The Early Childhood Education Playbook

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The Early Childhood Education Playbook

Kateri Thunder
John Almarode
Alisha Demchak
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kateri Thunder, PhD, has the pleasure of collaborating with learners, families, and educators from school divisions and early learning centers around the world to translate research into practice. Previously, Kateri served as an inclusive early childhood educator, an Upward Bound educator, a mathematics specialist, an assistant professor of mathematics education at James Madison University, and Site Director for the Central Virginia Writing Project. Then, Kateri followed her passion back into the classroom where she spent each day learning with her prekindergartners and coaching mathematics specialists in Charlottesville City Schools. Kateri researches, writes, and presents on equity and access in early childhood and mathematics education and the intersection of literacy and mathematics for teaching and learning. She has partnered with thousands of educators to catalyze change in their classrooms, centers, and schools. Kateri is chair of NCTM's Research Committee, co-creator of The Math Diet, board member for Barrett Early Learning Center, and a best-selling author for Corwin's *Teaching Mathematics in the Visible Learning Classroom* Series, the *Success Criteria Playbook*, and *Visible Learning in Early Childhood*.

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Dr. John Almarode is a professor of education in the College of Education at James Madison University, teaching in the Elementary and Inclusive Early Childhood Education Programs. In 2015, John was awarded the inaugural Sarah Miller Luck Endowed Professorship. In 2021, John was honored with an Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia. At James Madison University, he continues to work with pre-service teachers, graduate students, and teacher leaders and was recently named a Madison Scholar in the College of Education. He has published numerous articles on teaching and learning as well as books such as *Clarity for Learning, The Success Criteria Playbook*, *PLC+*, *Visible Learning for Science*, *Visible Learning in Early Childhood, Inclusive Teaching in the Early Childhood Science Classroom*, and most recently, *How Learning Works*.

Alisha Demchak, MEd, is an early childhood educator and researcher whose passion for improving reading outcomes for all learners is visible across her work. Alisha has taught in early childhood classrooms and mixed-age settings, served as a reading specialist and interventionist, and coached early childhood educators, administrators, and literacy coordinators. Currently, she is researching evidenced-based instructional practices in early childhood reading and striving to ensure those practices enter into classrooms by working with pre-service and in-service teachers to build their skill set and confidence in reading instruction.

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Douglas Fisher, PhD, is a professor of educational leadership at San Diego State University and a teacher leader at Health Sciences High. At Health Sciences High, he currently oversees a child development and preschool program with Nancy Frey. Previously, Doug was an early intervention teacher and elementary school educator. He is the recipient of an International Reading Association William S. Grey citation of merit and an Exemplary Leader award from the Conference on English Leadership of NCTE. He has published numerous articles on teaching and learning as well as books such as *The Teacher Clarity Playbook*, *PLC+*, *Visible Learning for Literacy*, *Comprehension: The Skill, Will, and Thrill of Reading*, *How Tutoring Works*, and most recently, *How Learning Works*. Doug loves being an educator and hopes to share that passion with others.

Nancy Frey, PhD, is a professor in educational leadership at San Diego State and a teacher leader at Health Sciences High and Middle College where she oversees a child development and preschool program with Douglas Fisher. Nancy started her career as special educator for young children. Later, as a reading specialist, she directed an intervention clinic that supported language and literacy development in children. She is a member of the International Literacy Association's Literacy Research Panel. Her published titles include *Visible Learning in Literacy*, *This Is Balanced Literacy*, *Removing Labels*, and *Rebound*. Nancy is a credentialed special educator, reading specialist, and administrator in California and learns from teachers and students every day.

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PART I

WHO BEFORE DO

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1 BECOMING EXPERT EDUCATORS

Positive teacher–student relationships are critical to learning and development. Therefore, in our work with learners, we put *who* before *do*. We discover *who* is learning with us *before* we make decisions about what we will *do* related to teaching, learning, and development.

Part 1 is all about *who before do*. In this module, we focus on getting to know YOU. We begin by inviting you to reflect on your teacher identity, teacher credibility, and teacher efficacy. Then, we explore the seven characteristics of expert early childhood educators and set aims to intentionally grow these characteristics in *all* our young learners.

