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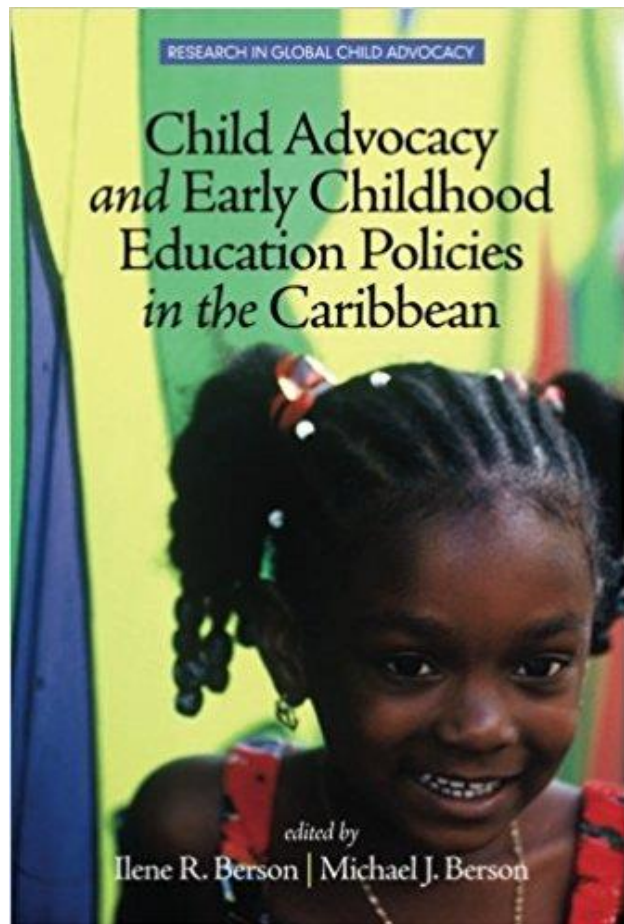
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Much of the scholarship on young Caribbean children's socialization is consistent with existing literature that points to the relationship between parenting strategies and children's development (e.g., Escayg, 2014; Fearon, Copeland, & Saxon, 2013; Griffith & Grolnick, 2014; Roopnarine, Wang, Krishnakumar, & Davidson, 2013). The role of early childhood education, and in particular, teaching and parental practices that take into account the whole child, have also garnered regional attention (see, for example, Davies, 2005).

The contributors of *Child advocacy and early childhood education policies in the Caribbean* further enrich scholarly discussions on early learning by examining pedagogy, curriculum, including developmentally appropriate practice, and national policies. While the contributions reflect context-specific values and culture, a common unifying theme framing these regional approaches is a commitment to the overall well-being of Caribbean children. In keeping with discourses on the quality of early childhood education in the Caribbean—and the role of policy and



advocacy in safeguarding the interests of young children—this edited volume offers a diverse body of scholarship that combines rigorous analysis of extant early childhood practices with practical, action-oriented recommendations, much of which derive from a careful examination of both cultural and contextual factors. Owing to the ongoing influence of the region’s colonial history as well as current neo-colonial practices, I argue that a culturally relevant/anti-colonial approach to early childhood education in the Caribbean context is indeed an important one. For, in doing so, the authors and editors draw attention to the prevailing influence of Eurocentric epistemologies, particularly in early childhood education, that may give rise to teaching practices that marginalize students’ cultural realities and local knowledges.

The text is organized around four sections: national policies to support young children, developmentally appropriate practices, purposeful and engaging early childhood curriculum, and child protection and well-being. In the latter section, the chapters revolve around key issues affecting children’s well-being, namely, abuse, violence and trauma, and the need for systemic interventions at regional and local levels.

