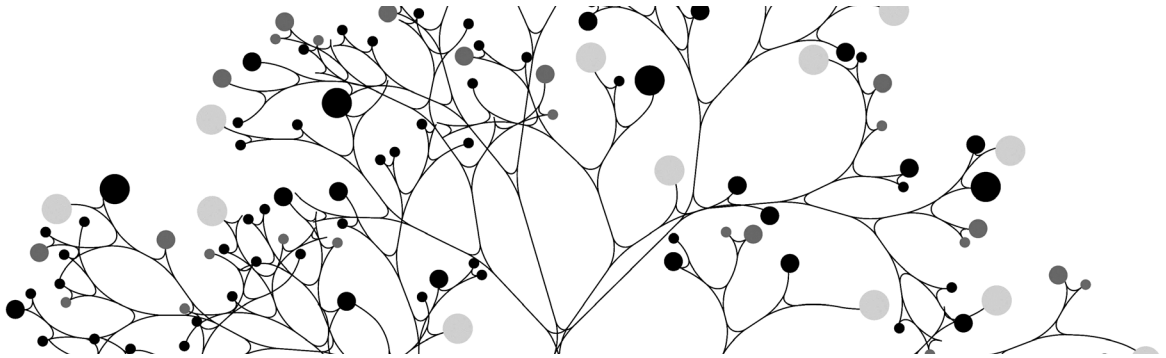
The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Policy



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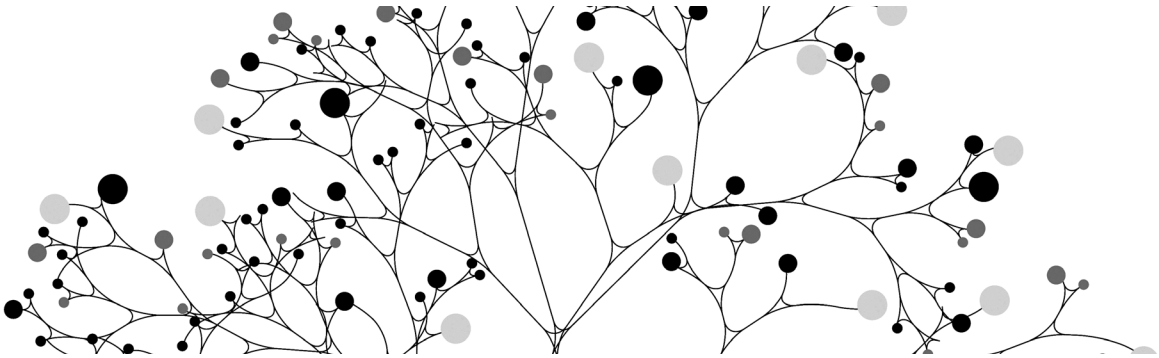

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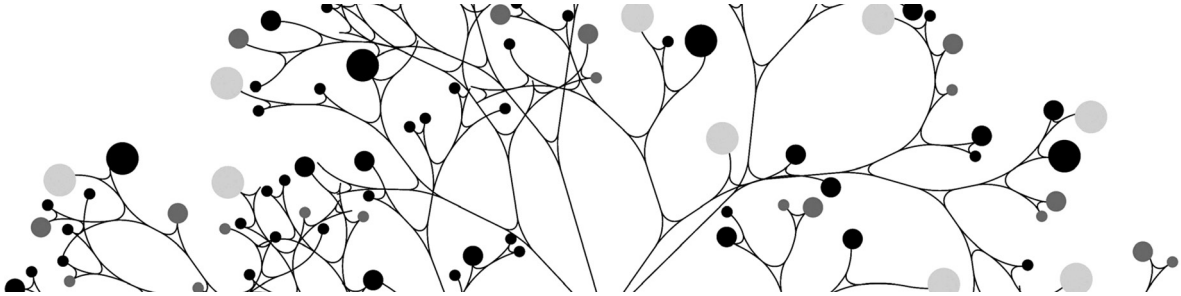

Introduction: Exploring the Landscape of Early Childhood Policy

Linda Miller, Claire Cameron, Carmen Dalli and Nancy Barbour

This *Handbook* draws together recent and current research and analytical commentaries relevant to the field of early childhood (EC) policy. Since the turn of the twenty-first century EC policy has become an area of increasing priority for governments globally, and this volume makes a contribution to understanding the scope, scale and diversity of approaches taken by different jurisdictions. The chapters are authored by established policy scholars and authoritative policy actors as well as emergent policy researchers. In inviting contributors for this *Handbook* we had a number of objectives. We wanted to ensure the *Handbook* was truly 'global' in that it represented perspectives from across the world and beyond the global 'north'. Second, we were concerned to reach beyond established figures in the field of early childhood research and give space to emerging talent, such as recent doctoral researchers and architects of innovative practice. For us as editors, 'policy' is what happens in practice as much as what is written in policy documents. Third, we wanted to question what 'Early Childhood Education and Care' (ECEC) actually means – and 'looks like' – in different parts of the world and thus open up discussion and thinking about ECEC services and their purposes, such as support for families in communities, and to consider emerging issues such as 'superdiversity', the increasing 'marketisation' of ECEC services and the impact of supranational organisations – like the OECD – on global discourses about ECEC.

