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Stefanija Ališauskienė
Natallia Bahdanovich Hanssen
Daiva Kairienė
Editors

Interprofessional and
Family-Professional
Collaboration for
Inclusive Early
Childhood Education
and Care

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FOREWORD

It is a great honour and privilege to be invited to write this forward to this new volume edited by Stefanija, Natallia and Daiva entitled: *Interprofessional and Family-Professional Collaboration for Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care*. I have worked professionally with Stefanija and Daiva in Lithuania over a number of years.

Stefanija Ališauskienė, Natallia Bahdanovich Hanssen and Daiva Kairienė are leaders in the field of family-professional collaboration in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Their combined expertise in practice and research gives this new book credibility and can be viewed as an authoritative voice about the rights of children and the responsibilities of adults (families and professionals) to respect and protect children's interests and rights. The collection of chapters in this edited book represents a selection of the best practice from authors around the world, but predominantly in Europe.

The research and practice questions linked to the relationship between education institutions, professionals and families are frequently addressed by scholars around the world. The research literature suggests that the power dynamic between professionals and families can be problematic. The relationship between home and school is frequently characterized as challenging and unequal, and the knowledge of professionals and experts can at times overshadow the knowledge and expertise that parents bring to the relationship.

The literature also provides models for working with parents, and they often replicate the practices that promote an imbalance in the relationships

which does not always value the knowledge and expertise. Conceptual frameworks that promote a more inclusive approach for professionals and families are increasingly recognizing the valuable insights and expertise that each member of the team around the child brings, and at the end of the day, all want the same outcomes for the child: that is, for them to reach their potential.

Parents and families are the greatest allies for teachers and professionals. This statement is particularly true when the aim of education is for an inclusive experience for all children. This book presents an argument for something more than what is typically discussed in the literature in terms of partnerships with families and seeks to promote collaboration as a more authentic way to facilitate inclusive education for children with diverse learning needs.

This edited book brings together leading scholars and practitioners from around the world, each of whom considers their context and explores the nature of the relationships between educators and those professionals who work with children and their families to ensure that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) caters for not only the diverse and individualized needs of all children, but specifically those children with complex needs.

The central premise of this book is based on a rights-based approach for the education and care of young children. The European countries have adopted the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and other European conventions that make it statutory to operate within a framework that considers the rights of individuals as a prime driver in education and social care policy and practice.

One of the book's outstanding features is that it fills a gap in the research literature about the complex nature of the relationships between professionals and families but adopting the rights-based approach that underpins the importance of this type of work.

One of the benefits of the text is that it is structured in a way that teases out the complexities of collaboration and the layers that can present barriers to full participation. There are three notable features of this book that focus on interprofessional collaboration. The first feature is relationships between professionals can present challenges when viewing the rights of a child through various professional lenses. The emphasis on collaboration minimizes the formation of hierarchies and prevents the ranking of knowledge based on perceived importance. For example, preferencing medical knowledge over educational or social work knowledge may lead to

decisions made by professionals ignoring the most important aspects for an individual. A decision to move a child into a specialist education facility because of their health needs fails to recognize the child's rights to friends, peers and social contacts that they could experience in a mainstream setting.

The second notable feature of this book looks at the complex relationships that exist between professionals and parents. My own research is about the role of professionals' attitudes towards families and the significance of the relationship in optimizing children's life chances and potential. The power imbalance that can exist between families and professionals can be due to the 'hierarchies of knowledge' that value 'professional and expert' knowledge over parents' knowledge of the child or a professional's practical knowledge of working with the child.

The third notable feature of this book is the specific focus on the most important years of life, early childhood. International research confirms that this period of life, a child's experience during this time, will shape their future. In some cases, children's early experiences and trauma cannot be reversed but so much can be done by families and professionals to ensure that children's experiences are positive and to support them to thrive.

The core message of the book places the child and the child's family at the centre of all pedagogical decisions. This book has a lot to offer international audiences who are currently recovering from the impact of Covid-19, being impacted by the significant conflict in the Ukraine and challenging economic times. This set of circumstances adds stress to families and systems designed to support and reduce the impact of such external factors. For professionals who read this book, it will introduce some new ideas and potential support for an improvement in practices that will lead to a more inclusive educational experience for children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

Stefanija Ališauskienė, Natallia Bahdanovich Hanssen and Daiva Kairienė and their colleagues have started a conversation in this book that offers a tangible opportunity to make changes to the way in which families and professionals, and professionals work with other professionals.

Catherine Carroll-Meehan, Professor of Education and Pedagogy at Liverpool Hope University, UK. Her career in early childhood education has included work in Australia and the UK as a teacher, leader and academic. Her recent research in parents and partnership included a study

that explores the nature of trainee teachers' beliefs about the role of parents and families in the lives of children.

