

34th

EECERA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Development of Agency, Participation and
Democracy in the Digital Age

Funchal, Madeira

25th – 28th August 2026

Poster Sessions



**34th EECERA
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2026 Madeira**

25 - 28 August, Tecnopolo

The Development of Agency,
Participation and Democracy
in a Digital Age


UNIVERSIDADE da MADEIRA


European Early Childhood
Education Research Association


apei
Associação
de Professores
de Educação de Infância


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DE EARLY CHILDHOOD

Poster Session A (14:40 – 15:25) | Wednesday 26th August 2026

Pavilion A, Level 0, Tecnopolo building

A01: Framing Digital Childhood: How Early Childhood Policies in England and China Shape Teachers' Practice

Presenters:

Shuolin He, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

All Authors:

Shuolin He, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

This study analyses how early childhood education (ECE) policies in England and China construct expectations for digital practice and how these policy framings may influence teachers' professional decision-making. The central question is: How do national and local ECE policies shape the ways teachers understand and enact digital practices in early years classrooms? Existing research highlights contrasting global narratives around digital childhood, ranging from risk-focused safeguarding approaches to digital innovation and modernisation (Marsh, 2017). However, cross-national analyses specifically addressing early childhood policy remain limited. This study contributes by comparing two influential ECE systems with differing cultural and policy traditions. The analysis draws on Hyatt's (2013) Critical Policy Discourse Analysis framework, viewing policy as interpreted and negotiated within practice contexts rather than simply implemented. This framework supports examining how macro-level framing constructs expectations for teachers' digital pedagogy. Applying Hyatt's (2013) CPDA framework, this document analysis interrogates English and Chinese ECE policies (2001–2025), specifically examining how discourse shapes pedagogical enactment. Beyond using public documents, rigour is maintained through researcher reflexivity to ensure balanced interpretation and authentic representation of both contexts. England's policies frame digital practice through safeguarding and screen-time caution. China's policies emphasise teacher competence, digital infrastructure, and technology-driven curriculum enhancement. These contrasting framings shape differing expectations placed on teachers, influencing how digital tools are perceived, prioritised, or limited in early years settings. Findings suggest that teachers' digital practice is deeply shaped by national policy narratives. Aligning training, resources, and guidance with realistic classroom needs may support more meaningful and context-sensitive digital pedagogies in both countries.

digital childhood, early childhood policy, digital competence, cross-national analysis, teacher practice

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A02: Early STEAM Explorers - Engineering

Presenters:

Paula Walshe, South East Technological University, Ireland

All Authors:

Paula Walshe, South East Technological University, Ireland

Dean McDonnell, South East Technological University, Ireland

Develop STEAM workshops to promote the engineering domain of STEAM in early childhood education (ECE). The OECD has called for ECE to become increasingly 'future-oriented' (2023, p.117) to empower children as active 21st-century citizens, and incorporating STEAM in ECE can support children's development of important 21st-century skills to facilitate this (Leavy et al., 2022; OECD, 2023). However, numerous research studies maintain ECE educator knowledge and beliefs regarding STEAM can significantly impact their ability and inclination to include STEAM concepts (Pajares, 1992; DeJarnette, 2018; Jamil et al., 2018). The ECE sector provides education and care for

children 0-6, before and during the stage when they develop a sense of intellectual ability based upon gender (Bian et al, 2017). This unique position of ECE engagement, prior to gender stereotypes becoming ingrained, is recognized by UNICEF (2021) who described ECE as potentially gender transformative in the drive to support UN SDG Goal 4: Education. Paradigm is interpretivist. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered through surveys. Statistical analysis of quantitative data. Content and thematic analysis of qualitative data. Full ethical approval obtained. Participant information letters detail how confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and data stored and destroyed. Informed consent obtained. This is an ongoing piece of research. Findings will be collated after each workshop to evaluate the efficacy of the workshop and implement changes to improve the format. Eliminate barriers to STEAM, support educators to provide playful, educational STEAM activities to ECE children, right at the beginning of the educational continuum and the very source of the leaky STE(A)M pipeline.

STEAM education, engineering, leaky STEM pipeline, gender

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Funded by SETUVice President Research, Innovation and Impact Strategic Fund 2025.

A03: Capturing Executive Functions in Authentic Situations: Validating a Tool to Reveal Children's Potential

Presenters:

Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

All Authors:

Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

Ariane Fiset, Université Laval, Canada

This study evaluates the psychometric properties of the GOFER (Duval & Montminy, 2025), an observational tool for assessing children's executive functions (EFs) in authentic situations (e.g., playtimes). EFs are linked to early educational success, making this period critical for their study. While traditional measures (e.g., rating scales, performance tests) provide valuable information, they often lack ecological validity. The GOFER was therefore developed and validated to address this limitation by capturing children's EFs in authentic situations. EFs are interdependent processes that help children regulate their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to achieve goals in everyday situations (Berg et al., 2020), including early childhood education settings. Because existing tools rarely allow these skills to be observed in authentic contexts (Londono et al., 2025), we propose the creation of a systematic tool to better recognize children's potential. The GOFER was tested with 312 children aged 3 to 6 in Quebec (Canada). Interval-based observations provided the data used to evaluate its psychometric validity, capturing children's spontaneous behaviors. The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Université Laval. Parents provided written informed consent, and children gave verbal assent. The data show good internal consistency and inter-rater agreement, supporting the reliability of the GOFER for observing EFs in authentic situations. Exploratory factor analysis further confirmed its construct validity, revealing a two-component structure. The GOFER helps reveal children's potential in authentic situations and supports the development of intentional practices to foster their EFs. The results also demonstrate that it is feasible to use the tool for assessing EFs in early childhood educational settings.

executive functions, observation, tool, children's potential, kindergarten

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), a federal research funding agency. The full reference for the funded project is as follows: Duval, S., Brault-Foisy, L.-M., Matte-Gagné, C., and Matte-Landy, A. (2024–2029). Feasibility study on the use of an observation tool for executive functions in children aged 4 to 6 in ecological contexts by various qualified observers.

A04: Children's Free Play in Video Games: Practices of Multimodal Meaning-Making

Presenters:

Joakim Langfjæran, University of Stavanger, Norway

All Authors:

Joakim Langfjæran, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study aims to investigate how 4-5-year-olds experience freedom, agency, creativity and social interaction through free play in video games. Research shows that children resist perceived rules and restrictions in video games in order to develop their own forms of play (Marsh et al., 2016, p. 250). However, there are few studies on digital gameplay that consider children's perspectives, and which conceptualize digital play as initiated, organized, and controlled by the children (Loudoun et al., 2022, p. 13). This study draws on post-digital perspectives (Edwards, 2023), gaming literacy (Gee, 2003), and theories of multimodality and social semiotics (Kress, 2010). These frameworks support an understanding of play in digital contexts as a multimodal meaning-making process. Planned methods in this qualitative study include video-based observation of play sessions with groups of four children, combined with video-stimulated recall interviews to capture children's reflections (Theobald, 2017). The study recognizes children as competent actors throughout the research process. In line with Norwegian research ethics (NESH, 2023), informed consent will be collected from all participants. All participants, including the children, will be informed that they can withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. The study is expected to provide insights into how children perceive freedom and agency during play in video games. Findings may inform early childhood education practices by integrating digital play in ways that respect children's freedom and agency.

free play, meaning making, children's agency, video games, digital play

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

The project is fully funded by the University of Stavanger through a PhD research fellowship.

A05: "Involve Me": An extended research programme

Presenters:

John Siraj Blatchford, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan

Aysel Korkmaz, Yozgat Bozok University, Türkiye

John Siraj Blatchford, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan

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Aysel Korkmaz, Yozgat Bozok University, Türkiye

The research aims to provide resources to support parents and professional educators in providing educational support for children engaged in free-flow play that is 'fit for purpose' and 'just in time'. Provides an account of a sustained research programme followed by the principle authors since 2013, and reports on the most recent findings and analytical framework. The work engages with research conducted in information science, library studies and education. We present a new analytical model that engages with work by Yrjö Engeström, Marilyn Fleer and others applying Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The analysis integrates 3rd generation CHAT with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, and extends this, drawing upon the insights of embodied and extended cognitive science and neuroscience, to provide an ecologically consistent Endosystem that includes an effective dimension suitable for studying relational educational practices. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been

systematically applied in an effort to sustain a long-term progressive programme of study (Lakatos). In the latest empirical study constructs were elicited from 111, 4 and 5 year olds and subjected to statistical repertory grid analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the National Cheng Kung University ethics committee, and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' anonymity, and the children were empowered through open dialogue. Theoretical developments of relevance to pedagogy, and taxonomic findings related to children's schematic interests that support classification, and information systems development in home, preschool and in public library contexts. The study also contributes towards providing a conceptual framework for the analysis of play based pedagogy and emergent education for sustainable citizenship.

repertory grid, schema, relational pedagogy, chat, endosystem

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A06: Leadership of reflective practices for the development of quality in kindergarten

Presenters:

Charlotte Johannessen, Independent, Norway

All Authors:

Charlotte Johannessen, Independent, Norway

Ann Kristin Larsen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Camilla Skredderstuen Stolpe, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Linda Geelmuyden Ringen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Magritt Lundestad, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Leadership in kindergartens has developed into a complex interplay between leadership, competence development and cooperation at different levels. Kindergarten owners and leaders must balance clear leadership with pedagogical and relational work. How can owners and leaders develop the staffs competence through guidance and reflective practice? Leadership in kindergartens is concerned with equal opportunities for all children. Owner involvement in the development of competence and quality. Leaders want closer cooperation with owners in the development of high quality in kindergartens (Larsen, 2023, Lundestad, 2023, Børhaug, 2021, KD, 2023). Perspectives on Leadership of Kindergarten as a Learning Organization (Gotvassli, 2020, Senge, 2005), transformational leadership (Matthiesen, 2014, Roland and Ertesvåg, 2023, Wadel and Knabel, 2022), structure and culture for supervision in kindergarten (Bang, 2020, Fullan & Quinn, 2017). The study is based on a sociocultural paradigm. The presentation is based on two qualitative studies. Individual and group interviews were conducted. The studies follow research ethics guidelines by ensuring informed consent from all participants, and protecting their identity through confidential data processing. Owners and leaders are dependent on close cooperation in competence development and guidance to create quality in the pedagogical work. Guidance as an important tool for developing reflective practices for collective learning, increased mastery and quality for the benefit of the children. Owners and leaders have joint responsibility for developing structures and culture for guidance and competence development for increased quality in kindergartens.

ECEC's leadership, collaboration, guidance, reflective practice, quality

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A07: Using digital observation to investigate construction play and the relationship to child agency during playful learning.

Presenters:

Lori Walter-Carro, Florida State University, United States

All Authors:

Lori Walter-Carro, Florida State University, United States

The case study uses digital technology (observations) to showcase how an experienced preschool teacher uses block play to balance curricular rigor with play-based learning that respects child agency.

This case study gives a holistic picture of the classroom context, the teacher's actions, and the children's learning. Previous work consisted of a quantitative study to determine the extent and in which ways teachers used block play in the classroom (Walter-Carro, 2024). A third study looked at how student teachers would incorporate the use of block play in an integrated curriculum unit (Walter-Carro, 2022). Pyle and Danniels' (2017) "Continuum of Play Based Learning" conceptualizes teacher involvement in play-based learning. By examining levels of engagement during block play, the proposed study will clarify the strategies used to support learning while respecting child agency. This descriptive case study is grounded in a constructivist framework and explores learning through construction play; encompassing not just the children, but the classroom context, and the teacher. Data collection includes observations, interviews, and classroom artifacts. The project proposal was approved by Florida State University's Internal Review Board. Informed consent was obtained for participants. Verbal assent was obtained for children. All data is held according to confidentiality laws. Expected outcomes: Using typological qualitative analysis, data described the classroom context developed to facilitate both academic and developmental learning during construction play. The data also identified various teacher strategies for scaffolding children's learning and movement along the Continuum of Playful Learning. Digital and analogous data provide concrete evidence of how play and academic learning can be integrated effectively.

playful learning, construction play, teacher practice, blocks, digital observation

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A08: Interaction Profiles while Shared Picture Book Reading: The Role of Book Format and Effects on Children's Language Outcomes

Presenters:

Kerstin Pfannes, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

All Authors:

Kerstin Pfannes, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Silvana Kappeler Suter, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

The present research investigates which interaction quality profiles can be identified during shared picture book reading, whether these profiles are influenced by the reading format, and whether they differentially predict children's vocabulary and story comprehension. Research has revealed various educator interaction profiles during picture book reading linked to children's vocabulary and story comprehension (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Zucker et al., 2021). Interaction quality is pivotal during shared book reading regardless of the format (print or digital), although the format exerts varying influences (Kim & Anderson, 2008; Korat et al., 2013; Neumann, 2020). Within this framework, interaction quality is conceptualised as educators' cognitive and linguistic scaffolding during shared reading (Vygotsky, 1978). A quantitative, person-centred methodology is being employed. Video data from a total of 206 dyadic reading sessions are being coded for interaction quality using a project-developed scale. The dyads are randomly assigned to use print picture book, picture book app including hotspots, or hotspots and games. Children's (aged 4–5) vocabulary and story comprehension are being assessed using approaches based on Smeets and Bus (2015). All participants have provided written informed consent, with data anonymised and a voluntary withdrawal option throughout. Analysis is ongoing and will be completed shortly. Following latent profile analysis to identify

interaction profiles, a three-step approach examines whether reading formats influence profile membership and how these profiles differentially predict children's vocabulary and story comprehension outcomes. These findings will offer insights into professional development by identifying profiles that effectively support early literacy.

interaction quality, shared book reading, picture book (-app), early literacy skills, latent profile analysis

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Data analysis are ongoing; completed results will be presented at the conference. The research project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

A09: Supporting Kindergarten Teachers to Observe and Promote Executive Functions Through a Child-Centered Lens

Presenters:

Ariane Fiset, Université Laval, Canada

All Authors:

Ariane Fiset, Université Laval, Canada

Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

Christine Hamel, Université Laval, Canada

This study aims to evaluate the effects of a professional development (PD) initiative designed to strengthen kindergarten teachers' ability to observe and support children's executive functions (EFs) through a child-centered lens to recognize and build on each child's potential. Early childhood is a sensitive period for EFs development, and teachers play a key role in supporting these skills (Sankalaite et al., 2021). Supporting teachers through PD can strengthen their ability to promote children's EFs (Muir et al., 2024). However, while PD initiatives have aimed to enhance children's EFs, prior studies (e.g., Kellens et al., 2023) have focused on child outcomes, with limited attention to teacher outcomes. This study draws on Desimone's (2009) conceptual framework, which posits that well-designed PD initiatives can influence teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and self-efficacy, leading to changes in practices and, ultimately, improvements in children's outcomes. A pragmatic paradigm using a quasi-experimental mixed methods design with a control group is employed. Participants will include 10 teachers and 150 children aged 4-6. Data will be collected from multiple sources (e.g., questionnaires, observation grids). Analyses will include linear regression and thematic analysis. The project is approved by the Université Laval Ethics Committee. Parents and teachers will provide written consent, and children will give verbal assent. The study will examine whether supporting teachers through PD can enhance their capacity to observe and support children's EFs, providing insights into potential changes in teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices, as well as children's EFs. Results and recommendations will inform kindergarten teachers' practices and the design of future PD initiatives.

executive functions, professional development, teacher practices, kindergarten, classroom observation

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This research is funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec, secteur Société et culture and the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, administered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

A10: Best Practices to Enhance Neurodiverse Preschoolers' Social Participation: A Rapid Review

Presenters:

Isabelle Préfontaine, Université Laval, Canada

All Authors:

Isabelle Préfontaine, Université Laval, Canada
Malena Argumedes, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada
Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Sabrina Fortin, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada
Mélodie Bélisle, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

This study aims to identify best practices for supporting the social participation of neurodivergent children in daycare in order to inform an observation framework for assessing the quality of interventions in early childhood settings. Neurodivergent children often experience multiple developmental challenges (APA, 2022), and research suggests that the childcare environments they attend play an important role in their development (Gulsrud et al., 2019). This project is guided by the ecological model Bronfenbrenner (1979), which posits that environments influence individual development. To identify evidence-based strategies that promote inclusion and social participation, we conducted a rapid review of the literature. Following PRISMA guidelines, we performed a systematic search across major databases (e.g., PubMed, PsycINFO, CINAHL, ERIC). A total of 1,580 studies were screened, 203 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 60 articles were included. Data were extracted and synthesized thematically. Although this research is a literature review, ethical consideration was given to ensuring fair representation of literature from a wide range of sources. Findings highlight several best practices, including structured peer-mediated interventions, environmental adaptations to support sensory regulation, individualized communication supports, and staff training in neurodiversity-affirming approaches. Collaborative partnerships among educators, specialists, and families also emerged as a critical factor. Gaps in the literature include limited attention to intersectionality, cultural diversity, and the voices of neurodiverse children themselves. This review provides a foundation for developing tools to assess the quality and inclusiveness of daycare programs. By translating research into practical observation criteria, it contributes to improving early intervention and fostering equitable participation for all preschoolers.

neurodivergent children, social participation, early childhood education, daycare settings, inclusive practices

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

A11: Rules or Playfulness? Contextualising Mealtimes through Children's Participation in Finnish Early Childhood Education

Presenters:

Jenni Vaara, University of Helsinki, Finland

All Authors:

Jenni Vaara, University of Helsinki, Finland
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland
Jonna Kangas, University of Helsinki, Finland
Sanna Talvia, University of Helsinki, Finland
Jyrki Reunamo, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study aims to examine how pedagogical practices and structural factors influence children's participation during mealtimes in Finnish ECEC. For young children, ECEC mealtimes are central everyday contexts supporting togetherness and social interaction (Alcock, 2007). In Finnish ECEC, mealtimes are embedded within a holistic pedagogical approach and recognised as meaningful interactional learning situations (Kumpulainen, 2018). However, previous research shows that mealtimes are often constrained by routinised practices (Glaser, 2019), creating

tension between educator-oriented rules and children's agency (Hansen et al., 2018), while playful and responsive interactions may enhance children's participation during mealtimes (Bae, 2009). Despite Finnish national guidelines recognising mealtimes as contexts for supporting children's participation, empirical research remains limited. The theoretical framework is based on Reunamo's (2007) social orientation theory, in which participative orientation refers to children's active and initiative-taking role in social situations. Playfulness is considered a pedagogical lens for understanding how participation emerges in mealtime interactions. This study adopts a quantitative research paradigm using systematic observation methods. Data includes 483,327 child observations collected between 2017–2024 across 19 Finnish municipalities. Data will be analysed using logistic regression models. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Helsinki. Data were anonymised using only numeric codes. Participation was voluntary, and written consent was obtained from guardians. Preliminary findings show that limited resources and routine-focused practices restrict children's participation during mealtimes. Findings highlight the need to reconsider mealtime practices and support educators in recognising mealtimes as meaningful pedagogical contexts beyond nutrition, with implications for teacher training and ECEC policy.

children's participation, mealtime pedagogy, social orientation theory, observational research, everyday practices

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A12: The Effects of Coding Play Participation on the Improvement of Children's Computational Thinking

Presenters:

YungEui Yoo, Soon Chun Hyang Univ., Republic of Korea

All Authors:

YungEui Yoo, SoonChunHyang Univ., Republic of Korea

MiRyang Kim, SoonChunHyang Univ., Republic of Korea

BoKyoung Cho, SoonChunHyang Univ., Republic of Korea

This study aims to identify changes in the computational thinking of five-year-old children after applying coding play and to analyze its effects. The United States provides early childhood coding education beginning in K–3, and the United Kingdom includes Computing as a compulsory subject from age five. Several European countries also introduce coding education in early childhood, emphasizing the growing importance of early instruction for nurturing future talent (Dubrow, 2013; Balanskat & Engelhardt, 2015; European Commission, 2015). Early childhood is a period of rapid development in symbolic thinking, and five-year-olds can understand concepts such as sequence, condition, and repetition through play, making this stage suitable for building the foundations of computational thinking. Coding play provides natural opportunities to practice core components of computational thinking, including problem decomposition, pattern recognition, algorithms, abstraction, and debugging. 36 five-year-old children were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a computational-thinking rubric and observation. Pre- and post-test scores were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 25 and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Legal guardians provided written consent after receiving information about the study and the year-long coding play plan. Children were also informed that they could withdraw at any time. The analysis showed significant improvement in all components of computational thinking, including decomposition, pattern recognition, algorithms, abstraction, and debugging. These results suggest that coding play reflecting children's interests promotes the development of computational thinking, and that long-term, continuous experiences may be more effective than short-term activities.

coding play, early childhood coding education, computational thinking, early childhood education, coding education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A13: Features and meanings of children's outdoor playgrounds: Toward an affordance perspective

Presenters:

YungEui Yoo, SoonChunHyang University, Republic of Korea

All Authors:

YungEui Yoo, SoonChunHyang University, Republic of Korea

Sunhee Yang, SoonChunHyang University, Republic of Korea

Eunjung Jang, SoonChunHyang University, Republic of Korea

This study explored features and meanings of children's self-created outdoor playgrounds through affordance lens. An affordance is a concept that describes how a space induces or supports human behavior, either positively or negatively, for its users(Gibson,1986). When applied to outdoor playgrounds, this means that they should be organized in a way that takes into account the characteristics, needs, preferences, and educational goals of children. Outdoor playgrounds are spaces where young children can freely run and play as active participants(Kim & Kang, 2019; Lee, 2018). Since young children are active agents who utilize the space and can reflect on its meaning and value(Im et al.,2012), the characteristics and significance of outdoor play spaces must be examined from the children's perspective. This study is a qualitative study, and the analysis went through the process of open coding, categorization, and re-categorization(Creswell, 2010). The participants of the study were 20 7-year-old children and two classroom teachers in a daycare center in Chungcheongnam-do. All participants were provided with informed consent, all names were pseudonymized, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the observation and interview at any time. The outdoor play spaces that young children create themselves are spaces where nature blends in, spaces we must protect, and creative spaces that can be freely transformed according to their own interests and curiosities. The significance of this study is that it sought to explore the characteristics and meanings of the outdoor playgrounds that children, who are the subjects of play, create through the interaction of their surroundings and objects.

outdoor playgrounds, affordance, children's agency, children's rights

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A14: Personality Resilience Predicts Mental Health in Preschool Professionals: Partial Mediation via Perceived Work Stress

Presenters:

Tina Kavčič, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Maja Zupančič, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Urška Fekonja, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

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Tina Kavčič, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Katja Kurnik-Mesaric, University Medical Centre Ljubljana,Slovenia

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Urška Fekonja, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

This study investigated the sources of work-related stress and examined how personality resilience contributes to preschool professionals' mental health, both directly and indirectly through perceived workplace stressors. Teachers face high levels of occupational stress (Abu Hasan et al., 2022), which can undermine mental health and hinder their capacity to support children's wellbeing (Smith & Lawrence, 2019). Resilience is a recognized protective factor (Rancher & Moreland, 2023), yet its mechanisms—particularly in early childhood education—remain insufficiently explored. The transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) depicts stress as arising from individuals'

cognitive appraisals of environmental demands. Personality resilience is conceptualized as a personal resource that shapes stress appraisal and buffers its negative effects (Kołodziej et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2024). This quantitative, correlational study included 1,004 preschool professionals (teachers, assistants, and counsellors) from public preschools across Slovenia, who completed an online self-report survey assessing resilience, perceived work-related stressors, anxiety, depression, somatic symptoms, and subjective wellbeing. Correlation, regression, and mediation analyses were conducted. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, informed consent was obtained, and data were securely stored. Participants could withdraw at any time. Collaboration with parents emerged as the most stressful job demand. Resilience predicted positive and problematic mental health outcomes, both directly and indirectly through the perceived stressor intensity, suggesting that resilience contributes to mental health partly by shaping perceptions of job demands. The findings highlight the need for resilience-building and stress-reduction programs in early childhood education to promote professionals' mental health and, indirectly, the quality of early childhood education and child outcomes.

work-related stressors, mental health, early childhood professionals, personality resilience, wellbeing.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The project was funded by Slovenian Research Agency via funding to the research program Applied Developmental Psychology (No. P5-0062).

A15: Smart Learning–Based Mentoring for Early Childhood Teachers' Bullying Prevention and Intervention Competence

Presenters:

Naeun Shin, Yeonsung University, Republic of Korea

All Authors:

Naeun Shin, Yeonsung University, Republic of Korea

This study examined how smart learning–based mentoring (SLM)—an individualized professional development approach using digital platforms for real-time and asynchronous communication—supported early childhood teachers in bullying prevention and intervention, and explored participant-derived meanings. While bullying among young children has been documented (Monks et al., 2003), research on early childhood–specific interventions remains limited. Existing training often relies on standardized group instruction with minimal personalized support. Grounded in a socio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and reflective practice theory, the study conceptualized early childhood bullying as a situation where a child experiences harm from another and has little means of escape (Lee, 2024). Because intentionality and power imbalance are not always evident in young children, emphasis was placed on the harmed child's experience rather than the perpetrator's intent. Three early childhood teachers participated in 1:1 mentoring via a smart learning platform. Data included mentoring logs, digital artifacts, observations, interviews, and reflective journals. Ethical considerations were carefully followed through informed consent, confidentiality, and trust-based mentoring that encouraged open reflection on sensitive experiences. Findings showed teachers initially lacked conceptual clarity, sufficient intervention skills, and capacity for self-reflection. Through individualized SLM sessions, they gained deeper understanding of early childhood bullying, improved recognition of subtle cues, and applied context-sensitive strategies. SLM's flexibility, immediate feedback, continuous communication, and shared digital materials surpassed conventional group training, enabling teachers to revisit guidance and apply it to classroom situations. This study highlights SLM's potential as a sustainable and adaptive professional development model, bridging theory and practice while fostering empathetic, context-aware competencies for early childhood bullying prevention and intervention.

bullying in early childhood, smart-learning, mentoring, teachers, intervention

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A16: Analysis of the theme of attachment in children's literature

Presenters:

Zlatka Cugmas, University of Maribor, Faculty of Education, Slovenia

All Authors:

Zlatka Cugmas, University of Maribor, Faculty of Education, Slovenia

The subjects of the study were the attachment objects and criteria of attachment (the closeness, safe haven and secure base) that are highlighted in the children's picture books (CPB). CPB are often analyzed from the perspective of theme, literary time and place, illustrations, etc. (Haramija, 2022). Analysis of the theme of attachment in CPB is originally. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) states that children develop a certain style of attachment to caregivers (parents, teachers etc.). It depends on the caregivers' sensitivity. All attachment criteria can be implemented between a child and parents when reading CPB together. The study was conducted within a quantitative and qualitative interpretive research paradigms. Two independent researchers analyzed the theme of attachment in 53 CPB (22 CPB by Slovenian authors and 31 CPB by foreign authors translated into Slovenian). Ethical consideration has been given to ensuring fair representation of literature from a wide range of sources. We found that the CPB address most often closeness (36 CPB), then a safe haven (24 CPB), a safe base (21 CPB) and fear of separation (20 CPB). The content of the CPB supports the assumption of multiple attachment, attachment to several objects at the same time. The CPB address 12 attachment objects, most often mother, father, peers, place and imaginary friends. We conclude that many CPB in the Slovenian language address the theme of attachment and provide many opportunities for caregivers to express their sensitivity when reading CPB together with their child (talking about their own experiences, warmth, touches, looks, regulation of emotions, etc.).

children's picture books, reading, caregivers' sensitivity, attachment objects, attachment criteria

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A17: Exploring Digital Device Use Among Young Children from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Presenters:

Hwewon Kim, Yeungnam University, Republic of Korea

All Authors:

Hwewon Kim, Yeungnam University, Republic of Korea

This study explored how young children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds experience digital device use and the contexts shaping these experiences. Previous studies have examined screen time and its developmental effects among socioeconomically disadvantaged young children. This study extends prior research by examining their lived experiences and everyday contexts of digital device use. Sociocultural theory views learning as embedded in social interactions. Drawing on this theory, the analysis examined how children's digital device use was mediated by interactions with caregivers and peers, as well as contextual factors such as family routines and resource availability. This phenomenological study explored the experiences of seven children aged 3–5 from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Data were collected through three months of classroom observations and interviews with their parents and teachers. After IRB approval, consent forms were sent to caregivers outlining the study and requesting written permission for participation. Children's assent was respected, and observations were discontinued if any child showed discomfort or unwillingness to participate. The children

spent most of their after-school hours and weekends at home, often alone or with siblings, leading to heavy reliance on digital media and the imitation of aggressive play observed online within early childhood education settings. These patterns were shaped by limited parental availability due to self-employment or agricultural work and a lack of extended family support. First, social support systems should be strengthened to better support socioeconomically disadvantaged young children. Second, preventive environments and collaboration between early childhood settings and families are needed to reduce excessive digital device use.

digital device use, socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, young children, multicultural family, North Korean defector family

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF).

A18: Exploring Democratic Learning Through Educators' Conflict Management Practices in Swedish Preschools

Presenters:

Danai Voukelatou, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

All Authors:

Danai Voukelatou, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

This study examines how educators' conflict management practices foster children's democratic learning during peer conflicts in Swedish preschools. Educators play a crucial role in shaping how children manage disagreements constructively—an ability closely linked to democratic competencies. When educators handle peer conflicts in ways that promote dialogue, negotiation, perspective-taking, and cooperation, they create opportunities for children to practice these competencies, thereby fostering democratic learning. While previous research has demonstrated that children can learn about democracy through participation in conflicts, there is limited empirical knowledge on how educators' conflict management practices actively foster such learning. The study draws upon Chantal Mouffe's theoretical ideas, where conflict is viewed as a prerequisite for democracy. The data consist of video-recorded peer conflicts and educators' interventions in them. A total of 12 hours of video footage was collected. The analytic technique employed is interaction analysis. This involves repeatedly viewing the video footage to examine turn-taking sequences, examining communicative actions such as questions inviting responses, and mapping the sequential organization of interactions to explore how democratic learning is constructed in practice. Ethical approval was granted by the national ethical review board. The study discusses how educators' interventions can enable children's democratic learning and identifies the competencies children may develop through different conflict management approaches. In practice, it underscores the importance for preschool educators to prioritize conflict management strategies that cultivate cooperation, dialogue, negotiation, and mutual respect in children's peer interactions, strengthening their democratic competencies for active citizenship.

conflict management, peer-conflicts, democratic learning, preschool, agonism

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A19: Podcasting as a Direct Line to ECEC Professionals?!

Presenters:

Johanna Quiring, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Mita Ray, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Fabienne Bohler, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

All Authors:

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This project aims to bridge the research-practice gap in ECEC through an innovative podcast format. By interviewing researchers and practitioners, the podcast *Frühe Bildung* (Early Childhood Education) integrates empirical insights with strategies for practical application. Recent research indicates that podcast design has the potential to influence shifts in professional beliefs (Götzfried et al., 2024), while evidence from related fields confirms the medium's efficacy for knowledge acquisition (Kelly et al., 2022). Grounded in the understanding that theoretical knowledge facilitates a distanced perspective on professional action (Leonhard, 2018), the format fosters reflective practice and helps professionals articulate underlying rationales for pedagogical decisions. To assess audience engagement and reach, this contribution draws on analytics from the podcast hosting service as well as anecdotal evidence from listeners. The data analysed is aggregated and anonymised usage metrics alongside listener feedback, ensuring full participant anonymity. To date, the podcast has reached nearly 40,000 downloads, with primary engagement in Switzerland (54%) and Germany (38%). User feedback indicates that the podcast is being integrated into professional development programs while usage metrics suggest strong resonance among experienced professionals in the field. These findings suggest that tailored podcast formats can establish a direct line to practice, though further research is needed to evaluate their long-term impact on knowledge acquisition and behavioural change. Consequently, podcasting should be recognised as a valuable instrument for professional development. Educational policy should support the integration of such low-threshold formats into formal training and further education frameworks.

podcast, professionalisation, research-practice-gap, reflective practice, knowledge transfer

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A20: EYdigiFoLio: Pedagogical documentation and digital portfolios in early childhood education

Presenters:

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Cristiana Ribeiro, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

All Authors:

Cristina Mesquita, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

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Rui Pedro Lopes, CEDRI, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

The EYdigiFoLio project aims to develop an innovative approach to documenting, assessing, and communicating children's learning in early childhood settings. It seeks to empower educators to improve documentation practices, engage families, and create digital portfolios for formative and reflective assessment. This work builds on previous studies in pedagogical documentation, participatory and emergent learning, and evidence-based assessment of children's learning. EYdigiFoLio aligns with principles explored in approaches such as Reggio Emilia and participatory

action research, emphasizing meaning-making through interactions among children, educators, and families. The theoretical framework is based on pedagogical documentation as a means to make learning and development processes visible, the digital portfolio as a tool for reflection and communication, active family involvement, and principles of active, contextualized learning. The project follows an interpretative and collaborative paradigm, applying practical and formative methodologies including professional development, the design and testing of digital portfolio systems, case study data collection, and reflection on the implementation and impact of digital tools and documentation practices. Ethical considerations focus on data protection, privacy, informed consent, responsible use of digital technologies, and respect for children's voices in assessment. Initial findings indicate that structured documentation provides deeper insights into children's holistic development, strengthens communication among educators, children, and families, and highlights the importance of continuous professional development and technological support for effective pedagogical practices. Implications for practice and policy include promoting child-centered documentation, integrating digital tools as formative assessment instruments, strengthening partnerships with families and communities, and contributing to policies that recognize assessment as a shared, participatory process.

pedagogical documentation, digital portfolios, early childhood education, family engagement, professional development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The EYDP project (Project Number: 2022-1-PT01-KA220-SCH-000086979) has been co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

A21: Children's Agency in Democratic Early Childhood Classrooms: From Voice to Collective Action

Presenters:

Haemin Lee, Chung-Ang University, Republic of Korea

All Authors:

Haemin Lee, Chung-Ang University, Republic of Korea

Seungha Lee, Chung-Ang University, Republic of Korea

This study examines how children's agency emerges, develops, and functions across individual, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions within a democratic early childhood classroom community. While prior research has emphasized children's participation and voice (James & Prout, 1997; Corsaro, 2018), limited empirical attention has examined how agency develops longitudinally as a cultural process embedded in everyday classroom practices (Vaughn, 2020; Varpanen, 2019). Grounded in sociocultural theory and democratic pedagogy frameworks (Rogoff, 1995; Edwards, 2005), agency is conceptualized as socially constructed through shared practices, operating across interconnected personal, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Stoecklin & Fattore, 2018). This collaborative action research was conducted over ten months in a South Korean public kindergarten, involving twenty-two five-year-old children, their teacher, and the researcher as co-participants. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, reflective dialogue, and document analysis, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. IRB was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Parental consent and children's assent were secured, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured throughout. Analysis revealed a developmental trajectory of children's agency across three interconnected dimensions—personal, interpersonal, and cultural—through which agentic practices progressively expanded. At the cultural level, children actively contributed to sustaining and transforming classroom norms, demonstrating genuine influence over collective practices. This study advances theoretical understanding of children's agency by foregrounding its cultural dimensions. It also

demonstrates participatory action research as a methodological approach for fostering pedagogically democratic environments with implications for education policy, practice, and future research.

children's agency, early childhood education, classroom culture, child participation, collaborative action research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A22: Parental Cognitive Functioning Mediates the Longitudinal Association of Parental Mindfulness with Parental Involvement in Child Education

Presenters:

Chun Bun Lam, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

All Authors:

Chun Bun Lam, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Kevin Kien Hoa Chung, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