For these reasons we adopted a range of methods in finding contributors. Some authors were known to us as colleagues, as co-researchers or as members of the broader early childhood community whose work we had encountered in our professional lives, including at international conferences, often as keynote speakers. Others we deliberately sought out as well-known authors working on major trends and key areas of interest in ECEC. We asked some early career researchers whose work we felt should be reaching a wider audience. We also made sure that we located

experts who were writing about the gaps we discovered in the ECEC policy literature.

As a result, we have a very rich global representation of ideas, practices, theoretical perspectives, experiences and debating points relevant to the development of early childhood policy. No doubt there will still be some omissions but we are delighted that early childhood policy and practice in all continents (beyond Antarctica) are represented in the *Handbook*. Countries in Asia such as Myanmar (Ang), Hong Kong (Li and Wang), China (Chen), South Korea (Lee and Kang), Pakistan (Neuman) and India (Kaul and Sharma) are represented either as case studies or within thematic regional discussions. From Africa we have important discussions of Ethiopian and South African early childhood and family support practices (Woodhead, Rossiter, Dawes and Pankhurst; Harris and Phatudi; Alsopp, Diamini, Mamabula, Jacobs and Fulcher). There are six chapters principally or partly concerned with early childhood policy and practice in North America (Jones; Brown; Horm, Yazijian, Kennel and Stringfellow; Barnett and Nores; Mathers and Ereky-Stevens; Kagan, Gomez and Roth), and, again, they raise issues of cross-country learning or set the reported research in comparative contexts. In all chapters, the issues discussed stimulate ideas for other countries worldwide.

Two contributions address the South American context: Adlerstein and Pardo, whose focus is on Latin American and Caribbean countries; and Neuman, whose discussion of low- and medium-resource countries includes Zanzibar and Jamaica, as well as Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan, thus contributing further to the discussion in Asia.

Europe is a significant leader in terms of early childhood policy and practice and that is reflected in the *Handbook*, with 14 chapters represented here, discussing policy (Milotay) and practices from Poland (Gawlicz) to England (Cameron, Dalli and Simon; Eisenstadt; Moss; Mathers and Ereky-Stevens; Lloyd; O'Sullivan; Jackson and Hollingworth) and from France and Sweden (Kaga), Denmark (Jensen), Germany (Klinkhammer and Riedel) and Belgium (Vandenbroeck; Peeters and Peleman).

Finally, we are pleased to include five chapters from countries in Oceania covering developments in Australia and New Zealand (Woodrow and Press; May; Cameron, Dalli and Simon; Skerrett; Mathers and Ereky-Stevens).

Some chapters are highly international such as those by Young; Tankersley, Ionescu and Trikic; and Smith, which defy classification by continent. All contributors were asked to reflect, where possible, on the applicability of their findings in other country, or resource contexts.

We have sought to combine chapters outlining results of major empirical studies with others that are authoritative literature reviews, collaborative descriptive accounts, models of policymaking and the relationships of policy with research and practice. This variety reflects the variable state of research and policymaking across countries, and the varying ways in which new knowledge is acquired and adopted in action. Each chapter in the *Handbook* stands as a work in its own right; as editors we cannot guarantee complete coherence across the book and the authors are solely responsible for the views expressed. Readers will find that some chapters present interestingly different takes on similar topics, for example what 'early childhood services' or 'readiness for school' might mean in different cultures and contexts. We believe this range of perspectives enables a comprehensive and balanced approach.

WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY?

Growing Participation in ECEC

Why a *Handbook* on Early Childhood Policy? Since the turn of the new millennium participation rates in early childhood services have mushroomed all around the world

with a corresponding expansion of early childhood services, albeit in different forms and of varying quality. In the global 'north', changes in social, economic and labour market conditions since the 1980s have transformed the way that families structure their lives, making shared care between home and ECEC services the new context of children's lives (Dencik, 1989; Singer, 1993). OECD (2016a) figures show that across its member states around 35% of children aged 0–2 years participate in some form of ECEC with a mean average rate increase of five percentage points between 2006 and 2014. For children aged 3 to 5 years, the average enrolment rate is 83.8% across all OECD countries, with some countries having a near universal enrolment rate of 98% or above. Such growing participation rates create challenging policy demands on governments and civil societies to provide the necessary infrastructural arrangements that support the provision of high quality ECEC services.

The Early Years as the Foundation for Later Well-Being

The expansion of enrolment, especially for the younger age groups, stems also from a strengthening discourse of the importance of the earliest stages of life for subsequent development, as many chapters in this *Handbook* show (see also Rebello Britto, Engle and Super, 2013). The OECD (2012) Starting Strong 'toolbox' refers to the potential for better child well-being, better foundations for lifelong learning, more equitable child outcomes, more female labour market participation and so reductions in family poverty, and better social and economic development in societies – all as a result of young children's participation in *high quality* early childhood education and care services. Beyond the OECD, early childhood development and quality lifelong education is a significant target (Goal 4) among the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2016). Early education that prepares children for primary school, especially for children who are most at 'risk of being left behind' (p. 220), is seen as a cost-effective strategy for eliminating disadvantage and contributing to economic and societal development (Woodhead, Rossiter, Dawes and Pankhurst, this Volume). Governments thus increasingly see ECEC as an investment for the future, tied to economic growth and well-being as well as the development of human capital.

