



**Southern Cross
University**

Early Years Research Lab

2026-2030 STRATEGY



Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge Widjabul Wia-bal Country where Southern Cross University originated and grew, and from where it continues to flourish. It seeded the growth of the Gumbaynggirr Campus in Coffs Harbour, the Yugambeh Campus in Coolangatta and planted the seeds to transform the Countries where we work, study and learn. Understanding these origins helps us step forward with purpose, presence and wisdom, leading us to transform tomorrow.



PURPOSE

EYRL 2026 – 2030 STRATEGY

The Early Years Research Lab (2026–2030) is a collaborative community of Faculty of Education scholars and research partners committed to advancing early childhood education and care (ECEC) through critical, innovative, and impactful scholarship. Together, we generate The strategy draws on diverse knowledges and diverse approaches to research. research, build meaningful partnerships, and advocate for policy and practice that uphold children's rights, learning, and wellbeing; strengthen educators, families, and communities; and contribute to socially just, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable futures.

PRINCIPLES

EYRL 2026 – 2030 STRATEGY

The strategy therefore draws on diverse knowledges and approaches to research. Four interconnected principles guide the academic and research endeavours of Early Years Research Lab members. Each principle encompasses key objectives that define what we aim to achieve and collectively provides the foundation for transformative strategies across ECEC, teacher education, research, and community engagement.





RELATIONAL AND ENTANGLED CHILDHOODS

Childhood is recognised as relational and entangled through dynamic relationships among children, families, communities, cultures, places, environments, technologies and more-than-human worlds. This perspective values the complexity and interconnectedness of childhood, providing a counterpoint to individualised and human-centred approaches and opening possibilities for sustainable futures.

OBJECTIVES

1.1

Advance relational approaches to teaching, learning, and research that recognise the importance of relationships in supporting wellbeing, belonging, identity, and learning.

1.2

Recognise and support diverse childhoods by exploring how children's experiences are shaped through connections with people, places, cultures, technologies, and the more-than-human world

1.3

Cultivate diverse scholarly dialogue by inviting visiting scholars, practitioners, Elders, artists, and community leaders whose perspectives challenge, enrich, and extend contemporary thinking in early childhood education.

1.4

Create and nurture national and international collaborations with practitioners, scholars, and partnerships with education settings to co-create research and ensure the currency of teacher education.

1.5

Foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship that addresses complex challenges affecting children, families, and communities by bringing diverse into dialogue to address complex challenges in early childhood education and the translation of research into educational policy and practice.

1.6

Build strong partnerships and collaborative networks with educators, families, communities, Elders, organisations, and national and international researchers to co-create knowledge and practice.

1.7

Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Ecological and more-than-human relational perspectives within ECE units with the guidance of SCU Gnibi College scholars.

1.8

Undertake research that explores relational, collective, and ecological dimensions of place responsive pedagogies (PRP) within initial teacher education unit design with relational worldviews in addition to developmental paradigms and wellbeing.

1.9

Recognise children's relational agency within a collective co-constructed process that emerges through relationships with peers, educators, materials, and environments.

AIM

To foster relational, inclusive, and responsive ECEC through partnerships, collaboration, and respect for the interconnected lives of children, families, educators, communities, and environments.



IMPACTFUL RESEARCH

Research is understood as a generative practice that creates knowledge and contributes to meaningful change. We value research that is rigorous, collaborative and responsive to the complexities of children's lives, communities and the worlds they inhabit, with impact extending across research, policy, practice and public life.

OBJECTIVES

2.1

Produce high-quality research outputs and innovative research that promotes early childhood education and care across local, national, and international contexts.

2.2

Build research capacity and leadership through mentoring HDR graduate researchers, ECRs, and MCRs with professional learning, collaboration, and writing retreats that prioritise publications, research workshops and grant development sessions.

2.3

Develop an edited book proposal during a writing retreat that integrates the four principles of the EYRL 2026-2030 Strategy and integrates the expertise of all EYRL members. This book can be launched at an ECEERA conference in 2027/2008.

2.4

Attract large-scale funding to lead policy, curricula, and pedagogical development in ECEC.

2.5

Disseminate research through strategic funding projects, policy engagement, and international collaborations.

2.6

Host the annual Waves of Wisdom (WOW) conference for national and international knowledge creation and exchange, mentoring, networking and to promote SCU.

