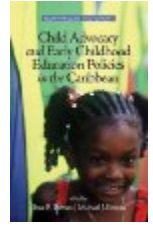


Child Advocacy and Early Childhood Education Policies in the Caribbean

reviewed by [Saran Stewart](#) – November 30, 2016

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Child Advocacy and Early Childhood Education Policies in the Caribbean provides a rigorous examination of policy, praxis, curriculum development, and socioemotional assessment regarding early childhood education (ECE) across the Caribbean. Editors Ilene R. Berson and Michael J. Berson along with Kofi Marfo contribute to the introductory chapter by providing an overview and rationale to a text that is divided into four parts. The book includes chapters from a wide cross section of the Caribbean including Spanish and English speaking countries and the eastern and western island states. The scholars and practitioners who write in this book contribute to a range of advocacy topics such as national policies to support children, developmentally appropriate practice, purposeful and engaging curriculum, and child welfare issues, among others. This breadth provides readers, researchers, and early childhood advocates with critical perspectives on current issues and challenges facing early childhood education in the Caribbean. Further, the chapters in this volume contribute to the synthesis of literature in the field of ECE and particularly to the much-needed growing canon of policy development in the Caribbean.

The book is comprised of 10 chapters divided into four parts. Most chapters start with a case study and/or vignette that is culturally contextual, which provides a unique lens inside each country's ECE system. These case studies offer a colorful window into the daily routine of early childhood teachers and children's engagement with the curriculum. Each case study provides the background for the respective author to develop an analysis of the country's policy on ECE. This creative structure provides a balance between policy and practice rhetoric to maintain focus on the development of the child.

Part One of this edited volume examines national policies to support young children in St. Lucia, Puerto Rico, and Belize. Within the context of St. Lucia, author Partriann Smith and editor Marfo comb through the historical underpinnings of key policy initiatives both nationally and globally. They highlight the need to shift policies and services from early childhood care and education to development. Annette López de Méndez, Victor E. Bonilla-Rodriguez, and Claudia X. Alvarez-Romero illustrate the Puerto Rican experience by highlighting the country's unique political and economic relationship with the United States. They also emphasize the benefits associated with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The chapter discusses the country's contribution to designing a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that would not only provide universal criteria for quality in ECE but also embed cultural relevance and context to quality in Puerto Rico.

Part Two explores the shift from theory to praxis by illustrating some of the Caribbean's developmentally appropriate practices in ECE. Carol Long, the author of Chapter Four's "From 'Bull in the Pen' to One, Two, Three, and Then? Transitioning from Outdoor Play to Indoor Activities," discusses the benefits of a play-based curriculum. She also provides recommendations for policy and practice. After starting with a rich and colorful vignette of Jamaican children engaging in outdoor play, Long concludes her chapter with a list of recommended policies and practices to enhance the use and development of play-based curriculum. This chapter is a welcome supportive argument to the inclusion of play-based curriculum in Jamaican ECE but would have benefited from a greater deal of critical analysis of the vignette that is chronicled and current regional literature on the application of Move Theory in the Caribbean.

The second chapter in Part Two explores Belize's ECE issues from the voices of parents. Here, Erin M. Casey's qualitative study offers a window into the lived experiences of parents engaging in early childhood education within Belize. However, little is mentioned regarding the process and rigor attained in the data collection and analysis procedures, leaving the quality of the findings to be questioned. For example, the author states "[f]rom these interviews, 10 were with mothers of children in early childhood education" (p. 132). However, on the following page, two of the interviewees commented that their children were 11- and 10-years-old, which is outside of the defined ECE period of 0- to 8-year-olds. Furthermore, the selected sections of the interviews reported on page 133 detail teachers' pedagogy and students' learning outside of the scope of ECE. With that said, the findings are in keeping with the larger issues facing ECE in Belize. Also, the recommendations for policy and practice provide clear strategies to remedy the issues of teacher training and large classroom sizes.

Part Three focuses on an example of a meaningful implementation of an engaging ECE curriculum. With the inviting title "A Postcolonial Waltz: Encouraging Meaningful Mathematics Learning in Jamaica's Early Childhood Classrooms," authors La-Toya Laty and Lissa Ledbetter discuss a critical issue in Jamaica's education system: increased rates of non-mastery in numeracy and mathematics. Their chapter goes further in presenting colonialism issues that still "bind classroom norms and educators' beliefs to traditional imperialistic practices and mindsets" (p. 156). It ends with key policy recommendations on new ways of effective teaching for math learning including the creation of "culturally relevant contexts" (p. 160). The final chapter in Part Three tackles an important growing issue on boys' underachievement in the region. Authors Sharon Edwards and Lori Rakes discuss gender issues in the classroom unique to the Jamaican context that interrogates the learning difficulties and instructional practices between boys and girls. The recommended policies trend towards increasing parental involvement and improving teacher professional development to enhance boys' learning.

Finally, Part Four tackles sensitive issues in the region such as children's welfare, protection, and well-being. Deviating from the others, the final two chapters do not include a case study or vignette. Instead, these chapters dive deeply into the issues of children's welfare. Authors Tavis D. Jules and Gina Coffee present a policy-laden chapter that is regional in scope and deals with initiatives consisting of key frameworks developed by non-governmental and governmental entities such as the United Nations, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to name a few. This chapter is unique from the others as it focuses on the Caribbean community as a whole rather than a single country. The chapter might have been better suited at the beginning of the text to set the context of regional ECE policies. The authors argue "the call by CARICOM for an integrated approach across all sectors" (p. 189) and the implementation of the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) across ECE in all CARICOM countries together has the potential to better develop the ideal Caribbean child. Jules and Coffee go on to address the need for a social-emotional and behavioral assessment and intervention program, which aligns well with the sustainability of the HFLE program across the Caribbean. The closing chapter by Paul Miller discusses children at risk, particularly in Jamaica, but also provides data of reported cases of child abuse across the Caribbean. This text is more summative in nature and provides a theoretical perspective supported by regional and national data on the scope and prevalence of child sex abuse. It concludes with a call to action to be more proactive in the fight to protect all children.

Overall, *Child Advocacy and Early Childhood Education Policies in the Caribbean* consists of significant contributions to the field of early childhood education by (a) providing much-needed literature that is contextual on a regional basis and relevant to developing ECE policies in the Caribbean; (b) synthesizing the canon on advocacy initiatives to better support young children; and (c) advancing appropriate policy and practice recommendations to purposefully engage ECE instruction, curriculum and overall development initiatives for children's well-being. This book is a must-read for early childhood practitioners, scholars, policymakers, parents, and ECE agencies trying to create sustainable change in the Caribbean.

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SARAN STEWART is Lecturer of Comparative Higher Education in the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. She is also the Coordinator for the M.A. in Higher Educational Management programme and Chief Editor of the Journal of Education and Development in the Caribbean. Much of her research uses quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods to critically examine issues of comparative education, postcolonial theories, critical-inclusive pedagogy and access/equity issues in higher education. Dr. Stewart is devoted to the examination and exploration of topics related to access and equity in education and teaching and learning in developing country contexts. Her recent research comparatively examines the scope and prevalence of private tutoring and its effects on access to higher education in multiple Caribbean countries. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Journal of Student Affairs*, *Postcolonial Directions in Education Journal* and the *Applied Anthropologist Journal*. Dr. Stewart most recently, received the International Scholars Award at the Research in Education Symposium from the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank.

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