

Book Review

Early Childhoods in a Changing World.

Margaret M. Clark and Stanley T. Tucker

Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books (2010) pp. 186 Pbk. £20.99

ISBN 9781858564739

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As early childhood education and care professionals (ECEC) we can become all too wrapped up in our own practice and procedures and this book offers an excellent insight into the challenges facing young children on a daily basis across the world. Consideration of issues of poverty, war, multiple transitions and health illustrate that we may have either forgotten, or put to the back of our minds, the experiences and the challenges for children in other countries. In this book each chapter offers an insight into issues in a particular country, considering geographical factors, policy issues and the impact of government or parental attitude. A unifying theme is that education and care in all countries is linked to policy and the book highlights the way in which varying cultures deal with this.

Clark and Tucker have edited contributions from a range of authors, each writing about their own country. They offer the reader an insight into many different countries from the extremes of Iceland, Africa and Australia, whilst also expanding our existing knowledge to of issues within European countries. The diverse voices add particular weight to the publication. A potted history of the country is given and key geographical and policy issues are reviewed. Several sections focus on policy, but it is the case studies that fully engage the reader and allow them to empathise with the participants in the individual studies. They demonstrate that children still want to be children despite the challenges they face. At times they believe their childhood has been eroded due to being forced to undertake adult roles prematurely. For example, in Africa children frequently care for parents afflicted by AIDS, even though they themselves may also be HIV positive. Cultural differences create other issues which impact on ECEC professionals. For instance where families immigrate to a new country parents may experience difficulties assimilating and continue practices, such as corporal punishment, from their home country.

The case studies illustrate a north/south divide in attitudes to the importance of children's voice; this was particularly evident in the chapters associated with the Scandinavian countries where the 'Rights of the Child' were adhered to closely. However, a range of countries were exposed as not meeting the basic requirements regarding this UNICEF policy but were striving to support early education and considering early intervention initiatives to enhance children's experiences. Throughout the cases studies the importance of family, especially the extended family, comes through loud and clear. Across a range of cultures, grandparents, aunts and siblings undertake the parental role when parents are either ill, pass away, have a particular moral stance or choose to disown their children.

The excellent and informative text considers the full spectrum from underdeveloped and developing to highly developed countries and presents an insight into children's experiences that allows the reader to reflect on the challenges that need to be addressed at home. It is well structured and designed. Each section is clearly signposted and offers the reader the opportunity to consider pertinent points before reading further. At the completion of each section the reader is asked to engage with the chapter in relation to their own environment linked to practice, or policy. In this way readers can draw from the content to create supportive learning environments in other contexts. This book would support education and sociology undergraduate and post-graduate students.