Undergirding the first three chapters is a cogent critique of the current state of early childhood policies in St. Lucia, Puerto Rico and Belize (in particular, the development and implementation of these documents). Collectively, the contributors call for a more seamless and comprehensive approach among early childhood sectors; one that would ensure consistency between policies and the services aimed at optimizing the holistic well-being of young children. For instance, in August’s (2016) examination of a childhood development policy in Belize, the author revealed that “the absence of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy makes it a challenge for preschool teachers and directors/principals to ensure the quality

development and delivery of their preschool programs” (p. 85). Indeed, while written in a passionate tone, this chapter offers a clear and well-supported argument as to why an early childhood development policy is urgently needed in Belize.

In another chapter that illustrated the importance of the policy-program/service delivery connection, Lopez de Mendez, Bonilla-Rodriguez and Alvarez-Romero (2016) reported on the development of a Quality Rating and Improvement Systems used to assess early childhood centres in Puerto Rico. The vantage point of this chapter was somewhat different, for although an early childhood policy already existed in this locale, the authors sought to examine how specific stakeholders conceptualize quality as it pertained to early childhood education. Indeed, this is made quite explicit when the authors expressed that one of their future plans for the project was “the alignment of PR ECE licensing policy and the QRIS” (p. 75).

Concerning developmentally appropriate practice in Caribbean early childhood education, the text discusses the pedagogical challenges that educators encounter while attempting to enact such an approach in their teaching practice, as well as parents’ views on the quality of their children’s early learning experiences. The relationship between developmentally appropriate practice and pedagogy emerged in the section on “purposeful and engaging early childhood curriculum.” Using classroom-based vignettes, Latty and Ledbetter critiqued traditional approaches to teaching mathematics in the Jamaican context as “teacher directed” and one which relies on “whole group instruction and drills” (p. 157). According to the authors, a developmental approach that is also inclusive of students’ cultural knowledges can give rise to more meaningful learning opportunities for young Caribbean children.

In terms of literacy, Edwards and Rakes provided a detailed overview of the factors affecting young Jamaican male's literacy performance: "socio-economic status (chief among them being poverty), gender and socialization, learning difficulties, lack of early stimulation in the home, limited exposure to basic education and inappropriate instructional practices" (pp. 168-172). Drawing on these central issues, the authors then offer policy recommendations to improve early childhood literacy among young Jamaican students and boys in particular. For example, to counteract the effects of home influences, the authors suggested parenting programs that would enable caregivers to provide engaging learning opportunities for children. In contrast, and specifically related to educational settings, one recommendation was "...to ensure an abundance of children's literature for early education schools" (p. 176). While I agree with the authors' suggestion, I believe it is also important to consider the availability of books that represent Caribbean children's cultural realities (especially picture books), and how these may foster their interest in reading and other literacy activities.

A commendable feature of this text is that the chapter's recommendations follow from a panoramic analysis of the issue. To wit, the majority of authors offer recommendations for either policy (e.g., Edwards & Rakes), or policy and practice (e.g., Bailey & Cross; Casey; Long). Many of these recommendations recognize and highlight the importance of multiple stakeholders, including teacher preparation programs (Edwards & Rakes; Long), teachers (Casey; Latty & Ledbetter) and parents (Long).

Anti-racism theory accords much significance to experiential knowledge (Dei, 1996). While neither the authors nor the editors ground their discussions in this or any particular framework, the inclusion of voices that depart from the traditional academic perspective supports this approach. Indeed,

the contributors of this collection represent "early childhood practitioners, policymakers, caregivers, representatives from family agencies, as well as other key stakeholders in the education of young children" (p. 2). Yet the text does not sacrifice its academic rigour on the altar of accessibility, and strikes a commendable balance between chapters that present a more scholarly analysis and those that focus more on pedagogy and teaching practices.

