

## Review of the book *Partnership with Parents in Early Childhood Today*, by Philippa Thompson and Helen Simmons

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*Partnership with Parents in Early Childhood Today* explores the role of early childhood practitioners in understanding the needs of parents/carers with whom they work. The book is edited by Helen Simmons, a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Northampton, and Philippa Thompson, a Principal Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. Each chapter presents a group of parents/carers who may have been marginalised in practice and encourages practitioners to consider how their settings can become more inclusive in their practice. Furthermore, it supports the reader to reflect on and challenge their own unconscious biases around their work with parents/carers. A wide range of parent/carer groups are presented, such as LGBTQ+ families, multi-lingual families, adoptive families and many more. It also includes some groups which may be considered less 'seen' by early childhood practitioners, such as families living with anaphylaxis and student mothers in higher education.

The book opens by acknowledging the long-standing belief around the importance of parental engagement being at the forefront of early childhood policy. However, an important contribution of this book lies in its 'call to action' for the reader. It asks that we engage with the reflections and challenge our thinking around the variety of families which may experience marginalisation. The book provides a strong rationale for why it is needed, presenting the current socio-economic climate as a backdrop for discussion. It reminds the reader of how 'coming out of a world pandemic and entering a cost-of-living crisis', provides an additional layer of challenge to families who may already be struggling. It also highlights how there is a need for 'significant support across all realms of health, social care and education'.

The true uniqueness of this book is that it goes deeper than simply addressing the need to 'work in partnership with parents/carers' but moves to amplifying the voices of those who have not been included in previous writing and are almost certainly not included in policy. Contributors present and deconstruct a range of experiences from families, using a wide range of diverse knowledge and from direct experience of supporting parents and children.

Towards the end of the book, a chapter named 'Practice

Perspective: Parents as Experts' presents the notion that positioning the parents as experts regarding their child should be a prerequisite to working within the early childhood sector. In our profession as educational psychologists, we are aware of the importance of this positioning and use this in our consultation work frequently. It is positive to see this convention being discussed in literature aimed at early childhood educators and highlights the importance of EPs continuing to adopt this approach. The chapter then goes on to present a case study of how an organisation in the north of England empowered parents by placing them as experts around their children and by utilising a growth mindset approach to promote validation of self-esteem and parenting skills. This chapter is a strength of the book and demonstrates the real-world impact of placing parents/carers and the centre and forefront of their child's education.

One shortcoming of the book was the limited recognition around the potential impact of intersection of identity. Although each chapter provides an in-depth and insightful exploration of a range of different family stories and potential marginalisation, it may have added to the inclusive nature of the book if the complex and multidirectional relationships between different aspects of identity could have been acknowledged, perhaps as part of the introduction to the book. This may have added further depth and recognition of even 'lesser heard' voices, for example those who experience multiple marginalisations.

This book is helpful not only for early childhood practitioners, but also for those who work with school-age children, thus I would urge any professional working with children and young people to read this book. For educational psychologists, this book expands our thinking and awareness of a range of groups who may be marginalised in education and provides helpful reflection and challenge prompts to stimulate thinking. It is a book which is well-placed to support thinking during supervision around how we can not only amplify these voices, but how we can support the other professionals whom we work alongside to 'come along' with us and work in this way too.



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