

Introduction



In order to support educators' plan to be strategic in optimizing children's holistic experiences, this Spring 2018 IJWC issue provides international readers with deeper understandings associated with how culture, family, and environment influence designing quality learning opportunities. As professional educators, we acknowledge issues confronting one population may be somewhat different than another, but also we understand the issues may as well be similar in many critical ways. In order to ensure children's intellectual, social, and emotional well-being, on behalf of the global community of all children, what factors might we consider as commonly shared and of critical importance?

The IJWC mission is to share stories representing diverse populations, highlight best practices supporting authentic learning, and provide examples of interactions showcasing learning as holistic, genuine, and caring. By providing a variety of perspectives, readers are invited to step out of their comfort zones and question, challenge, and extend their current thinking.

Articles

In the first manuscript, "Childrearing Experiences in Cross-national Families," Yajuan Xiang and Tori Colson identify cross-national family as an understudied group. Using qualitative data, their findings contribute to this minimally explored area - multicultural parenting experiences. The findings provide evidence the role of place of residence, language, and extended families and friends, as cultural media, influence multicultural parenting experiences. Xiang and Colson describe how the country of residence (through the dominance of cultures, values, and beliefs) influence couples in their childrearing practices. Additionally, authors describe how living in the U.S. influenced children's learning opportunities, parental responsibilities, and parenting practices. As couples become ever more mobile, opportunities for teachers to interact with children of cross-national families increases. This research study provides valuable insight for both parents and teachers.

In the second article, "Differentiated Instruction: A Band-Aid Approach for a Flawed System," Sandra J. Stone questions the current emphasis on differentiation and challenges whether or not differentiation truly supports children's holistic learning. While initially well-intended, Stone discusses how by residing within the curriculum, differentiation is not child-centered; by focusing efforts to master standards, differentiation discounts individual children's developmental continuum; and by narrowing assessment possibilities, differentiation undermines children's opportunities to engage in genuine, authentic, and

long-range holistic learning experiences. On behalf of all children, Stone invites readers to reject the “mainstream think” and consider a balanced, social, and respectful alternative.

In the third article, “Early Childhood Education in Iran: Progress and Emerging Challenges,” Maryam Sharifian, building on her extensive fieldwork with marginalized populations, describes the status of early childhood education in Iran. She identifies challenges associated with dual governmental oversight, describes issues related to private schooling and the influence of socioeconomic status, and discusses the challenges related to teacher preparation and equitable staffing. As a positive note, Sharifian reports increasing numbers of parents realize the importance of high quality early education and, as well, are more sensitive to issues related to second language and special needs learners. Yet, despite the improved status of education, she also identifies issues making access to universal pre-primary school programs difficult. In an effort to improve the lives of Iranian children, Dr. Sharifian calls for a discussion beyond political borders and an opening of professional conversations across cultures.

Pictures for Reflection

Without children knowing their environment, how can they well adapt and become a steward of the global community? In “Playing in the Snow and Much More,” the photographs show children playing in the snow; yet, the informed adult knows there is much, much, much more happening. Playing in the snow is a holistic learning experience; the children use their intellect to plan, design, and organize props; use their emotions to embrace the cold, enjoy friends, and celebrate the play event; and use their physicality to roll, carry, and pack the snow. Some parents and teachers report children no longer want to go outside and play. “It is too cold. What can I do?” If this is the case, as facilitators for children’s well-being, let us take a few minutes and revisit the photographs to discover what is truly happening as children play in the snow.

Tech Talk

Larry L. Burriss, cosmologist-wanna-be and long-time Star Party groupie, in “Star Parties: Bringing the Infinite Universe into a Small Classroom,” describes the extraordinary learning possibilities afforded the local community through university-sponsored Star Parties. With the support of technology, the wonders of the universe are made conceivable each month. Burriss describes how it becomes possible for the Star Parties to bring the sights and sounds of the universe into the classroom.

ETC.

Highlighted as an example of extraordinary holistic planning, in the fourth article, “Teaching Sustainable Practices as Part of a Holistic Education in the Saudi Context,” Ahlam Alghamdi, James Ernest, and Fatimah Hafiz illustrate the powerful capacity of storytelling to well integrate culture, environment, and religion into children’s learning. The authors describe how teachers nurture Saudi children to become caretakers for their natural sand-desert environment, while simultaneously underscoring the critical importance of culture and religion in the daily lives of all Saudi citizens. Using the potential of storytelling as a most effective instructional alternative, ensuring authentic play events with sand, and integrating and affirming the tenets of the Quran, teachers support children’s emerging understandings of their critical role and responsibilities in their physical world and cultural framework.