



Editorial

The Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) was founded, in part, on the belief that all children have a right to participate as equal and active citizens in early education assured of their rights and free from all forms of discrimination including racism, sexism and classism. The CEIEC has argued the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to social justice and key equity issues as a means of producing high quality knowledge about equity, children's rights and early education. It is in this spirit that two themed editions (November 2005 and June 2006) of the International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood have been dedicated to children's rights and children's voices.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child represents a signal achievement in the arena of international human rights. Unanimously endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and signed by a record 61 countries on the day it was opened for signature on 26 January 1990, the

Convention provides powerful testimony to a global recognition for its pressing

need (Coady & Page).

The Convention builds on over 75-years of UN children's rights initiatives. As early as 1924, the League of Nation's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (also known as the Declaration of Geneva) set out a basic blueprint for the fundamental principles of children's well being. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights focused further on children's needs as part of the broader freedoms and protections to which all human beings are entitled. In 1959, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child added to both these initiatives with a greater emphasis on children's legal and moral rights and on broader areas of need such as education and recreation. These initiatives provided the impetus for drafting the Convention, which began in 1978, in anticipation of the 1979 International Year of the Child, before taking ten years to reach fruition. Through its adoption, children have for the first time been granted the same comprehensive range of civil, political, economic, social, and

cultural rights enjoyed by adults and State Parties are accountable for the realization of these universal human rights standards for children (Tobin).

The Convention also differs from the precedents in the philosophical understanding of children's rights, which it encapsulates. The 1924 Declaration presented children's rights predominantly in terms of basic welfare issues. Growing out of the post-First World War concerns to rebuild social and economic stability, the 1924 Declaration concerned itself more with providing the fundamentals of children's well-being and development such as food, medical care, shelter and spiritual sustenance. It was also directed towards an earlier understanding of children's rights, which viewed them primarily from the perspective of adults in their care-taking roles. The 1959 Declaration, likewise, contained little reference to children's ability to take control for themselves, and participate actively in the creation and retention of their rights. The Convention, by contrast, seeks to replace this paternalistic conception of rights with an understanding of children as active agents of their own destinies. It emphasizes, for example, children's ability to form their own opinions and to participate in society; and seeks to safeguard children's rights to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings, which affect them.

Paternalistic conceptions of children still however exist and present a challenge to the realization of the key principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Tobin). It is thus critical that adult

practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and academics do not become complacent towards advancing debates around the complexities of realizing children's rights.

The authors in the Forum section of this edition respond to this imperative in a number of ways. Tobin explores the potential impact of children's voices in pedagogy and policy making and outlines a number of key strategies for ensuring that children's voices are heard and influence the institutional structures that impact on their lives. In advancing his argument Tobin observes that "It is suggested that historically the law contributed to the silencing, marginalization and invisibility of children within Australia, the legacy of which still remains in our treatment of children today in all aspects of life including pedagogy and policy making." This statement directly correlates with key themes provided by Rayner and Penovic and Sifris. Rayner critiques the inability of the law to involve children in investigations and judicial proceedings which, she argues, should be directed towards their wellbeing. Penovic and Sifris examine Australia's immigration detention regime and the lack of effort that exists to inform debate through the voices and perspectives of the children subject to this regime. Newman's practitioner perspective profiles the work of Real Rights for Refugee Children and is an active demonstration of how early childhood practitioners can advocate for children's rights in broader political arenas.

The further four articles offered within this edition's Forum section focus more specifically on children's rights within educational settings. Coady and Page trace developments around children's rights in the field of early childhood education in Australia and identify a number of initiatives that are required to further the objectives set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in these settings. Tadich highlights key findings from her research study on children's perspectives on the Children's Museum in the Museum of Victoria to demonstrate how children's views have influenced practice and shaped decision-making within the Children's Museum. Wood focuses more specifically on children as participants in research in the early years of school and uses data from a study on children's understanding of progression in their learning to illustrate the complexities involved in developing research methods that advance ethical and authentic participation of children. Dockett and Perry emphasise the potential power of drawing and narrative in engaging children in research and offering them some control over the research process through their study on children's experiences and expectations of school. Importantly, these articles are complemented and accompanied by book reviews by children. I would like to extend my thanks to Laura, Christian, Maddy, Shannon and Jemima for sharing their views with us.

This edition also includes two other articles by Hughes and Pawilen, Sumida and Clavio. Hughes explores the strategies that toy companies

employ to market children's toys and argues that they collectively make it difficult for children to critique and engage with cultural products. Pawilen, Sumida and Clavio discuss their vision for a Science-based curriculum for United Methodist's kindergartens in the Philippines.

It is hoped that this edition of IJEIEC will stimulate debate around how adults can respectfully listen to children and work towards co-creating a more just and equitable world for and with children now and in the future. We look forward to advancing these issues further in our second themed edition on children's rights and voices in June 2006.

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