

Early Childhood Education, Care, and Development: Perspectives from around the Globe

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Abstract

Early childhood education, care, and development (ECECD) has reached prominence due to its recognition by the global community as an important national investment and right for children. ECECD programs advocate for quality in education, protection, health, and nutrition for children and families, in most countries and nation-states. Global seekers of quality programs and practices recognize variability in how quality is defined, developed, delivered, and assessed; as well as recognizing each nations' unique focus on culturally relevant aspects of programs and practices for specific contexts. Research indicates that well-designed ECECD programs of high quality contribute to children's holistic development and sense of well-being, educational attainment, workforce productivity, international collaborations, sustainability of peace-building initiatives, and improved economies in the long run. Eleven diverse articles are presented in this themed journal as a contribution to the rich, on-going conversations about the importance of global ECECD programs and practices.

Introduction

Early childhood education, care, and development (ECECD) has reached global prominence as seen in the United Nations' facilitated "Global Conversation" and by the actions of many international organizations (UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2004; UNDP, 2014). Education has been identified as "the single best investment countries can make towards building prosperous, healthy and equitable societies" (UNDG, 2013, p. 18). Interest in quality ECECD programs and practices is shared globally by stakeholders, including governmental leaders, policy makers, researchers, academics, educators, community members, family members, and children. There is a global call for access, equity, quality, and sustainability (Arndt

et al., 2016; UNDP, 2014), child rights (Bennett et al., 2016; Georgeson & Payler, 2013; Reardon, 2014), the need for glocal curriculum development (Mbugua, 2013; Trube & Yan, 2018), and strong educator and caregiver preparation (Campbell-Barr & Bogatić, 2017; Wortham, 2013).

Context

The early childhood years span the period of a child's life from conception to age eight (NAEYC, n. d.; Trawick-Smith, 2018) that the United Nations International Children's Emergency

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Fund (n.d.) identifies as "the most and rapid period of development in a human life," which is a critical time "to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children" (p. 1). The essential stages of early development take place during this critical time. Global early childhood development encourages children's "physical well-being, their cognitive and linguistic capacities, and their social and emotional development" (Global Partnership for Education, 2014, p. 21). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), any global ECEC program leading to a favorable environment, which contributes to children's optimal growth and development, is considered important. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (n.d.) suggests the most beneficial programs for young children include education, protection, health, and nutrition. Differences in programs and practices for young children vary greatly among countries and nations, mostly due to the official ages children enter preprimary and primary education.

Research suggests that positive developmental outcomes are realized by young children in ECECD programs deemed to be of high quality; however, there is considerable variation in how quality is defined, developed, delivered and assessed. Variations of quality are found when observing and reviewing indicators of quality such as indoor and outdoor learning environments; curriculum content; learning and teaching interactions that produce positive outcomes for young children; and access to education and other services for all children and their families (Association of Childhood Education International, n.d.; Trube, 2016).

In our increasingly interconnected and interdependent global community, studying ECECD programs and practices becomes vitally important since all children deserve a quality education that essentially empowers them to

thrive. Research suggests that there has been a global endeavor to prioritize ECECD programs with many governments investing in these programs in recognition of their potential to contribute to human capital accumulation that has a positive impact on economies (Naudeau et al., 2011; UNICEF, 2013). According to Heckman and Masterov (2006) this distinctive return on investment perspective by governments lays the foundation for early learning experiences that greatly influence later earning potentials of stakeholders. However, with the accelerating pace of change, necessitated by technology, increased migration, and geographic, cultural and contextual differences, educators and stakeholders are faced with new challenges and opportunities of studying ECECD in a diverse world (Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2014; Mbugua, 2015; Trawick-Smith, 2018). In effect, the need to perceive, understand, and act on emerging trends with regards to ECECD programs and practices creates added complexities that can strain capacities (RTI International, 2018); and, at the same time, also presents opportunities for positive change to occur.

