

## **Introduction**

For the spring of 2016, the International Journal of the Whole Child (IJWC) editorial team proudly announces publication of the first volume of the journal. Typically, IJWC includes the Introduction, three manuscripts, Pictures for Reflection, and the Spotlight on Real-World Practice.

The Introduction section provides a summary of the articles and underscores the relationship to the whole child perspective; the main content includes three original manuscripts with relevance for children birth through the adolescent years; Pictures for Reflection provides for readers a photograph, illustration, or graphic that, in a single moment, captures the learning of the whole child; and finally, the fourth component, Spotlight on Real-World Practice, demonstrates how practitioners make daily contributions to the lives of children; they appreciate children are diverse, unique, and holistic learners.

In this issue, three authors describe the importance of “messaging-about”, listening, and advocating on behalf of children.

In the first article, “Playing Around in Science: How Self-Directed Inquiry Benefits the Whole Child”, Brian Stone describes the integral connections among inquiry thinking, children’s choice, and play behaviors. Assuming a constructivist perspective, his discussion, strategies, and arguments for holistic learning are relevant for children of all ages. Stone describes the importance of providing children with opportunities, time, and materials to explore science content in a self-directed manner. He argues that through play and messaging-about, children develop higher-level understandings, and demonstrate more sophisticated approaches to science. The author discusses existing research supporting the academic benefits of self-directed or authentic scientific inquiry. Inquiry refers to questioning that belongs to the individual. He goes on to describe how, in adults seeking to promote inquiry, they often overlook an aspect of children’s distinctive ownership. This is play.

Through play, children learn to think creatively, plan divergently, and solve problems innovatively. They develop a unique scientific identity. But, within an understanding of the whole child, Stone is quick to point out that play in science extends far beyond promoting academic understandings. He argues when a child engages in play activities, while simultaneously undertaking inquiry processes, the child can also choose to participate in social/collaborative scientific endeavors. Additionally, emotional development and connections can also be made when children play around with science content. Finally, since play activities typically involve movement, children are actively occupied in physical representations that can also make concepts concrete for their better understanding. With respect to nurturing the whole child, play in science promotes comprehension, but it also provides opportunities for children to become socially, physically, emotionally, and even culturally involved.

In the second article, “Conversations in an 8<sup>th</sup>-Grade ELA Classroom: Spaces Where Young Adolescents Can Construct Identities,” the author, Kathleen Reeb-Reascos, discusses how, since the mandates of *No Child Left Behind* and the subsequent integration of the *Common Core State Standards*, an era of accountability and high-stakes testing, have led teachers to a deficit-based approach to children’s learning. Instead of highlighting logical reasoning, critical thinking, expressing creativity, synthesizing text, analyzing information, posing and solving problems, communicating, collaborating and reflecting, this prescriptive approach targets basic skills of reading comprehension and technical writing composition. Consequently, children’s learning experiences lack in creativity, meaning, and empowerment. When instruction is superficial, students disengage. For the adolescent, it is critical the child reconciles his or her self-identity.

Using discourse analysis, Reeb-Reascos demonstrated how when students join together over a compelling literary text, they use this discursive space to transform into a practice in identity construction. She argues that the young adolescents’ scaffolded discussion and the substance of literary text facilitated the adoption and rejection of new facets of identity. The lesson became a means to explore identity in historical, generational and individual contexts. This led to the creation of students’ understanding of new discourses. Students gained a deeper awareness of society, justice, and their positions in relation to each.

L. Kathryn Sharp, in the third article, “Examining the Precepts of Early Childhood Education: The Basics or the Essence?” provides readers with a theoretical framework for holistic teaching and learning. This discussion encourages early childhood educators and the related professional development and research communities to become the leading voices in determining the direction of early childhood education. In advocating on behalf of targeting the whole child, Sharp revisits fundamental aspects of what is meant by early childhood education. Using the four precepts identified by Jalongo and Isenberg (2008), Sharp offers a conceptual and philosophical starting point for creating learning experiences targeting the whole child. These precepts include: Precept 1: Young children need special nurturing, Precept 2: Young children are the future of society, Precept 3: Young children are worthy of study, and Precept 4: Young children’s potential should be optimized.

Sharp’s discussion examines the nature of these precepts and the potential each of these may play in responding to teacher recruitment, quality, and retention, and the role in fulfilling the anticipated promise of universally implemented early childhood education standards. She provides readers with specific language and strategies to build and justify holistic practices for young children. She identifies a clear and concise roadmap toward supporting the learning and development of the whole child. Finally, she describes ways in which teachers of all ages may promote children’s social, emotional, physical, as well as intellectual learning and development.

### **Pictures for Reflection**

In order to promote the learning of the whole child, children, of all ages, must experience a range of opportunities and continue to challenge and test themselves. In particular, the out-of-doors provides learning events not possible in the indoors. It is important for children to run, slide, feel wet, race with the wind, and embrace the joy of genuine ownership.

### **Spotlight on Real-World Practice**

In “Puddle Ponderings,” Cris Lozon provides practitioners with the extraordinary potential for using a puddle for children’s deeper and more reflective learning.