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VOLUME 9

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Louise Boyle Swiniarski
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World Class Initiatives and Practices in Early Education

Moving Forward in a Global Age

 Springer

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Foreword

The landscape for early years and primary education has undergone a vast amount of change since Margaret McMillan, the founder of nursery school education, exasperated by the British state education practices of the early twentieth century, opined:

The state compels the children to work [in school]. It makes the demand for sustenance urgent, intolerable. But it does not compel parents to feed their children. Hence it is certain to some of these hungry little ones, free education is less of a boon than an outrage. Mansbridge (1932, pp. 41–42)

But what would McMillan find if she returned to early twenty-first century early years education? Certainly, she would be unlikely to walk into a classroom full of sleepy, infested, hungry children! However, she would find state education systems that are still immersed within cultures that are geared more to the perceived needs of government and state than to those of the developing child. When nations' education systems are compared, the focus on conditioning citizens to fit into a particular conception of society rather than providing a flexible learning environment for developing human beings is a particularly prevalent characteristic of the education systems within nations; this will become increasingly clear to the reader who reads through the chapters in this book.

The “global village” of the twenty-first century has created a situation that would be beyond McMillan's frame of reference, but which is becoming increasingly prevalent within early years settings worldwide as exemplified by the need to address multicultural aspects of education and care. Such exemplars are discussed in Part II of the book, *Curriculum Initiatives for Early Childhood Programs in a Global Age*, by Michelle Pierce in her chapter on dual language education in Chile, on gender education in science classrooms for primary children in Wales by Cleiti Cervoni, on early language development in Britain by Avril Brock, and early education innovative approaches in China by Yaoying Xu and Bin Liu. Within some nations, early years education may initially have to defend its very existence in a debate which encompasses “the polarizing positions for and against preschool education,” explored by Louise Swiniarski in the very first chapter of this book and discussed in

different frames throughout the chapters which follow Part I, *The Evolution of Universal Preschool Education in a Global Age*. But it is only when the case for early years education is finally accepted by national governments that the more intricate battle may subsequently emerge. This endeavor is clearly articulated by Pat Broadhead in her account of quite heated discussions between early years educators and politicians in England alongside Mary-Lou Breitborde's examination of new partnerships for early education as developed in the Readiness Centers of Massachusetts in Part III, *Beyond the Walls of the School and Center*.

The machine of governance, particularly in periods of austerity, is prone to operate on the basis that its tax money should be paying teachers and other early years practitioners to be "doing something," most particularly something that can be clearly demonstrated to immediately benefit the state. The chapters in this book highlight differences between nations rooted in the extent to which policy makers have listened to early years researchers, theorists, and educators and the emergent results. For example, a vast difference can be viewed between the Reggio Emilia program in Northern Italy, developed in the aftermath of World War II on a platform of education for freedom and democracy, and the English Early Years Foundation Stage, which emerged from a narrow set of government-sponsored initiatives undertaken since 1997 as noted in Chap. 1. This book therefore emerges onto the world stage at a highly opportune moment, to provide some "food for thought" to all cultures and nations.

In conclusion, although more than a century has passed since Margaret McMillan blazed her reforming trail through nursery education, twenty-first-century early educators could very easily update her plea to policy makers to provide an education based on what educators know about human development. Children are born not only willing to learn but programmed to actively seek out learning opportunities. The role of adults in this, as consciousness of "self" and meta-cognition begin to flower in young children, is to support children in their joyful explorations, giving their thoughts and imagination wings to fly, rather than firmly tying them to the economic and political agenda of the government of the day. This book contains so many useful ideas for readers from all nations engaged in this endeavor. As such, I am delighted to have this opportunity to heartily recommend it to the reader.

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Pamela Jarvis

Reference

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