

Resilience and Wellbeing in Young Children, Their Families and Communities

Exploring Diverse Contexts,
Circumstances and Populations

Edited by
Zoi Nikiforidou,
Babs Anderson and
Wilma Robles-Melendez



Towards an
Ethical Praxis in
Early Childhood

EECERA
European Early Childhood
Education Research Association



ROUTLEDGE

RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING IN YOUNG CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Resilience and Wellbeing in Young Children, Their Families and Communities unpicks the theme of resilience and wellbeing through diverse contexts, circumstances, populations and life stories in order to explore its complexity globally.

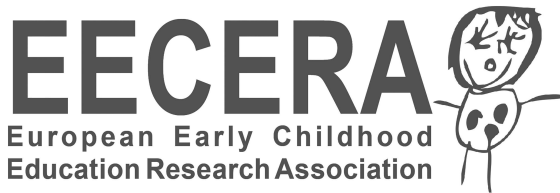
Current societal events have brought forward a need for understanding how to best support and create environments with conditions that promote children's holistic wellbeing. Violence in all its facets, poverty, political conflict and the recent pandemic are among the major realities threatening children, and this demands attention to how resilience can be supported to effectively safeguard children's lived experiences. This book explores resilience from a range of perspectives, research projects and practical support mechanisms for young children, families, educators and communities. It starts with theoretical conceptualizations and goes on to present specific research projects and applied initiatives and how these can be used in application to praxis for young children and their families.

Being of interest to educators and human services striving to advocate for and enhance young children's wellbeing, this book will serve as both a useful overview of the many approaches to supporting resilience in young children, while providing a sound theoretical perspective that is accessible for all.

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Towards an Ethical Praxis in Early Childhood

Written in association with the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA), titles in this series will reflect the latest developments and most current research and practice in early childhood education on a global level. Feeding into and supporting the further development of the discipline as an exciting and urgent field of research and high academic endeavour, the series carries a particular focus on knowledge and reflection, which has huge relevance and topicality for those at the front line of decision making and professional practice.

Rather than following a linear approach of research to practice, this series offers a unique fusion of research, theoretical, conceptual and philosophical perspectives, values and ethics, and professional practice, which has been termed 'Ethical Praxis'.

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Resilience and Wellbeing in Young Children, Their Families and Communities

Exploring Diverse Contexts, Circumstances and Populations

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and Wilma Robles-Melendez*

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*To my parents and my two little sunrays who remind me
of life and goodness.
– Zoi Nikiforidou*

*To my amazing, loving, supportive family, who have
encouraged me to do my very best.
– Babs Anderson*

*To my mother, whose example, caring words, and
resilience continue today to inspire my work and efforts.
– Wilma Robles-Melendez*

Special dedication to Babs

*Honoring the memory of Dr. Babs Anderson, a resilient
and distinctive professional and friend*

*It was during the summer of 2023 when we last met and
chatted with our dear colleague Babs about the last steps
of the project that became this book. With the wisdom,
enthusiasm and optimistic ways that always described
her, Babs was radiant and smiling as we talked about
the final steps for this book about resilience. Though she
left us before this book was published, her strong presence
and resilient example will always be treasured in our
memories and hearts. We honor her today for her legacy,
passionate dedication to children and to early childhood
excellence that will always be remembered.*





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SERIES EDITOR FOREWORD

Reflections on the Focus

We have seen the negative impact of global crises on children and childhoods. Many of us are living through a series of global crises which include the COVID-19 pandemic, rising poverty, diminishing health and mental wellbeing, mass population movements through war and climate breakdown, changing and increasingly diverse family structures, the creation of digital childhoods and the growth of AI, increasing surveillance and privacy intrusion and the dominance of metrics and big data. These changes shift the nature of childhood and family life, and the evidence is that they have impacted more heavily on the young than any other section of society. Reflecting on the current state of children's wellbeing and mental health, and the quality and nature of the early experiences that are shaping their life chances, causes us to re-think our priorities in ECE policy and practice.

This scholarly and reflective book titled '*Resilience and Wellbeing: Children, Families, Communities and Societies*' edited by Zoi Nikiforidou, Babs Anderson and Wilma Robles-Melendez provides the 13th book in the EECERA Ethical Praxis book series and offers a timely and very important agenda for our re-thinking. Its focus on building resilience and wellbeing in young children offers a much-needed stimulus for reflection on how the ECE sector might better understand

the nature of resiliency and the factors supporting its development as well as practices to guide practitioners and parents. Because of the importance that resilience has in promoting positive developmental outcomes, there is a need for further knowledge on how to enable and support it.