LEARNING INTENTION AND SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR MODULE 1

Before you engage with the learning in this module, read what we intend to learn (LI, the learning intention) and what it'll look and sound like when we've learned this (SC, the success criteria). Next, read the levels, descriptions, and images of the path to mastery (the rubric). Evaluate where you are right now for each success criteria. At the end of the module, we'll return to this self-evaluation and document the ways we've intentionally grown our teaching practice over time.

LI: We are learning about the importance of growing our credibility and self-efficacy so that we can build our expertise as early childhood educators.

SC: I'll know I've learned this when I can

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- Reflect on my teacher identity, credibility, and self-efficacy.

- Explain the importance of my teacher identity, credibility, and self-efficacy for positively impacting children's learning and development.

- Make sense of the relationship between growing my credibility and self-efficacy and growing my expertise in the big ideas of teaching, learning, and development for early childhood.

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- Identify ways to grow my credibility and efficacy as an early educator.

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REFLECTION

The teaching, learning, and development of our youngest learners unite us. There are so many occupations, and in education, quite a variety of roles. So, why are you an early childhood educator? What keeps you returning each day? Take a moment to pause and reflect on who you are as an educator and what insights and strengths you bring to this work.

Your Teacher Identity

Why do you choose to work with this unique age of young learners?	What draws you to your specific role at your specific program?
What makes you a great early educator?	What is your hope for your young learners?

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REFLECTION

We began by reflecting on who we are as educators. And now, we reflect on who we are to the children we work with, their families, and our colleagues. How do they see us?

Teacher Credibility

How would your **learners** respond to the following question: *How would you describe your teacher?*	How would your learners' **families** respond to the following question: *How would you describe your child's teacher?*	How would your **colleagues** respond to the following question: *How would you describe (your name) as a teacher?*

These answers represent teacher credibility. Teacher credibility is the learner's belief that they can and will learn from you. In early childhood, our partnerships with learners, families, and colleagues are central to teaching, learning, and development so we consider all their perspectives. Teacher credibility has a very strong effect size of 1.09 (www.visiblelearningmetax.com); it is worth our time and energy to grow our teacher credibility because when children believe they can learn from us, they are more likely to.

There are four characteristics of teacher credibility:

- Trust
- Competence
- Dynamism
- Immediacy

These characteristics are the ways that we communicate to learners that they can and will learn from us.

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Trust: Children and families want to trust us to keep our word and to follow through. They want us to genuinely care for and respect each child and trust that we always work to do our best for them as learners, friends, and family members.

Competence: Children and families want to know we are competent educators by experiencing well-organized, accurate, and clearly communicated instruction. They want to be assured that we hold expertise from both experience and education about early childhood learning and development and that we apply this knowledge thoughtfully as we interact with children.

Dynamism: Children and families want to feel our passion for working with young children and for being a part of their learning and development. They want to be meaningfully engaged in their interactions with us and know that we will be positive, energetic, and active.

Immediacy: Children and families want us to be accessible and relatable. They want to know we are moving learning and development forward with purpose, not wasting time, and that we are responsive to who they are as individuals.

REFLECTION

Now that you've read about the four characteristics of teacher credibly, choose a color, a symbol, or an image to represent each one. Briefly explain the reasoning behind your representations.

Trust	Competence
Dynamism	Immediacy

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Through words and actions, we make sure our children and their families believe they will experience success as learners because we are their teachers. One pivotal way to grow our teacher credibility is by viewing every interaction we share with our learners and their families as a learning opportunity. Every interaction occurs by design, not by chance. Rather than simply engaging in free play or mere observation, we engage in interactions for learning where we communicate trust, competence, dynamism, and immediacy.

REFLECTION

What are other ways we can strengthen our credibility?

Ways I can strengthen my credibility with my **learners** this school year	Ways I can strengthen my credibility with **families** this school year	Ways I can strengthen my credibility with my **colleagues** this school year

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CASE IN POINT

Emelie Mendoza promised to give her children's families a schedule for the week. But she forgot. She sits fairly far away from her learners when reading aloud to them because she thinks that they can see her better. And she often calls a child by another child's name. Her skill level in terms of instructional repertoire is very strong, and she is often asked to share her teaching strategies with others.

