

International research for the betterment of children worldwide.

Early Childhood Education: International Research Report (2015). Editor: Dr. László Varga University of West Hungary, Benedek Elek Faculty of Pedagogy, Sopron, Hungary

The book “*Early Childhood Education: International Research Report*” edited by László Varga is a unique and successful demonstration of global efforts for the betterment of children worldwide. This joint research initiative brought researchers and practitioners from the field of early childhood together to explore the context and culture of childhood as perceived by children, and current and future educators. In sixteen chapters, authors from eight countries across three continents – Europe, Asia and America – investigated diverse aspects of childhood and child development, such as children stories, play, project approach and traditional and non-traditional learning environments. The purposeful selection of countries and authors allows the reader to gain insights into early childhood trends and practices in diverse cultures. The studies conducted in various countries – Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Turkey, The United Kingdom, Thailand and the United States of America – target the local context of childhood; however the context-specific findings carry features of similarities

across cultures, and point to universal trends in childhood as well. For example, all chapters mirror the importance of quality early childhood care and education. This quality can be approached and achieved through empowering the future generation to participate in the global community (Ntuli–Nyarambi, 2015). The spirit of this international research collaboration which resulted in the publication of this outstanding book testify the importance global education. During the past decade, skills for becoming citizens of this interdependent and interconnected world have been target-goals for early childhood education worldwide (Bell, Jean-Sigur–Kim, 2015). When researchers and experts find international research as a meaningful platform for exchanging ideas and working in collaboration, the path to implementing global education in early childhood settings is well-paved.

This book serves as a much needed resource for early childhood teachers, teacher educators and parents for refining their understanding of the concept of

childhood and for acquiring research-based information on essential indicators of quality early childhood worldwide.

The chapter “*Children’s vision on the world in the mirror of children’s culture*” by László Varga and Réka Zsamboki Kissné reports on the views of parents, preschool teachers and preschool teacher candidates in terms of children’s culture and the participants’ preferred cultural activities. The examination of the participants’ perception about children favorite cultural activities, including the role of media technologies in cultural activities suggests the critical role of adults in creating a culture for children; however the authors also acknowledge the unique culture that children create and recreate through their activities.

Bacalja, Ivon and Gospic examined the relationship between classic and modern fairytales and children’s artistic expressions in the chapter “*A fairytale as an incentive of artistic creativity in children*”. The authors found that children aged 6–7 in Croatia expressed their preference in the old version of a tale by using a variety of colors and objects to depict their interpretation of the story. At the same time, the less familiar modern version of the tale generated less specific creative expressions. Based on these findings, the authors propose that children’s creativity is rooted in the culture

with which they are familiar and strongly connected.

In the chapter “*Pedagogic-didactic concept in bringing up and educating gifted children*”, Zrilic, Vukic and Jurcic advocate for appropriate identification and service for gifted and talented children. In addition to comprehensive policy overview of the gifted education in Croatia, they also point out the benefits of project approach, e.g. Reggio Emilia as an effective teaching approach for gifted children. They argue that only supportive learning environment can successfully contribute to the optimal development and learning of gifted children.

The research by Kisover-Ivanda and Nenadic-Bilan targets the relationship among children’s selection of objects and information in the museum, the degree of interest and satisfaction and the degree of pedagogical modelling of museum-related content in preschool. The unique feature of the study conducted in Croatia is its focus on a non-traditional learning context, the museum. The interviews and children’s drawings suggest that children who completed pre-activities before the museum visit had a more focused and targeted interest than children with no preparation. These findings might promote the use of museums as possible learning contexts for preschoolers.

In the chapter “*Social interaction among children in play activities*”, Mira Klarin examines the age and gender differences in social behavior in play among Croatian preschoolers. Children behavior in solitary passive play activities indicates no age differences; however gender difference was captured with more frequent participation of boys. Similar gender difference was recorded in rough play; though no age and gender difference was present in solitary active play. The author argues that an in-depth understanding of social interaction can promote children’s cognitive and social development.

The chapter “*Materials and spatial dimensions of the children’s projects in their explorations of surroundings*” by Nenadic–Bilan and Kisovar–Ivanda provides a detailed description of learning centers in preschools in Croatia. They argue that developmentally appropriate centers are essential contexts for learning; they also emphasize flexibility in center arrangement which ultimately should be driven by children’s interest and exploration.