As the authors point out, this is of particular importance and urgency and has resonance and value for all cultures and societies who face global and local adverse realities and conditions. We believe this book provides a valuable contribution to transforming the quality of early education as we move to consider a new post-pandemic and post-Anthropocene world in which all involved in ECE need to carefully consider how to progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals where resilience and wellbeing are seen as central to this agenda.

As the Editors point out, the *'aim of the book is to unpick the theme of resilience and wellbeing through diverse contexts, circumstances, populations and life stories'*. And

at the centre of this work is the search for practices that will better inform efforts of early childhood professionals in a time when many diverse challenges heighten the need to empower children with skills and abilities to cope with difficult events and circumstances.

This opportune book contains a wealth of new knowledge and theoretical thinking about resilience and wellbeing, in which ideas and concepts to integrate resilience into the praxis of early childhood education are explored and exemplified. This book's editors and chapter authors are experienced and active researchers and practitioners committed to contribute with their views and work to the need for resilience-oriented practices to support children's wellbeing in times of greater societal challenges. Collectively, the contributions of each chapter provide an excellent fusion of theory, research and practice which lives out the intent of the EECERA Praxis Series and should stimulate critical and deep reflections and actions to transform and improve current ECE policy and practice.

Underpinning Aspirations

The EECERA Book Series titled *'Towards an Ethical Praxis in Early Childhood'* offers an innovative and exemplary vehicle for the international early childhood sector to develop transformative pedagogy which demonstrates effective integrated praxis. The EECERA Book Series is designed to complement and link with the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal (EECERJ), which is primarily a worldwide academic platform for publishing research according to the highest international standards of scholarship. The EECERA **Ethical Praxis** Book Series aims to highlight pedagogic praxis in order to demonstrate how this knowledge can be used to develop

and improve the quality of early education and care services to young children and their families.

Pedagogic Approach

The approach taken in the book series is not a linear one, but rather a praxeological one focused on praxis, meaning a focus on pedagogic action impregnated in theory and supported by a belief system. It is this fusion of practice, theoretical perspectives, ethics and research which we term '**Ethical Praxis**'. This fusion is embodied in all EECERA research and development activity, but we anticipate that the book series will have a stronger focus on the development of pedagogic praxis and policy. In addition to offering a forum for plural, integrated pedagogic praxis, the series will offer a strong model of praxeological processes that will secure deep improvements in the educational experience of children and families, of professionals and of researchers across international early childhood services.

The book series acknowledges pedagogy as a branch of professional/practical knowledge which is constructed in situated action in dialogue with theories and research and with beliefs (values) and principles. Pedagogy is seen as an 'ambiguous' space, not of one-between-two (theory and practice) but as one-between-three (actions, theories and beliefs) in an interactive, constantly renewed triangulation. Convening beliefs, values and principles, analyzing practices and dialoguing with several branches of knowledge (philosophy, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, among others) constitutes the triangular movement of the creation of pedagogy. Pedagogy is thus based on praxis, in other words, action based on theory and sustained by belief systems. Contrary to other branches of knowledge which are identified by the definition of areas with well-defined frontiers, the pedagogical branch of knowledge is created in the ambiguity of a space which is aware of the frontiers but does not delimit them because its essence is in integration.

Praxeological Intentions

There is a growing body of practitioner and practice-focused research which is reflected in the push at national and international levels to integrate research and analysis skills into the professional skill set of all early childhood practitioners. This is a reflection of the growing professionalism of the early childhood sector and its increased status internationally. The development of higher-order professional standards and increased accountability are reflective of these international trends, as the status and importance of early education in the success of educational systems are acknowledged.

Each book in the series is designed to have the following praxeological features:

- strongly and transparently positioned in the socio-cultural context of the authors
- practice or policy in dialogue with research, ethics and with conceptual/theoretical perspectives
- topical and timely, focusing on key issues and new knowledge
- provocative, ground breaking, innovative
- critical, dialogic, reflexive
- euro-centric, giving voice to Europe's traditions and innovations but open to global contributions
- open, polyphonic, prismatic
- plural, multidisciplinary, multi-method
- praxeological, with a concern for power, values and ethics, praxis and a focus on action research, the learning community and reflexive practitioners
- views early childhood pedagogy as a field in itself, not as applied psychology
- concerned with social justice, equity, diversity and transformation
- concerned with professionalism and quality improvement
- working for a social science of the social
- NOT designed as a text book for practice but as a text for professional and practice/policy development

This 13th book in the series exemplifies these underpinning philosophies, pedagogical ethics and scholarly intentions beautifully. We believe it is topical and timely, focusing on key issues and new knowledge, and also provocative and critical, encouraging and opening polyphonic dialogue about our thinking and actions in developing high-quality early childhood services internationally.

Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal

PREFACE

This is the first collective work of the ‘Holistic Wellbeing’ EECERA SIG. We are really excited to share this interdisciplinary international collaboration that derives from a common interest – that of resilience under the spectrum of wellbeing. As EECERA SIG co-convenors and co-editors of the book, we believe that this edited book will showcase and problematize contexts, experiences, realities of young children, their families and communities, where resilience plays a key role in wellbeing and well-becoming. It is our hope that this book will contribute to bring attention to the ongoing need for practices to support and empower children to build their resilience growing up in a society of change and challenges. This book has also been a personal journey for each of us, facing life in a post-pandemic world and navigating many life challenges while learning about our own resilience.

We would like to thank all the authors who contributed to the book with their valuable chapters, knowledge and enthusiasm. We would also like to thank the EECERA book series editors Dr. Chris Pascal and Dr. Tony Bertram for their support and guidance, and the Publishers for their invaluable efforts.

Zoi Nikiforidou, Babs Anderson
and Wilma Robles-Melendez



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PART 1

Research-Based Views on Resilience



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1

RESILIENCE AND CHILDREN

Introducing Concepts, Notions, and Tensions

*Wilma Robles-Melendez, Zoi Nikiforidou
and Babs Anderson*

Establishing happy and healthy early experiences and preparing children for life at present and in the future is at the heart of efforts and practices in early childhood programs. This is what guides and leads early childhood professionals and advocates of children to defy undesirable realities and embrace actions for the future of new generations. Consciously aware of our interconnected realities, the world of childhood is always intricately tied to the context of society and its advances and challenges (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Drerup & Schweiger, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The notion that their present and future are dependent on the array of circumstances and events they face, both personal and societal, raises awareness to the ongoing interest for ways to care for and take care of young children.

It has been long understood that contextual factors, whether individual or community based, play a fundamental role in how children are and become – grow, thrive, and develop (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Corsaro, 2018). This brings attention to the influence and impact of ecologies, interactions, and conditions experienced by children, many times becoming confounding factors for the young child. Given the multiple disruptions many children may experience and encounter in their communities, highlights the search for concerted efforts and practices centered on their wellbeing. A way to respond is through what is called resilience, what inspires hope and shines through now (Nearchou & Douglas, 2021), even in times of unusual and difficult adversities.

In the Best Interest of the Child

The overarching principle of “*in the best interest of the child*” that frames the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the call for developmentally

appropriate and responsive support (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020), inspires and guides practices and efforts in early childhood. The aim is to promote and nurture in the child the abilities needed to effectively face the challenges of a world and time denoted by multiple uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that “every child [is] resilient” (UNICEF, 2022). Resilience is what many consider as that shield and individual capacity that protects children and adults whenever faced with challenging, many times difficult, and stressful circumstances (Dvorsky & Langberg, 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2020; Masten et al., 2021). Today, it is what is much needed, as society continues to face greater complexity. Thus, making possible for children to become resilient is a call for everyone working for what is in the best interest for children.

A Focus on Resiliency: Concepts and Notions

The recent events experienced with the 2020 pandemic made evident the need for placing attention on efforts to ensure children’s wellbeing. In particular, it has created interest in aspects that contribute to supporting children’s capacity to handle stress and overcome challenges through resiliency. Studies on resilient children show that this is a capacity that can be supported and developed during the early years (Masten, 2014; Sorrells, 2015; Center on the Developing Child, 2023). Contrary to the notion that resilient individuals are born with that capacity, research today has shown that many factors are known to empower children and build their resilience. Among those factors, caring relationships are crucial in fostering a child’s ability to face and adjust to adverse events and challenges (Ungar, 2011; Sorrells, 2015; Slone & Peer, 2021). Considerations of the influential role of relationships on children raise attention to the role of early childhood practitioners and how their interactions and caring actions contribute to enabling children to become resilient. Implications for practitioners, particularly for early childhood educators and social services, call for considerations to the nature of resiliency and factors supporting its development and to needed practices to intentionally guide efforts for children. Because of the importance that resilience has in promoting positive developmental outcomes, serving as a mitigating factor when children are faced with threats and risk factors clearly establishes a need for furthering knowledge on how to support it. Contributing to understanding its meaning, educational implications of resilience, and applications in practice is what guides and defines the goals for this book.

Defining Resilience: A Multidimensional Construct

Recent and ongoing research continues to unveil the power of resilience on individuals when faced with adverse realities throughout life (Masten et al.,