This two-wave longitudinal study examined the question: Do changes in parental cognitive functioning mediated the association of parental mindfulness with parental involvement in child education. Parental mindfulness has been linked to positive family dynamics and nurturing parent-child relationships. However, little is known about how it may be related to parental educational involvement. Mindfulness refers to the ability to attend to the immediate experience with curious and nonjudgmental attitudes. More mindful individuals may be better adjusted and more able to connect with others. Therefore, it was hypothesized that parental mindfulness would be linked with increases in parental cognitive functioning (Duncan et al., 2009), which in turn would be linked to increases in parental involvement in child education (Wang, 2026). At two time points approximately 6 months apart, questionnaire data were collected from the parents of 948 kindergarten children. At Time 1, children averaged 57.66 months of age, and 47% of them were girls. At Times 1, parents rated their mindfulness. At Times 1 and 2, parents rated their cognitive functioning and involvement in child school work, parent-school communication, and preschool involvement (i.e., volunteering in school and participating in school administration). All parents provided informed consent. Their confidentiality was protected. The procedures were approved by the University. Path analyses indicated that increases in parental cognitive functioning Mediated the associations of parental mindfulness with increases in involvement in child school work, parent-school communication, and preschool involvement. Findings highlighted the potential utility of targeting parental mindfulness and cognitive functioning as means to promote parental involvement in child education.

parental mindfulness, parental adjustment, parental educational involvement, longitudinal analysis, chinese families

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study was supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

A23: SIG play: Evidence-informed trajectories on play-guidance

Presenters:

Ilse Aerden, UCLL, Belgium

All Authors:

Ilse Aerden, UCLL, Belgium

In this evidence-informed professionalisation project, 15 schools are supported in optimising free play for preschoolers through play-guidance. Research shows that mature role play promotes self-regulation, language development and social skills (Leong & Bodrova, 2012). To strengthen mature role play, teachers need professional play-guidance skills (Van Oers, 2020; Fisher, 2016) and rich interactions (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). De Haan's (2012) three-step model - explore, connect, enrich - offers a clear framework for improving these interactions. The project uses the evidence-informed working model by Van den Rym, et al. (2025). Video-coaching (Bracke et al., 2018) is implemented to stimulate reflection on teacher-child interactions during play. Project implementation begins with an intake with the school leadership. A baseline assessment is conducted using teacher surveys and video recordings of free play. Research questions and objectives are derived from observed challenges. School-based play coaches then support teachers through structured video-coaching, using dedicated reflection tools based on scientific frameworks. By analysing children's play initiatives and teachers' responses, triangulation is ensured. Practical-organisational arrangements are established, and feedback loops are embedded. Schools obtain informed consent from parents. Children and teachers can opt out of filming at any time. Teachers retain ownership of all video's. Confidentiality is emphasised throughout the process. Although teachers value play-guidance, they often struggle with implementation. Video-coaching helps identify progress on three levels: organising moments for play-guidance, developing play-guidance skills and using play-guidance intentionally. The third level is key for long-term impact. Seeing their own practice on video helps teachers recognise opportunities and strengthens their professional growth.

play-guidance, role play, evidence-informed professionalisation, video-coaching

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project has been selected by 'Leerpunt' as one of the projects aimed at strengthening broad-based care and enhanced care in schools, and financed by the Flemish government.

A24: Children's Voices in Lines and Layers: Using LIVE Threads in Dialogic Drawing

Presenters:

Amelia Ruscoe, Edith Cowan University, Australia

All Authors:

Amelia Ruscoe, Edith Cowan University, Australia

This study explored how Dialogic Drawing can be developed and used as a pedagogical tool to deepen understandings of young children's engagement in learning. It examined whether the approach supports teachers to access emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of engagement beyond observation alone. Interpreting young children's engagement is widely understood to be complex, particularly as language and multimodal communication continue to develop. Drawing on over a decade of research, Dialogic Drawing (Ruscoe, 2022) has shown potential for accessing children's perspectives on learning, schooling, and transitions through the combination of drawing and sustained dialogue. The study is grounded in Freirean dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and informed by sociocultural and multimodal theories of learning and communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Kress, 2010), conceptualising drawing as part of a broader communicative ensemble. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the research adopted a qualitative, participatory methodology. Ten early childhood teachers from seven schools participated as co-researchers, trialling dialogic drawing prompts with 66 children aged 3–6 years. Data sources included drawings, dialogic transcripts, and teacher reflections, analysed thematically through iterative and reflexive processes. Ethical approval was obtained, with informed parental consent, ongoing child assent, and anonymity ensured. Findings suggest that the use of LIVE Threads strengthened Dialogic Drawing by creating supportive conditions for children to express emotional, conceptual, and relational perspectives. Teachers reported deeper insights into children's engagement, including aspects often less visible within everyday practice. The approach functioned as a reflective,

in-the-moment practice tool that supported teachers' attuned responsiveness, deepened relational connections with children, and strengthened children's sense of agency within everyday learning experiences.

dialogic pedagogy, drawing, meaning-making, early childhood, children's perspectives

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

With gratitude, this project was funded by the Association of Independent Schools, Western Australia (AISWA).

A25: Estonian Preschool Teachers' Climate Awareness, Attitudes, and Readiness to Address Climate Topics

Presenters:

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This study focuses on Estonian kindergarten teachers' climate awareness, attitudes, and pedagogical practices that support the development of children's climate awareness. It also examines how participation in professional development influences teachers' knowledge, confidence, and teaching approaches related to climate topics. Climate education is becoming an increasingly important part of early childhood education. Previous studies have shown that teachers' awareness and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping children's environmental awareness. The study is grounded in Education for Sustainable Development, drawing on UNESCO's ESD for 2030 roadmap that emphasises values-based, participatory and transformative learning (UNESCO, 2020). The framework is informed by recent research in early childhood education for sustainability and climate education, highlighting experiential, play-based and relational learning (e.g., Ardoin et al., 2020; Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2024), and a social-cognitive perspective that foregrounds modelling and teachers' self-efficacy in addressing climate topics (e.g., Herranen, 2024). A mixed-methods research design was employed, utilizing questionnaires (100) and semi-structured interviews (30) with preschool teachers. The study adheres to scientific ethics, including considerations of participant awareness, confidentiality, and anonymity. 76% of teachers consider climate change to be a very important topic in their teaching, but 46% admit they lack sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively address it. Teachers who have participated in climate training feel more confident and evaluate the importance of the topic more highly, although 66% of teachers have not previously attended such training. ECEC teachers also feel a lack of suitable learning materials. The study highlights the need for systematic professional development, age-appropriate learning materials, and institutional support for consistent climate education implementation.

climate education, early childhood, teacher, support, awareness

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A26: "I'm free during recess": Children's perspectives on their opportunities for participation in kindergarten and primary school

Presenters:

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All Authors:

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This study aimed to identify children's perspectives regarding participation in their educational contexts (preschool and basic education), as well as explore the participation experiences within the context of a research project. Children's participation rights in educational contexts have been studied mainly from the perspectives of adults (Correia et al., 2019). However, adults' perceptions differ from children's perceptions of participation (Forde et al., 2018). It is therefore important to listen to the voices of children and understand how they experience their participation rights. The project is anchored in the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the new sociology of childhood which positions children as active participants of society. A qualitative and participatory approach was adopted. Of the 32 children participating, 11 attended kindergarten, aged between 5 and 6 ($M = 5.56$ years), and 21 attended first grade, aged between 6 and 7 ($M = 6.9$ years). Data collection included the use of observation, focus groups and tools from the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011). Only children who assented to participate and whose guardians completed the consent form took part in the project. Other measures (e.g., researcher's attention to non-verbal signals of disagreement) were implemented to ensure children's free assent. The results show that children experience their participation rights primarily through individual choices. Children considered play as the activity through which they experience more participation. The study illustrates the complexities in designing studies and participatory policies based on ethical principles that are appropriate for child development.

children's participation rights, children's perspectives, early childhood education, school education, participatory research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A27: The demands and resources of pedagogical development in early childhood education and care in Finnish municipalities

Presenters:

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Maarit Alasuutari, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

Eija Sevón, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

The present study aims to investigate, what kind of demands and resources early childhood education and care (ECEC) administrators describe in the development of pedagogical work of ECEC educators. Prior research has shown that positive and cooperative working atmosphere can promote development processes (Grützmacher et al., 2023; Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2023), while lack of resources can hinder it (Grützmacher et al., 2023). However, ECEC field lacks research concerning pedagogical development. Pedagogical development does not only concern individual teachers but covers the whole teaching community (Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2023) and shapes staff's attitudes and pedagogical beliefs (Du & Lundberg, 2021). The theoretical framework for this study also includes the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (e.g. Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The current study was conducted by interviewing 10 ECEC administrators in Finnish municipalities in 2022. The analysis method was reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A consent form and information sheet were sent to all participants. Interviews were transcribed and pseudonymised. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. According to our preliminary findings, three main themes were identified: 1) role of professionals, 2) commitment and engagement in

development processes, and 3) changing ECEC field. According to the JD-R model, each theme disclosed both demands and resources. These findings suggest that while there is a wide range of elements that should be considered when implementing pedagogical development in ECEC, there is also a need for further research.

quality in ECEC, pedagogical development, ECEC administrators, reflexive thematic analysis, job demands and resources model

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This study is part of EDUCA Education for the Future Flagship, funded by the Research Council of Finland (No. 358924 for 2024 – 2028), and the project Right to Belong, funded by the Strategic Research Council within the Research Council of Finland (No. 372253, No. 372259 for 2025–2028). The second author was supported by grants from the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation.

A28: Models of Socio-Pedagogical Support in Estonian Early Childhood Education: A Child-Centred View of Local Support Systems

Presenters:

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The objective of this study is to analyse organisational models of socio-pedagogical support in Estonian early childhood education and to describe their structure, principles, and implementation at the level of local governments and preschools. The analysis is guided by children's needs, wellbeing, and participation rights. Previous research has addressed socio-pedagogical support and interdisciplinary cooperation primarily from the perspective of individual services or professional roles (Karila & Kuppila, 2023; Fukkink & Lalihatu, 2020). This study extends existing knowledge by examining local support systems as integrated organisational structures. By foregrounding practitioners' experiences, it enables a comparison of different models operating within the Estonian context. The study is grounded in the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which conceptualises child development as the outcome of interactions across multiple environmental levels. It also draws on the concepts of professional agency and shared responsibility in multi-professional collaboration (Edwards, 2010). The research adopts a qualitative, interpretive design. Data were collected through focus group interviews with six local government and preschool professionals and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. ClaudeAI supported the organisation and systematisation of the analytical process. Ethical principles included research permissions, informed consent, participant anonymity, and secure data management. The findings reveal three main organisational models: centrally coordinated, institution-based, and partially fragmented systems. While practitioners emphasise early identification of children's needs and strong family involvement, they also highlight limited resources, unclear professional roles, and inconsistencies in cooperation. The study underscores the need for clearer collaboration agreements, stronger coordination, and sustained professional support to advance child-centred and inclusive socio-pedagogical systems.

early childhood education, socio-pedagogical support, interdisciplinary cooperation, support systems, child-centred

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

EU ERASMUS+ project "Socially Sustainable Early Childhood Education in the Future – SoSECE"

A29: Conceptualizing Educational Quality in Home-Based Childcare: A Qualitative Cross-Stakeholder Study in Quebec

Presenters:

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All Authors:

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Alexandra Paquette, UQAM, Canada

Julie Lemire, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Chantale Breault, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Noémie Paquette, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This study documents how educational quality in home-based childcare (HBCC) services is conceptualized by educators, coordinating office staff and parents. While quality is a determinant of children's development, most conceptual frameworks and evaluation tools are based on the realities specific to center-based settings (Bromer et al., 2021). As Quebec (Canada) is planning to extend its Educational Quality Evaluation and Improvement Measure implemented in centers since 2019 to HBCC, examining stakeholder conceptualizations is crucial for ensuring the tools sensitivity. The study adopts a situated definition of educational quality, informed by the theory of competent systems (Urban, 2012). viewing stakeholders as experts best positioned to define quality contextually. This qualitative study uses a multi-phase digital participatory method. 1) An online consultation with 100 stakeholders (parents and professionals) generated statements defining "exemplary" HBCC. 2) The statements were clustered into key themes. 3) These clusters were submitted again to respondents to rate their importance. 4) Focus groups (10 parents, 10 educators, 10 coordinating office staff) were conducted to reflect on these dimensions. The research has received approval from a research ethics committee. Stakeholders voluntarily agreed to participate based on free and informed consent. Analyses indicate key dimensions of quality, as well as convergence and divergence across groups. Findings will be interpreted in relation to Brunson et al. (2025) and Bromer et al. (2025) to highlight shared and context-specific dimensions of HBCC quality. This democratic knowledge production supports agency and informs the Quebec government. It advocates for flexible, context-sensitive quality measures that recognize the realities of HBCC.

home-based childcare, educational quality, stakeholder perspectives, participatory methods, conceptualizations of quality,

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This study is funded by the Quebec Ministry of the Family.

A30: A Scoping Review of Belonging and Children's Agency: Pedagogical Practices and Digital Dimensions in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Presenters:

Melissa Ruffo, University of Stavanger, Norway

Sara Esmaeeli, University of Stavanger, Norway

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Cay Gjerustad, NIFU, Norway

This systematic scoping review examines how belonging and children's agency are conceptualised in international ECEC research, and how these concepts are linked to pedagogical practices including analogue and digital practices. Policy frameworks position ECEC as an early arena for children's rights, participation, and equal opportunities (UNCRC, 1989). However, research shows variation in how belonging and children's agency are defined and enacted. Existing studies often emphasise inclusion as an aspiration or structural feature, while less attention is given to how belonging is produced, negotiated, and constrained in pedagogical interactions (Einarsdottir et al., 2022; Johansson et al., 2024). The review explores range of conceptualisations and theoretical perspectives present in the field rather than imposing a single framework, in line with scoping review methodology (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Following scoping review methodology and PRISMA-ScR guidelines, peer-reviewed studies will be systematically identified and screened by authors. Data extraction focus on theoretical framings, conceptualisations of belonging and children's agency, as well as pedagogical (analogue and digital) practices and implications for children's sense of belonging and agency. No participants or personal data are involved. Ethical quality is ensured through transparent, reproducible procedures in line with PRISMA-ScR. Preliminary analysis suggests considerable variation in how belonging and diversity are conceptualised and operationalised, tensions between visibility-oriented and relational approaches to participation, and limited specification of how pedagogical judgement supports children's agency and democratic participation in diverse and digital ECEC contexts. The review provides conceptual clarity and highlights practice-near gaps to empower democratic and equity-oriented pedagogies to enhance children's sense of belonging and agency.

children's agency, belonging, ecec, analogue and digital pedagogical practices, scoping review

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A31: Resonance, Participation and Democracy in the Digital Age: Forests as Relational Educational Spaces in Early Childhood

Presenters:

Evelyn Kobler, University of Education Salzburg, Austria

All Authors:

Evelyn Kobler, University of Education Salzburg, Austria

Across Europe, concerns are growing about children's wellbeing and participation in increasingly digitalised early childhood education and care (ECEC). This paper examines how forest-based pedagogies support children's subjective wellbeing, agency and democratic participation. It focuses on children's perspectives on wellbeing and learning across two contexts: institutional group rooms and regular forest stays. Studies show that natural environments positively affect children's stress regulation, concentration and socio-emotional development (Fyfe-Johnson et al., 2021; Gebhart, 2023; Pichler et al., 2022). However, children's experiences of wellbeing and participation across different educational environments remain insufficiently explored in European ECEC research. Drawing on childhood–nature studies and democratic education, the forest is conceptualised as a relational educational space enabling embodied participation, resonance and agency (Horstmann, 2021; Morgan & Smith, 2024). wellbeing is understood as a relational and participatory process emerging through meaningful engagement with social, spatial and material environments (Kobler, 2025). Guided by an interpretative and participatory paradigm, the WoLeWa project (2023–2027) uses a mixed-methods design. The sample includes approximately 50 children aged five to six from Austrian ECEC settings with weekly forest days. Data collection includes structured interviews on subjective wellbeing (Nenntwig-Gesemann & Fröhlich-Gildhoff, 2022), participatory visual methods, observations, and educator surveys (Pettinen et al., 2023), enabling comparison between institutional and forest

contexts. Ethical standards included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and child-sensitive research practices. Preliminary findings indicate higher subjective wellbeing, autonomy and sustained engagement in forest settings, highlighting their democratic and participatory potential. Forest-based pedagogies support democratic participation and wellbeing. European ECEC policy should strengthen access to natural learning environments to balance digitalisation and relational pedagogy.

participation, wellbeing, democracy, nature, agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A32: Challenges in the Consolidation of Early Childhood Education Facilities: Insights from Deliberative Processes of Japanese Local Governments Facing Declining Birth Rates

Presenters:

Yasuhito Tamma, University of Tsukuba, Japan

All Authors:

Yasuhito Tamma, University of Tsukuba, Japan

This study aims to identify the challenges arising from the consolidation of early childhood education facilities (ECEFs) in regions experiencing declining birth rates. We explore the impact that the consolidation of ECEFs has on children, parents, childcare practitioners, managers, and local governments. The results of TALIS Starting Strong 2024 addressed the conditions faced by ECEFs in rural areas and their co-location with elementary schools. At the 33rd EECERA conference, we presented strategies for maintaining ECEFs amid declining birth rates. In contrast, this study focuses on deliberative processes when consolidation becomes unavoidable. Japan's Children and Families Agency urges local governments to promote multifunctional childcare facilities and interorganizational collaboration amid population decline. Childcare has undergone a paradigm shift from quantity to quality. Therefore, we analyze whether improving the quality of childcare were taken into account during deliberative processes. We collected minutes from recent "Advisory Meetings on the Future of ECEFs" held by local governments in Japan and classified the topics and keywords and identified their commonalities and differences. The sample included urban municipalities with diverse ECEFs and severely depopulated localities maintaining limited facilities. The analysis draws on publicly available minutes. No personal information was collected during supplementary interviews. The consolidation of ECEFs provided an opportunity to reevaluate the quality of childcare in local communities. Specifically, discussions focused on addressing the needs of diverse children and families and ensuring articulate with the elementary school system. Local governments should consider the future of ECEFs alongside elementary school reorganization, position them as regional infrastructure, and integrate them into long-term, comprehensive administrative plans.

population decline, sustainability, infrastructure, childcare perspectives, comprehensive plan

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP22K02252.