Teachers in the Caribbean and other contexts may find such works particularly insightful for several reasons. First, the volume provides a conceptual background for understanding the role of early childhood policies in shaping program development and delivery. Second, it provides educators with an opportunity to reflect on how their teaching practice may or may not reflect developmentally appropriate approaches and the importance of including children's cultural identities in the teaching and learning process. Third, the text accents child protection rights as an essential element of advocacy for early childhood care and development. Such information is indeed beneficial to educators, for it brings to light the often adverse circumstances (e. g., violence, abuse) that young children may face, the significance of children's social-emotional well-being, and pedagogical strategies to support their development across both of these domains.

For example, contributing authors Jules and Coffee presented a compelling case on the need for universal screening procedures as well social-emotional and behavioural interventions for young children. They substantiate such claim by providing a rich discussion on the environmental conditions that Caribbean children may experience in their respective social contexts. The authors further established that data derived from universal screening "can also be used to inform the selection and implementation of interventions to promote healthy social-

emotional and behavioural development among young children” (p. 203). In my opinion, this approach holds both scholarly and practical merit. For, it acknowledges and gives credence to the variation commonly found among children in terms of their cognitive, social and emotional skills; as well, it situates empirical data as a valuable resource for creating individualized programs that are tailored to children’s unique needs and strengths, thereby further increasing the likelihood of positive developmental and academic outcomes.

Despite its many strong attributes, the text does fall short in some areas. For instance, the editors might have included an introductory chapter on the Caribbean, detailing historical information as well as present-day challenges for readers who are unfamiliar with the region or who are new to the Caribbean Studies literature. Early learning and policy are tied to local issues (for example, poverty, teachers’ pedagogies, under-resourced classrooms, and the disconnect between policy and practice), but also resonate with the broader historical and cultural forces (such as colonization) that have shaped the Caribbean region. While the text is not completely bereft of historical references, historical grounding is inconsistent across chapters. While the majority of the chapters provide a historical overview of early childhood education in a specific region, only one chapter (Latty & Ledbetter) addresses the link between the colonial legacy and current attitudes towards the teaching-learning process and pedagogical approaches used in early childhood classrooms.

Additionally, the majority of the chapters focused on the Jamaican context. While the representation of mostly Jamaican perspectives does not take away from the quality of the material, literature from the islands of the French- or English-speaking Caribbean would have provided a more balanced discussion of early learning

curriculum, policies and pedagogy, and the ways in which these components promoted or hindered optimal development among Caribbean children across diverse regional contexts. Additionally, a larger body of data, either empirical or experiential-based, would have illustrated the common challenges derived from a shared colonial past, and the effects of such encounter on the social and economic institutions (schooling, in particular) of Caribbean societies.

Ultimately, the text represents an integrated approach to regional early childhood education, moving the discussion beyond a singular focus on pedagogy, curriculum, or advocacy to a more comprehensive account, highlighting how such dimensions should inhere in policy and interventions. Further, by including Caribbean children in the global narrative on early learning, the contributors, in my opinion, clearly challenge the hegemonic bent of early childhood education, one that tends to privilege Eurocentric constructions and understandings, while marginalizing alternate forms of knowledge. It stands to reason, therefore, that the text would appeal to researchers, early childhood teachers, university students of Caribbean Studies, and Early Childhood Education students in the Caribbean and or international contexts.

For Caribbean Studies students and teachers, the text provides much insight on how childhood education is operationalized in specific Caribbean countries and the ways in which culture influences teaching practices. Readers who hold administrative positions or make policy may find the discussions on childhood policies particularly useful, especially examples of how policies intersect with high quality early learning services and advocacy for all children, including the most vulnerable.

In sum, the substantive content of the text encourages the reader to pause, probe,

consider, and analyze the various factors that bear upon early learning/development in the Caribbean. Indeed, my own reading of the text engendered a series of contemplative musings: What next? What more can be done? How? Or more cogently, what can I do? It was

through such processes, one that engaged intellectual rigour as well as self-introspection, that I identified a compelling element of *Child advocacy and early childhood education policies in the Caribbean*: an appeal to both the intellect and the human spirit.

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