

## Book Review

Miller, L. & Cable, C. (Eds.) (2011). *Professionalization, leadership and management in the early years*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.  
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### Jerneja Jager

*Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia, Europe*  
jerneja.jager@pei.si

During the past two centuries as Urban (2010, p.5) asserts, “the responsibility for the upbringing of young children extend[ed] from the family domain to public institutions” and following this change in society the provision of “care and early education ... have become specialized tasks for those who are specifically identified as early years practitioners” (Urban, 2010, p. 5). Being labeled as ‘professionals’ during the past decade in reference to more and more aspects of their work, professionals in early childhood have to engage with dynamically changing policy fields and socio-political contexts. This book, *Professionalization, leadership and management in the early years*, discusses the ‘changing face’ of professionalism in the ‘minority world’ and addresses questions related to leading and managing in contemporary contexts by singling out countries, such as Australia, Northern Ireland, Belgium and so on.

The editors, Linda Miller and Carrie Cable, in the opening chapter of the book, introduce readers to the ‘growth’ of forms of professionalism that is prevalent in the multiplying reform agendas directed to the field. Connecting to this view, the first part of the book titled *Leading, Managing and New Professional Identities* explores multiple understandings of professional identities of early years practitioners, such as leaders, managers, change agents, ‘networked leaders’, actors of change, and so on, which identities are unified by an overarching sense of the need for continuous development and reflexivity to answer changing contexts. The six chapters’ authors of this section carefully guide their readers through a process of critical reflection to understand the ways in which particular contexts shape identities and in turn how imagining professionals anew has the potential to “regenerating democracy, community-building and community transformation” (Woodrow, p. 42) and to interrupt the powerful effect of governing discourses. For example, Christine Woodrow, through the analysis of policy trends in early childhood provision in Australia that increasingly privatise the field and individualise its leaders, stresses that “traditional identities for early childhood have not served the interests of equity and justice very effectively”, therefore she imagines a more activist type of leadership built on participatory democracy (Woodrow, 2011, p. 41).

Jan Peeters and Michele Vandenbroeck in their chapter titled ‘Childcare practitioners and the process of professionalization’ argue, based on their 30 years long action research, that the voices of professionals are often missed from defining what ‘reflective’ and ‘reflexive’ professionalism means. However, by considering “the

experiences and the meaning making of professionals”, elements or competencies of reflective practice come to light (Peeters & Vandenbroeck, p. 72). The authors assert that becoming a reflective and reflexive practitioner with an ability to open new possibilities, what they term ‘actors of change’, can be developed through ‘sustained pedagogic counselling’ and practice. They propose action research to play an important role in increasing professionalism that also has potentials to create new knowledge in complex and uncertain situations. While the six chapter authors in this section agree on the need to enhance in some ways the competence of practitioners, they also acknowledge that this should be coupled with raising the reputation of early years practitioners in society. Recognised as a global concern in regards to teachers and perhaps with the increased awareness about the importance of the early years, the demand for highly skilled professionals remains a central issue in early childhood education.

Chapters in Part 2, titled *Towards a New Professionalism in the Early Years*, look to the future and conceptualise professionalism as an ongoing rather than a finite process. Based on the understanding that professionalism is “a discourse as much as a phenomenon”, authors discuss how professionalism evolves in its discursive contexts and the need to understand professionalism as “constantly under re-construction” (Dalli & Urban, 2008. p. 132). Gill McGillivray explores how the current workforce reform by constructing a benchmark for minimum qualification and standardising qualification requirements shape professionals’ identities in England and perhaps will result in a ‘culture of performativity’. In the discursive context of professionalism, she exposes personal life histories of practitioners and stories about being a part of a community of practice. She also points to two decisive influences, the “changing societal and psychological expectations of the role of the women, ... and the ideologies and policies of the governing political party” (p. 96). McGillivray argues that it is important to consider how these constructions “perpetuate the stereotype of what it means to be an early years worker” (p. 96). McGillivray continues with the exploration of how constantly changing ideas about one’s self, people and places construct professional identities. She continues, that contexts, experiences and situations also play an important role in constructing identities. Further, she argues that space, skills and support are critical in the interpretation of one’s experiences. Communities of practice are in this context recognised as one of the “significant factors that seems to have an influence on the construction of professional identity” (p. 101), because they combine all factors that shape professional identity: people, space, context, experiences, situations, skills, and support. In her final thoughts McGillivray powerfully reasons that in order to shift the power bases on which professionalism is conceptualised we need to start with accounting for the ‘bottom up’ perspective that represent how young people in secondary schools “make sense of working with young children as a worthwhile career” (p. 102).

To finish reviewing the selected chapters, I highlight Iris Duhn’s contribution to the topic of the book, in which she reconceptualises professionalism as constituted partly by a struggle for meaning, which struggle also makes the term professionalism itself contestable. Professionalism for her is intertwined with the teacher’s learning self that experiences and questions “its relation to the world” (p. 143) when developing

new/professional knowledge through a continuous process. This in turn contributes to novel understandings of what professionalism(s) in early childhood education may look like in an ever-changing manner. It is obvious after reading this chapter and the book that clear-cut definitions about 'what the teacher is as a professional' do not exist anymore. Today, professionalism/s is understood as a "continuous process of entanglement between self, others and the world" and about professional 'knowledge in the making' (Duhn, p. 141).

In summary, the book presents a rich collection of ideas on current issues in the field of professionalism, leadership and management in the early years. Besides offering a summary of the latest research findings in the field, it is also very practical as a textbook for pre-service and in-service ECEC professionals to engage with these current issues governing the field and to get absorbed in their own dynamic meaning-making process of what professionalism/s mean in their contexts and 'worlds'. While I have found this book very engaging and thought-provoking for the general field of early childhood education, I still recognised the silences of those who has much less chance in engaging about theorisations and explorations of professionalism. Several authors of the book raised my attention to groups whose input into thinking about professionalism is vital, such as pre-service students or practitioners. Therefore, I missed even more the voices of possible contributors to this book who come from the majority world, perhaps including those of post-socialist countries, and practitioners who are the ones summoned to do this work of self-reforming and self-actualising to become agents of change. How do they see professionalism? How do global agendas of professionalisation of the field meet with their local understandings?

Perhaps the book gives me an opportunity as a trainer of early years practitioners to continue this work of meaning making with those who work with young children in Slovenia. The book offers an accessible read and manages to theoretically rework the concept of professionalism. It also provides examples from practice, such as case studies, to which I am sure any practitioner will find easy to relate to. In this way, in my work I can easily connect the theoretical aspects with practical ones and ask practitioners to reflect on their own experiences and think about their own practice. Peeters and Vandenbroeck present reflection as one of the cornerstones in developing professionalism in the early years. In Slovenia, we still must do quite a lot to develop professionalism through critical reflection. The problem is that early years practitioners do not have sufficient conditions (for example time, space) to engage in critical reflection. They are also not exposed to critical reflection in their everyday practice (CORE, 2011). In their case 'sustained pedagogic counselling', discussed by Peeters and Vandenbroeck, might offer a solution. By encouraging them to be actively involved in, for example changing the conditions of their work, or in thinking about what could be changed to increase the wellbeing and involvement of children, they could develop skills they need for critical reflection in relation to their own practice. If practitioners actively participate in changing their practice, they become the 'agents of change'.

I recommend this book to all pre-service and in-service practitioners, and postgraduate students of early years since we are all concerned about who we are as professionals

and what professionalism(s) means in relation to our work that is under constant reconstruction.

## References

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