ECEC as Investment for Economic Productivity

This link between children's care and education and the economic productivity of nations has made the provision of ECEC a national and global priority, shifting responsibility for very young children out of the private space of the family to the public and global space. Rebello Britto et al. (2013) describe this global trend as 'positive and promising' (p. 3) but argue that the situation for a majority of young children and families globally 'is not good' (p. 3), as we will see in some of the chapters that follow.

Diverse Range of ECEC Services

The increasingly diverse and complex socio-economic and political contexts of ECEC services is very evident in this *Handbook*. Some chapters describe innovative approaches to these issues, including reaching marginalised children and families. Others suggest that low resource does not necessarily mean low quality ECEC, although when resources are low deciding priorities is a challenge. It is clear that some obstacles remain to achieving equitable services, in particular for low-income families and in low-middle-income and 'fragile states' defined by the OECD (2016b) as susceptible to political and economic instability, where policy frameworks have insufficient capacity

or are slow to develop. Challenges to policy frameworks are also evident in more economically and politically stable countries, with many reporting major shifts in the ECEC policy landscape through a massive increase in privately owned EC services creating what some call a mixed economy of childcare. In both cases a common theme is the call for systemic approaches to policy, whether this be government-led or in partnership with private providers.

Aim of the Handbook

In this *Handbook* we have aimed for an international and global reach which, although not comprehensive, aims to bring critical attention to the nature of ECEC policy and its relationship to research, service provision, and practice. Simpson and Connor use the term 'policy literacy' (2011, p. 2) to argue that it is essential for those committed to working both with and for ECEC services to achieve an awareness of policy and its implications for services and practice in order to understand its impact on the lives of children and families. This would include asking key questions such as: Whose interests does a particular policy ultimately serve? Whose viewpoints are represented (or ignored)? What are the alternatives? How can existing policy be challenged? What is included and what is missed out? (Simpson and Connor, 2011). Our aim is that by including multiple perspectives, this *Handbook* enables readers to take a critical perspective to some of these questions.

Organisation of the Handbook

Content preview

The *Handbook* is organised into five Parts. **Part I** highlights the important relationships between research, policy and practice. As we have noted already, policy interest in ECEC has been growing worldwide and chapters in Part I document policy levers and drivers for improving services through 11 country or regional case studies. Chapters in Part 1 serve to remind us of significant common concerns across markedly different local contexts: about quality of services and equity of access; about cost and affordability; and about the balance in focus between care and education in the services on offer. They also highlight that shifts in policy directions are strongly embedded in societal views of children and childhood, as much as they also reflect the political, historical and economic realities that vary tremendously across different regions of the globe, and sometimes within country borders.

Part II addresses critical issues related to ensuring that equitable and high quality ECEC services are accessible to vulnerable children and their parents across different cultures and contexts. We see that national policy frameworks are an important tool for creating enabling spaces for the development and implementation of ECEC services but also that innovative, localised and low-resource interventions have an important role to play. The chapters cover well-established models of ECEC and new initiatives. Themes across chapters include the 'schoolification' of ECEC, ECEC as investment in human capital, the funding challenge, and lack of intersectoral coordination.

Part III examines various ways in which ECEC services perform an important function in supporting families. From South Africa we look at how the Isibindi model is working within the communities to help rebuild family life in the face of multiple losses caused by HIV/AIDS. The model of integrating the concepts of care, support and upbringing, as well as broad-based education as a framework for ECEC, is one at the heart of Children's Centres in England. Chapters in Part III also discuss the position of children in foster care, and the importance of monitoring and supporting good health as a foundation for children's all-round development.

Part IV presents perspectives on participation, rights and diversity in ECEC. Young children have participation rights through the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), to which almost all countries worldwide are signatories. However, signing and enacting policy to ensure these important rights for children are not the same. Social, economic and cultural climates have influenced how the UNCRC has been interpreted and how countries have responded to the needs of children and families. Likewise, there has been growing recognition of the increasingly diverse societies that we live in and the need for ECEC practice to reflect the diversity of childhoods in order to foster social cohesion.

Finally, **Part V**, 'Future Directions for Early Childhood Policy', explores the knowledge needed to enact informed policy development and protect and improve the lives of children and families. Chapters in Part V explore the economic benefits of ECEC, the lack of access to services for the very youngest children, the possibility of a common framework to define the quality of ECEC services, and whether traditional research agendas and methods will garner the kind of data we need to make informed policy decisions.

PART I THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE: REGIONAL AND COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

Part I is made up of 11 regional or country case studies of ECEC policy spanning six continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America and Oceania. Collectively, they highlight the important relationship between research and policy and the role of socio-political and historical forces in shaping that relationship. A number of discourses connect the chapters, including the focus of ECEC policy on the early years as a time to promote children's overall health and well-being as well as readiness for school; a time of investment for later economic well-being; a time of promise as well as vulnerability. Instrumentally positioning children as beings-yet-to-become, these discourses compete with others that view children as rights-bearers and 'citizens now', influenced by the global child's rights movement and the policy initiatives of supranational organisations like the World Bank and UNESCO. The discourse of quality, and its frequent competitor quantity, appears in each chapter, accompanying concerns about who pays, in what proportion and with what gain.