Ms. Mendoza means well. She loves her role and wants to see her learners flourish. In reflecting on her teaching with her director, Ms. Mendoza said, "I'm just not seeing the growth that I thought I would get. The children are a little distant from me, but they seem warmer with other staff. They are so happy to see the other people who work here and they are nice to me, but it's just not the same."

The program director asked Ms. Mendoza to analyze her actions to identify if there were possibilities for increasing her credibility with children and their caregivers. Immediately, she said that she really needed to learn names and get them right. When asked how she might do that, Ms. Mendoza said that she could put their pictures on index cards and practice them every night. As she noted, "I have three different classes that I'm with at different parts of the day. So I'm seeing about 50 children a day and that's hard. But I want to be better."

What else might Ms. Mendoza do to improve her credibility?

Trust	Competence
Dynamism	Immediacy

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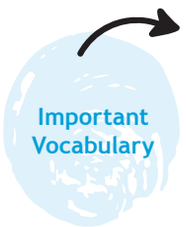
TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY

The potential for learning begins with both teacher credibility and self-efficacy. Just as learners must believe they can learn from us, we must believe we can teach them effectively. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief that our work matters and that we can and will be effective educators. Most significantly, teacher self-efficacy is the belief that we can have a positive impact on *every* learner. In early childhood, this belief is critical because we lay the foundation that thwarts achievement gaps from forming. Teacher self-efficacy has a large effect size of 0.65 (www.visiblelearningmetax.com); it is worth our time and energy to grow our teacher self-efficacy because when we believe we can move *all* learners forward, we are more likely to.

There are four influences that develop our self-efficacy: experiences of mastery, modeling, social persuasion, and physiological factors (Bandura, 1977).



Experiences of Mastery

When we take on a new challenge and we are successful, this experience of mastery builds our belief that we can learn new skills or improve. As early educators, these experiences of mastery occur when we try something new in our planning, teaching, and assessment and when we directly see the positive impact it has on our learners. As we see evidence that each learner grows and develops because of our interactions, we expand our experiences of mastery and we come to more deeply believe we are capable of having a positive impact on *every* learner's development.

Modeling

When our colleagues and educator friends take on new challenges and are successful, their modeling also positively influences our self-efficacy. They serve as a model to us; we see someone we can relate to and connect with trying new strategies and positively impacting every learner. And then, we transfer their success to the possibility of success in our own teaching. Their modeling grows our belief that we can do it too.

Social Persuasion

When we are told that we can help every child grow and develop, this verbal encouragement builds our belief that our teaching is impactful. Social persuasion can come from messages we hear and read that describe the importance of early childhood experiences, from feedback based on observations by coaches or administrators, from compliments and encouragement from colleagues and our children's families, and from words and actions of gratitude from our young learners themselves. All this positive feedback tells us we are capable of reaching *every* child, which becomes a message we remember and rely on as we work to improve our practice.

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Physiological Factors

When we are healthy, happy, and safe, we are more willing to take risks, to expend our energy while trying, and to seek new challenges. This physiological well-being opens us to believing that our efforts to meet each child where they are and help move them forward will result in successful learning and development; in other words, it helps us believe the work is worth it. Many personal, professional, and community factors can influence how we perceive risk and challenge as professionals. We need to be in a mental, emotional, and physical space that energizes and facilitates honing our craft.

REFLECTION

Return to the descriptions of the four influences on self-efficacy.

- For each influence, underline or highlight one **sentence** that most clearly captures its meaning for you.
- Next, select a **phrase** that captures its meaning and write it in the appropriate box below. The phrase may be in the sentence you identified or it may be a phrase from elsewhere in the description.
- Finally, select a single **word** that captures its meaning and write it in the appropriate box below. Again, the word may be in the sentence or phrase you identified or it may be a word from elsewhere in the description.

When you read the sentence, phrase, and word, you should have a more complete understanding of each influence.

Experiences of Mastery Sentence Phrase Word	**Modeling** Sentence Phrase Word
Social Persuasion Sentence Phrase Word	**Physiological Factors** Sentence Phrase Word

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While we phrased each of the influences on self-efficacy in positive terms, you may recall experiences that had either positive or negative effects on your self-efficacy. Being aware of experiences that build and deplete our self-efficacy is important so that we can intentionally engage in building experiences and avoid depleting experiences.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on each of the four influences on self-efficacy and your specific experiences with them. What experiences have built or depleted your teacher self-efficacy?