2.7

Establish an annual EYRL visiting scholars and public seminars events program featuring SCU, national and international scholars.

2.8

Distribute regular updates on funding opportunities, and existing and planned collaborations to the faculty in the EYRL reports and newsletter.

2.9

Develop a communication plan to disseminate research through conferences, showcase members' research on the EYRL website and newsletters, Conversation articles, one-minute reels, blogs, and post these on the EYRL website, EYRL socials, Faculty Matters, Southern Cross Matters, SCU Research Matters, and any other relevant avenues or platforms.

AIM

Generate high-impact publications, research, funded projects, and creative works that bring visibility, and change, to diverse social, cultural, ecological, and educational issues.



DISRUPTIVE TRANSFORMATIONS

We embrace disruption as a generative force for questioning established assumptions, unsettling dominant paradigms and opening possibilities for new ways of thinking, being and doing. We seek transformations that imagine and reimagine childhood, education and research and contribute to equitable, inclusive and sustainable futures.

OBJECTIVES

3.1

Advance research, policy, and practice to inform and transform diverse pedagogies, theories, and methodologies in early childhood education, both in Australia and internationally.

3.2

Disrupt colonial discourses with critical theories (feminist, queer, poststructural, posthuman, postcolonial) and anti-bias curriculum pedagogies.

3.3

Empower and support students in early childhood ITE with a culturally sustaining framework that supports academic success, professional belonging, agency, wellbeing and transition into the early childhood sector.

3.4

Develop transformative thinking and practice by exploring diverse pedagogies, theories, methodologies, and approaches that support socially, culturally, and ecologically just futures.

3.5

Critically assess and implement amendments to the core environmental education ITE (Initial Teacher Education) units to transform curricula and pedagogies for climate, environmental, and social justice.

3.6

Support innovative and critical research that reimagines childhood in contemporary contexts.

3.7

Develop and respond to policy briefs and practitioner resources informed by research.

3.8

Collaborate with the SCU PEX team to build culturally safe, inclusive, and supportive placement environments that value students' diverse linguistic and cultural capital.

3.9

Interpret and demystify key ECEC frameworks such as the EYRL v.2.0 and NQS to support intercultural understandings in early childhood ITE units.

AIM

Generate knowledge that challenges dominant understandings of childhood and contributes to socially, culturally, and ecologically-just futures for children.



HONOURING WISDOM

We value the wisdom of children and the ECE profession and build upon the histories, teachings, pedagogies and practices that have often been overlooked or marginalised, recognising children, families, educators, communities and Elders as contributors to what can be known, understood and imagined. We recognise knowledge as multiple, situated and lived, and create space for different ways of knowing, being and understanding to inform our research, teaching and engagement.

OBJECTIVES

4.1

Emphasise the importance of the early years as a time of formative growth and extraordinary development in teaching, learning and research to increase the visibility and awareness of child wisdom and ways of being, knowing and doing.

4.2

Recognise the wisdom of the early childhood profession as a unique field with specialised pedagogies for play-based learning, multiliteracies, curiosity, mark making and development, nature pedagogies, arts and sensorial learning.

4.3

Integrate the wisdom of past philosophies, theories, and educational approaches while staying open to expansive theories and approaches that respond to the complexities of the present and the cultivation of diverse futures.

4.4

Advocate for strength-based teaching, learning and research that celebrates the wisdom of infants, toddlers and young children as active citizens in their communities.

4.5

Identify how children are connected through digital technologies that shape digital childhoods

4.6

Strengthen the recognition, status and importance of ECEC by amplifying the knowledge, expertise and contributions of children, families, the ECE profession, communities and diverse knowledge systems.

4.7

Consider the lived experiences of children and families and the communities that work with them when designing research studies so data can inform policy and practice. (Eg, through discussions, artwork and storytelling about what matters to children in their lives, including people, places and activities.

4.8

Strengthen the foundations of children's futures by 2030 as climate change, technological shifts and global instability impact the lives of children, families and communities.

AIM

To honour wisdom as relational, lived and accumulated through experience, place, and diverse knowledge systems; recognise children as wise learners and communicators; and value the expertise of educators who attune with children, listen deeply, and build upon their ideas, knowledge, and ways of knowing.



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<https://www.scu.edu.au/education/research/early-years-research-lab/>