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GUEST EDITORIAL



Lessons and legacies of early childhood history

The topic of this special issue of *Early Years* is the history of early childhood education and care. The current attention to ECEC programmes and policies worldwide makes it imperative to understand developments in the past. This special issue adds to the burgeoning literature on ECEC history in recent years to present new work by scholars conducting research in diverse international contexts. It has been more than a decade since a history of education journal focused on early childhood education for the first time. The special issue of *History of Education* in 2006 was a significantly Froebelian history, given that it arose from the papers of the first International Froebel Society conference. In his editorial to the issue, Kevin Brehony (1948–2013), Froebel professor of early childhood studies at Roehampton University, remarked on the ‘relative neglect’ (Brehony 2006, 167) of history in the area over a period of 50 years, coinciding with a heightened social and political interest in educating the young child. The idea for this issue originated during a conversation between Helen May and Pamela Oberhuemer over a long lunch in London in 2015, noting burgeoning publications on early childhood policy and pedagogy, but regretting that less attention was given to the historical origins and analysis underpinning pedagogy and policy issues. This is the first time that an early childhood education journal has had a special history edition, signalling that interest in the value of historical interrogation and investigation of the institutions and people engaged with ECE is being increasingly recognised (cf., Allen 2017; May and Bethell 2017; May, Nawrotzki, and Prochner 2017; Whitehead 2016). The papers in this edition demonstrate that there is value in the stories themselves, but also that the legacies and lessons of history have value for policy and practice today and in future planning.

With reference to cross-national research, Peter Moss (2001) reminded us of the significance of the historical view:

The cross-national researcher is partial and is involved in a meaning making process, using his or her favoured collection of theories and perspectives. We also need to consider what disciplinary perspectives are *not* being brought to the work and what the consequences might be. For example, what might a historian see? (10, 11)

The special issue was planned to take a wide frame regarding early years history in terms of its perspectives, geography and its scope, to include contributions ‘beyond kindergarten’ and the main ECE country players. The aim was to open up the question of what ECE history is. What is the role and place of history in current policy and pedagogical discourses? What are the interconnections between ECE history and other institutional or policy histories? The collection is, of course, selective; it is not, for example, inclusive of indigenous histories of early childhood institutions. However, while these histories are less researched and recorded than those of what might be called mainstream preschool institutions, there is growing scholarly enquiry into their particular historical trajectory (cf., May, Kaur, and Prochner 2014).

The first two papers are recent histories of research and policy in ECE. The first, by Elly Singer and Sandie Wong, used an oral history methodology to understand theory/practice connections in early childhood education research. Singer and Wong’s comparative and international study highlights the contribution of researchers’ collaborative work with teachers on conceptions of theory and practice. The paper is drawn from a larger project looking at a key era of advocacy and growth in ECE internationally. The second article, by Helen Logan, also looks at recent decades of ECE policy expansion and governmental interests, but it shifts the focus to policy rather than

pedagogy, turning directly to policy makers for insights on understandings of ECEC quality in Australian ECEC policy using a post-structural lens. The research uses interview data as the basis for its analysis, which Logan identifies as a 'history of the present'.

The next three articles are by experienced historians in ECE with a presence in the education history community. Each of the articles stands on its own but is part of each author's ongoing investigations using rich and rare archival sources and resources. Jane Read's paper explores the introduction of kindergarten pedagogy by Froebelian teachers in India and South Africa, one hundred years apart. Using a Gramscian framework, Read considers the relationship between kindergarten pedagogy and local approaches to teaching and learning in each of the cases, and the approaches used to negotiating the inevitable tensions. Next is Kerry Bethell's paper, which considers the experience of New Zealand kindergarten teachers travelling abroad for study in the 1930s. Bethell's use of new sources enables her to focus on the experience of the travelling teachers, during and after their study leave, and its lasting contribution to professional networks in New Zealand. In the last paper in this section, Kay Whitehead explores teachers' careers and professional networks in a South Australian context. Whitehead concludes that the female teachers' leadership, while seldom acknowledged, was essential for the success of progressive education in infant departments.

The next two papers are historical studies of ECEC in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Although they differ in terms of their time period and focus, they present understandings of childhood and ECE that were lost from Western scholarly communities' accounts of the post-war growth of ECE. The papers represent historical eras that not only follow each other but are shaped or contained by cataclysmic events and ideologies. Katarzyna Gawlicz and Marcin Starnawski use institutional case studies to examine the development of progressive and experimental pedagogies in Poland in the context of state-centred education between the wars. Marek Tesar uses a childhood studies perspective to focus on Communist-era Czechoslovakia, illustrating the power and purposes of political ideology which indeed has shaped all EC institutions.

The final paper in the special edition, by Diane Boyd, identifies the precedents of current conceptions of education for sustainability in the historical ideas of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner. Boyd finds lessons for current educators, curriculum-writers and policy-makers to consider, including the emphasis of Montessori and Steiner on rights-based education and spirituality as essential aspects of sustainable education. Boyd's paper draws the focus towards legacies of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historic post-Froebelian influences and current concerns around ECE pedagogy, involving looking again at the past to consider implications for the future.

Together, this edition's eight articles illustrate the potential of early childhood history for shedding light on lessons and highlighting important legacies of the policies and practices of the past. We are pleased to note that further papers with a historical focus will be included in another issue of *Early Years* to be published later in 2018. These papers, by scholars documenting or framing country-wide histories of ECEC for the first time, will address what we are calling 'new histories'. In most of these settings ECEC services are recent and the historical stories intersect with policy.

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