC practice (Brett, Chapter 9). Moreover, the book in its fifth and final section considers the acquisition and construction of knowledge developed by today's practitioner, and the role and responsibility for professional practice. Chapters in this

section include Chapter 25 written by Solvason who details the impact that can be made from action based research in practice.

Whilst practitioners may decide to focus on specific chapters, the chapters have not been designed to stand alone: links have been made to show readers how they inter-relate. These links are particularly relevant for undergraduate students. There are chapters that complement and extend from previous chapters and should therefore be considered by students in relation to one another. An example is Hanson and Appleby's chapter that focuses on reflective practice (Chapter two), advocating readers to be 'reflective activists'. This is wholly relevant to Callan's chapter on the concept of the 'ethical practitioner' (Chapter 3) because readers are encouraged to critically question existing assumptions and values to ensure a rights-based approach to practice. Equally Gasper (Chapter 21) and Nicholas (Chapter 22) ask readers to consider their practice today, identifying characteristics of what it is to be a modern professional and encouraging reflection on multi-agency working and current roles and responsibilities within settings.

The book includes focus on UK practice, national and international perspectives. On UK practice, Chapter 4 by Worsley and Lamond considers the need for critical thinking to be used in readers' studies and practice, noting research on undergraduate students' perspectives. Chapter 16 by Carey-Jenkins also reflects on the design and delivery of the UK curriculum from alternative perspectives. On national and international perspectives, Musgrave in Chapter 8 considers her professional experience as a nurse and teacher in the UK to encourage the reader to examine their roles in promoting children's health and wellbeing by reflecting on national and international theory. Some chapters specifically consider international perspectives: Benson McMullen in Chapter 6 on US early-years practice and Hesterman in Chapter 20 on the early year's framework in Australia. It is in the consideration of these chapters collectively that undergraduate students will be able to critically reflect on their own practice as well as the practice of differing national and international perspectives.

Overall, the book has two main strengths: its intended focus as a training companion will support undergraduate students' critical reflection and its content will support students developing understanding of the early years and how it relates to practice. Students can use their developing critical reflection skills when considering this content. These strengths support the use of this book as a recommended read for early-years undergraduate students to use throughout their studies to support their studies and practice.

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