A33: Shared reading as an instructional approach for reading comprehension in the early grades

Presenters:

Mosa Khasu, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

All Authors:

Mosa Khasu, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

This study aimed to explore how early grade teachers teach reading comprehension skills when teaching shared reading. Reading comprehension is by far the most important outcome of teaching reading (Pretorius, 2019). Young children need to be taught decoding and language comprehension skills to understand what they are reading (Ramabenyane, 2012). More often, decoding skills are learned quickly in Grades 1 to 2, but at times language comprehension skills are not always explicitly taught (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Veresov, 2017) was employed as a theoretical lens to analyse the data interpretively. A qualitative approach was employed, with a case study design. A pilot was conducted with a sample of three Grade 1 to 3 teachers. The data was collected through observations of reading lessons and through semi-structured interviews with teachers. An inductive thematic analysis of the data generated descriptive themes about the data. Ethics for this study was granted (SEM 2-2025-057) by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Johannesburg. Informed consent and participant confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The study was conducted within specific cultural and linguistic contexts, which required sensitivity to local language and values. The preliminary findings conveyed that teachers teach reading comprehension skills when they teach shared reading. However, these skills are often included incidentally in shared reading lessons. Reading comprehension skills must be articulated in shared reading lessons. The study contributes to the body of literature on teaching shared reading in African languages, a much-needed research area, particularly in multilingual South African classrooms.

shared reading, early grades, reading comprehension, sesotho, literacy skills.

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This study received a South African National Research Foundation grant.

A34: Teachers as Researchers: Participation, Action, and Reflection in Guiding the Introduction of Social Robots in Early Education

Presenters:

Anna Allegra Bixio, University of Genoa, Italy

All Authors:

Alessia Bartolini, University of Perugia, Italy

Anna Allegra Bixio, University of Genoa, Italy

Alice Nardelli, University of Genoa, Italy

Alice Stopponi, University of Perugia, Italy

Maria Filomia, Link Campus University, Italy

Carmine Tommaso Recchiuto, University of Genoa, Italy

The study explores changes in teachers' attitudes and reflective practices regarding the use of a social robot to address pedagogical challenges, particularly the promotion of intercultural education in multicultural ECEC settings. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of designing interactions with stakeholders. Learning content was collaboratively pre-assessed, together with key characteristics of the robot. However, the specific needs of educational contexts were not adequately addressed. Our research followed the Teacher Professional Development and Research framework, where the goal is the professional development of teachers who, together with researchers, negotiate methodological choices. 43 teachers were involved in the study. They shaped how the robot would be introduced to the children and defined the activities it would suggest, engaging as active researchers and reflecting on their daily practices. Data collection included teachers' logbooks, follow-up and final meetings, and quantitative measures. The study complied with ethical guidelines, including informed consent from teachers and families, child assent, and approval from the University of Genoa Ethics Committee. Findings indicate an increase in teachers' intention to use the robot and a clearer understanding of its educational potential. There was also a

positive shift in their ethnorelative sensitivity and a meaningful impact on their reflective practices. Teachers proved to be fundamental agents in the research process, as they were key mediators between the robot and the children, fostering children's agency and democratic participation in classroom activities.

co-design, intercultural education, social robotics, research-training, children agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by the PRIN 2022 PNRR SONRIE project – CUP D53D23020550001; the European Union – Next Generation EU. The research was conducted by the University of Genoa and the University of Perugia.

A35: Reframing Play and Learning: Developing Professional Judgement through Play-Based Higher Education Pedagogy

Presenters:

Monica Gjølsten, Volda University College, Norway

All Authors:

Monica Gjølsten, Volda University College, Norway

This study examines how structured play-based facilitation in higher education can support the development of professional judgement among kindergarten student teachers. Research highlights tensions between play and formal learning in early childhood education (Pyle & Dannielis, 2016) and the need for stronger professional reasoning in teacher education (Biesta, 2015; Hargreaves et al., 2019). Drawing on Dewey's theory of experience (1904; 1938) and Kolb's experiential learning (2005), professionalism is understood as situated judgement. Play is conceptualised as a pedagogically mediated practice (Pyle & Dannielis, 2016). A qualitative design was employed. Nineteen Norwegian kindergarten student teachers participated in a university-based mini seminar combining theoretical input and facilitation of interdisciplinary play-based activities for 18 children (5–6 years). The study draws on data from an ongoing development project initiated in 2023 and expanded in 2024 to include interdisciplinary collaboration across language, text and mathematics. Data from pre- and post-seminar open-ended surveys, including six group reflections, were analysed thematically. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent from students and children's guardians. Data were anonymised and handled according to institutional guidelines, and attention was given to the researcher's dual role. This study contributes by conceptualising professional judgement as emerging through iterative, practice-based facilitation within play-based higher education pedagogy. Integrating authentic facilitation experiences can strengthen professional judgement and support integrated understandings of play and learning.

professionalism, higher education pedagogy, professional judgement, play-based learning, kindergarten teacher education

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

The project is funded by Volda University College as part of institutional support for collaboration with a partner kindergarten

A36: "They Eat Each Other ... and We Eat Them": A Child's Drawings and Narratives of the Sea

Presenters:

Anne Grethe Baustad, Nord University, Norway

Josephine Deguara, University of Malta, Malta

All Authors:

Anne Grethe Baustad, Nord University, Norway

Josephine Deguara, University of Malta, Malta

This study explores a six-year-old child's perspectives of the sea through drawing and narrative within a rights-based, child-centred framework that positions young children as agentic meaning-makers. The work extends Fache et al. (2022), foregrounding children's connections to the sea within sustainability discourse, and aligns with research on children's sense-making of ecological processes, responsibility, and environmental protection (e.g., Kavaz et al., 2021; Sanchis et al., 2022). Grounded in social semiotics (Kress, 2010), drawings are conceptualised as meaningful signs through which children construe knowledge (cf. Deguara & Nutbrown, 2025), while a sociocultural lens situates these practices within cultural narratives and environmental experience. The study adopts an interpretivist qualitative design. Children from two Maltese and two Norwegian kindergarten settings were invited to produce three drawings each about the sea. Focusing on a single-case analysis of three interconnected drawings created by one Norwegian child during one session, video-recorded drawing processes and narrative transcripts position drawing as digitally mediated participation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, and drawings were scanned for visual interpretation. Ethical procedures followed University of Malta and Norwegian Social Science Data Services guidelines. Parental consent and child assent were secured, and pseudonyms and withdrawal rights were ensured. Camera was positioned to maintain confidentiality. Across the three drawings, an evolving ecological narrative emerged. Three themes were identified: ecological interconnectedness; power, agency and conflict; reality, fantasy and mediated knowledge. The study highlights the importance of prioritising children's perspectives in early education and suggests exploring digital extensions of children's drawings, including participatory video analysis.

children's drawings and narratives, ecological awareness, early childhood education for sustainability, research with children, children's agency

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

The project is funded by the Research Networking Scheme (RNS), 2024 2nd call (RNS-2024-054).

A37: Challenges and Professional Role Dissonance Faced by Nurses in Post-Illness Childcare Services

Presenters:

Takahiro Sakurai, Aichi-University of Education, Japan

All Authors:

Takahiro Sakurai, Aichi-University of Education, Japan

This study aims to identify and clarify the specific challenges faced by nurses providing post-illness childcare. While Kanda and Miyazu (2010) reported that nurses experience difficulties in one-on-one care for sick children, the specific challenges faced by nurses in post-sickness childcare have not been sufficiently clarified. This study adopts a dual-paradigm framework comprising "healthcare" and "childcare." Following the approach of Sakurai (2021, 2023), the study uses this framework as a theoretical foundation to analyze the commonalities and differences between the two fields, with the aim of identifying the underlying factors contributing to the professional distress and difficulties experienced by nurses. Adopting a qualitative approach based on the theoretical descriptions by Sato (2008), this study theorizes the "sense of difficulty" experienced by nurses. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, from which core concepts were extracted and categorized to develop a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. This study was conducted with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee at the author's affiliated university. Participants were provided with comprehensive explanations regarding the voluntary nature of their participation and were assured that they would suffer no disadvantages should they choose to withdraw. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. This study revealed that nurses particularly lack an understanding of children with developmental disabilities, leaving them unable to effectively manage behaviors

associated with their specific characteristics. The study concludes that establishing a clear delineation of roles and a collaborative framework between medical and childcare perspectives is vital for reducing the burden on nurses and enhancing the quality of care.

nurses, post-illness, childcare

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 24K05880.

A38: Aligning National Policy with International Standards: Human Rights Education in the Japanese ECEC Context

Presenters:

Hiroaki Sono, J.F.Oberlin University, Japan

All Authors:

Hiroaki Sono, J.F.Oberlin University, Japan

This study examines the alignment between Japan's ECEC policies and international standards. It identifies structural challenges in translating the Child Basic Act (2022) into pedagogical strategies that effectively foster children's agency within the global discourse on educational quality. The study builds on foundational research by Hori (2005) on UNCRC implementation and Akutsu (2010) on HRE frameworks. It addresses the "implementation gap" following recent shifts, extending beyond their theoretical focus into practical policy-practice translation. The research employs Ball's (1993, 2006) Critical Policy Analysis (policy as text/discourse) and Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) "rights-based pedagogy" to analyze the tension between universal rights and local particularism. Operating within a social constructionist paradigm, the study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and Clyne-Clark's (2010) comparative method to analyze national curriculum guidelines, policy documents, and recent legislative texts. < As this is a policy and literature-based study, there are no human participants. However, the researcher maintains ethical integrity by ensuring transparent data interpretation and acknowledging the cultural sensitivity of Japanese ECEC values. Analysis reveals a "decoupling" between new rights-based legislation and traditional practices. Rights are often framed as "moral development" in group contexts rather than individual agency, reflecting structural misalignment with international UNCRC General Comments. The findings necessitate a paradigm shift from protection to participation. The study proposes a culturally responsive training framework that bridges international standards and Japanese values, fostering practitioner identities rooted in human rights advocacy to ensure equitable pedagogical experiences for all children.

human rights education, early childhood education policy, United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child, critical discourse analysis, early childhood education in Japan

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This research was supported by J. F. Oberlin University's Individual Research Grant.

A39: From Space to Practice: Innovative Learning Environments for Developing Early Childhood Educators

Presenters:

Irit Sasson, Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee, Israel

All Authors:

Irit Sasson, Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee, Israel

Nufar Gavrieli, Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee, Israel

This study evaluates how learning in an innovative laboratory influences early childhood pre-service teachers' professional development, perceived fulfillment of psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and pedagogical enactment during their practicum. Following research on the shift toward innovative learning environments to meet 21st-century demands (Collins & Halverson, 2018; Sasson & Yehuda, 2023), this work addresses the need to examine their specific impact on early childhood teacher training. The framework integrates constructivist views of learning as active meaning-making and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). It emphasizes the "third teacher" concept, where the physical environment acts as an active pedagogical agent (Malaguzzi, 1998). Using a mixed-methods design, the study compared an experimental lab group (N=35) with a traditional classroom group (N=37) via quasi-experimental pretest–posttest surveys and 16 semi-structured interviews with students. The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee. All ethical standards were maintained, ensuring participant privacy and obtaining signed informed consent from all participants. At posttest, the lab group reported significantly higher implementation of collaborative pedagogy and learner diversity response during practicum. Qualitative themes highlighted the environment as a shaper of concentration and a bridge for "hands-on" theory-practice translation. To improve 21st-century learning, traditional classrooms must be redesigned for student needs. However, physical change is insufficient without faculty training to align instruction with the environment and realize the lab's full potential.

innovative learning environment, early childhood teacher education, professional development, self-determination theory, basic psychological needs, best pedagogical practices.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A40: Toddler sociality: Co-constructing the peer group through embodied interactions

Presenters:

Bryndis Gunnarsdottir, University of Iceland, Iceland

All Authors:

Bryndis Gunnarsdottir, University of Iceland, Iceland

Amanda Bateman, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

Sally Peters, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Hrönn Pálmadóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland

This study explores toddlers' sociality and competence within peer interactions, focusing on their use of embodied actions to actively participate and co-construct their peer group, create a sense of togetherness and form a 'mutual we'. Examining interactions in the toddler peer group has given us insights into the competent ways toddlers engage with each other (Løkken, 2010; Engdahl, 2021; Ylikörkkö & Puriola, 2023) and how they represent their agency and sociality through being together (Greve, 2008; Katsiada, 2025). The study uses an ethnomethodological (Garfinkel, 1967) framing to explore toddler sociality, and the conceptual framework of the sociology of childhood, situating toddlers as competent social actors. Through an inductive ethnomethodological paradigm, video data was collected in an ECEC setting in Iceland, transcribed, and analysed using a multimodal conversation analysis approach. Ethical approval was gained through the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and the University of Iceland, including informed consent from relevant gatekeepers and assent/dissent from participating toddlers. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on toddler social experiences within ECEC settings. The findings highlight their agency in shaping social relationships and peer culture. The findings also provide a unique and valuable insights into toddlers' active role in peer interactions and their ability to co-construct social relationships. The study underscores the importance of recognising toddlers' sociality and calls for greater awareness among ECEC educators to ensure

that these subtle, yet meaningful interactions are acknowledged and supported. Through this recognition, educators can foster more inclusive peer interactions, ultimately enhancing toddlers' social experiences in ECEC settings.

toddlers, sociality, multimodal conversation analysis, peer group, embodied interactions

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A41: "New Kindergarten Curriculum (2025): Promoting Safe and Thoughtful Digital Environments for Children"

Presenters:

Edita Bah Berglez, Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, Slovenia

All Authors:

Edita Bah Berglez, Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, Slovenia

To determine whether the new Kindergarten Curriculum (2025) in Slovenia encourages preschool teachers and principals to:

- recognize the opportunities and risks of digital learning environments and involve children in play and learning across natural and digital settings in a balanced way,
- introduce digital environments thoughtfully, age-appropriately, and child-centered, focusing on wellbeing,
- raise parents' awareness of their responsibility to support children's safe and appropriate behavior in the virtual world.

Previous research: identifying the negative effects of excessive digital tool use and exploring respectful, effective ways to raise parents' awareness about appropriate digital device use at home, without interfering with family autonomy. In 2025, the revised Kindergarten Curriculum was adopted in the Republic of Slovenia, serving as the theoretical framework for this research. It emphasizes the thoughtful integration of children into digital learning environments when these contribute to the higher-quality achievement of educational and developmental goals. The research was conducted as action research during the introduction of the new Kindergarten Curriculum. Preschool teachers and principals participated in workshops, where guided discussions and practice analysis were used to collaboratively develop professional guidelines. The ethical dimension of the research includes safeguarding children's wellbeing, respecting parental autonomy, the responsible introduction of digital environments, and the professional conduct of preschool teachers. Identifying key innovations of the revised Kindergarten Curriculum in digitalization and parent cooperation, while emphasizing the kindergarten's autonomy and responsibility in introducing digital content. Updating guidelines on digital technology and integrating them into preschool teachers' professional development plan.

new kindergarten curriculum, digital and natural learning environments, children's wellbeing, parental awareness, professional development

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

A42: A Study on Collaboration between Public Integrated Elementary and Junior High Schools and Nursery School in Japan

Presenters:

Yoshiko Shirakawa, Kyoritsu Women's University, Japan

All Authors:

Yoshiko Shirakawa, Kyoritsu Women's University, Japan

Makiko Fujimoto, Kyoritsu Women's University, Japan

This research aims to clarify the actual state of collaboration between public integrated elementary and junior high schools and nursery through questionnaire surveys and interviews with teachers. Though Shirakawa et al. (2025) revealed that there were challenges in the first year of collaboration between integrated primary and secondary schools and nurseries, this study aims to determine whether these challenges have been resolved after one year. This study is based on Vygotsky's theory of 'Zone of Proximal Development' Wood's theory dealing with 'scaffolding' in its examination of the smooth transition between nursery school and primary school. We conducted a questionnaire survey of nine teachers at a combined elementary and junior high school and nursery school, and carried out an interview survey with one elementary school teacher. The methodology and paradigm used in this study was qualitative and quantitative approaches. Participants were provided with a consent form prior to the start of the study and were also offered the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. The findings of this study revealed that while interaction is frequent and joint activities are readily facilitated within the integrated elementary and junior high school due to their co-location on the same floor, exchanges with the nursery school occur only about once a month. Aligning the timetables of the elementary and junior high schools with the nursery school's daily schedule presents a challenge for the future. This study may contribute to the implementation of effective coordination between early childhood and secondary education.

ECEC, nursery-elementary school collaboration, transition, exchange activities, fieldwork

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This research is supported by a grant from the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies at our university.

