

*Challenging our ways of being: The  
contribution of research to early  
childhood education for  
sustainability*

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# Overview

- Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)
- Collating research narratives and perspectives
- An analysis of commonalities and contrasts
- Moving forward with diverse theoretical lenses to promote transformative change



# Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)

## Global environmental dimension

- An era of increasing global environmental concerns and a new epoch, the 'anthropocene'

## Sociocultural dimension

- Old ways of being, based in individualism are not conducive to transformative global change, collective ways of being are required
- Rights require revisioning beyond foundational rights as defined by UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989)
- Different ways of thinking, acting and relating are essential to sustainable being (Kemmis, 2009)

# Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)

## International and historical dimension

- Mid 1980's emergence of early childhood environmental education in Australia and USA
- Local and national networks and conferences, and publications 1992-2014
- Broader advocacy and engagement by ECA, OMEP, UNESCO through publications and conferences

# Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)

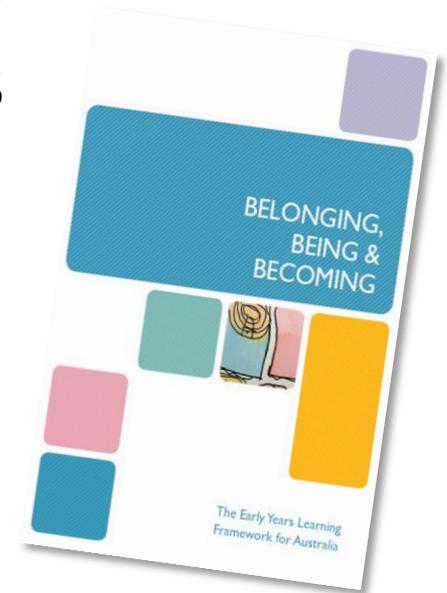
## Early childhood dimension

- Most modelling of the impacts of climate change does not include children (Strazdinis & Skeat, 2011, p3)
- Climate change is the greatest crisis for child health (Waterston, 2006)
- Children are 'most at risk from the impact of environmental challenges' (Siraj-Blatchford & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009, p10)

# Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)

Australian early childhood policy dimension

- The NQS (ACECQA, 2013) advocates a systemic approach to sustainability, notably QA3.3
- The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) supports sustainability, notably Outcome 2



# Multiple dimensions of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)

These multiple and interwoven global and local dimensions offer a basis for theorising and conceptualising about research and there are many ECEfS research avenues to explore.

# Collating research narratives and perspectives

Establishment of an International ECEfS  
Transnational Dialogues Research Group in 2010  
and subsequent meeting in 2011



# Collating research narratives and perspectives

- Participants from Scandinavia, South-East Asia, and Australasia.
- The group identified a shared view of the actual and potential capabilities of young children as change agents for sustainability as core to ECEfS.
- The group focus on documentation about their research and theorising about early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS) led to the compilation of 18 chapters in this publication.



# Research in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability

International perspectives and provocations

Edited by Julie Davis and Sue Elliott



# Collating research narratives and perspectives

Analysis of the chapters led to three clusters around key themes:

1. Core values and ethics
2. The impacts of historical, sociocultural and political contexts
3. Curriculum and pedagogy



# An analysis of commonalities and contrasts: Cluster 1

A small, but strongly theoretically focussed cluster with provocations for deeper reflection about ECEfS from rights based and Indigenous perspectives

- Revisioning rights beyond the foundational UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989) to agentic participation rights, collective rights, intergenerational rights and bio/ecocentric rights

- Rights as integral to ‘belonging’, the child being invited to be a world citizen who actively participates in communities for change
- Participation inevitably brings ‘value conflicts’ and approaches to dealing with these viewed as emergent learning in ECEfS
- Critical place-based and Indigenous-informed pedagogies involving a reframing of place meanings and building deeper environmental relationships

# An analysis of commonalities and contrasts: Cluster 2

A cluster reflecting the impacts of diverse historical and sociocultural contexts on the implementation of ECEfS, insights from Australia, Japan, Singapore and Norway

- Building reciprocity and shared goals informed by Indigenous perspectives through intercultural dialogues in Australia
- Bridging the historical separation between EE and EC in Japan and moving beyond EE as 'nature activities' to a build a sustainable society

- Aligning an island nation's national green plan, EE and EC paradigms in Singapore as an opportunity to build partnerships
- Acknowledging the tensions between Norwegian traditions in nature, Arne Naess's philosophies, environmental responsibilities and individual motivations towards action for sustainability

# An analysis of commonalities and contrasts: Cluster 3

The largest cluster, offering a broad coverage of curriculum and pedagogy, building on the historical practitioner base of ECEfS over three decades.

- Transformative approaches with children, pre-service and in-service educators , a strong commonality well aligned with EfS
- Outdoors and nature education reflecting ECEfS foundations in nature experiences, but some questioning about is this sufficient

- Place-based education linked to incorporating Indigenous perspectives across Australia and New Zealand
- Community experiences and partnerships where children are active, visible and engaged participants/decision-makers in their communities
- Integrated and interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches drawing particularly on literature, the arts and sciences

# Moving forward with diverse theoretical lenses to promote transformative change

We challenge researchers and practitioners alike to:

- Move beyond the dominance of Cluster 3
- Explore the historical, sociocultural and political contexts in which our ways of being are constructed in Cluster 2
- Engage in deep reflection about the ethics and values of sustainability as identified in Cluster 1

*We believe, as early childhood educators, that we have an ethical responsibility to address the urgency for transformative change necessary for sustainable living; as researchers, we have responsibilities to investigate, through diverse theoretical lenses, the why's and how's of ECEfS, and to challenge our ways of being.....*

*In particular, we need to question where are the gaps and silences in ECEfS research to explore through these diverse theoretical lenses.....*



# Discussion points

- **What research possibilities can you identify in ECEfS?**
- **What theoretical lenses might be relevant?**



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