Chapter 1 takes us to the policy formation context within the European Union. Milotay offers an 'insider' view of 'evidence-based' policymaking with ECEC policy as the main example. Unpacking the complexity of the term 'evidence-based', Milotay explains that the process of evidence-based policymaking is more complex than a strictly linear relationship between evidence and policy. She argues for more nuanced understandings such as 'evidence-aware', 'evidence-informed', 'evidence-inspired' policymaking, and that there may be no clear 'right' or 'wrong' path to follow.

Chapter 2 illustrates the complexities of ECEC policymaking in the very different social and geo-political context of India. Positioning current policy developments against a critical historical analysis of ECEC provisions across this vast and diverse country, Kaul and Sharma highlight the locally designed and nationally implemented Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programmes as the dominant model of ECEC in India. With an improved economy, in contemporary India young children are increasingly positioned as a human resource and as rights bearers, yet the majority of them are still affected by poverty and inadequate health and educational services. In the context of this challenging policy–practice divide, the authors argue for an overall policy infrastructure that goes beyond the single-window approach of ICDS

and delivers quality, affordable ECEC that meets rising parental expectations for quality education.

Returning to the global 'north', in Chapter 3 Klinkhammer and Riedel argue that Germany has undergone a fundamental shift of social policy from a familialist welfare approach to a focus on social investment and growing human capital – including female labour market participation and seeing children as future citizens. The policy shift has resulted in an instrumental discourse about ECEC as the 'catch-all' solution to increasing female labour market participation, and improving the educational chances of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors question the hidden price of the policy shift as undermining the three traditional principles of German ECEC provision: a balance of upbringing (*Erziehung*), education (*Bildung*) and care (*Betreuung*). Germany's disappointing PISA ranking in 2005 is credited with contributing to an increasing schoolification within ECEC. They emphasise the need to be vigilant against the social investment ideology and the accompanying 'institutionalisation' of children, proposing that the social-pedagogical tradition of ECEC in Germany can be a useful alternative.

In Chapter 4, Jensen offers a case study of an integrated, universal approach to early childhood education and care in Denmark, and illustrates a distinctively Danish approach to conceptualising practice, as seen through practitioners' interpretations of videos of practice in three countries – England, Hungary and Denmark. Jensen uses the metaphor of a 'mud-child' to envision the Danish ideal of a child as an active co-participant in ECEC services, who is free, active and 'can find expression most readily outdoors' (p. 79). However, Jensen finds that this ideal is under threat from a policy-led invasion that is elevating the status of more prescriptive intervention programmes and perhaps sidelining the professional judgement of highly trained practitioners.

In Chapter 5 Kaga provides a comparative analysis of the relationship between ECEC and primary school policy in Sweden and France through the lenses of globalised discourses about ECEC and different views of children and childhood. Kaga's reflections on the impact of globalised educational evaluations such as PISA on workforce policies in Sweden provide a link back to themes introduced in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 6 the focus shifts to East Asia and the Asia Pacific region which includes countries which the OECD (2013) classifies as 'fragile'. Ang offers a critical examination of the role of supranational organisations like the United Nations, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF in making services for children a worldwide policy priority. She challenges us to contemplate how constructions of children's place in the world reflect cultural and societal worldviews and the need for debate around such constructions and their implications at the level of children's lived experience. Focusing on Myanmar as a case study, Ang highlights that ECEC policy is a multi-dimensional issue and poses considerable structural as well as conceptual challenges, particularly in resource-limited fragile nations; she argues that equitable ECEC policy requires innovative approaches and continued open debate.

Remaining in Asia, Chapter 7 takes us to Hong Kong and the challenges faced by the government in introducing three years of free early childhood education in a completely privatised market. Li and Wang provide a fascinating insight into how different economic ideologies shape perceptions of what is possible, fair and equitable, not only conceptually but also at the level of policy infrastructure and practical implementation, to ensure what they call the '3A2S' framework: affordability, accessibility, accountability, sustainability and social justice of early childhood education services. Li and Wang explore the likely challenges to the implementation of the new policy as its financial implications play out in practice; they call for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its impact.

Chapter 8 shifts us geographically to the United States and focuses on historical and more recent ECEC policy as it relates to children under 5 and families living in poverty; the chapter documents changing attitudes and subsequent policy responses over time. Whilst recognising the achievements of some key early intervention programmes such as the Perry Preschool Project, Head Start and Early Head Start, Jones critiques a fragmented system at federal, state and city levels which has resulted in 'conflicting multiple regulatory systems, separate technical assistance systems, disconnected research agendas, overlapping segmentation of the populations to be served, and wide variability in state certifications [for teachers]' (p. 141). She argues for a more coherent approach to early childhood services to address the needs of young children and their families.

In Chapter 9 we change continent to Oceania and a first-person account of policy advocacy and change in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a long-time activist, ex-childcare worker, university professor and policy actor, May traces the shifts in EC policy in this small and innovative country which was among the first to move away from a split system of care and education provision and subsequently developed an EC curriculum document – *Te Whāriki* – that has drawn worldwide attention. Along the way, May shows that in New Zealand, as elsewhere, issues of systemic quality infrastructure continue to be a concern, with recent changes to regulations relating to staff qualifications, and ongoing privatisation of the ECEC sector being contemporary challenges.

