

International perspectives on wellbeing and democratic living in early childhood curricula ^[1]

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Abstract

Early childhood curricula are constructed from what is deemed important for young children's development and learning nationally, while influenced by international policy developments. Following concerns surrounding international neo-liberal agendas in early childhood policy formation, this article examines the position of young children's wellbeing and democratic living in early childhood curricula in China, Colombia, Denmark, England and Portugal. A qualitative documentary analysis revealed multifaceted aspects of wellbeing, where the five curricula share an emphasis on holistic health, though with cultural distinctiveness. Social responsibility, relationships and respect for diversity are positioned as key to promoting safe and caring learning environments, where children's participation, agency and rights are emphasised in the Chinese, Colombian, Danish and Portuguese curricula, and with young children's play as the base for the curricula. However, it is a concern that the position of children's rights and agency is comparatively weak within the English curriculum, especially in the context of England's influence in developing international learning and wellbeing assessments of five-year olds. The authors urge stakeholders to use this knowledge to promote democratic living and young children's wellbeing, and to challenge when these values are not present in curricula, or national and international contexts.

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