Learning and Teaching in the Early Years provides a comprehensive, contemporary and practical introduction to early childhood teaching in Australia. A strong focus on the links between theory, policy and practice firmly aligns this text with the Early Years Learning Framework.

Written for students of early childhood programs, this book covers learning and development, as well as professional practice in teaching children from birth to eight years. In recognition of the evolving role of early childhood teachers, topic areas include learning, teaching, working with families, leading, advocating and researching. Each chapter contains learning objectives, key terms and reflection points. Detailed case studies document the intersection between research, policy and practice, enhancing pre-service and practicing early childhood teachers’ appreciation of how a policy-aligned approach reinforces learning and development in the early years.

Learning and Teaching in the Early Years draws on the latest Australian and international research to examine the features of effective practice and to present children’s learning as a dynamic and active process requiring specific, intentional teaching behaviours.

Jane Page is Senior Lecturer at the University of Melbourne.

Collette Tayler is Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care at the University of Melbourne.
Learning and Teaching in the Early Years

Edited by

Jane Page
Collette Tayler
For Rod and Pam, Christopher, Laura and Dominic (JP)
For my grandson, Hugo, and all his contemporaries (CT)
Foreword

When I was documenting my own thoughts of the 2007 Federal Labor Government and its achievements in early childhood policy, it was Collette Tayler who said to me: 'we’re involved in a decade-long effort. If we hold our nerve, we’re on track to achieve something fine in this country'. Then, as now, I loved the optimism and ambition of this statement. This publication, guided so ably by Collette, Jane Page and many other academic colleagues, is an important and timely compilation. It explores the raison d’être behind Australia’s renewed investment in the early years of a child’s life, and details the policy framework and research ideas that govern learning and development in all care settings – be it pre-school, family or long day care.

As described across these chapters, there is now a national focus on policy goals, and a set of standards and regulations against which we can judge the quality of the services provided for Australian children. There has been fine-tuning, to be sure, but there now exists, across the disparate jurisdictions that make up the Commonwealth of Australia, a recognition that the Australian National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care is a core foundational document.

Within this volume the authors have also considered the many critical issues that are needed to achieve an optimal pedagogical environment. They include the recognition that young children are learners with rights, that intentional teaching is the way to help children achieve the skills they need to succeed to life, and importantly an acknowledgement that families are the ‘first’ partners in the learning process.

Readers of this publication will emerge with a finer appreciation of the complexity, hard work and critical thinking that now informs practice by teachers and families. We know that children are born hard-wired to learn and that the major life phase that represents early childhood is a period of astonishing development. That so many of our talented academic thinkers, policy makers and practitioners are working collaboratively is testament to the open spirit and sense of opportunity that is shared across the early childhood education and care sector.

They are inspired by a singular goal – to help nurture a generation of children who are happy, confident life-long learners.

Maxine McKew
Parliamentary Secretary Early Childhood – Rudd Labor Government
## Contents

Foreword vi
Contributors ix

### Introduction

1

### Chapter 1: Learning and teaching in the early years

*Collette Tayler and Jane Page*

- **Features of learning in the early years** 7
- **The active ingredients of high-quality early childhood programs** 15
- **Collecting evidence of learning to build teaching effectiveness** 19

### Chapter 2: A policy frame on early learning and teaching

*Karen Weston and Collette Tayler*

- **Direction from research: some influences and dilemmas of Australian early childhood policy** 28
- **The Early Years Learning Framework** 33
- **The National Quality Framework and Standard** 36
- **The impact of reform on teachers and teaching** 38

### Chapter 3: Young children as learners with rights

*Jane Page and Collette Tayler*

- **Repositioning young children as active social agents: Australian policy context** 48
- **The UNCRC and the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care** 50
- **Young children as holders of rights: implications for teaching and learning** 55

### Chapter 4: Teaching for learning

*Jan Deans, Jane Page and Collette Tayler*

- **Early years teaching and learning in the Australian policy context** 70
- **Pedagogy: the selection and use of evidence-based teaching strategies** 74
## Contents

The balance, purpose and intent of children's learning within play-based programs 78

**Chapter 5: Partnering with families to promote learning**  
*Caroline Cohrssen and Frank Niklas*  
The family as context of child development 91  
A theoretical framework for the home learning environment 96  
Teachers, children and children's families 101  
Establishing and maintaining partnerships with families 104

**Chapter 6: Leading for learning**  
*Jane Page and Collette Tayler*  
Conceptualising educational leadership 113  
A model of educational leadership in ECEC settings: building the climate and commitment to advance young children's learning outcomes 118  
A model of educational leadership: tracking the effectiveness of educational leadership on young children's learning outcomes 124

