

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73612-1 - Young Children and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability

Edited by Julie M. Davis

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YOUNG CHILDREN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Young Children and the Environment tackles one of the biggest contemporary issues of our times – the changing environment – and demonstrates how early education can contribute to sustainable living. An essential text for students in early childhood education and a practical resource for child care practitioners and primary school teachers, it is designed to promote education for sustainability from birth to eight years.

The text refers to national and international initiatives such as ‘Sustainable Schools’, ‘Child Friendly Cities’ and ‘Health Promoting Schools’, and explores their existing and potential links with early childhood education. Groundbreaking content draws on recent literature in the areas of organisational, educational and cultural change, and environmental sustainability. Specific chapters explore ethical challenges and the use of information technology to advance learning. Early childhood case studies and vignettes exemplify leadership in practice, and ‘Provocations’ are integrated throughout to inspire new ways of thinking about the environment, the wider world, young children and the transformative power of early education.

Julie M. Davis is Senior Lecturer in the School of Early Childhood, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

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To all the world’s children – today and tomorrow

FOREWORD

It has been a pleasure to read this book, a pioneer in an area that focuses on how early childhood education can contribute towards a more sustainable world. It contains a balanced mix of facts, illustrative examples and provocative questions, with the authors aiming actively to engage the reader to become involved in changing him/herself as much as changing his/her ideas. The different chapters focus both on early childhood educational settings as places for children's actions related to the environment and on related topics – such as health – that are concerned with early childhood and children's lives in a wider sense.

Although the focus here is mainly on questions related to the environment, the text gives a much broader view of what education for sustainability can be like. Convincingly, the authors show how urgent it is to transform our education systems in order to be cross-disciplinary, authentic and closely related to children's everyday experiences. The reasons for this are global, in terms of justice, equality and equity, but also environmental, in terms of global warming and climate change.

While the book illustrates the need for global and community political commitments to sustainable living, it emphasises the importance of beginning with the youngest children. We know from years of research that the early years provide a window of opportunity to lay the foundations for knowledge, skills and attitudes. We also know that there are many international agreements and declarations that are commitments intended to guide policy as well as everyday life for children and those who work with children. One of these is the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). This Convention is the starting point for a theoretical framework for early childhood education for sustainability that is argued for in this book; a framework based on children's rights, a child competency dimension and children as participants and activists in their world. In other words, children should live in a democracy in which they are regarded as equal human beings already involved in, and becoming increasingly aware, of the state of the world.

The book shows clearly that early childhood education of high quality is a good starting point for education for sustainable development, but that it is not enough to educate children for a more sustainable world and society. We need to know a lot more through mainstream research processes, and also to engage



Foreword

in alternative cross-disciplinary research, methods and approaches, whereby the complexity of environmental and sustainability questions and issues can be explored.

This book will be of great value to pre-service teacher education all over the world, as well as for early childhood practitioners already in the field, to inspire them to change their own practice. Researchers are another important target group, specifically those who want to approach this complex and challenging area of early childhood education and sustainable development. Last, but not the least, this book will be of value to our politicians, who need to become much more aware of how economy, social-cultural dimensions and environment are intertwined and, in so doing, help to create possibilities for working towards a sustainable world and society at all levels, beginning in the early years and proceeding throughout life.

Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson
UNESCO Chair of Early Childhood Education and
Sustainable Development

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Julie M. Davis is Senior Lecturer in the School of Early Childhood, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, where the focus of her teacher education work is in social, environmental, science and health education, in early childhood educational contexts. Julie has undergraduate qualifications in education and environmental studies, and holds a masters degree and doctorate in environmental education. She has advocated for early childhood education for sustainability for almost 20 years.

Sue Elliott is an experienced early childhood practitioner and lecturer in early childhood education, with interests in education for sustainability and natural outdoor playspaces. She edited the recent publication *The Outdoor Playspace: Naturally* and is currently completing doctoral studies at the University of New England while lecturing at RMIT University, Melbourne. Sue has been a pioneer and mobiliser of environmental education and education for sustainability in Australia and internationally.

Megan Gibson is Lecturer in the School of Early Childhood, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Her key areas of interest are education for sustainability, leadership and management and early childhood teachers' professional identities. As then-Director of Brisbane's Campus Kindergarten, in 1997 Megan initiated its highly regarded *Sustainable Planet Project*. Megan's current doctoral research seeks to provide understandings about pre-service teachers' professional identities and career choices, particularly related to child care.

Robert Pratt is an early childhood educator with over 16 years' experience in early childhood settings. Until recently, he worked at Campus Kindergarten in Brisbane, where he developed and coordinated many of the centre's sustainability initiatives. Robert is committed to working collaboratively with children, teachers and the community to embed sustainability ideals, concepts and actions into everyday life. In 2008, he received a Highly Commended award for *Excellence by a Teacher* at the *Australian Government National Awards for Quality Schooling*, in recognition of his work in early childhood education for sustainability.

Lesley Robinson and **Sue Vaealiki** work for *Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa*, the New Zealand Childcare Association. This organisation delivers initial teacher education programs and advocates for quality early childhood education

throughout New Zealand. Lesley and Sue’s interest in education for sustainability has led them to develop courses, workshops and presentations for early childhood teachers. Both writers have a passion for exploring transformative pedagogy in the tertiary and early childhood education sectors.

Melinda G. Miller is completing a doctorate on professional development for teachers in before-school contexts, around social justice and inclusion. Her teaching and research interests include sociology, cultural studies, early childhood education for sustainability and inclusive practices in child care. Her recent publications focus on the transition of children from immigrant and refugee backgrounds into Australian child care settings. She also advocates on issues of access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Margaret Lloyd is Senior Lecturer specialising in information and communications technologies (ICT) in education at the Queensland University of Technology. She has published widely, has been involved in school curriculum design in Queensland and the Northern Territory, and is currently involved in a transnational project to set up connections between schools in Australia and Norway. Her passion, put into action through her management of the oz-Teacher.net, is to harness the power of ICT into meaningful use in the classroom.

Sue Cooke is a Brisbane-based policy adviser in children’s health and education and has postgraduate qualifications in public health, education and environmental change. As an advocate for ‘green and healthy schools’ (health-promoting and sustainable schools) over the 20 years since her own children were little, she believes that early childhood and school settings can be powerful community generators for the transformational changes needed to switch humanity’s path towards healthy, just and sustainable futures.

Jo-Anne Ferreira is an environmental educator with a research interest in teacher education and systems of governance. She is particularly interested in how systems, networks and organisations operate and create opportunities for simultaneous change in large and complex systems. She convenes the Master of Environmental Education program at Griffith University in Queensland, and is the most recent past-editor of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*.