A43: Researchers' Experiences Interviewing Children: Navigating the Fine Balance of Ethics, Method, and Children's Agency

Presenters:

Tone Rove Nilsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Elisabeth Bjørnstad, Oslomet, Norway

All Authors:

Tone Rove Nilsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Elisabeth Bjørnstad, Oslomet, Norway

Cecilie Evertsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study explores researchers' experiences with success criteria and key ethical considerations in interviewing children. While child interviews are well studied in welfare and health services (e.g., Gamst, 2017), fewer have examined how such practices support children's agency within an educational context. The study has a phenomenological orientation to researchers' lived experiences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015) and draws upon a social-constructivist view of meaning-making and children's agency (Varpanen, 2019). This is an exploratory qualitative study involving 27 Norwegian researchers who use child interviews in educational research. Eight online semi-structured group interviews were conducted. Data was audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in NVivo 14 using conventional content analysis. Written and oral informed consent were obtained, and data were stored securely. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. In line with the EECERA ethical code (Bertram et al., 2024), we ensured balanced participation and advised participants not to share sensitive information. The study was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. Findings highlight the importance of recognizing the child as a competent knower, fostering trust and respect. Ethical considerations centered on balancing the child's best interests with data needs, recruitment and sensitive disclosures. Interviewing children remains a balancing act, prioritizing their integrity even when this limits data depth. Success criteria also

include flexible interview guides, collaboration with gatekeepers, use of regulatory artefacts, and the researcher's ability to accommodate digressions and spontaneity. The study offers guidance for sensitive, agency-affirming interviews that support democratic participation, methodological rigour, and ethical responsibility.

researchers' experiences, interviewing children, method, ethics, agency,

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Poster Session B (10:25 – 11:10) | Thursday 27th August 2026

Pavilion A, Level 0, Tecnopolo building

B01: Practices and Perceptions of Digital Use in Kindergarten: the role of Self- Efficacy, Cognitive Flexibility, Emotional Style, Technostress, Work Engagement and Personality traits

Presenters:

Giulia Fiorentini, LUMSA University, Italy

All Authors:

Giulia Fiorentini, LUMSA University, Italy

Benedetta Ragni, LUMSA University, Italy

Daniela Paoletti, LUMSA University, Italy

Carmen Berenguer, Universitat de Valencia, Spain

Simona De Stasio, LUMSA University, Italy

This study investigates kindergarten teachers' intention to integrate technology at school (ITIS), focusing on the joint role of self-efficacy (TSES), cognitive flexibility (CFS), emotional style (CEESQ), work engagement (UWES) technostress (TQ), and personality traits (Mini-IPIP). Previous studies have shown that teachers' perceptions, dispositions and attitudes seem to be significant predictors of technology integration at school (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2010; Jenßen et al., 2023); however, these variables have often been examined separately. ECEC teachers face the dual challenge of fostering child development and integrating technology (OECD, 2023). TPACK model highlights the need for coherent interaction between content, pedagogy and technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). 154 kindergarten teachers (Female= 90.3% Mage=53.1y) completed: Intrapersonal Technology Integration Scale (ITIS), Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS), Technostress Questionnaire (TQ), Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), Crèche Educator Emotional Style Questionnaire (CEESQ), Utrecht-short Work Engagement Scale -ultra-short version (UWES), Mini-International Personality Item Pool (Mini-IPIP). A mediation model was conducted. Ethical principles of informed consent, data confidentiality and anonymity were respected. In a sample of 154 kindergarten teachers, a significant chain mediation model emerged linking CFS and UWES to ITIS via TSES and TQ. Specifically, higher CFS and UWES were associated with increased TSES, which in turn reduced TQ, ultimately leading to higher ITIS. The indirect effects were significant for CFS ($b = 0.102$, $p = .036$) and UWES ($b = 0.261$, $p = .042$), highlighting the importance of this sequential mechanism in explaining teachers' technology integration. These findings provided practical guidance for teacher training and for promoting effective digital integration strategies in ECEC contexts.

early childhood education, teachers' technology integration, teachers' dispositions, tpack model, quantitative study

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B02: A child's multiple attachment

Presenters:

Zlatka Cugmas, University of Maribor, Faculty of Education, Slovenia

All Authors:

Zlatka Cugmas, University of Maribor, Faculty of Education, Slovenia

We examined the relationship between attachment styles to parent and teachers in preschool children. In the second year of life, a child is capable of developing attachments to several people at the same time (Praper, 1992). The independent model assumes that the attachment style to different people depends on the sensitivity of these

people, whether they provide the child with a safe haven and secure base (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010). Attachment theory is theoretical framework of the study. It was conducted within a quantitative interpretive research paradigm. Based on the scale of Child's Attachment to his/her Kindergarten Teacher and adapted scales of child's attachment to his/her mother and father (Cugmas, 2007), we determined the connection of attachment styles for 178 children, ages ranging from 36 to 82 months. Their parents and teachers responded to the rating scale items. Participation in the research was voluntary, transparent and anonymous. Parents signed consent for their child's participation in the study. Children expressed the expected percentages of standard attachment styles (i.e., secure, avoidant, resisting). We found low levels of concordance between children's attachment styles to mother and father and an absence of concordance between children's attachment styles to parents and kindergarten teachers. The results of the study supported an independent multiple attachment model. They showed the need for additional education of parents and teachers of preschool children about the important role of their sensitivity in the development of the child's secure attachment. Further research should examine the child's attachment to other attachment objects (e.g., siblings, grandparents, friends, animals, toys).

attachment styles, attachment objects, independent model, multiple attachment, preschool child

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B03: Pedagogy-in-Participation: building a community of practice for sustainability and praxeological transformation

Presenters:

Andreia Lima, Fundação Aga Khan Portugal, Portugal

Joana de Sousa, Fundação Aga Khan Portugal, Portugal

All Authors:

Andreia Lima, Fundação Aga Khan Portugal, Portugal

Joana de Sousa, Fundação Aga Khan Portugal, Portugal

This study addresses the question: How does participation in a community of practice within early childhood education enhance pedagogical quality by fostering continuous professional development, innovation, and collective responses to everyday educational challenges? National and international studies (Sousa, 2017; Ferreira, 2019; Formosinho, Pascal, Bertram & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2024) show that educators' professional development benefits from situated collaborative processes centred on joint reflection on practice. These processes foster the transformation of educational contexts and generate professional knowledge relevant to the sustained improvement of pedagogical action. The study is grounded in Pedagogy-in-Participation as a pedagogical grammar focused on building meaningful relationships, active listening, co-authorship, and the attribution of meaning to educational experiences. The community of practice is understood as a context-based professional learning process that supports praxeological transformation, encouraging shared reflection and the co-construction of high-quality, participatory, and culturally meaningful educational environments for children and adults. The research adopts a qualitative action-research paradigm with a praxeological orientation, following a community of practice through cycles of action, critical reflection, and pedagogical reconstruction. Data collection included participant observation, field notes, analysis of pedagogical documentation, and reflective narratives, valuing professionals as co-researchers. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for all participants. Findings suggest that participation in these communities of practice fosters professional self-inquiry and reflection, leading to the co-construction of resources addressing pedagogical challenges and sustain long-term transformation in educational practice. The findings highlight the need to integrate time for collaborative work within educational settings as a condition for sustaining pedagogical quality.

community of practice, pedagogy-in-participation, context-based professional learning, praxeological research, continuous professional development.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B04: Co-Constructing Peace Through Digitally Enabled Shared Education: Early Findings from PEACEPLUS ASPIRE

Presenters:

Jolene Nig Uidhir, National Childhood Network, Ireland

Aoife O Dowd, National Childhood Network, Ireland

Zoe Kernohan Neely, Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Audrey Rainey, Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

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Jolene Nig Uidhir, National Childhood Network, Ireland

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Zoe Kernohan Neely, Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Audrey Rainey, Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Michelle Hart, National Childhood Network, Ireland

The study explores early findings from the PEACEPLUS ASPIRE project in early years settings, addressing the research question of how relational pedagogy within shared education partnerships supports peacebuilding, inclusion, and sustained engagement across difference. The research is informed by shared education literature (Hughes et al.) and contact theory (Allport, 1954), alongside early childhood peace education (Connolly, 2008). It builds on Sharing from the Start by examining how relational approaches are enacted in early years contexts. The project is underpinned by a relational and socio-cultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978), recognising learning as co-constructed through relationships. It also draws on the Lundy Model (Lundy, 2007), foregrounding children's agency and dialogic practice in peacebuilding. Adopting a pragmatic qualitative mixed-methods paradigm, the study draws on programme engagement data, professional learning evaluations, and practitioner reflections. Participants include early years educators and leaders from multiple cross-border settings, purposively selected through their participation in sustained shared education partnerships. Ethical considerations included informed consent, safeguarding children's participation, and respect for relational and cultural sensitivities within shared education contexts. Attention was given to power dynamics across partnerships and to ethical decision-making aligned with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Early findings suggest that relational pedagogical approaches are strengthening trust, dialogue, and collaboration between settings. Educators report increased confidence in facilitating shared experiences that support children's sense of belonging, mutual respect, and engagement with difference. The findings highlight the importance of relational pedagogy in enacting shared education and PEACEPLUS policy within early years practice, with implications for curriculum design, professional learning, leadership development, and policy approaches prioritising peacebuilding and social cohesion.

relationality, partnership, peace building, agency, collaboration

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B05: Analysis of Project Documentation on Civic Education in Croatian ECEC

Presenters:

Ružica Tokić Zec, Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia

All Authors:

Ružica Tokić Zec, Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia
 Maja Brust Nemet, Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia
 Luja Zamečnik, Education and Teacher Training Agency, Croatia

The aim is to present relevant scientific literature in the field of project planning of civic activities in ECEC institutions. Civic competences are formed at an early age, with educational institutions playing a key role in children's participation and social responsibility (Álamo-Bolaños et al., 2024; Shih, 2024). Previous research advocates interdisciplinary approach to civic education in ECEC through project learning (Li et al., 2024; Carr-Fanning and Rihtman, 2025; Martínez-Rico et al., 2024). Theoretical framework is based on constructivism (Piaget, 1970), sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which advocate the holistic development of the child, and competency-based approach to learning based on international documents (EU, 2018; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2015), whereby civic education is defined as a set of competencies enabling active participation. Content analysis of the project documentation of 39 Croatian projects implemented in ECEC institutions during 2024, 2025 and 2026 on the topic of civic education was made. The research used qualitative paradigm and content analysis method. Topics, objectives, activities, outcomes, planning approaches and focus on individual dimensions of civic education were analyzed. This research ensures fair representation of literature from different sources and a proper literature citation. Results show the human-legal, social and ecological dimensions prevail, while the political and economic dimensions are less represented. Most projects show characteristics of project planning, with activities coordinated with children's age and interests. The results indicate the need for a more systematic balancing of all dimensions of civic education and strengthening the professional competences of educators in the field of civic education and project planning.

civic education, croatian context, educators, project proposals, quality education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This scientific work is co-financed from the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism (RRF; source 581 – institutional research projects "Improving Culture and Quality of the Education System in the Context of Teachers' Professional Development- KUL-PRO", code 581-UNIOS-49) within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Croatia, financed by the European Union – NextGenerationEU. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

B06: Playful Green Learning Pathways Initiative

Presenters:

Catherine Kilburn, University of Hull, United Kingdom

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Catherine Kilburn, University of Hull, United Kingdom

Isobel Reagan, University of Hull, United Kingdom

Lee Fallin, University of Hull, United Kingdom

How educators design, facilitate, and interpret outdoor pedagogy in local green spaces. Identify barriers and enablers shaping outdoor practice. Evaluate the Playful Green Learning Pathways Initiative's impact on practitioner learning. Previous research shows that outdoor learning is constrained by curriculum pressures, risk-averse cultures, limited green space and parental concerns (Parsons and Traunter, 2021). This study offers practical, school-level strategies to address barriers through leadership, flexible planning and professional learning. At policy level, it supports frameworks that position outdoor learning as central to children's wellbeing and environmental awareness (Barrable, 2019). We view outdoor environments as relational pedagogical spaces where learning is co-constructed

through play, dialogue and experience (Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020). The study integrates socio-constructivist, place-based, nature-connected perspectives, positioning educators as co-producers of knowledge (Gill, 2022) through a qualitative, participatory design. Paradigm: Socio-constructivist/interpretivist, adopting a qualitative, participatory and co-productive methodology in which practitioners collaborate to shape the research focus and outputs. Methodology: Qualitative, participatory and co-productive; practitioners are partners in shaping focus and outputs. Semi-structured interviews with teachers, leaders and support staff. Co-design workshops. Reflexive thematic analysis. The study follows institutional ethics: informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw and safeguarding. We minimise disruption to children's routines. The study generates actionable, context-sensitive insights for developing and sustaining playful outdoor learning in urban schools. Schools should adopt whole-school strategies that position outdoor learning as a core entitlement. This requires leadership support, flexible curriculum planning and focused professional development using local spaces. Policy frameworks strengthen staff development, widen access to quality outdoor environments

outdoor learning, play, nature-connection, co-production, early childhood

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B07: Beyond Manuals: Professional Dialogue as a Vehicle for Flexible, Evidence-Informed Learning

Presenters:

Julia Birchenough, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, United Kingdom

All Authors:

Julia Birchenough, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, United Kingdom

Soizic Le Courtois, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, United Kingdom

Laura Oxley, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, United Kingdom

Jane Lewis, Centre for Evidence and Implementation, United Kingdom

Stephanie Smith, Centre for Evidence and Implementation, United Kingdom

Sara Baker, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

This project aims to pilot a wrap-around support package to empower early years practitioners in their professional learning using an evidence-informed resource, the Early Years Library (EYL). The support package is inspired by coaching principles and focuses on practitioners' strengths and peer-to-peer support using professional dialogue and reflective practice. Coaching seems an effective way to enhance professional learning (Rogers et al., 2020) but there is little evidence on what is required to apply coaching principles for in-house peer-to-peer support in professional learning. We used the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (EPIS) framework (Moullin et al. 2019) to inform our approach to implementing the EYL and its support package in ECE settings. We focus on the practical application with a pragmatist worldview. Data is being collected in form of pre-and post-test surveys and interviews on reflective practice, dialogic learning and metacognitive awareness, as well as dosage. We will use a mixed methods approach (Creswell et al., 2007) with descriptive measures for quantitative and Framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) for qualitative data analysis. Ethical approval has been given at departmental level. Participants receive all relevant information before consent is sought. All data is anonymised. We will present our first findings from this pilot. We will report on the sustainment of engagement with the EYL and investigate if there is evidence of promise of using a wrap-around support based on dialogue and reflection. The results will contribute to our understanding of how much and what type of scaffolding is needed to support practitioners in their own professional learning.

professional learning, common elements, coaching, professional dialogue, peer-to-peer support

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This research study is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

B08: The Impact of Computational Thinking and Teaching Creativity on Early Childhood Teachers' Digital Competency

Presenters:

YungEui Yoo, Soon Chun Hyang Univeristy, Republic of Korea

All Authors:

Su Hyeon Bang, Far East University, Republic of Korea

YungEui Yoo, Soon Chun Hyang Univeristy, Republic of Korea

Exploring the impact of early childhood teachers' computational thinking and teaching creativity on digital competency. While there are many studies on digital competencies of early childhood teachers (Park, Sohyun, 2024; Lim, Chae-Seo, 2023; Jang, Moon-Young, 2023), there is a lack of research on the impact of computational thinking and teaching creativity. The Ministry of Education's Digital Competency Theory for Early Childhood Teachers(2021), Denning's(2009) and Wing's(2006) theories of computational thinking, and Halliwell's(1993) theory of teaching creativity. The study population was a random sample of 241 early childhood teachers working in Chungcheongnam-do, South Korea. The data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 program, and reliability analysis, descriptive statistics analysis, peason correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis (stepwise selection) were conducted. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the participating early childhood education institutions. The purpose and procedures of the study were explained to all participants, and informed consent was obtained. All data were collected and analyzed anonymously to ensure confidentiality. Higher computational thinking and teaching creativity were associated with higher digital competence. This has implications for early childhood education because in the digital age, we need to educate young children to be digitally competent, which means teachers need to be well-equipped. This suggests that early childhood teachers should be trained in computational thinking and teaching creativity to improve their digital competencies. In the future, the level of digital competence will be an important factor in teaching and can be expected to have a positive impact on the digital competence of young children.

digital competency, computational thinking, teaching creativity, early childhood teachers, early childhood digital education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B09: Integrating Educational Robotics and Narrative Card Games in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:

Maria Figueiredo, CI&DEI and School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal

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Sílvia Loureiro, School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu,Portugal

Valter Alves, CIsEd and School of Technology and Management, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal

Sandra Ferreira, School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu and Research Centre on Child Studies, University of Minho, Portugal

This study aims to investigate the integration of educational robotics with narrative-based tools in early childhood education. It specifically explores how the "Dream City" card game and the Tale Bot robot can foster environmental awareness, creative thinking, and initial computational logic among preschool children. Play connected to educational robotics is a strong pedagogical tool. This research builds on the GREENCODE Erasmus+ project (2023–2025), addressing the gap in articulating technologies with outdoor learning and environmental stewardship in the Portuguese context. The study is grounded in Vygotskian socio-cultural theory, viewing the robot and cards as "mediating tools" within the Zone of Proximal Development. It emphasises "mature play" where children move from passive users to active creators through storytelling and problem-solving. Adopting a qualitative case study paradigm, the research involved a group of 20 children (ages 3–6). Methods included participant observation, field notes, and thematic analysis of collective narratives and robot-led sequences created during forest sessions and classroom activities. The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring informed consent from guardians and children, and maintaining children's anonymity. Participation was voluntary, prioritising the children's wellbeing at all times. Findings show that the "Dream City" game successfully bridged environmental problems (e.g., pollution) with creative solutions. A productive synergy emerged: children used the Tale Bot to "act out" stories, demonstrating basic programming skills and semiotic flexibility by assigning complex emotions to robotic characters. The study suggests that articulating technology with nature-based play enriches early childhood education. It advocates for learning environments where technology serves as a bridge between imagination and ecological responsibility.

educational robotics, deck of cards, environmental education, play, narrative

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work is funded by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., within the scope of the project Ref^a UID/05507/2025 and DOI identifier <https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/05507/2025>. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation (CI&DEI) for their support.

B10: How do early childhood educators support the beginnings and endings of children's play?