**Chapter 7: Advocating for learning**  
*Collette Tayler, Tim Gilley and Jane Page*  
Nature of advocacy 135  
The place of research in advocating for children and their learning rights 141  
Advocacy at the practice level 146

**Chapter 8: Research for learning and teaching**  
*Amelia Church, Jane Page, Susan Wright and Collette Tayler*  
The role research plays in shaping practice and policy in early learning and teaching 158  
Types of research in the early years 163  
Research participation in the early years: teacher and children as co-researchers in learning 168  
Research ethics in the early years 171

*Index* 179
Contributors

Editors

Jane Page (PhD) is Senior Lecturer in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She has worked in the early childhood profession for over 20 years covering a range of roles both as a practitioner in early childhood services and also as a teacher in the university sector, including Program Coordinator Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) for seven years. Jane has been actively engaged with State and local governments and the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) in the development and implementation of a number of projects that focus on early childhood teachers’ pedagogical practices. Her research focuses on the application of human rights principles in early childhood settings. Jane is currently managing research projects concerned with quality pedagogy and the impact of evidence-based interventions on children and families experiencing vulnerable circumstances, and is Chief Investigator of an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Building a Bridge into Preschool in Remote Northern Territory, in partnership with the Northern Territory Government’s Department of Education and Operations Manager of the Victorian Advancing Early Learning Research Project.

Collette Tayler (PhD) is Chair in Early Childhood Education and Care in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She is Chief Investigator in the Australian Research Council National Science of Learning Centre, Project Leader of the E4Kids longitudinal study and its related Victorian Advancing Early Learning studies, and leader of the 3a (Abecedarian Approach Australia) group of development projects, at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Collette also served as the Deputy Chair of the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority from 2012–2015, and is a board member of the VCAA and the Victorian Children’s Council. Collette’s teaching, educational research and development work spans 40 years in different parts of Australia, addressing effective early years teaching and learning, with studies conducted in home-, centre- and school-based programs within culturally and linguistically diverse urban, regional and remote communities.
Chapter authors

Amelia Church (PhD) is Lecturer in the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, where she leads subjects in qualitative research methodologies, and coordinates the Master of Teaching Research Option and Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research. Amelia holds a PhD in Linguistics from Monash University and published this research as *Preference organization and peer disputes: How young children resolve conflict* (2009). Most recently, collaborations with other researchers will be published in *Children’s Knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (2016), edited with Amanda Bateman. Her current research interests include communicative competence in early childhood, peer interaction, developmental pragmatics and conversation analysis in institutional settings.

Caroline Cohrssen (PhD) is Senior Lecturer in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She edited the writing of the evidence paper for *Practice Principle 1: Family-centred practice* published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in 2010 to support the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*. Caroline’s subsequent research has investigated quality adult–child interactions to support mathematics learning, the influence of the home learning environment on children’s numeracy skills, and children’s spatial thinking and academic self-concept in the year prior to school entry. Her work is aimed at equipping families, pre-service early years students and teachers to recognise mathematical thinking, plan playful activities and interact purposefully to support and extend children’s emerging skills and understanding. She believes that small-group, play-based mathematics activities provide opportunities for adults to support individual children’s skills and understanding as they transition into formal school education, and that equipping children with the skills to achieve success contributes to a child’s sense of belonging to a community and a broader society.

Jan Deans (PhD) is Director of the Early Learning Centre, the University of Melbourne’s research and demonstration pre-school. She is also Senior Lecturer at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, taking the role of Professional Partnership Coordinator for the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program. She is a long-time advocate for teaching and learning through the arts, and has worked both locally and internationally in early childhood, primary, tertiary and special education settings. She has broad-based expertise in relation to early childhood education and service delivery, and her recent research interests include learning through dance, social emotional competence and learning through music. In 1997, she established Boorai – The Children’s Art Gallery to present the voices of young children as expressed through their art and narratives. Boorai collaborates with educational and community organisations locally, nationally and internationally.
Frank Niklas (PhD) is a researcher and Lecturer at the University of Würzburg, Germany and Senior Research Fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. He is a developmental and educational psychologist with research interests in how children learn in the context of families (Home Learning Environment). In 2010, Frank completed his PhD at the University of Würzburg, where he investigated precursors of reading, writing, and mathematical abilities as well as school readiness in children. He was granted a two-year post-doctoral fellowship by the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD) in August 2013. In his honorary appointment at the University of Melbourne he works on projects such as ‘Effective Early Educational Experiences for Kids’ (E4Kids study) and ‘Enriching the home learning environment’. In August 2015 he returned to the University of Würzburg.

