
Introduction

The articles in this special issue of *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* are based on an early childhood forum that took place at the University of Victoria, Canada in November 2007. The forum was one in a series that have been organized as part of the Investigating Quality (IQ) project, co-led by Drs Alan Pence and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria.

The IQ project grows out of a shared interest the two investigators have in applying critical theory, post-structural, postmodern, anti-colonial and related perspectives to early childhood practices, policies and research in the province of British Columbia, and more broadly. As noted by Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw in their article, Canada does not have a strong history of engagement with these ideas, but the province's and country's commitments to diversity, multiculturalism and social equity suggest such an engagement is both appropriate and timely.

Forums associated with the IQ project have allowed the opportunity to explore early childhood issues for diverse audiences and from a variety of perspectives, including indigenous early childhood care and education (see Rodriguez et al, 2007), implications of 'reconceptualist ideas' for practice in Canada (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006) and international development (Pence & Hix-Small, 2007).

The articles that constitute this special issue have implications for practices, policies and research in Canada – and far beyond. Each challenges key aspects of early childhood understandings as they have been constructed and projected through European/Western lenses. Drs Michael Niles and Lisa Byers, indigenous scholars from the United States, lead off the issue and question the degree to which the dominant or mainstream early years literature is capable of addressing questions that arise within indigenous communities given the absence of those communities in studies cited as 'pointing the way'. Dr Jenny Ritchie, based in Aotearoa/New Zealand and speaking from the context of a country that is much further advanced in recognizing the importance of indigenous perspectives in its early childhood curriculum, policies and research, looks closely at the challenges early childhood professionals face in attempting to realize such objectives at the program level. Dr Bame Nsamenang, from Cameroon, speaks from the perspective of childhoods in Africa and the degree to which 'African voices' and African experiences of childhood are actively discouraged at the international level. Children as active agents in their own development, and in concert with other children, are dismissed as constituting neglect and abuse despite centuries of practice and evidence of contextual efficacy. Dr Radhika Viruru also raises key questions regarding childhoods in different contexts, and how labor and childhood have been constructed differently in the West and in India. Dr Lourdes Diaz Soto provides a heartfelt reflection regarding violence against children in the contemporary world and children's ability to demonstrate compassion – becoming models for an 'adulterated' society. Drs Alan Pence and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw bring these diverse discussions back into the context of attempting to influence change in early childhood practices, policies and research in British Columbia and Canada, while Dr Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and doctoral student Ahna Berikoff, in the final article, take us into specific programs in British Columbia where we can 'hear' the words of young children wrestling with constructions of race, poverty and discrimination, and explore professional discourses regarding those words, which carry practitioners in very different directions.

The seven articles presented here grew out of three days of interaction, listening to and engaging with individuals from diverse parts of the world, but all sharing a commitment to issues of voice, representation and social equity. A shared concern was that children and childhoods are increasingly subjected to templates and acts of normalization and universalization that suppress diversity in the name of child well-being. These articles challenge many dominant understandings

of 'best practice' and good works – hearing in them echoes of colonization. While the positions taken in the articles are critical, their message is hopeful.

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References

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- Pence, A. & Hix-Small, H. (2007) Global Children in the Shadow of the Global Child, *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research and Practice*, 8(1), 83-100.
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- Rodriguez, C., Pence, A. & Greenwood, M. (Eds) (2007) Indigenous Approaches to Early Childhood Care and Education [special issue], *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 30(1).