Presenters:

Keiko Iwata, Tamagawa University, Japan

Ikuko Gyobu, Ochanomizu University, Japan

All Authors:

Keiko Iwata, Tamagawa University, Japan

Ikuko Gyobu, Ochanomizu University, Japan

This study examines how early childhood educators support the beginnings and endings of children's play, focusing on how children's voices and temporal experiences are recognized in Japanese early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. Listening to children's voices is widely recognized as central to ECEC; however, research shows that children's play is often segmented by adult-defined schedules and learning priorities. Interview research with Japanese educators revealed a tendency to prioritize adult-intended skill development over sustained engagement with children's play (Iwata, 2023). This study extends this research by examining how educators' interpretations affect play continuity. The study draws on the Reggio Emilia approach, particularly its critique of externally governed time and its emphasis on guaranteeing children time to engage, time without haste, and time to act with satisfaction (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Clark, 2023). Situated within an interpretive qualitative paradigm, this study conceptualizes children's play as relational meaning-making. It employs qualitative analysis of pedagogical documentation from Japanese ECEC settings, focusing on photographs and narratives to examine how children's play is interpreted. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymization, and all documentation and observational data were handled in accordance with approved ethical

procedures. Documentation conveys children's rich experiences of time in play. However, when educators' pre-established plans guide interpretation, only elements aligning with those plans are carried forward, limiting play continuity. The findings highlight the importance of resisting premature alignment of children's expressions with adult-driven plans. Attending carefully to children's emerging interests may support more responsive play in ECEC practice.

documentation, japanese early childhood education and care, time, play, planning

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B11: Agency in Motion: Listening to Preschool Children's Voices about Active Play in Early Childhood Centers

Presenters:

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All Authors:

Judy-Ann Connelly, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

Hanitriniaina Rafanomezantsoa, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

This study explores how preschool children (4–5 years old) attending early childhood centers in one region of Quebec (Canada) describe their preferred activities and their perceived barriers and facilitators to active play. Active play is widely recognized as central to young children's holistic development (Poitras et al., 2016). However, research in early childhood centers has predominantly focused on environmental characteristics, educator practices, or objective measures of physical activity (Henderson et al., 2015; Nobre et al., 2022), leaving children's own perspectives comparatively underexplored. Drawing on conceptualizations of children's voice and participation in early childhood education (Harcourt & Einarsdóttir, 2011), the study examines active play as a context in which agency is enacted within institutional routines. The research adopts a qualitative interpretive paradigm (Merriam, 2002). Data are being collected through individual Draw-and-Tell interviews (Driessnack, 2005) with a minimum of 40 preschool children, conducted in situ. Parental consent and child assent are obtained prior to data collection. Data are coded to ensure confidentiality, and participants may withdraw at any time. Preliminary analysis examines how children describe their opportunities and constraints and how agency is enacted within structured institutional routines. The study contributes to debates on children's participation and democratic praxis in early childhood education and invites reflection on how institutional practices may more authentically support children's everyday exercise of choice.

children's agency, active play, children's voice, democratic pedagogy, draw-and-tell method

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research is funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) under its Early Career Researcher Support Program.

B12: Behavioral Manifestations of Non-Cognitive Skills in Kindergarteners' Tag Games: Acceleration Variability Across Educational Contexts

Presenters:

Shunichi Tazuke, Doshisha University, Japan

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Rintaro Hamamura, Doshisha University, Japan

This study examined adaptive chasing and fleeing in kindergarteners' tag as manifestations of non-cognitive skills, particularly self-regulation. It compared acceleration variability across age groups and kindergartens and explored whether institutional differences reflect educational practice. Although prior research has modeled chasing and fleeing roles (Moreno et al., 2016: 63–75), the movement dynamics of tag have rarely been examined developmentally. The significance of movement variability and situational adaptability remains underexplored. A preliminary version was presented at the 38th Annual Conference of the Japan Society of Sport Movement and Behavior (Tazuke et al., 2025). Based on a movement theory framework of “knack” and “embodied intuition”, movement variability may reflect children's self-regulatory capacities. In tag, children observe peers and adjust actions in real time. Adaptive chasing and fleeing are seen as expressions of self-regulation, with acceleration variability as an indicator. Children from private and public kindergartens wore lightweight position-tracking sensors. Movements were recorded using an Ultra-Wideband system, and acceleration was calculated from positional data. Institutional and age differences were analyzed using Welch's ANOVA and Games–Howell tests. Written parental consent and child assent were obtained. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and informed of their right to withdraw. Private Kindergarten A showed greater acceleration variability than others; Private Kindergarten B exceeded the public kindergartens. Within Kindergarten A, five-year-olds showed higher variability than three-year-olds ($p < .005$). Although curricula were comparable, pedagogical emphases differed—free play versus structured activities—suggesting variability may relate to educational practice. Movement data can be used to assess non-cognitive skills and inform play-based activities that support self-regulation in kindergarten settings.

tag game, kindergarten children, non-cognitive skills, acceleration variability, institutional differences

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP22K02586 and in part by a FY2025 grant-in-aid from the Harris Science Research Institute of Doshisha University.

B13: Advancing knowledge on quality inclusion of children with high support needs – A multiple case study protocol

Presenters:

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Shanelle Perron, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Sabrina Bolduc, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Noémie Paquette, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Mathieu Point, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Megann Vaillancourt-Cashman, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This project aims to explore how early childhood daycares receiving last-resort financial aid to provide individual assistance for children with high support needs promote quality inclusion. Interventions identified to support social inclusion mostly focused on “fixing” the child rather than on creating inclusive and flexible environments (Koller and Stoddart 2021). Moreover, children with autism, cerebral palsy, or other significant needs are frequently excluded because the daycares are not equipped to meet their needs (Meyer et al. 2019). The protocol for this multiple case study is guided by the concept of quality inclusion, in which inclusive practices target learning environments, instructional practices, relationships and supportive interactions, partnership with families, and professional collaboration (Soukakou et al. 2024). This qualitative multiple case study was designed within a constructivist paradigm. The Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale (Irwin, 2011) was deconstructed to better capture context-

sensitive inclusive practices across diverse educational environments in Québec, Canada. Pilot testing each tool enabled improvement and the identification of ethical issues. Informed consent was planned for all research participants, and ongoing assent was deemed necessary for all children and staff during observation. Four questionnaires, five interview guides, and an observation grid were developed. The collected data will be analyzed using a structured plan to enable coding of the Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale (Irwin 2011). As quality inclusion mobilizes many resources around children with high support needs, this protocol will help build a clear picture and could inspire similar initiatives.

qualitative methods, quality inclusion, high support needs, observation grid, interview

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

B14: Childcare Between the Ordinary and the Emergency: The Transitional Phase Following Disasters

Presenters:

Miho Nishimura, Kokugakuin University, Japan

All Authors:

Miho Nishimura, Kokugakuin University, Japan

Natural disasters caused by climate change are occurring more frequently worldwide. The authors have conducted case studies of early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities in Japan affected by past disasters (Nishimura & Nakano, 2024). This study examines challenges faced by ECEC facilities as they restore care functions and work toward resuming and continuing operations. Previous studies have mainly focused on emergency response and reopening timing after disasters. UNICEF (2024) also points out that research covering continuity and the post-reopening phase remains limited in the ECEC field. This study presents an analytical framework that captures the unstable period that continues after reopening. It conceptualizes post-disaster childcare continuity not simply in terms of reopening, but as a transitional process toward normalization. Adopting a phenomenological perspective that emphasizes the experiences of those involved and the meanings they attach, this study conducts a secondary analysis of multiple cases of childcare facilities in Japan affected by natural disasters between 2019 and 2025. The analysis was conducted with the consent of the interviewees and with care taken to ensure that neither individuals nor facilities could be identified. The analysis revealed that even after reopening, instability in the childcare environment, overlap between childcare work and recovery-related duties, and differences in perceptions of the childcare situation among stakeholders persisted. The findings suggest that reopening should not be regarded as the final goal of BCP and related policies. Continued support is needed during the transitional phase to address childcare under constraints, maintain quality, reduce staff burden, and ensure sustainable operation.

climate change, natural disasters, continuing early childhood education, disaster response, post-disaster recovery

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B15: Amal's Walk, a technical artefact within the EECERA Inclusive Education Toolkit for Refugee and Migrant Children in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings

Presenters:

Jennifer Koutoulas, Early Years Intercultural Association, Australia

All Authors:

Jennifer Koutoulas, Early Years Intercultural Association, Australia

Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucester, United Kingdom
Alison Tobin, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Josephine Gabi, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom
Angelika Popyk, SWPS University, Poland

To approach and mitigate the challenges refugee and migrant children face in their new country and address the absence of guidance in trauma informed framework for early years educators in concepts about refugee/ migration experiences. The study was based on 'The Walk' (Little Amal) (Good Chance, 2021) representing a displaced refugee child from Syria, in pedagogies of welcome (Gaywood et al., 2024) informed an eBook: Inclusive Education for Refugee and Migrant Children: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Education and Care Settings (EECERA, 2022) which was co-created by five EECERA SIG researchers in partnership with Good Chance. The Toolkit resource drew upon Fredrich Fröbel's theoretical philosophy of play based learning (Bruce, 2021, p. 21) " being part of a community strengthens educational practice," and situating relationality of belonging (Gabi, 2013). The conceptual framework addresses refugee experiences in identity and belonging in the experiences of Amal, a technological artefact. Inclusive and culturally responsive paradigms were informed by children's rights (UNCRC,1989) and SDG 4.2. Educators and allied health practitioners evaluated the toolkit based on children, families, colleagues, and pedagogical perspectives were analysed through pre anonymised data responses (Popyk et al., 2025). The study pre examined researchers' positionality and ensured respectful research practices aligned with the EECERA ethical code for early childhood researchers (Bertram et al., 2015; Bertram et al., 2025). Evaluation of the Toolkit identified the critical role of welcoming practices for building relationships with children, educators and families, Some contextual difference may not be fully accounted for in the analysis and recommend further studies on children and families.

refugee migrant, welcome pedagogy, cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, children's rights

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project was funded by Froebel Trust.

B16: How can new understandings of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teachers' mentoring practices strengthen ECEC Teacher Education? - withdrawn

Presenters:

Anna Elisabeth Kristoffersen, Nord University, Norway

B17: Developing an E-Handbook for Teaching Estonian in Early Childhood Education: Design, Evaluation, and Quality

Presenters:

Anne-Mai Meesak, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

All Authors:

Anne-Mai Meesak, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

The aim of the current research was to develop an e-handbook supporting the teaching of Estonian in early childhood education. Research shows that teachers are positively minded towards integrating digital devices into kindergartens (Zilka, 2021) and digital learning applications support disadvantaged (e.g. migrant, refugee, disabled) children's language learning (Poleschuk et al., 2023). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social process influenced by cultural aspects such as language, occurring in the Zone of Proximal Development with the help of more knowledgeable others — a role the e-handbook aims to support teachers in fulfilling. The research was grounded in a post-positivist paradigm, which involves using measurable data to test theories (Creswell, 2009).

Development was guided by the ADDIE model, which divides the process into five stages (Branch, 2010). A questionnaire was created based on the constructs of the Learning Object Review Instrument (LORI) (Leacock & Nesbit, 2007), comprising 10 blocks ($\alpha = .64 - .89$) on a four-point scale. In total, 95 kindergarten teachers and specialists with a mean age of 44 years ($SD = 12$) participated in a free training and completed the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary. Only anonymised data was analysed. Participants gave high ratings for all constructs ($M = 3.60 - 3.72$, $SD = .42 - .50$), indicating their suitability. Significant relations were found between all constructs ($r = .56 - .90$, $p < .001$), suggesting they are strongly interrelated. The e-handbook meets the criteria for quality multimedia learning resources and comprises of 16 chapters, which are freely available to all educators in Estonia.

e-handbook, language learning, professional development, digital resources, ADDIE model

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B18: Deconstructing online roundtable dialogues to explore conceptual dimensions related to sustainability in ECEC practice

Presenters:

Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

All Authors:

Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

Angela Scollan, Middlesex University London, United Kingdom

Martin Needham, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Diane Boyd, University of Hull, United Kingdom

Kerrie Lee, University of Hull, United Kingdom

Rachel Strisino, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Emma Ransome, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

Karen Barr, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

Pamela Calder, London South Bank University, United Kingdom

Sandra Lyndon, University of Chichester, United Kingdom

This research explores online round-table dialogic exchange that explores sustainability in practice and in research. This work is part of the ECSDN's Sustainability Group impact that promote the 17 SDGs (UN2015), the 3 Pillars of Sustainability (WCED, 1987) and sustainable pedagogy (Boyd, Lee & Scollan, 2024) through our work with and for Early Childhood practitioners and ultimately the children they engage with. Bohms (1996, 2003) dialogic pedagogy, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Wenger's (2009) Social Theory of Learning is used to explore the agency digital media afford in developing Communities of Practice. Lewin's (1946) Action Research Model and Grey's (2022) Doing Research in the Real World is adapted with the view that pedagogy and action research are interrelated and messy (Columbia Embury et al 2020) benefiting from reflective exchange to analyse perceptions of sustainability. Ethical considerations regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw and safeguarding in line with institutional, BERA (2024), EECERA (2025) and the code of practice (2011) guidelines for reflective data gathering and dialogues from participants took place. Participants will be recruited through the ECSDN website through open invitations with consent being gathered prior to the event and any recordings. The research will question symbiotic AI, Digital Media agency and practitioner reflexivity during online roundtable interactions to ponder 'what might be missing' during exploration of sustainability if we do not meet in the 'real world'. The main findings will explore the impact, benefits and challenges roundtables offer for learning, training, CPD of Early childhood pedagogues to ensure the sustainability of Early Childhood Workforce.

round-tables, dialogic exchange, sustainability, sustainable pedagogy, communities of practice

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B19: Concepts in the context of current requirements: educational documentation, participation and media education

Presenters:

Claudia Schwertl, University of Salzburg, Austria

All Authors:

Claudia Schwertl, University of Salzburg, Austria

This poster presents considerations for a research project that aims to examine how established theories and methods can be reinterpreted to address current challenges. In the context of the conference theme, the question arises as to whether analogue observation methods in early childhood education settings in Austria can be understood as preparation for participation and agency in digital public spaces, e.g., on social media. Unlike standardised observation methods, hermeneutic observation methods (e.g. portfolio or "talking walls") create opportunities for agency by allowing children to participate in the selection, presentation, and interpretation of their educational processes. This research project draws on theories of participation and agency from the field of childhood studies, as well as on research on observational methods in German-speaking countries. In addition, (reform) pedagogical approaches (such as Reggio) are considered. The first part of the planned research project is designed as a theoretical contribution. A hermeneutic approach is applied to examine how these observational methods might be reinterpreted. An empirical study will follow. Ethical considerations include questions about how and to what extent children should be introduced to social media, as well as issues of social inequality. In light of the growing demands placed on educators, it is important to consider how established concepts and methods can be further developed to address current challenges without creating additional workload. Following the elaboration of the research project, it is important to consider how its findings can be translated into practice. With appropriate training, these perspectives can become practically relevant and encourage professionals to reflect on their previous work.

observation methods, participation, agency, media education

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B20: Collaborating with young children: the impact on professional identities of alumni in today's world

Presenters:

Kerry Holman, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

All Authors:

Kerry Holman, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

Part of my doctoral study explores how collaborating with children as co-constructors of knowledge has impacted on Early Childhood graduates and their professional identities. The process of researching with young children enhances adult perceptions of children's knowledge and value (Bird et al., 2013). The role of the adult is pivotal in emancipating children to realise their rights (Le Borgne and Tisdall, 2007) and for early childhood undergraduate students, experiential learning opportunities like this enable critical thinking and a way of challenging prior assumptions (Wolff et al, 2022). Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) underpins this study with research by Moorhead et al. (2025) identifying the prominence of social constructivism in conceptualising professional identity; the collaborations with children undertaken by the participants of the study were also informed by this lens. The study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and semi-

structured interviews with three alumni who all collaborated with young children to create new knowledge as part of their undergraduate degree. Interviews took place upon graduation and one year later. Institutional guidelines were followed and all participants maintained ongoing informed consent in line with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024), with respect for the value of knowing from multiple perspectives. Alumni stories revealed an emotive shift in feelings around collaboration with children, from fear to confidence. Understandings of agency and competence evolved and challenged their assumptions of children as experts, impacting significantly on their identities as graduate professionals. The findings reiterate the need for experiential learning opportunities and research informed practice to influence change in hearing children's stories.

collaboration, professional identity, alumni, experiential learning

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B21: Co-creating a Professional Gaze for children's Sense of Belonging and their agency in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Presenters:

Sara Esmaeeli, University of Stavanger, Norway, Norway

All Authors:

Sara Esmaeeli, University of Stavanger, Norway, Norway

This study explores how ECEC practitioners can strengthen children's agency, participation and sense of belonging through co-created competence development in professional learning communities. Previous research positions agency and participation as central democratic values in ECEC, emphasizing recognition, relational responsiveness and everyday pedagogical interactions (Emilson & Johansson, 2013). The study draws on perspectives of recognition, participation and belonging as relational and situated processes (Emilson & Johansson, 2013). Children's agency is understood as emerging in interaction, shaped by practitioners' communicative choices, positioning and responsiveness (Bae, 2009). Democratic participation is enacted in micro-situations where practitioners either open or restrict children's opportunities to influence shared meaning-making. Grounded in participatory action research (Kemmis et al., 2013), the project was conducted in partnership with two Norwegian ECEC centres within a national competence development framework. Practitioners engaged in experiential workshops, role-based exercises and collective reflection on practice narratives. Data include written reflections, group discussions and researcher logs, analysed through a qualitative interpretative approach. The study followed national research ethics guidelines (NESH, 2021). Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Practice narratives and reflections were anonymized. Findings show that collective, practice-based reflection strengthens practitioners' professional gaze in supporting children's agency. Practitioners reported increased awareness of how their communicative choices, positioning, and tempo can shape children's sense of belonging and their opportunities to exercise agency and contribute to shared meaning-making. Empowering children's agency requires sustained, collaborative professional learning embedded in everyday practice. Policy frameworks should therefore prioritize competence development models that support co-creation, reflective dialogue, and leadership engagement rather than isolated training initiatives.

professional gaze, children's agency, belonging, professional learning communities, action research

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B22: Agentic AI Technologies in Early Childhood Education: A Scoping Review

Presenters:

Zacharias Andreadakis, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

All Authors:

Zacharias Andreadakis, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Georgia Gessiou, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Georgia Dimopoulou, Metropolitan College, Greece, Greece

This scoping review maps the state of knowledge on agentic AI technologies in early childhood education (ECE), examining how agentic AI is conceptualised; what systems are developed, proposed, or implemented for children aged 0–8; which pedagogical theories inform this work and what ethical/developmental considerations are raised. Recent reviews clarify the broader agentic AI landscape but do not focus on ECEC. Bandi et al.(2025) synthesise definitions and Kamalov et al.(2025) analyse agentic workflows in education, both noting limited empirical classroom evidence. Agentic AI systems are characterised by autonomy, goal-directedness, and adaptivity. This includes AI agents, autonomous agents, intelligent tutoring systems with adaptive capabilities, LLM-based educational agents, and multi-agent systems in educational contexts. Policy literature discusses autonomous/adaptive AI through rights and equity lenses yet offers little ECEC-specific guidance (UNESCO,2025; OECD,2024). The review follows the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework for scoping reviews, enhanced by Levac et al.(2010) and aligned with JBI scoping review guidelines. Reporting will follow the PRISMA-ScR checklist (Tricco et al.,2018). No primary data collection; synthesis foregrounds privacy, bias, transparency, oversight, developmental appropriateness, and over-reliance risks. Expected patterns include rapid conceptual growth but limited classroom-based ECE evidence. Likely gaps include limited reporting of teacher mediation and relational dynamics, unclear autonomy (agentic vs. “smart” automation), narrow domains (often STEM/content generation), and underdeveloped ethical/developmental safeguards for young children. By mapping empirical clusters the review will support a clearer research agenda for agentic AI in ECE, guide designers toward developmentally meaningful, pedagogically grounded use cases, and inform policy on responsible deployment of autonomous/adaptive systems in early learning environments.