Tim Gilley (PhD) lectures in the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) and the Master of Teaching (Early Years) courses in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. He is also Partner Investigator for the Victorian Department of Education and Training on a major Australian longitudinal study on the impact on children’s outcomes of their participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs in the years before school – the E4Kids study. He has a PhD in early childhood education and a Master of Social Work. Tim has worked in a wide range of government organisations (local, State and Commonwealth) and non-government agencies, and has broad experience and expertise in the areas of public administration, social work, social research and social policy. A key element across all roles has been as an advocate for social justice, particularly for families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Karen Weston is Director of Early Learning and Development Reform Branch at the Department of Education in Victoria. Karen has over 25 years experience in early childhood policy and sector development. Her recent work has included leading, in collaboration with many others, the development of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and its Regulations, and the 2014 Review of the National Quality Framework (NQF), which has established new benchmarks for quality in the provision of education and care in Australia.

Susan Wright (PhD) is Chair of Arts Education and Director of the UNESCO Observatory of Arts Education in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. Prior to this, she was Professor and Head of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education at the National Institute of Education in Singapore, and the Director of the Centre of Applied Studies in Early Childhood at the Queensland University of Technology. Susan’s research interests include semiotics within artistic domains, including narrative genres, and non-verbal modalities, such as gesture, dance, graphic representation and music. A common thread running through much of this work is temporal–spatial–embodied knowing, meaning making and communication. Her books include Children, Meaning-Making and the...
Arts (2012), Understanding Creativity in Early Childhood (2010) and The Arts, Young Children and Learning (2003). She has published numerous chapters in research handbooks and books, and journal articles on various topics related to arts education.

Case study authors

Jeff Borland (PhD) is Truby Williams Professor of Economics at the University of Melbourne. One of his major topics of research is on evaluating policies and programs that are intended to assist skill development. His roles in Early Years Education Research Project (EYERP) are to assist with the design of the trial and data analysis.

Isabel Brookes is Research Fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. Her recent work includes the implementation of a targeted intervention to support Indigenous children’s English language learning, leading an early years improvement strategy at a remote early childhood site and the development of online resources to support pre-service teacher education. Isabel is a PhD candidate with the Science of Learning Research Centre, investigating the effect of adult prompts and feedback on children’s learning.

Tamera Clancy is Senior Clinical Psychologist with postgraduate training in perinatal psychiatry and infant mental health. Tamera joined the EYERP in 2012, bringing specialised training in developmental assessment and significant experience with families experiencing stress and adversity. Tamera’s clinical and research interests include infant–parent relationships, child development and early intervention.

Louise Cooke is the Family Educator for the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) Program at Gunbalanya School and has worked in a number of leadership roles in the FaFT program since 2009. Louise has worked in remote Indigenous early childhood setting since 2004. Prior to her current role, she was Abecedarian Manager (Indigenous Early Learning Programs) in the Department of Education, Northern Territory Government for two years.

Nichola Coombs (PhD) has a clinical background in infant, child and family mental health. She is the Senior Clinical Research Associate for the EYERP, managing the data collection process – including recruitment, engagement and sustained participation of trial participants – and collection of clinical observational data.

Kate Cotter is Chair of the Working Group and a former Children’s Protection Society (CPS) board member. Kate has worked as a strategy consultant on major reform programs for public sector organisations and brings extensive experience in project management, service delivery reform in social welfare and public policy development to the research team.

Rachel Flottman has been a lecturer in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She is currently completing a PhD on the
implementation of the EYLF. Prior to this, she was Policy Adviser in the Victorian Education Department for six years, taking a lead role in the development of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

John Haisken-DeNew (PhD) is Professorial Research Fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. His research interests include empirical economic analyses of education, economic expectations, health, labour and welfare/subjective well-being.

Alice Hill (PhD) founded the Early Years Education Program (EYEP) and the EYERP (on which she continues to serve) during her time as Chair of the Board of the Children’s Protection Society. A Director of the Antipodean Family Foundation, she is a former World Bank economist and McKinsey and Frontier Economics consultant.

Natalie Jones is Senior Kindergarten Teacher and Team Leader at the University of Melbourne’s Early Learning Centre. Natalie’s experience in the early childhood field spans 20 years and has seen her work in long day care, tutoring in Indigenous Australian Studies at the University of Melbourne and guest lecturing on a range of topics including the Reggio Emilia approach to education, Indigenous perspectives in early childhood and anti-bias curriculum.