The foundation for quality practices in Early Childhood Inclusive Education and Care (ECIEC) entails interprofessional and family-professional collaboration. We know from more than 30 years of research that quality of the partnership with families and professionals is a crucial factor and influences the effectiveness of interventions and outcomes for children and their families. The complexity involved in supporting and answering to the concerns and expectations of families of *all* children, particularly of children with Special Needs, makes the need for different professional knowledge's and consequently, teamwork that ensures inter-professional collaboration. A model that helps our understanding of those influences on child and family well-being is Urie Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological model of development. In his model mesosystems are the relationships between two or more settings in which the child is an active participant, such as school and home, so the social richness of a child's mesosystem stems from the number and quality of those connections. We can have two extremes: the case where the child is the only connection and the microsystems in both sides making irreconcilable demands, and at the other extreme, where there is a total joining between the two settings. Risk exists in mesosystems when there is absence of connections between one microsystem and the other. The sturdier, more positive, and more diverse the links between settings, the more powerful and beneficial the resulting mesosystems will be as an influence on the child's development.

So, for example, how well preschool, day care or other setting and home work together to provide a healthy balance between the two settings becomes of crucial importance in this process. Getzels (1974) mentions the balance between *particularism* (looks at each person individually) and *universalism* (treating everyone by the same standards), in the child's experience. Families tend to emphasize particularism, but preschool appear to be universalistic ones, but for a healthy balance and positive child outcomes, family and preschool must work together and complement each other. It is like riding a tandem bike; if you ever tried to do it, one needs to be synchronized in movements, balance and pace. If not, then you don't move or go anywhere. But if you are synchronized, then you can take the tandem bike where you want. ECIEC family and professional partners contribute *equal* amounts of power to meet their shared goals. Creating this power level—energy to act, that is brought to each encounter by both parents and professionals in the partnership, as noted

by Ann Turnbull—can be sometimes an easy journey and sometimes complicated by mismatching, miscommunication or other challenges which require on part of professionals important competences, that go beyond the knowledge base of the different disciplines. These relational and participatory competencies are related to *how* support is provided, that is, in ways that entail family-centred principles. Going back to the tandem bike metaphor, the problem with the history of family-professional collaboration is that we had not been able yet to allow families to ride the tandem bike with us. We still want to *drive* families and very few times allow the family to be part of the power that moves the tandem bike. This is the necessary paradigm shift we need in family-professional collaboration, and this book with its rich chapters and research from different European countries can have an important role in opening the reflection on the need for this paradigmatic change. The way it is organized and the information it provides on experiences in different European cultures brings an enormous contribution for an understanding of this topic. The reflection on these different experiences and components of interprofessional collaboration and family-professional collaboration can be a leverage for the implementation of IPC and FPC practices in ECIEC to improve the outcomes for all children and families. Last but not least, entailing the concepts of collaboration and participation, ‘nothing about me without me’, it will be nice to read, in a next book on this topic, a chapter written by families.

Ana Maria Serrano, Associate Professor at University of Minho, Portugal. She is the president of EURLYAID—The European Association on Early Childhood Intervention.

Over the past decades, a growing amount of research has shown that the first years of a child’s life are crucial when the ‘brain architecture’ of the human being is formed in a short period and in a particularly intense way. High-quality early childhood education positively impacts a child’s future cognitive, social and emotional development. Moreover, at the same time, it provides an opportunity to detect risks or developmental disorders early and provide the necessary care, education and support.

Today, early childhood is influenced by globalization, emigration, immigration, social exclusion, poverty, multilingualism, the pace of change and the development of information technology, and is therefore complex and multifaceted. Thus, the debate on how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policies and practices should change and what factors influence the quality of education of young children is becoming an increasingly important topic worldwide.

The anthology *Interprofessional and Family-Professional Collaboration for Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care*, written by an international team of researchers, is particularly timely and relevant. The anthology presents unique and inspiring Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practices and discoveries from different countries, various models and trends in collaboration between those working with and for children, and the latest research, providing a cross-country perspective on today's issues and problems. The unique value of the work lies in its focus on inter-institutional cooperation between different sectors (education, health, and social), on the partnership between early childhood teachers, family and professionals working as a team, sharing responsibility in decision-making, and thus creating an inclusive culture and practice for each and every one.

Laima Jankauskienė, Head of Preschool and Primary Education Division Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Lithuanian Republic.

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We are also thankful to our families for understanding and support that was very helpful in the intensive process of the book writing.

Sincerely,

Stefanija Ališauskienė

Natallia Bahdanovich Hanssen


Daiva Kairienė

Praise for *Interprofessional and Family-Professional
Collaboration for Inclusive Early Childhood
Education and Care*

“A scholarly and important contribution to the often neglected areas of interdisciplinary collaboration and collaboration with the family to promote inclusion of children with special needs. This book is authoritative because the authors do research in this area, and it is a must-have book for all interested in inclusive and special needs education.”




—Monica Melby-Lervåg, *Professor Department of Special Needs
Education University of Oslo. Director of the Centre for Research
on Special Needs Education and Inclusion (SpedAims)*

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Family-Professional Collaboration in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ukrainian Policy

*Olena Martynchuk, Tetiana Skrypnyk, Nataliia Sofii,
Natalia Babych, Jonna Kangas,
and Heidi Harju-Luukkainen*

INTRODUCTION

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA, 2018) has provided evidence that the quality of parental participation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has a positive impact on the education, upbringing, development, and social adaptation of children. Further, numerous studies have also demonstrated a positive connection between parents' participation in the educational processes and

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