Agentic AI, early childhood, LLM agents, intelligent tutoring systems, ethics

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B23: Developing Existential Resilience Through Participation with Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Finnish Early Childhood Special Education

Presenters:

Roosa Segersvärd, University of Helsinki, Finland

All Authors:

Roosa Segersvärd, University of Helsinki, Finland

Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

The aim of this study is to examine the construction of existential resilience in children aged 3–7 years with severe intellectual disabilities (ID) through the concept of participation in Finnish ECSE. Participation is defined following the theory of sustainable wellbeing (Allardt 1993), as the child's opportunity to be recognized within interaction that connect them to various sources of wellbeing and meaningful life experiences - to existential resilience. Research on how young children with severe ID make sense of their experiences, perceive their social belonging, and identify meaningful elements supporting holistic wellbeing remains limited (Peltomäki et al. 2025). Theoretical framework draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978), the theory of sustainable wellbeing (Allardt 1993), and the theory of recognition (Honneth 1995) to examine children's development within social communities. Grounded in a relational, child-centered ontology that views children as active agents who co-construct their social worlds through

interaction, the study used qualitative ethnographic and data-driven approaches to collect data with children (n = 17), complemented by the perspectives of guardians and personnel. Ethical practice required ensuring each child's participation based on their individual capacities. Guardian consent was secured, and children's willingness to participate was continuously observed based on their gestures and bodily expressions. Preliminary findings indicate that reciprocal relationships characterized by holistic understanding and recognition, along with multiprofessional collaboration with guardians, enable participation that supports existential resilience. Elements strengthening existential resilience include agency, close relationships, sensory experiences and meaningful places and *objects*. The findings highlight ways to strengthen participation from an existential resilience perspective and offer methodological insights for studying its elements.

inclusion, participation, disability, resilience, special education

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This study is part of the research project "Child in time – Existential Resilience in Early Childhood" (2023 – 2027) funded by the Research Council of Finland (Grant no. 356905).

B24: Children's agency narratives – community and belonging

Presenters:

Hilde Hjertager Lund, University of Bergen, Norway

Maria-Rosa Raphaela Doublet, Western University of Applied Sciences, Norway

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This qualitative study explores children's agencies towards cultural and linguistic diversity, with particular emphasis on children's participation in communities, both digital and physical. We focus on children's perspectives as agents in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). While prior research mainly examines staff's approaches to diversity, children's perspectives have received less attention, despite evidence that children with migration backgrounds may face additional challenges compared to others. Children are understood as active civilising agents, as Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes (1994) shows, who are both shaped by and contribute to shaping cultural norms. The study is qualitative, using an inductive approach, based on empirical data from interviews with children aged 3–5, pedagogical leaders, assistants, the director, and observations of daily interactions within the ECEC setting. The project is preapproved by the Norwegian ethical committee (ID: R3521 SIKT ref.: 217922). All data is anonymised, and participants have given written consent. Preliminary findings highlight children's agency narratives, illustrating how their initiatives foster belonging, democracy, peer interactions, and the institutional environment. These are reflected through staff interviews and their ethical educational practices in ECEC. The methods emphasize inclusion, openness, and curiosity. Unlike other research where cultural diversity is less explicit and aligns with majority practices, this ECEC explicitly states cultural diversity as their norm. The study discusses how recognition of multiple voices and everyday participatory structures can strengthen inclusion, and points to the need for pedagogical approaches that invite all children's linguistic and cultural resources into the shared community, regardless of social, linguistic or cultural background.

children's agency, belonging, communities, children's interviews, participation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by University of Bergen and Western University of Applied Sciences.

B25: Individual and Work-Related Predictors of Depression Risk in Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers in Portugal

Presenters:

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Silvia Barros, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

This study aimed to identify individual (age, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, emotion regulation) and work-related factors (job satisfaction, children's age group, institutional sector) associated with the risk of depression among ECEC teachers. ECEC teachers frequently experience stress, burnout, and depressive symptoms, influenced by age, social support, and job satisfaction. Cognitive reappraisal and other emotion regulation strategies are linked to lower depressive symptoms and greater resilience. Still, few studies examine how personal and occupational factors jointly predict depression risk. This study was informed by theoretical evidence linking wellbeing dimensions, emotion regulation, and workplace conditions to mental health outcomes (e.g., Keyes, 2002; Gross & John, 2003). Rather than assuming these relationships, this study empirically tested how individual and occupational factors contribute to depression risk in ECEC teachers. A quantitative, post-positivist paradigm was used. Participants were 922 ECEC teachers. Standardized self-report instruments assessed wellbeing and emotion regulation. Classification Tree Analysis identified predictors and decision rules distinguishing risk from no-risk groups. The study was approved by an institutional ethics committee, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. Job satisfaction was the strongest predictor of depression risk among teachers. Those with low to medium job satisfaction were more at risk, and lower emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing further increased risk. In contrast, teachers with high job satisfaction were mostly not at risk, with higher emotional wellbeing and older age lowering their likelihood of depression. Interventions that strengthen job satisfaction and support teachers' wellbeing may mitigate the risk of depression and enhance the quality of ECEC.

early childhood education and care teachers, depression risk, wellbeing, emotion regulation, job satisfaction

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B26: From Student AI Use to Children's Agency: Implication of Generative AI for Democratic Early Childhood Pedagogy

Presenters:

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This study explores how early childhood education and care (ECEC) students use artificial intelligence (AI) in their studies and how this shapes readiness to support children's agency, participation, and democratic learning. Research questions address: frequency and purposes of AI use, perceived opportunities, risks, and ethical considerations. Research shows AI increasingly shapes higher education learning and academic practices, influencing professional competence and beliefs, while early childhood scholarship highlights educators' roles in fostering participatory, relational, democratic environments recognizing children as active meaning-makers (Škugor et al., 2025). The study integrates sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), theories of children's agency and participatory pedagogy (Biesta, 2020), digital competence and TPACK frameworks (Mishra & Koehler, 2023), conceptualizing AI as a mediational tool shaping knowledge construction, professional identity, and pedagogical decision-making. Conducted as part of the KUL-PRO projects, the study employed a pragmatic paradigm and quantitative survey design. Participants were ECEC students from Faculty of Education in Osijek (Croatia). Data were collected via a questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent, anonymity, and secure data management. Recruitment occurred outside assessment contexts to minimize power imbalances, aligned with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Findings indicate ECEC students primarily used AI for clarification, writing, translation, and summarization, reporting largely positive attitudes alongside concerns about over-reliance, authorship, and reduced collaboration. Experiences with AI appear to influence emerging professional beliefs about teaching and learner participation. Results highlight the need for structured AI integration in ECEC teacher education, emphasizing ethical reflection, relational pedagogy, and critical digital competence to ensure technologies enhance democratic and participatory early childhood practice.

ECEC students, artificial intelligence (AI), higher education, digital competence, democratic ec pedagogy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This scientific work was co-financed by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF; source 581-UNIOS-49 Improving Culture and Quality of the Education System in the Context of Teachers' Professional Development (KUL-PRO) and 581-UNIOS-50 Synergy of Technology and Science: STEM Education and Intelligent Methods (SINTEZA) within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Croatia, financed by the European Union – NextGenerationEU. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Union or the European Commission.

B27: Alone by choice or by circumstance? Children's withdrawing social orientation in Finnish early childhood education

Presenters:

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Jyrki Reunamo, University of Helsinki, Finland

Heini Paavola, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study aims to investigate children's withdrawing social orientation in ECEC by differentiating its distinct forms and examining how they relate to social exclusion risk. Withdrawing from social situations has been associated with risks for children's wellbeing and learning (Coplan & Ooi, 2013), yet solitude may support regulation in the stimulating life of ECEC (Chen et al., 2024). While not inherently negative, withdrawing becomes problematic when individuals have little influence over their situation (Rubin et al., 2009; Coplan et al. 2017). This study is grounded in

Reunamo's (2007) social orientation theory, which utilizes Piaget's (1932) assimilation and accommodation to identify alternative ways of approaching social situations. Within this framework, withdrawing orientation refers to detachment from others by choice or circumstances. Conducted within a quantitative paradigm, this study uses a large-scale observational methodology. Data were collected in 2017-2025 through systematic observations (N= 394,405) of random sampling from 19,149 children in 5,201 Finnish ECEC groups. Methods included regression analysis and two- and three-way cross-tabulations with Bonferroni-adjusted column proportions. Involvement (Laevers, 2003) served as an indicator of engagement, enabling the distinction between high-involvement forms of withdrawing and low-involvement, risk-related forms. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Helsinki Ethical Review Board; parental consent was secured and data were anonymized. Preliminary findings indicate distinct forms of withdrawing, ranging from high-involvement, emotionally positive solitary play to low-involvement activities including negative emotions, lack of focus or rule-breaking. These findings offer insight into potential pathways to early exclusion and inform in-service professional development supporting children's participation.

withdrawing, social orientation, involvement, exclusion, participation

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

The presenting author's doctoral work is supported by Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation.

B28: Leading Reform in the Early Primary Years: Leadership Agency, Participation and Democratic Curriculum Enactment in Malta

Presenters:

Marcelle Fenech, University of Malta, Malta

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This paper, based on my doctoral research, examines how democratic values and participatory practices are realised in curriculum reform in Malta. It explores how early years school leaders enact professional agency while mediating inquiry-based, child-centred curriculum mandates within accountability and digital governance contexts. Building on the work of Ramamoorthi et al. (2023) and Wong et al. (2025), which explore curriculum reform, policy enactment, and teacher agency, this study examines the role of early years leaders as mediators between policy and practice, addressing relative gap in the literature. Drawing on Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of agency, leadership is conceptualised as relational, temporal, and contextually situated in dynamic interconnection with both teacher and children's agency. Agency is analysed across iterative, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions to explore how leaders negotiate the conditions that enable or constrain teachers' professional judgement and children's participation, while pursuing democratic aspirations within structural constraints. Adopting a pragmatic paradigm, the study uses an embedded mixed-methods design: a national survey of Heads of Schools, followed by qualitative case studies using semi-structured interviews, voice journals, and walking interviews. Ethical procedures adhere to University of Malta guidelines addressing informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Findings may indicate that leadership agency is shaped by accountability pressures, digital systems, and institutional cultures, influencing how democratic reform is enacted. The study offers evidence-informed guidance for leadership development and highlights the need for policy frameworks and accountability frameworks that actively support leadership agency, enabling early years leaders to create conditions for democratic curriculum enactment.

leadership agency, democratic curriculum enactment, early primary years, curriculum reform, participation

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B29: Seeing the City Through Children's Eyes: Urban Space as a Democratic Experience

Presenters:

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Irene Moraga López, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain

This study explores how addressing urban space from a child's perspective can function as a democratic practice that contributes to children's holistic development and transforms planning, participation, and public life. Based on studies of childhood and participatory urbanism, and on the study, valorisation, and utilisation of the intercultural heritage of the city of Córdoba (Spain) (Olivares García et al., 2019), this research expands the debates on children's right to the city moving beyond consultation toward the epistemic recognition of childhood as a generator of knowledge and with agency (Rinaldi, 2021). The study draws on democratic theory, the sociology of childhood, and spatial justice, conceptualising children's everyday spatial practices as forms of civic engagement and situated knowledge as we can see in Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 2012). Situated within a constructivist and interpretive paradigm, this research considers that the city is socially produced and experienced differently by each age group. Qualitative methods included child-led walks, environmental observation, participatory mapping, drawing and photography workshops, and group discussions with preschool children in urban neighborhoods. The mosaic approach (Clarck & Moss, 2011) served as important methodological guide in this study. The study follows child-centered ethical protocols, including informed consent/assent, anonymity, and reflexive attention to power dynamics between adult researchers and young participants. Findings reveal that children prioritize safety, playability, sensory richness, and social connection, identifying overlooked micro-spaces as meaningful sites of belonging. Their perspectives challenge adult planning and expose spatial inequities. Integrating children's insights into urban governance can foster more inclusive, intergenerational, and democratic cities.

children's perspectives, democratic urbanism, participatory methods, early childhood, right to the city.

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B30: Children's Mapping of their Outdoor Early Childhood Educational Environments in Denmark and the United States

Presenters:

Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Elon University, United States

Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus University, Denmark

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This cross-national study investigated children's perspectives through individual and collaborative mapping activities of their outdoor ECE environments. Mapping fosters community-building, spatial skill development, and place-based learning (Fontozzi et al., 2013). Through map-making, children connect behaviors, social relationships, and activities

to particular spaces (Cox et al., 2018; Gowers, 2022). Mapping outdoor environments offers insight into cultural values and practices, though more research is needed (Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015). Situated within a sociocultural framework, the research explored children's co-creation of meaning and knowledge through social interactions with peers and teachers (Hedegaard, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). The mosaic method, a multi-modal, child-centered participatory approach, was employed (Clark, 2001). Participants were 37 4- and 5-year-old children attending a nature-focused ECE in Denmark or the United States. Data collection included drawing, photographing, and mapping outdoor spaces, and hiding and finding objects using a treasure map of the outdoor environment. Coding was inductive and qualitative thematic analyses were conducted. Following the EECERA-2024 code, parents provided written informed consent and children gave verbal assent. They could freely choose to participate in or decline the activities. Across contexts, joint participation in map-making activities supported negotiation, collaborative decision-making, and spatial representation skills. Children's maps conveyed preferences for specific affordances and suggested cultural variations between contexts, such as risky play in Denmark and safety awareness in the United States. The mosaic method offers researchers and practitioners opportunities to learn from children's perspectives using multiple tools. Mapping activities fostered social and cognitive developmental processes.

mapping outdoor environments, outdoor play, drawing, photo, voice

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B31: Exploring the Landscape of Early Educator Wellbeing Research

Presenters:

Mary Lachney, University of Alabama, United States

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Courtney O'Grady, University of Alabama, United States

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Mia Chudzik, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, United States

wellbeing is a critical issue in early childhood education, essential for recruiting and retaining educators, supporting their effectiveness, and sustaining commitment to the profession. Given its importance for both educator and child outcomes, this literature review presents a comprehensive overview of the empirical literature on early childhood educator (ECE) wellbeing in the U.S. Although the importance of educator wellbeing is well-documented, the literature remains fragmented (Cumming, 2017; Demirci-Unal & Olgan, 2025; Hasher & Waber, 2021). This review clarifies how educator wellbeing has been conceptualized and studied over time. Guided by an ecological systems framework, this review examines wellbeing across individual, relational, organizational, and policy contexts. We drew upon a range of existing wellbeing definitions in research/frameworks to result in a multidimensional conceptualization of wellbeing. We conducted a scoping review and thematic content analysis following PRISMA guidelines. Although this work is based on secondary data, ethical considerations were given to ensure transparent inclusion and exclusion criteria and careful documentation of analytic decisions, for example, defining early educators as in-service professionals working with children from birth to age five. Findings suggest wide variation in how educator wellbeing is defined. Few studies draw on explicit theoretical frameworks, and many frame educators as needing remediation rather than as professionals with agency. Connections between educator wellbeing, educator voice, and child mental health outcomes are rarely made explicit. Future research should prioritize actionable strategies to improve wellbeing and consider whether it is framed as the presence of positive states (e.g., flourishing) rather than solely the absence of negative conditions (e.g., depression and anxiety).

wellbeing, mental health, burnout, educator agency, workforce sustainability

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B32: Best Practices for Critical Digital Citizenship in Early Childhood Education (CiDiC-EI)

Presenters:

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María Ainoa Zabalza-Cerdeiriña, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

M. Manuela Ordóñez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

Isabel Mociño-González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

This poster presents the CiDiC-EI project, which aims to identify, analyse and highlight Best Practices (BP) in Early Childhood Education that integrate digital technologies, foster critical digital citizenship and enhance educational quality. International agendas and policies emphasise quality ECE and digital competence. However, research has largely focused on instrumental uses of technology or on teacher training, with limited attention to critical approaches and to BP in ECE classrooms. Conceptual ambiguity around BP and the predominance of screen-based, consumer-oriented practices justify this project. The project draws on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970, & hooks, 2021) and critical digital competence, emphasizing media literacy, ethics and citizenship. Best practices are context-sensitive, socially shared, and pedagogically effective in early childhood digital education. CiDiC-EI adopts a critical participatory mixed-methods design in three Spanish regions. The study combines Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping of ICT-related educational policies and document analysis with ethnographic case studies (≥ 24 BP). Data are analysed through inductive–deductive qualitative content analysis, supported by constant comparison and triangulation. The project received approval from the University of Vigo Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained, data were anonymised and securely stored, and participant risks were minimised through confidentiality procedures and voluntary participation. Preliminary content analysis indicates that most digital practices in Early Childhood Education focus on instrumental or behavioural uses of technology, while critical approaches promoting agency, participation and digital citizenship remain scarce and unevenly distributed across contexts. Making BP visible may strengthen teacher professional development, promote equitable digital inclusion and support socially just digital education policies.

best practices, early childhood education, critical digital competence, digital citizenship, educational technology.