Concomitant with the increasing diversity of our world is civil strife, violence and wars especially in fragile contexts within and between countries. In response, an emerging theme in ECECD is peace-building as a necessary prerequisite to the overall well-being of children, and peaceable co-existence while fostering global citizenship (Global Education First Initiative, n.d.; Bennett et al., 2016). Starting peace-building education during the early years is critical to promoting the skills that enable children to become agents of change in building peace in their own societies. Studies show evidence of the synergistic effects of integrating peace education in early childhood education curriculum which engenders an ethical core of peace education (Reardon, 2014). The evidence

includes a positive impact on children's social and emotional development, and reduction of behavioral problems later in life. Further evidence indicates that well-designed ECECD programs can lead to children developing and maintaining an openness to difference (NAEYC, n.d.). This openness is demonstrated by children showing a willingness to play with others including those different from themselves (UNICEF, 2018). The cognitive and social-emotional development skills that are fostered in the early years of life provide a dynamic interplay of cognition and character, two sets of personal skills necessary for thriving the 21st century. ECECD programs and practices offer mechanisms for optimum development of children and efforts toward sustained peace.

Exploration of ECECD Programs and Practices

Before readers turn to the articles themselves, they may find it helpful to consider a brief editor-eye view of what each article contributes. This synoptic perspective of the GER volume 5, number 2 as a whole presents themes and variations across the two inter-related domains of programs and practices. As readers will see, diverse perspectives are offered in the articles from a variety of vantage points. The overarching aim of this journal issue is to represent global ECECD as a diverse set of related programs and practices that reflect the character and missions of nations and recognize issues and challenges inherent in many programs.

Inter-relatedness

It is well recognized by the global community that ECECD builds human capacity and capital. The ability to sustain effective and quality programs is a strong subtheme. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), indicate

the importance of young children's abilities to meet developmental milestones and be involved in organized learning at the preschool level (SDG, Indicator 4.2.1).

Quality and sustainability

Navarro-Cruz and Luschei focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) to look at quality programming for children with disabilities, child health and wellbeing, and language immersion. In discussing quality and positive outcomes for children, authors Shallwani, Abubakar, and Nyongesa conclude that commitment of community stakeholders is essential to creating sustainable high-quality programs for children. In addition, Petrová and Zápotočná look at preschool literacy education and curricular reforms that result in improved literacy curriculum.

School readiness

Gove, Dombrowski, King, Pressley, and Weatherholt, highlight the SDGs as integral to quality international ECECD programs that create opportunities for children to develop school readiness skills. Likewise, Piper, Merseeth, and Ngaruiya report on public and private centers designed to improve learners' school readiness skills. Moreover, Becker, Grist, Caudle, Watson, and Bargreen look at the positive impact of play on preparing children for kindergarten readiness.

Assessment

The need for assessment is woven through several articles. As an example, Tal highlights the importance of grouping arrangements in the classroom to planning, observations, and assessments. Likewise, Rentzou and Daglas reflect on the importance of assessment and teacher evaluations to integrated education and care programs.

Arrangements of Articles

The discussions of themes and variations shows the network of ideas explored in the articles that are included in this themed journal issue. Co-editors chose programs and practices as the basis for organizing articles into a meaningful sequence. Part 1 focuses on studies and discussions undergirding global ECECD programs. Part 2 focuses on studies and discussions elaborating on ECECD practices.

Part 1: Programs

Article 1, "Early Childhood Education, Care, and Development: Perspectives from around the Globe," provides a brief overview of the themed issue from co-editors Tata Mbugua and Mary Barbara Trube.

Article 2 begins with an overview of international early childhood best practices. In "International Evidence on Effective Early Childhood Care and Education Programs: A Review of Best Practices," authors Giselle E. Navarro-Cruz and Thomas Luschei review 68 sources published between the years of 1993 and 2017, in order to gain an in-depth view on international early childhood care and education (ECCE) practices. Authors focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) to look at issues related to funding, quality, and workforce, as well as specific programming for children with disabilities, child health and wellbeing, and language immersion issues.

Article 3 by Sadaf Shallwani, Amina Abubakar, and Moses Nyongesa reports findings from their study conducted in community-based childcare centers (CBCC) of Malawi, in "The Quality of Learning and Care at Community-Based Early Childhood Development Centers in Malawi." Researchers sought to identify challenges and opportunities leading to quality and positive outcomes for children by

conducting systematic observations, interviews, and surveys. The study found in many communities, it is the community stakeholders who demonstrate strong commitment to the goal of creating sustainable quality childcare programs for children.