Experiences that **build** my teacher self-efficacy	Experiences that **deplete** my teacher self-efficacy

The collective work of a team of educators is incredibly powerful for positively impacting young children's learning and development. In fact, collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.36 (www.visiblelearningmetax.com), which is off the charts! Working collaboratively has the potential to considerably accelerate learners' development. With that said, you may have started work in this Playbook alone, but we highly encourage you to collaborate with a colleague or a team of colleagues for the remainder of the Playbook.

One of our favorite ways to think of collective teacher efficacy is in terms of our strengths. Each of us brings unique strengths of perspective, experience, and ideas to our work. In this module, we have reflected on our strengths through our teacher identity, credibility, and self-efficacy. Now, we need to leverage those strengths for the benefit of our collective team.

In this Playbook, we protect time and space to learn with and from each other, we model for each other, we give each other positive feedback, and we share the challenging journey to mastery. It's worth our time, energy, and effort to

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work as a team of educators to build our efficacy and to develop our teaching practice. It's worth it to build our expertise together.

BUILDING OUR EXPERTISE TOGETHER

If you're like us, you ask a lot of questions about what you can do that is best for your children's learning and development. There are so many decisions to make each day that sometimes we find ourselves in the weeds, surrounded by questions and unsure how to move forward. This is when we need to refocus our questions on what really matters, what is really worth it, what is likely to have a large positive impact on our learners. To build our expertise together, we must refocus our efforts on seven big ideas for effective teaching, learning, and development in early childhood.

REFLECTION

1.1 Big Ideas for Effective Teaching, Learning, and Development in Early Childhood

7 Big Ideas for Effective Teaching, Learning, and Development in Early Childhood		My Goals
Early childhood educators and their learners work together as evaluators of learning growth for all.	Effect Size = 1.32	
Early childhood educators and learners have high expectations for learning that communicate equity of access and opportunity to the highest level of learning possible.	Effect Size = 0.90	

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7 Big Ideas for Effective Teaching, Learning, and Development in Early Childhood		My Goals
Learning experiences move learning toward explicit and inclusive success criteria.	Effect Size = 0.77	
Learning experiences and tasks have the developmentally appropriate level or right level of challenge for all young learners.	Effect Size = 0.74	
Trust is established with all learners so that errors and mistakes are viewed as opportunities for new learning.	Effect Size = 0.72	
Early childhood educators are continually seeking feedback about their impact on all their children's learning.	Effect Size = 0.72	
There is the right balance of surface and deep learning in the early childhood classroom.	Effect Size = 0.69	

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As you read these seven big ideas, some may be familiar and others new. Some language may reflect how you and your colleagues talk about your teaching practice while other language may be novel. In this Playbook, we will unpack these seven big ideas and make them actionable in our early childhood contexts. Together, let's set our shared aim to intentionally implement these big ideas in our early childhood contexts.

REFLECTION

In the introduction, you shared your goals for working in this Playbook as well as the evidence that would make meeting those goals visible to you. Return to page 2 and review those goals. What connections do you see between your goals and the seven big ideas for effective teaching, learning, and development in early childhood? Now look back at the table on the previous page to record these connections. Highlight, circle, or underline anything that overlaps with your goals. You can use the empty column on the right to record connections between your goals and the big ideas.

LEARNING INTENTION AND SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR MODULE 1

Now that you have engaged with the learning in this module, reread what we intended to learn (LI, the learning intention) and what it looks and sounds like to have mastered learning this (SC, the success criteria). Next, reread the levels, descriptions, and images of the path to mastery (the rubric). Reevaluate where you are right now for each success criteria. Use the space to document the evidence you have of where you are and where you are headed next.

LI: We are learning about the importance of growing our credibility and self-efficacy so that we can build our expertise as early childhood educators.

SC: I'll know I've learned this when I can

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- Reflect on my teacher identity, credibility, and self-efficacy.

- Explain the importance of my teacher identity, credibility, and self-efficacy for positively impacting children's learning and development.

- Make sense of the relationship between growing my credibility and self-efficacy and growing my expertise in the big ideas of teaching, learning, and development for early childhood.

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- Identify ways to grow my credibility and efficacy as an early educator.

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