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Project PID2023-148530NA-I00, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FEDER, EU

B33: Nature as a Core Educational Value in Early Childhood Education: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Presenters:

Arita Lauka, Private Preschool 'Maziņš kā jūra', Latvia

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Aija Ozola, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

Gunita Delijeva, Riga Technical University, Latvia

This study explores early childhood teachers' beliefs about nature as a core educational value and examines how these beliefs shape pedagogical practices in early childhood education settings, focusing on how values are translated into daily routines, interactions, and curriculum. While prior research highlights the developmental benefits of outdoor learning and environmental education, less attention has been given to how teachers conceptualise nature as a value embedded within everyday practice, particularly in contexts where national policy mandates core values and sustainability frameworks (Collins & Garrity, 2025). The study draws on value theory in education and socio-cultural perspectives, positioning teachers as key mediators in translating policy-defined values into classroom practices and recognising values as socially constructed and enacted through interaction (Nicholson, 2023). Adopting a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study employed semi-structured interviews with 24 teachers from early childhood institutions. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework to identify patterns in beliefs and practices. Participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was ensured, and ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review body. Teachers consistently recognised nature as central to children's cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development and as an essential educational value. However, enactment varied. Curriculum pressures, limited resources, and differing parental expectations constrained implementation. Teachers' ecological beliefs, professional experience, and institutional culture influenced the depth and consistency of integrating nature into everyday practice. Findings suggest the need for enhanced teacher education, institutional support, and curriculum flexibility to strengthen the enactment of nature as a shared educational value and promote sustainable practices in education.

early childhood education, educational values, environmental education, nature, teachers' beliefs

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B34: Cognitive flexibility and pre-service teachers' perceptions of music teaching in early childhood education.

Presenters:

Gabriel Kappeler, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland

All Authors:

Gabriel Kappeler, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland

Antonio Trajanoski, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland

This study aims to validate a French questionnaire that assesses cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy in music teaching, and beliefs about developmentally appropriate music practices for children aged 4–8. The study also aims to explore the associations between cognitive flexibility and pre-service teachers' perceptions of music teaching. Previous studies have linked cognitive flexibility to reflective thinking, self-efficacy, and adaptive functioning in pre-service teachers, thereby supporting their ability to adapt their teaching in complex situations (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010; Kazan & Pullu, 2023; Orakçı & Khalili, 2025). However, few studies have examined its relationship with representations of music teaching in early childhood education. Cognitive flexibility is defined as the ability to consider different teaching methods and view challenging situations as manageable. This is particularly important in early childhood music education, which involves improvisation, responsiveness, and uncertainty. A pragmatic quantitative design was employed, involving a survey of pre-service early childhood teachers at a Swiss teacher training institution (N ≈ 150). The analyses addressed the psychometrics of the instruments and the correlations between cognitive flexibility, music-teaching self-efficacy, and beliefs. Ethical approval will be obtained. Participation is voluntary and based on informed consent. Aggregated results will be shared throughout the course. Cognitive flexibility, particularly in the 'Alternatives' dimension, is expected to be associated with more child-centred, creative and process-oriented representations. Meanwhile, it is anticipated that the 'Control' dimension will be linked to music teaching self-efficacy. These findings could inform teacher training programmes by encouraging a more formative approach to help pre-service teachers recognise their abilities in teaching music in preschool settings.

cognitive flexibility, early childhood music education, pre-service teachers

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B35: Critical Digital Citizenry and Educational ICT Policies in the Galician context

Presenters:

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Xabier Martínez-Rolán, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

This study, part of the CiDiC_EI project (PID2023-148530NA-I00, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FEDER, EU), aims to identify programs promoting digital competence in Galicia's early childhood schools and to highlight practices fostering critical digital citizenry. Early childhood education is key for fostering digital literacy; however, effective integration of digital technologies in the classroom is essential to promote children's digital skills while mitigating risks (Schleicher, 2019: 10). National and international policies address digital media in schools, notably the European DigComp Project (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025). The study is grounded on critical digital citizenry, understanding digital competence as the confident, critical, and responsible use of technologies for learning, work, and participation in society (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025: 16). A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted. Official government calls were reviewed, identifying 20 policies supporting digital competence during compulsory education, of which only seven include early childhood. Although based on publicly available data, the study ensured accurate representation of policy documents, transparency in selection criteria, proper citation of sources, and reflexivity to minimize researcher bias. Results show that ICT policies including early childhood are scarce. Programs range from instrumental technology use to broader educational and social approaches. Attention to diversity and inclusion is rarely prioritized. While some initiatives align with critical and participative approaches, greater attention is needed to foster critical digital citizenry.

early childhood education, educational policies, digital competence, digital citizenry, ICT policies

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

PID2023-148530NA-I00, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FEDER, EU

B36: The development of preschool teacher students' culturally responsive teaching in the university

Presenters:

Tiina Peterson, University of Tartu, Estonia

All Authors:

Tiina Peterson, University of Tartu, Estonia

Irja Vaas, University of Tartu, Estonia

The research aim is to investigate preschool teacher students' evaluations of culturally responsive teaching at the university. From the concept of intercultural education, it is important to enrich teachers' competencies of culturally

responsive teaching, including the ability to communicate appropriately in a diverse learning environment. This is necessary for the inclusive ECEC, where teachers recognise and use diversity as a resource (Deardorff, 2020; Vanahans, 2025). According to the Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecological system (1989), the micro, meso-, and macro-level factors of early childhood education are related to the professionalism of preschool teachers (Hujala et al., 2023; Peterson, 2023). The study was based on a contextual approach to supporting preschool teacher students' competence in culturally responsive teaching. Data was collected during the 2025/2026 academic year from students (N=76), who participated in a new subject "Culturally Enriched Education in Early Childhood" in the baccalaureate programme for preschool teacher students. The quantitative data collection and analysis were used. Principles such as honesty, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were followed in the study. The majority of respondents clearly considered the content of the subject to be useful in a professional context. The structure of the course was generally perceived as supportive, but some students felt that the connections between the topics could have been clearer. The active learning methods were appropriate. At the same time, the students wanted a little more practical examples. For the advancing equity and inclusion, current study offers solutions for improving culturally responsive teaching in universities to provide better preparation for preschool teachers.

early childhood education, preschool teachers, university students, culturally responsive teaching

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B37: Bridging Policy and Practice: Early Childhood Teachers' Explicit and Implicit Values in Educational Practice

Presenters:

Aija Ozola, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

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Aija Ozola, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

Gunita Delijeva, Riga Technical University, Latvia

This study examines early childhood teachers' explicit and implicit values and explores how these relate to value-based educational practices within policy frameworks. Research highlights the central role of values in early childhood education and moral development, yet there is limited empirical evidence on how teachers' personal value orientations align with policy-defined values and everyday practice (Gunnestad et al., 2022). The study draws on value theory, distinguishing between explicit values, which are consciously articulated, and implicit values, which are embedded in practice. It also adopts a socio-cultural perspective that positions teachers as mediators between policy and classroom practice (Silseth et al., 2023). A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 476 early childhood teachers. Two newly developed instruments were used to assess explicit and implicit values (Teachers' Value Questionnaire) and value-based practices (Early Value Education Scale). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlations. Ethical approval was obtained from a university research ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured electronically, and data were anonymised in compliance with GDPR requirements. Teachers reported strong endorsement of policy-defined values. Significant positive correlations emerged between explicit and implicit values. However, discrepancies appeared between declared values and practice. Some values, such as human dignity, work, and freedom, were implemented more consistently than others, such as marriage and culture. Overall, explicit and implicit values did not translate uniformly into classroom practice. The findings highlight the need for structured reflection in teacher education and professional development to strengthen alignment between teachers' personal values, policy frameworks, and classroom practice.

early childhood education, teachers' values, explicit and implicit values, value-based practice, educational policy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B38: Strengthening Outdoor Education Competencies in Early Childhood Educators: Evidence from the NEST Program

Presenters:

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All Authors:

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Benedetta Ragni, LUMSA University, Italy

Carmen Berenguer, Universitat de Valencia, Spain

Giulia Fiorentini, LUMSA University, Italy

Simona De Stasio, LUMSA University, Italy

This study examined the effectiveness of the Nature Education for Sustainable Teaching NEST program, a four session Outdoor Education training for student teachers and educators in the 0-6 sector. It aimed to enhance perceived knowledge, self-efficacy, and willingness to teach OE. Previous research on OE training program reports promising results, but remains methodologically limited, with a lack of clarity regarding the training content presented and the assessment measures used, limiting the generalisability (Wolf et al., 2022). OE is grounded in sociocultural and experiential perspectives that frame learning as active and rooted in direct experience, supporting holistic development (Wang et al., 2024). It is increasingly recognised as a powerful approach in early childhood education with several benefit on child development (Guerra et al., 2020; Kirkivanta et al., 2024). Using a pre post design, 206 student teachers and educators (mean age 26.3 years, 95.6% female) completed questionnaires on perceived knowledge, self-efficacy, and willingness to teach OE. Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were ensured. Paired sample t tests showed significant post intervention improvements in perceived OE knowledge, $t(204) = -18.90, p < .001, d = -1.32$, self-efficacy, $t(204) = -15.70, p < .001, d = -1.09$, and willingness to use OE, $t(204) = -5.65, p < .001, d = -0.40$. Follow up analyses on a subsample $n=190$ indicated maintained effects, with further increases in knowledge and self-efficacy and stable willingness to teach OE. These findings suggest that embedding targeted OE courses in teacher education can strengthen educators' competence and confidence and support the design of high quality, sustainable outdoor learning in ECEC.

outdoor education, student teachers and educators, early childhood education, training program, pre-post test.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

B39: Pedagogical Quality and Structural Conditions of Mealtime Practices in Daycare (0-3): Educators' Perspectives on Supporting Children's Autonomy - **withdrawn**

Presenters:

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This study forms part of the PAPAR research project examining feeding practices that promote children's agency, participation, and wellbeing in daycare. Positioned at the meso-level of PAPAR, this study analyses pedagogical practices and institutional conditions shaping feeding routines. It aims to understand how pedagogical quality and contextual factors influence children's autonomy and participation. Mealtimes are increasingly understood as pedagogical spaces where children develop autonomy, self-regulation and participation through everyday interactions with adults and peers. Nevertheless, evidence remains limited regarding how structural conditions — including institutional routines, temporal constraints, spatial organisation, adult-child ratios and agency— mediate feeding practices and shape children's opportunities for agency (Swindle et al., 2018; Muir et al., 2024). Grounded in sociocultural and democratic pedagogies, autonomy is conceptualised as emerging through participation in shared routines, supported by responsive interactions and enabling environments (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003; Moss, 2018; Marques et al., 2024; Quiñones & Ridgway, 2023). A qualitative design was adopted, combining systematic observation of mealtime practices using the TOWE framework and semi-structured interviews with four early childhood educators working with children aged 6 to 38 months. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, respect for children's wellbeing and right to withdraw were ensured. Findings highlight autonomy-supportive practices, including encouragement of utensil use and respect for children's rhythms. However, structural constraints, including time pressures and group size, may limit participation opportunities. Improving pedagogical and institutional conditions is essential to support feeding practices that promote agency, participation, and democratic engagement. Improving knowledge in sustainable nutrition for toddlers could trigger an optimization of outcomes

autonomy, pedagogical quality, feeding practices, participation, 0-3

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Funded by Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) / FCT.

B40: Early Childhood Learning Architecture: A Transdisciplinary Framework for Equity, Agency, and Belonging in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:

Emily Glass, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

Claudia Urrea, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

All Authors:

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This work proposes a research-informed framework that positions children as active protagonists and guides educators in designing equitable, joyful learning environments. It investigates three questions: How can global approaches to early childhood education be synthesized into a model that supports young learners from infancy? How can the framework inform and catalyze lifelong learning? How can theories be effectively translated into practice? The framework builds on neuroscience (Black et al 2016), developmental psychology (Schulz, 2014), and global pedagogies (Kuh & Ponte, 2022), including neuroconstructivism (Karmiloff-Smith et al., 2007), constructionism (Papert, 1980), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2006), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and understanding children as capable, rights-bearing individuals (UN, 1989). It is organized around three interdependent pillars: Social, Emotional, and Cultural Learning; Community Engagement; and Transdisciplinary Learning and Play, which converge to support meaningful, powerful educational experiences. Using mixed methods and an iterative constructionist paradigm, the research included site observations across five countries, literature reviews, expert interviews, and co-design workshops with ecosystem stakeholders. Thematic analysis identified cross-contextual quality indicators and transferable design principles. Participation was voluntary and based on

informed consent. Children's rights, equity, and dignity underscore the work. Findings affirm that relationships, play, and community interactions are foundational to developing agency, belonging, and curiosity in early learners. The framework integrates eight Areas of Early Learning as adaptable entry points, enabling educators to design learning experiences while maintaining local and contextual relevance. The framework provides educators and policymakers with a design tool to support equitable, responsive early childhood environments aligned with science and global priorities.

transdisciplinary learning, holistic development, early childhood educational frameworks, community engagement, learning environments

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

This project was undertaken by the MIT pK-12 Initiative and funded by Institución Universitaria Pascual Bravo in Medellin, Colombia. Together, we are working to develop a new model for early childhood education that will be implemented in a center on the university's campus. Operated and overseen by Buen Comienzo, the center will be housed on the ground floor of the new Laboratorio Global del Aprendizaje para Todos (Global Learning Lab for All).

B41: Staff and service characteristics associated with retention and turnover in ECEC services in Ireland

Presenters:

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All Authors:

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In order to identify factors that support a stable workforce in the context of Nurturing Skills (2021), this research sought to examine how staff and service characteristics shape retention and turnover in ECEC services in Ireland. Nurturing Skills (2021) is Ireland's workforce plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, setting out a long-term strategy to build a stable, professional ECEC workforce in line with the European Council recommendation on high quality ECEC systems (European Union, 2019). International evidence suggests that staff retention is influenced by pay, qualifications, career pathways and contractual stability. This research builds on these findings using national administrative data. This study is informed by workforce sustainability and quality improvement frameworks (European Union, 2019), recognising workforce stability as essential to achieving the system goals outlined in the European Council recommendation. A cross-sectional, quantitative approach is applied. Using data from the Annual Early Years Sector Profile, the study analyses data from 29,023 staff across 3,436 services. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analyses explore how staff and service characteristics relate to retention and turnover. Information about data processing for research and statistical analysis was detailed in the administrative system's privacy statement. No personal information was processed, and results are presented in aggregate. Preliminary results indicate that pay structures, contract stability, graduate supports and service characteristics are key predictors of retention. This presentation will consider how these insights can inform ongoing policy development and highlight the potential mechanisms that may support workforce stability and professionalisation.

workforce stability, retention, workforce characteristics, professionalization, ECEC policy

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

B42: Mentoring as a Bridge: Supporting Early Childhood Teachers in STEM Practice After Professional Training

Presenters:

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Ana Štefanec, Kindergarten Dobro Drvo, Zagreb, Croatia

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This study explores how a mentoring programme helps early childhood teachers implement STEM workshops following professional training, examining its role in supporting consistent STEM delivery, reflective practice, and professional development. Research highlights the importance of early STEM exposure for developing scientific literacy, creative thinking, and inquiry-based learning (DeJarnette, 2018; Vartiainen & Kumpulainen, 2019). Teachers are central to translating these benefits into practice, yet mentoring models that support sustained STEM implementation after initial training remain underexplored. Grounded in Schön's (1983) reflective practice theory, Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, and Stewart's (2014) view of professional learning as transformative, the programme operates through four mentor roles — advisor, observer, facilitator, and supporter — and four cyclical phases: preparation, observation, reflective dialogue, and evaluation, supporting the view that quality STEM in ECEC requires sustained mentoring rather than one-off training. A qualitative approach was adopted. Data were collected through a focus group with five early childhood teachers who completed STEM training and participated in the mentoring programme, exploring their experiences, perceived changes in practice, and professional growth. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. Structured mentoring positively influenced teachers' confidence and consistency in STEM delivery. Reflective dialogue enhanced understanding of children's inquiry processes and encouraged more intentional planning. Mentoring should be embedded within STEM professional development as an integral component, not an optional add-on. The model offers a replicable framework for sustaining pedagogical innovation in early childhood settings.

early childhood education, mentoring, professional development, reflective practice, STEM

This application discusses an ongoing piece of research and findings may be preliminary/emerging.

Funded by ESF (SF.2.4.06.04.0067).

B43: Listening to children's voices: the impact of the Mosaic Approach on Young Children's self- regulation, self-expression and self-efficacy.

Presenters:

Mattha Galakouti, University of Dundee, United Kingdom

All Authors:

Mattha Galakouti, University of Dundee, United Kingdom

This study explores how listening to children's voices in Early Childhood Education influences their Personal, Social and Emotional development, particularly self- regulation, self- expression and self-efficacy. While research has shown that all young children are knowledgeable commentators on their own lives (Clark, Flewitt, 2020), educational practice frequently fails to prioritize their perspectives (Urbina-Garcia et al., 2022). This study is informed by a child-centered and participatory theoretical framework, which positions children as experts in their own lives (Clark and Moss, 2005), and recognizes their right for their views to be respected and taken seriously (UNCRC, 1989, Article 12 (1)). Conducted in a kindergarten classroom in Athens (n=19, ages 4-5), the research used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative scales with qualitative observations, short interviews, drawings, and creative methods. A consent form and information sheet were provided to all participants as well as their parents, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Quantitative results revealed significant improvements in self-regulation, self-

expression, and self-efficacy from pre- to post-intervention. Qualitative data highlighted children's increased autonomy, creative expression, problem-solving, and social collaboration. However, follow-up analysis of children's transition to primary school indicated some decline in scores, suggesting that the child-led environment of the Mosaic approach may not be fully sustained in primary school. The study highlights the Mosaic Approach's potential to empower children's voices, emphasizing the need to sustain participatory practices beyond kindergarten.

children's voice, mosaic approach, self-regulation, self-expression, self-efficacy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.