Article 4, "Scaling Up Early Childhood Development and Education in a Devolved Setting: Policy Making, Resource Allocations, and Impacts of the Tayari School Readiness Program in Kenya," written by Benjamin Piper, Katherine A. Merseeth and Samuel K. Ngaruiya, presents a study of 7 out of 47 Kenyan' preprimary programs. Researchers investigated how county governments invest in cost-effective preprimary programs by providing materials, teacher training, and/or coaches in order to improve child outcomes. Piper, Merseeth and Ngaruiya report on the Tayari model, designed to improve learners' school readiness skills, which is followed in both public and private preprimary centers.

In Article 5, "Are We Ready for Integrated ECEC Systems? Greek In-service Early Childhood Educators' Level of Preparation for Implementing Educare Systems," Konstantina Rentzou and George Daglas reflect on the "Unified National Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care" initiative and contrasting views of practitioners. Their exploratory study sought to identify teachers' attitudes toward training to implement integrated education and care programs.

Part 2: Practices

Article 6 presents findings from a study by Amber Gove, Eileen Dombrowski, Simon J. King, Jennifer Pressley, and Tara Weatherholt, in "Persistence and Fadeout of Preschool Participation effects on Early Reading Skills in Low- and Middle-income Countries." Authors look at reading outcomes for children in sixteen low-and middle-income countries that include

Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Authors highlight the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as integral to focusing on children's school readiness. Their study offers important findings for practitioners and policy makers.

In Article 7, Derek R. Becker, Cathy L. Grist, Lori A. Caudle, Myra K. Watson, and Kaitlin Bargreen look at the impact of play in preparing children for kindergarten. In their article, "Complex Physical Activities, Outdoor Play, and School Readiness among Preschoolers," authors focus on the benefits of outdoor play and complex physical activities that children engaged in during their non-preschool hours. The Preschool Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale was used in the study, which also included parent interviews about the extent and frequency of their child's play-based activities. Findings support the importance of play in developing school readiness skills.

Article 8 provides insights into effective grouping practices in "The Challenge of Implementing Small Group Work in Early Childhood Education." Author Clodie Tal focuses on research identifying the processes of implementing small group work in early childhood classrooms to support children's wellbeing and learning by both inservice and preservice teachers in Israel. Findings support the importance of planning, observations, and documentation.

In Article 9, authors Zuzana Petrová and Oľga Zápotočná take a historical look at the development of preschool literacy education in Slovakia in, "Early Literacy Education in Ongoing Reforms of Preschool Curriculum: The Case of Post-communist Slovakia." Petrová and Zápotočná describe curricular reforms resulting in a new preschool literacy curriculum that is now part of Slovakia's national preschool

curriculum. Of interest is authors' descriptions of the processes followed for national adoption of the reading curriculum.

In Article 10, "Respect is an Investment': Community Perceptions of Social and Emotional Competencies in Early Childhood from Mtwara, Tanzania," author Matthew Jukes reports on a study conducted to more deeply understand teachers' and parents' perspectives about the importance of social-emotional competencies at the pre-primary levels. Findings from the Jukes' study have implications for teaching, learning, and assessing in preschool programs across Tanzania and beyond.

Article 11 presents "High-Stakes Accountability Systems: Creating Cultures of Fear." Shelly Lynn Counsell reviewed Florida's A+ Accountability System in the USA. Counsell's study results suggests implications for teaching and learning outcomes for stakeholders in low to high socio-economic public schools in light of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Comparisons of perceptions held by prekindergarten and third grade teachers and a guidance counselor regarding assessment practices, were shared. Counsell hopes that insights gained from the manuscript informs states as accountability systems are devised, with the aim of ensuring social justice for all learners in receiving an excellent education.

In Article 12, "What about Elementary Level Teachers: A Closer Look at the Intersection between Standardization and Multilingualism," Ignacio Barrenechea investigates tensions faced by teachers educating multilingual students and, at the same time, complying with standards and assessments in Florida, USA. The author's goal is to reveal teachers' experiences in order to inform decision-making practices regarding standardized testing policies in multilingual settings. Barrenechea advocates for

representation of students' cultural backgrounds in all educational processes.

Concluding Thoughts

ECECD programs vary among and within continents, nation-states, and places within a country. This themed issue of the *Global Education Review* focuses on variations among programs and practices in a limited number of regions across the globe. This issue is not intended to be exhaustive, however, the intention is to provide readers with perspectives expressed by authors of programs and practices found throughout the world in order to contribute to the on-going conversation about global ECECD.

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