Stlinska, Bercikova and Raskova discuss the changing concept of childhood and the role of educational system in child development in the Czech Republic. Their extensive historical overview explores how

the perception of childhood has influenced policies and practices throughout centuries. Interestingly, the current approach in early education – personality-based learning – has roots in Comenius’ philosophy in the early 1600; which demonstrates the continuity in the time of change.

In the chapter, “*Talking with children: Teacher’s use of interviews and group discussion in early education*” Liodaki, Kampeza and Karalis explore the role of talking in constructing new knowledge as perceived by early childhood educators in Greece. This qualitative investigation offers vital insights into topics, such as the challenges of group discussions, the individual interviews for assessment and the use of information gained in interviews and discussion for lesson planning. To mitigate the challenges, the authors propose changes in professional teacher preparation and development.

Sanchez, Martin Inglesias and Ibanez explore the different visual perspectives in young children learning in the context of their city in Spain. The authors argue that the city as a familiar and rich learning environment offers unlimited opportunities for children to investigate, and construct new knowledge in content areas, e.g. mathematics. In addition, they also describe future early childhood teachers’ sample projects on their city. The proposed

activities are accompanied by pictures to demonstrate how the urban and natural environments become avenues for innovative learning.

The chapter *“Early childhood education and care in Thailand today and the changing culture affecting young children’s vision about the world”* reports on the findings of a large scale observation and interview study. Chanbanchong and Boonying found an increase of bilingual and English speaking kindergarten programs, especially in the urban areas. In addition, a general dominance of western culture and new technology in early childhood programs across the country surfaced. In spite of this trend, teachers believe that Thai traditional toys, games and stories should be widely incorporated in children’s culture to achieve optimal synergy of modern western values and cultural elements and the traditional stories and values of Thailand.

Akdag and Cin examined the impact of teacher involvement in Kurdish speaking children’s free play in terms of the effectiveness of learning Turkish as a second language. Upon observing the lack of teacher engagement and scaffolding with children during free play, the authors promote an increase of rich teacher input for fostering children’s language development. It is especially important for children with lower socio-economic

background. Considering the increased number of refugees from Syria, the authors advocate for teacher education programs in Turkey in which teacher candidates develop competencies for working with linguistically diverse children.

The chapter *“The child’s vision on the world”* captures the concept of childhood from the children’s perspectives in the United Kingdom. The analysis of interviews with children aged 4–7 and their drawings uncovered the following topics that children consider important: family, friends, play, toys, books, school activities and nature. Beniston and Harris argue that an authentic understanding of children can be gained from children themselves, therefore they emphasize a paradigm shift in research – a transition from research about children toward research with children.

Noel and Lord examines educators’ perceptions about children’s general and content knowledge in light of domains of learning and development in the New York State standards document. In the chapter *“Perspectives on readiness: Opportunities for developing children’s conceptual knowledge”* the authors uncovered the differences between educators’ and administrations’ view on the importance of pre-literacy skills; teachers expressed that young children’s pre-literacy skills are more important than their general

knowledge. Though, Noel and Lord propose that general knowledge is an essential indicator for school readiness; therefore more emphasis should be placed on nurturing general knowledge of young children.

In the chapter “*Exploring play, peer relationships, and learning through the lenses and voices of children*” Russo examined various relationships that 4 and 5 year olds develop during play in the United States. The children’s voices in the study seem to advocate for the allocation of undisturbed play time in which teachers act as supportive facilitators with no major involvement. The author also emphasizes the attribute of joy in play that nurtures children’s imagination to create play episodes in which holistic growth is observed.

Szilagyi, Szecsi and Meehan examined teacher candidates’ views about play in the kindergarten classroom in the United States. The survey answers and picture interpretation indicate teacher candidates’

somewhat limited understanding of the role of play in a classroom for 5 year old, though they seem to recognize the importance of dramatic play and the social aspects of play. The authors note that in a political and educational context which seem to hinder play, teacher candidates need strong knowledge base and competencies along with support from administration in the implementation of developmentally appropriate play in kindergartens.

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