Brigid Jordan (PhD) is a social worker and infant mental health clinician/researcher. She is Associate Professor of Paediatric Social Work at the Royal Children’s Hospital and University of Melbourne and heads the Social and Mental Health Group at the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute. She has been involved in the design and implementation of both EYEP and EYERP.

Anne Kennedy (PhD) has extensive experience in early childhood education as an academic, advocate, writer, teacher, trainer and consultant and is an honorary fellow of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She is the Chairperson of Community Child Care Association, Victoria, a member of the EYEP research group and is the Curriculum Consultant for the CPS EYEP. Anne was a member of the Charles Sturt University writing team that developed the EYLF.

Gerry Mulhearn (PhD) is a member of the Research Institute for Professional Practice Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University, and an independent consultant. Previously, as Director in the South Australian Department of Education and Child Development, she played a lead role in the development of the EYLF, the National Early Childhood Development Strategy and the NQF assessment and rating process.

Carmel Phillips is Manager of the Early Years Unit, VCAA. In this role she supports the implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. This includes reviewing and developing curriculum and assessment resources, and
program evaluations. From 2012, a key focus of her role has been the development and delivery of inquiry based professional learning with practitioners, policy makers and researchers in multidisciplinary early years networks to improve outcomes for children.

**Nicole Pilsworth** holds a Master of Educational Leadership and Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). She has experience in a variety of ECEC settings over the last 25 years in New South Wales and Victoria including supporting the implementation of the EYLF and the National Reform Agenda. Nicole is the Albert Felton Early Childhood Education Fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne in research focusing on the impact of professional learning on teachers' interactions and young children’s learning outcomes.

**Rachel Pollitt** is a graduate of the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program at the University of Melbourne. She was the recipient of the School of Early Childhood Study Funds Award 2014 in her final year of study. She is a PhD Candidate (AAP) in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, undertaking research on spatial reasoning and assessment in early childhood teaching practice.

**Gracie Pupillo** holds a Bachelor in Early Childhood Studies, which has enabled her to work in a variety of early childhood settings including both long day care and kindergarten over the past 20 years. Her recent experience has been in leading the implementation of the 3a strategies (Abecedarian Approach Australia) and Victorian Advancing Early Learning (VAEL) Study with Melbourne University. Gracie is currently working as the educational leader across three services for the Moonee Valley City Council while teaching at a sessional kindergarten.

**Carol Rasborsek** was a graduate of the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program at the University of Melbourne. She was the recipient of the Ada Mary a’Beckett Award in her final year of study. She has fifteen years experience working with children in kindergarten and long day care settings. She is Clinical Specialist in the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program at the University of Melbourne and a consultant for the Early Years Unit at the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

**Joseph Sparling** (PhD) is Honorary Professorial Fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne and Senior Scientist Emeritus at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. With Professor Craig Ramey, he developed the Abecedarian Approach. Forty years of research shows that implementation of this program early in life has a positive long-lasting impact for children and parents experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

**Sophia Stirling** is a graduate of the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program at the University of Melbourne. She currently works as a graduate teacher at the
University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre. Sophia’s experience with children spans 15 years and has seen her work as a dance teacher’s assistant and a teacher in child care, primary school and long day care settings.

Jennifer Sumison (PhD) is Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education and Director of the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University. In previous leadership roles, she has been Co-Director of the Excellence in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network and co-leader of the national consortium that was contracted to develop and trial the EYLF.

Yi-Ping Tseng (PhD) is Senior Research Fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social research at the University of Melbourne. She is a labour economist with specific interest on program evaluation and social policies. Yi-Ping is a member of the CPS research group.

Wan Yi Lee is a graduate of the Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) program at the University of Melbourne. This case study was conducted in partial fulfillment of the Master’s program in which she was awarded the School of Early Childhood Fund Prize 2014 for best overall course results. She is a PhD scholarship recipient of an Australian Research Council Linkage Project, currently situated in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

Diana Warren (PhD) is an economist at the Australian Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne. Her research focuses on the application of longitudinal data analysis for complex survey data, particularly using the LSAC and HILDA. Her main research interests are economics of education and labour economics.

Sarah Young is a lecturer in early childhood education at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She also works with children and adults in a variety of community and educational settings focusing on teaching and learning in the early years, with a particular emphasis on the arts. Sarah is currently completing her PhD, which examines the kindergarten teacher’s role in play.