Returning to East Asia, Chapter 10 is a wide-ranging account of the evolving nature of ECEC policy in China – including the supplanting of the one-child policy with a two-child policy from January 2016. We get a sense of the challenges faced by central and local governments in building a strong infrastructure for quality ECEC provision that is equitably accessible to all children in a country as vast and as populous as China, including large expanses of impoverished rural areas. In the new social context of the two-child policy, the expected increase in the number of children is likely to further exacerbate existing issues of quantity and quality of ECEC services. Chen argues for a strengthened policy infrastructure, increased funding allocations, a focus on quality assurance and making social equity a top priority.

Part I concludes with a chapter by Adlerstein and Pardo (Chapter 11) analysing the 'highlights and shadows' in ECEC policy in Latin America and the Caribbean. Echoing the situation in many other countries, the highlights include the enthusiastic pursuit of strategies to expand ECEC services, strongly supported by supranational organisations; the expansion of coverage of both formal and community-based services, and growing enrolment figures; as well as the development of curricular frameworks and teacher education models. Among the shadows are fragmented policy responsibilities across different governmental agencies, a split-system model of ECEC provision with welfare-style 'care' settings for 0–3-year-olds, and a more learning-focused and schoolified provision for 4–5-year-olds, negatively impacting on playful and holistic approaches. Adlerstein and Pardo call for the breaking down of 'bureaucratic silos' and 'service duplication', and the need to build a systematic database for evidence-based policymaking – again a frequent plea across the chapters.

PART II EQUITABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES: INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LIFE CHANCES

The chapters in Part II are generally framed in terms of intervention programmes to provide education and care, preferably of high quality, to vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families. Preparation and 'readiness for school' is an underlying theme

and for Brown (Chapter 17) is the main focus. We see what this means in diverse contexts through case studies illustrating different approaches to early intervention ranging from a bold project in Ethiopia where the expansion of education has been from a very low base (Woodhead et al., Chapter 13) to an account of a well-established programme in the United States (Horm et al., Chapter 18). Such diversity illustrates how equitable services in ECEC can mean very different things in different country contexts; for example, terms such as 'preschool', 'pre-primary', 'readiness for school' 'workforce training' are differently conceived and interpreted – as indeed are the terms 'education' and 'care'. Equity issues are raised around gender, private and public services, and the life chances of children from low- and high-income families. The type, extent and quality of services are closely linked to resources and policy action and inaction but the challenges of evaluating outcomes and impact remain.

The first two chapters in this Part feature South Africa (Harris and Phatudi) and Ethiopia (Woodhead et al.). In Chapter 12, Harris and Phatudi acknowledge that South Africa is a country with a legacy of inequity due to the apartheid system which marginalised its majority population and excluded them from ECEC and primary education programmes. Their chapter focuses on the implications of both community-based initiatives and national policies. Intervention strategies include home visiting in rural areas, parent support focused on health, nutrition and educational stimulation, and training for practitioners/community workers. The authors critique five early childhood programmes featuring innovative approaches but note the challenge of evaluating outcomes and of taking these programmes to scale.

In Chapter 13, Woodhead, Rossiter, Dawes and Pankhurst report on an ambitious project in Ethiopia which is part of a larger Young Lives Project (2010) to scale up early learning across the country via ECEC programmes. Starting from a very low base the goal is to move from around 25% enrolment in 2013 to 80% by 2020. The authors name the challenges facing ECEC services: ensuring good governance, sufficient resources, well-trained and remunerated teachers and quality, age appropriateness and child-centred curricula and pedagogy.

The message from Neuman in Chapter 14 is that in developing countries, young children who would most likely benefit from quality early childhood development opportunities are the least likely to receive them. Three policy challenges have global resonance: reaching the most disadvantaged with quality services; building bridges across sectors; and filling the funding gap. Neuman profiles innovative solutions to providing ECEC in four developing countries: Kyrgyzstan, Zanzibar, Jamaica and Pakistan, thus offering an optimistic outlook contending that low cost does not necessarily mean low quality.

The historical split in many countries between education and care is described in Chapter 15 by Moss as 'bequeath[ing] a dysfunctional legacy' (p. 256); intersectoral coordination is seen as a key factor in achieving quality in ECEC. The chapter asks, 'What place for "care" in early childhood policy'? and is framed through the contrasting cases of England and Sweden. Sweden has a fully integrated early childhood system staffed by graduate pre-school teachers and qualified assistants with opening hours that support working parents. Parental fees are a small percentage of the public funding. The chapter explores why, in England, despite the efforts of a Labour Government between 1997 and 2010, integration stalled and confusion continued over the terms *childcare* and *education* in policy documents, in the press and in general usage. The chapter concludes by offering four policy points as a basis for discussion.

Poverty and low-income families are not just the province of developing and low-resource countries. In Chapter 16, in a case study of ECEC in England, Lloyd offers an analysis of barriers that hinder access to

ECEC for children growing up in poverty and a critique of the policy instruments for delivery. The chapter details three policy rationales for the justification of ECEC in England: *social mobility* reflected in publicly funded services; *economic wellbeing;* and *social justice* to eliminate inequalities, underachievement and to support inclusion. Lloyd identifies the challenges for equitable access to quality provision arising from the increasingly marketised early childhood system and highlights the need to revisit the role and location of ECEC within social welfare provision.

