

Paper round

Jackie Musgrave explains how using the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network to submit papers can enhance students' professional development



the criteria

- **Level 4 students**
Reflection on an aspect of practice/the role of the student practitioner – word limit: 1,000
- **Level 5 students**
View or commentary on a contemporary issue – word limit: 1,500
- **Level 6 students**
Report on leading practice underpinned by research – word limit: 2,500
- **Level 7 students**
Report on author's recent or current research findings – word limit: 4,500

When I mark students' work, I have many 'wow' moments. I am frequently moved by the depth of reflection, innovation and interesting content. I love reading when students had 'aha moments' and were able to write about explicit links between theory and practice and make clear statements about the impact of their role. But it struck me that much of their work remains under wraps and is never disseminated.

The Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN) was set up 25 years ago, when Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degrees were first introduced, to provide higher education institutions a way of meeting and sharing best practice. Its aims are to promote education and research for the continuing development of a highly qualified profession; and to provide critical perspectives on the advancement of appropriate early childhood policies.

Part of the network's aim is to advocate for our students. Given the fact that much insightful work was going unnoticed, we decided to create the publication opportunity as a way of celebrating it. For this reason, every few months we put out a call for papers to students at Levels 4-7, setting out the criteria they must meet (see box).

Student papers can be based on assignments they have written for their degree work, or they can be original work, but they must be edited appropriately to fit the word count. While a key aim is to share students' innovative ideas, it is really important that students are able to articulate the 'so what?' question: what is their contribution to practice?

Master's-level submissions must be based on a small piece of original research, which can draw upon documentary evidence or original data and include a brief justification of research methodology used.

All articles must cite appropriate sources from literature and be of satisfactory quality for academic writing. Students must seek

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approval from their course leader prior to submission.

Submissions are reviewed by both myself and Nikki Fairchild (programme co-ordinator at the University of Chichester). We give feedback to students about how to make minor modifications in order to meet the publication criteria. Finished versions of papers are uploaded to the ECSDN website.

COMMON PITFALLS

One pitfall that some students can fall into is the confusion between writing in a critical way versus being critical. Clearly, when writing critically, it is important to evaluate practice. However, it is vitally important that students do not critique in an unkind or negative way.

When Nikki and I review a paper and we feel that the student is writing like this, advice will be given about how to 'soften the language' they use. This point was driven home to me as a student, when my lecturer used to say that 'one can say anything as long as it is beautifully packaged'.

We strongly feel that it is part of being an ethical practitioner to convey your thoughts, verbally and

in writing, in ways that are supportive and honest, but not critical. The last thing that the settings that offer our students a placement need to hear is that their hospitality has been met with critical-sounding views.

CONFIDENCE BOOST

For many, writing for the ECSDN is their first attempt at academic publishing and a real boost to their confidence to see themselves in print. It's also an exercise in writing to a relatively tight word count. Students have included it on their CVs and applications for further study.

Kristen Stead, early childhood student at the University of Worcester, said, 'I wanted to challenge myself to achieve something I hadn't before, as well as joining the wider conversation about early years with students from all over the country. I have always had an interest in reading journals, articles and books on the early years, so to have the opportunity to join that literature and voice my perspective was an exciting prospect.'

'Finding out that I was able to overcome a self-set challenge and achieve something that I hadn't done before sparked a desire to seek out more opportunities to be published.'

STUDENT PAPER EXTRACTS



Rochelle Felix,
MA, University of
East London
Submission title:
*Exploring
Ghanaian Children's*

Perception of Friendship
'Throughout ... semi-structured

interviews, the children of Yaa-Kwaku village asserted that they went to the farm, caught fish, and retrieved water with their friends. To adequately comprehend why the children articulated such activities, it is imperative to remember that the children are from a village. Their environment plays an active role in how they define their friends and how their friendship unfolds. The data from this research project accentuates the statement from Hartup (1992) which declares that propinquity is influential in children's friendship development. Furthermore, by stating that friends retrieved water, caught fish and farmed together, the children of Yaa-Kwaku are giving prominence to communal activities. These activities are more than shared activities, they are activities that may only be carried out in a specific environment. Thus, it is unmistakable that the children's environment is shaping who they consider as friends, and the activities in which they engage in together.'



Nina Hajitfofi,
undergraduate,
early childhood
studies, University
of Chichester
Submission title:

How the Montessori Philosophy can be seen as Inspiring

'The Montessori philosophy can inspire learning, however that does not mean it is not without fault. For some children, a structured learning style like the National Curriculum may be more suitable and inspire them to work to their full ability, however other children may be more inspired to learn by the

FURTHER INFORMATION

- All of the students whose work has been published in the first three calls for papers can be found at: <http://www.ecsdn.org/ecsdn-website-student-publications>
- The next submission deadline is 14 February, 2019
- Send submissions to Jackie Musgrave (jackie.musgrave@open.ac.uk) or Nikki Fairchild (n.fairchild@chi.ac.uk)

freedom of choice in the Montessori method, where they feel in control of their own learning and the speed they go at. From the writer's perspective, without learning being inspirational, learning would not be enjoyable for the children and the teachers and neither will be working to their best ability. In an ideal world, in order to ensure that each child meets their full potential from an educational perspective, it would be beneficial if children were assessed to evaluate which type of learning environment would be best for them. This clearly has its difficulties, for example funding, as it would mean different types of schools would have to be available in all geographical areas and additional effort would be required in assessing children so that appropriate schools are selected for them.'



Kristen Stead,
undergraduate,
early childhood
studies, University
of Worcester
Submission title:

The Manipulation of Play by Society is Constraining the Power of Play to Empower

'The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) arguably sets out a very narrow view of play, with its only function being educational. Section 1.8 (DfE, 2017) highlights the importance of adult-led, planned and purposeful play to support children's learning and development. However, through understanding the ambiguity of play, its vagueness demonstrates its inability to be narrowly restricted to only being a function for children's educational development. Sturrock and Else (1998) comment that there is a danger to restricting children's play aims with adults' urge to "teach" or "educate" or simply to "dominate". This danger of dominating children's play could result in children being disempowered to be autonomous and an agent in their own lives. The EYFS limits its potential to encourage and support children's development by only acknowledging play's benefit in cognitive learning, and not acknowledging the benefits presented by play in children's health and well-being. If we are to support children's holistic development, then there should be no limitation put on the power of play.' ■

Academic writing as professional development

Academic writing is a valuable skill in its own right. It involves being aware of the theoretical context in which the subject under discussion fits. It may be necessary to use references to theoretical perspectives, overviews of earlier research, a discussion of methodology, and analysis of data.

It can also have a powerful impact on practice. 'By finding and making use of legitimate ways of ... writing in their work as professional pre-school teachers ... they are progressively creating their professional identity,' note Swedish academics Emma Arneback and Tomas

Englund in their paper 'Achieving a professional identity through writing'.

The importance of developing this identity has been highlighted in other academic research. For novice early years practitioners dealing with difficult situations, it is easy to see how having a secure sense of identity can be beneficial. According to *Teacher Identity and Early Career Resilience: Exploring the Links* by Jane Pearce and Chad Morrison, 'early career teacher resilience may be enhanced when teachers engage consciously in the construction of their professional identities'.