Book review

**Early Childhood Grows Up: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession** by Linda Miller, Carmen Dalli and Mathias Urban (Eds.)

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The first part of this book is entitled, ‘Professionalism in Local and Cross-national Contexts: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession.’ This section gives readers a glimpse into early childhood education in Australia, England, Finland, New Zealand, Germany and Sweden. Subsequently each chapter begins with an overview/background of early childhood education in each country. This provides a useful context to the key political and/or historical events that have led to the development of early childhood education in each setting. In all the chapters, the author/s analyse a case study in an attempt to bring out aspects related to being a professional early childhood educator. For instance, in Chapter Two, Christine Woodrow highlights being an early childhood professional in Australia. Set in New South Wales, Christine analyses three themes that she ascribes to professionalism in early childhood education, namely; relationships, reflexivity and renewal. Relationships are an essential part of the NSW Curriculum Framework, aptly titled ‘The Practice of Relationships’, demonstrating how early childhood practitioners reflect and use policies and regulations in developing their professional practice. The subject of Woodrow’s study ascribes importance to this topic, extending it beyond interpersonal relationships to include aspects of the physical and temporal environment. Themes related to the reflection process are also highlighted, where the author considered reflexivity and renewal as important professional attributes.

In another chapter with the heading, ‘A Constant Juggle for Balance: A Day in the Life of a New Zealand Kindergarten Teacher’, Carmen Dalli has provides a detailed background of early childhood education in New Zealand. In her description of the New Zealand context, Dalli provides a brief but comprehensive account of a day in the life of a kindergarten. In her analysis, Dalli highlights four essential professional attributes of an early childhood educator. Firstly Dalli examines the seamless manner in which the lives of children and the early childhood educator are intertwined, reiterating Woodrow’s point of reciprocal relationships. Next, Dalli describes the importance of teamwork as a professional attribute. Thirdly she notes that being a “creative and agentic” (p. 97) curriculum planner contributes towards professionalism in early childhood education. In this study Dalli’s subject likens planning the curriculum to being a “question mark”, where the teacher needs to be open to a range of possibilities in supporting children’s interests and needs. The chapter concludes by acknowledging that early childhood educators actions are “informed by multiple layers of thinking, experience, understandings and knowledge that come together in a moment of professional judgement” (p. 99).
While Part One focuses on professional practices in real-life contexts, Part Two offer readers insights into the socio-political influences shaping early childhood education in Europe and specifically Flanders and Spain. Urban and Dalli (2012) emphasise that professional practice is determined by the educator’s ability to critically reflect on “their political and social realities” to “engage with macro-level issues and make a difference” (p. 164). This was brought out by Irene Balaguer Felip, who discusses the formation of “Rosa Sensat”, an association founded in the 1960s when Spain was still under fascist rule. The association’s aim was the reform of the public school system while still under Franco’s rule. It points to the resilience of the sector that they managed to resist political interference throughout this period. Of all the chapters within this book, this comes close to a personal account. Nevertheless, the writing reiterates the importance of early childhood educators as ‘active agents’ of change within the profession. Jan Peeters shares the importance of a collaborative endeavour to initiate policy change by describing a collaborative effort by policy makers and advocates of early childhood education that contributed towards a movement to increase the qualifications of people who work with young children in Flanders. A point of interest are the exemplars drawn to emphasise the need for higher qualifications which the contributors believe contributes towards professionalism in the early childhood sector.

In conclusion, *Early Childhood Grows up: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession* is a useful resource for practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders in the early childhood sector. The insights that the authors provide, offer readers a deeper understanding of professionalism in early childhood education across the world. The different perspectives covered within this book are inspiring ‘stories’ that enable readers to reflect on what professionalism means to them and how they become agents for change. The book seems to echo a point made by the editors; that the “Cinderella of the education system seems to have finally found her ‘glass slipper’”!

**References**