In Chapter 17, Brown offers a comprehensive account of school readiness as it has evolved in the United States. He critiques four frameworks through which school readiness can be understood: nativist, empiricist, social constructionist and interactionist. Unpacking the complexity of the construct he recognises 'the multiple factors that affect children's growth and learning across all of their developmental domains during childhood and later life' (p. 287). Whilst acknowledging that large numbers of children enter school lacking the academic and/or social skills needed for later school success, the chapter concludes that school readiness is being narrowly framed by policymakers and other stakeholders and needs to be rethought in the context of cultural and global contexts.

Chapter 18 closes Part II with an 'insider' view of Educare, a comprehensive early childhood education programme model in the United States designed to meet the needs of young children and their families who live in poverty. The authors, Horm, Yazejian, Kennel and Stringfellow, include a co-founder of the programme, an administrator and two evaluators. The Educare programme builds on the well-established Head Start programme but with enhanced funding. The chapter describes a range of strategies to effect policy changes that support best practices in early childhood education at the city, state and national levels which could provide insights for countries in the earlier stages of programme development. These include: the power of public–private partnerships, disseminating research and identifying policy barriers. The authors end on a cautionary note, that funding and systems are needed to support programme coherence, quality and access.

PART III EXTENDING PRACTICE: THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN FAMILY SUPPORT

The chapters in Part III examine, in various ways, the contribution of early childhood services to addressing social disadvantage and in particular the role of services in supporting families to do so. It is increasingly recognised that to realise the aim of supporting early childhood development as a holistic, multidimensional phenomenon, embracing health, cognitive and social development, and children's place as citizens of communities, services must engage with families. It is no longer enough to focus just on cognitive outcomes through education at age 3 or 4; nor to provide 'care' that suits labour market participation. Young children benefit most when services are integrated, and offer, in addition, critical advice and support that challenges, encourages and guides what happens in the home environment too.

In Chapter 22, Eisenstadt documents an important, perhaps seismic, shift in English policy for young children and families: the introduction by government of area-based integrated care, education and support services aimed at families with young children living in areas of acute social disadvantage, but open to all to avoid stigmatisation of attendees. A national evaluation found that these programmes took a long time to develop, and were subject to changes of governmental direction, but did show benefits for children and positive effects on parents' behaviour to support children's development.

Young, in Chapter 23, focuses on the role of health services in promoting children's wellbeing. She analyses the neuroscientific

background to a well-known epithet in educational research and policy, that early adversity predicts poor health outcomes, and that caring, responsive adults, who foreground communication skills, can do much to alleviate disadvantage if they engage with young children and their parents. She advocates a 'life course health development model' (p. 386), which, in much the same way as the English programmes Eisenstadt describes, address early development from multiple angles, combining health promotion, education and social protection.

O'Sullivan puts the theory into practice in Chapter 19. She describes a new, social enterprise model of 'childcare' which explicitly addresses social disadvantage, by offering nearly half their places free of charge and by having high expectations of all children and of home learning. Knowing that previous research had shown that childcare practitioners often unwittingly had a negative bias against parents living in poverty, O'Sullivan's model puts considerable emphasis on a curriculum of stretching, encouraging and celebrating learning, literacy, language and the expressive arts, all in contexts of nurturing friendship across settings representing high levels of cultural and socio-economic diversity.

In Chapter 20, Allsopp, Dlamini, Jacobs, Mamabolo and Fulcher discuss their work to develop family support practices in South Africa in the particular context where high levels of illness and death of parents through HIV/AIDS, leave the care of children to peers and grandparents. The chapter discusses the work of a community-based care and protection initiative by childcare workers, called *Isibindi* (*Courage),* in providing lifespace, in situ counselling, practical help with daily activities, and play. Through 'being, interpreting and doing' (p. 350), Isibindi workers enable carers and communities to work through grief, take responsibility for their health status, and for children's rights to schooling, and for practising parenting without physical chastisement of children.

In all these examples, there are common principles: of the importance of meaningful adult–child and child–child relationships; of the power of formative early development; and of children 'owning' their learning through play and discovery. Also evident is the crucial importance of the highly skilled, finely tuned judgements of practitioners to facilitate both optimal development and family engagement.

Among the most disadvantaged groups of children are those who have been abused and neglected and are looked after by the state. In Chapter 21, Jackson and Hollingworth discuss the extreme paucity of information about the social and educational lives of young children in such alternative care, which in England is family-based foster care. Such care is often highly unstable, as young children can be either adopted or returned to birth parents. Despite this being a crucial developmental period, the quality of children's experience is often given little attention over and above being 'safe'. The authors attribute much of this compartmentalised thinking to conceptual, practical and policy splits between 'care' on the one hand and 'education' on the other – splits which have been endemic in the early childhood education and care sphere, while children clearly need both to thrive. By including these examples of family support in wider contexts than just children attending early education and care services, we can begin to imagine alternatives and possibilities for reconfiguration and conceptual translation.

PART IV PARTICIPATION, RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY

The United Nations issued a sea-changing document in 1989 after many years of deliberation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) took a clear stand about the rights of all children in terms of provision, protection and participation

throughout the document's 54 articles. Several of the UNCRC articles (e.g. 12, 13 and 14) specifically speak to children's rights to have their own perceptions, opinions and thought processes, while articles 29 and 30 address children's right to both language and religious diversity. With the addition of General Comment 7 from the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2005, the specific needs and concerns of children from birth to age 8 were spelled out, making the document more clearly inclusive of young children and their particular characteristics. The image of young children that emerges from the reading of these documents is clearly one that considers the rights of children as actors, as individuals with agency, as decision-makers and as forces to be reckoned with in their own lives. The UNCRC provides a solid foundation for the collection of chapters in this Part that look at participation, rights and diversity. Each chapter has examined children's rights to be recognised, respected, protected and educated. And all of the chapters examine the diverse contexts in which we live.

In Chapter 27, Smith provides an in-depth discussion of the ways that UNCRC principles can be used to support services and policies for young children. She notes the challenges UNCRC presents to previously held notions regarding children's abilities to fully engage in discourse, idea sharing and other ways of expressing and constructing knowledge. She urges the reader to consider the paradigm of Childhood Studies, a more holistic approach to ECEC, as the pathway to supporting and enacting children's rights.

The history of how Māori children have lost access to their language through colonialism and educational policies that do not respect their culture and heritage gives yet another perspective on children's rights. In Chapter 26, Skerrett provides a fascinating history of the demise of the Māori language in New Zealand and the beginnings of the Kōhanga Reo movement to revive and save the language. She shares how a non-linguist missionary, Thomas Kendall, created a phonology of the Māori language in the 1800s that provided the basis for a tool for early childhood teachers, many years later, to work with young Māori children. Still needed are policies that support the co-existence of both English and Māori languages in educational settings at all levels.

Vandenbroeck takes yet another view of language learning in ECEC settings and what he calls '(super)diversity' in Chapter 24. He cites the example of classrooms where multiple languages are present, rather than just one or two languages, as an opportunity for pedagogy rather than as a problem to overcome. He challenges a common misunderstanding that suggests there is some knowable norm to which children and families must conform for group-based learning or family support. He warns against the myth of homogeneity while working with children in classrooms or families in support settings. Instead he urges teachers and support group facilitators to view the increasing heterogeneity in ECEC services and families as a platform for understanding and appreciating differences.

Woven throughout the UNCRC document is the subtle expectation that democracy will prevail in the settings in which children live, and in Chapter 25 Gawlicz describes both theoretical and educational practices that embody democratic principles (e.g. Dewey, Bloom, Malaguzzi) as well as actual democratic practices in Poland. As with any theory in practice, the social and political context colours how and what is practised. Gawlicz tells the story of ECEC in a Poland that has previously focused on school readiness and behavioural approaches, predicated on an image of the child as having limited agency and coming to education without previous funds of knowledge. Gawlicz offers an analysis of interviews with teachers who are attempting to embrace democratic practices and explores their ability to overcome obstacles to this end.

In Chapter 28, Lee and Kang's discussion of conditions for North Korean refugee

children challenges so many of the rights of children stated in the UNCRC: to be safe and cared for, to get an education, to be with their families, to have a homeland, among others. The authors tell the tale of children who move from one repressive country to another searching for relief, only to be denied the right to live and be educated as future citizens in those countries. They note the challenges of social connections, food and exploitation. From an ecological systems perspective, their discussion can be seen to highlight the absence of those outer, protective social circles of people that most children take for granted. The issues in the chapter – that seem so critical – are overshadowed by the world's attention on the nuclear threats posed by North Korea. Meanwhile, there are clearly humanitarian threats of which we all should take note.

PART V FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY

The chapters in Part V take us a step back from the case studies, examination of specific interventions, the inclusion of family support and the rights and participation of children, and bring us to some questions about what we need in order to engage in policymaking to improve the lives of all children and families. As in Part I, the complexity of policy development is the theme that links the different chapters in this section. A series of questions about the process of developing informed and relevant policy are engendered: Who gets to inform policymaking? Are all perspectives represented in the process? Do we have the information necessary to help develop policies for young children or are there areas of research needed? Are there infrastructures to be developed in order to engage in the kind of necessary work to improve the lives of families and children around the world?

More specific questions emerge as a result of reading individual chapters. What do we know about the dimensions of quality in ECEC settings? Have we done the research necessary to identify those dimensions across cultures? Across various economic exigencies? Across the age range of children attending services? Do we have the kind of ECEC workforce to support quality across the age ranges? Do the European Quality Framework and ISSA Quality Framework identify these qualities? Or do we need to develop a framework for considering the many variables defining various policy arenas? There are both process (e.g. appropriate child–adult interactions, curricular choices) and structural (e.g. number of children in the preschool group, professional development of the ECEC professional) issues to consider.

Policy and practice related to children from birth to age 3 has been a neglected area. Two chapters in this Part take on the complex process of ensuring that access to high quality services for these very young children is an important focus of policy agendas. In Chapter 33, Tankersley, Ionescu and Trikic explore five key policy levers and how they can be used to strengthen the quality of programmes for young children, particularly those under 3 years. They do this by examining how the *European Quality Framework on Early Childhood Education and Care* (EQF) was strengthened by ISSA's development of a *Quality Framework for Early Childhood Practices in Services for Children under Three Years of Age.* Through the development of this document, they fostered dialogue around quality and policy development for the very youngest population.

Mathers and Ereky-Stevens, in Chapter 30, comprehensively review international research on the impact of ECEC for children under 3 years of age. They find clear and important benefits of attendance at high quality early childhood settings, especially for cognitive learning, language skills, and – for socially disadvantaged children in particular – social and emotional development. They highlight that the significant features of high quality provision are: warm and

responsive adults who offer meaningful relationships and are focused on communicative skills; rich and complex play with peers; and opportunities for much physical activity. The policy implications focus on issues of access for children aged at least 2 and upwards, and high quality practitioner preparation and their ongoing learning.

In Chapter 29, Barnett and Nores take a slightly different approach to the consideration of quality by examining both the costs and benefits of providing high quality ECEC services. They argue that economic research has strong evidence to suggest that public investments (i.e. provided through public policy) yield high rates of return. In other words, there is powerful evidence to support the fact that provision of high quality services to young children, particularly from socially disadvantaged homes, results in positive lifelong impacts. The emphases in their message are recurring themes in this *Handbook*: the importance of government policy and provision that focus on the quality of children's experiences; and the quality of practice by practitioners. The authors suggest that there is often a failure to translate knowledge about quality into policy and practice.

Woodrow and Press provide a different economic analysis of the provision of ECEC services in Chapter 32, as they explore the debate between 'privatization/marketization' and public investment in child-care services in Australia. They document the transformation of ECEC in Australia from publicly funded not-for-profit community-based services to a predominantly market-driven model of provision largely dominated by a publicly listed company called ABC Learning. They discuss the 'spectacular' failure of this company, the government response and the subsequent emergence of an alternative social venture model. They reflect on whether the framing of ECEC services as part of the agenda of women's right to participation in the workforce has had the unintended consequence of supporting the marketisation of childcare as a policy solution.

It is not possible to have high quality ECEC programme without a high quality ECEC workforce. For decades, the field has struggled to define both whether ECEC is/is not a profession and what the professionalisation of the workforce might look like in terms of policy and practice. In Chapter 35, Cameron, Dalli and Simon compare the integration of the care and education workforces in New Zealand and England, looking at the struggles in terms of policy, politics and lack of political will to invest in early childhood. In part, this is a reflection of the origins of ECEC as a service for very young children – seen as the responsibility of the private domain of the family. It also reflects the connection of ECEC work to the work of women and its historically low status. The New Zealand workforce is highly integrated with unified training for work with children aged 0–5 years and pay parity with primary school teachers, yet even in this 'good news' context, there are signs of retrenchment in policy that remind us of the need for sector advocacy to maintain the gains achieved. This is certainly an example of the vicissitudes of policy.

In Chapter 34, Kagan, Gomez and Roth offer a comprehensive view of ECEC research foci and traditions over the years, looking for guidance that will make the research to policy pathway smoother and more productive. They acknowledge the significant contributions the social sciences have made toward informing policy development. Noting both the valuable contributions and the ongoing debates in the field, they propose a systems approach to research that will bring important sectors together and lead more logically to policy development. The authors note the perennial difficulty that scientists have had in communicating their work in an understandable, translatable form to those who develop policy.

Similar disconnects between research and policy are noted by Peeters and Peleman in Chapter 31. They take this one step further and focus on practice as well. The lack of

common language across these sectors, they say, makes these necessary connections difficult. They offer an example of how these connections can be made through looking at increasing the quality of the ECEC workforce.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from our broad review of the contents of this *Handbook* that a wealth of experience and expertise is contained within the chapters. In collating this sweeping account of the key arguments of the Parts, we have identified what we see as some important themes that signal the preoccupations of governments and communities within particular contexts, or matters that have captured global consciousness. We have identified issues of principled debate (such as public vs private ownership of ECEC services) and others where the concern is more operational than principled (like breaking down bureaucratic silos). In doing so, our hope is that this volume contributes to a better understanding of the scope and limitations of policy in ECEC and offers opportunities for cross-national learning and discussion.

All the chapters show that ECEC policy is not something that happens in closeted offices separate from people's lived reality; often it arises from that lived reality. Policy may be the product of sustained advocacy or the response to a sudden situation that requires immediate attention. Policy can also arise from big-picture drivers and global movements; or from ideological shifts in local contexts. Policy is dynamic and affects services and lives. It creates change, some of which is not always intended. 'Policy' also exists in the non-written and non-bureaucratic form, represented by what happens in practice and by established traditions of practice. Policy can come about without the proper investigation or vetting that it deserves. For all these reasons, ECEC policy is complex and challenging and deserves our careful attention.

Contemplating this complexity, it is also very clear that we are in no way 'out of the woods' with regards to endemic issues of quality, equity and funding across different settings of all kinds: cultural, socio-economic, political. Moreover, there are new challenges of privatisation/marketisation; increased expectations of returns on investment and calls for accountability; a heightened discourse of schoolification and links to global assessment measures. The issue of human capital development is moving in strongly to change the big picture of ECEC policy, leading to a more instrumental view of what ECEC services should be doing. These all compound existing complexities and are worthy of further consideration as they may point to future directions in early childhood policy.

We will return to these and other themes in the concluding chapter of this *Handbook*. We invite you now to delve into the *Handbook* and engage in your own reflections.

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