Version: 12 October 2026

34th

EECERA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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

Funchal, Madeira

25th – 28th August 2026

Book of Abstracts



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

EECERA 2026 organisers would like to thank the Scientific Committee for their freely given time, diligence and scholarship.

Ana França, Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Ana Isabel Gouveia, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Gorete Pereira, Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Guida Mendes, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Inês Ferraz, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Maria José Camacho, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Mariana Estrela, Educator of Regional Secretariat for Education, Science and Technology, University of Madeira

Carla Gonçalves, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Valdemar Sousa, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Maria João Cardona, Assistant Professor with Habilitation, University of Madeira

Sónia Martins, Invited Assistant Professor, University of Madeira

Adérita Fernandes, Researcher at the Research Centre and Lecturer in Postgraduate Pre-School Education and Primary Education, University of Madeira

Irene Gunning, EECERA Trustee, Ireland

Gillian Lake, EECERA Trustee, Ireland

Donna Gaywood, EECERA Trustee, United Kingdom

Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, EECERA Trustee, Iceland

Maelis Karlsson-Lohmander, EECERA Trustee, Sweden

'Peer-Reviewed Abstracts of the EECERA 2026 Conference Proceedings'

These Abstracts have been formally assessed and approved by the Conference Scientific Committee against EECERA's published acceptance criteria.

CONDITION OF PARTICIPATION: Some abstracts submitted by delegates for participation in EECERA 2026 have been revised and edited in good faith by the Scientific Committee. The organisers cannot be held responsible for the contents of the abstracts published in this book.

Table of Contents

Keynote I	4
Keynote II	5
Keynote III	6
Keynote IV	7
Poster Session A	8
Poster Session B	33
Symposium Set A	59
Symposium Set B	112
Symposium Set C	166
Symposium Set D	221
Symposium Set E	277
Symposium Set F	333

KEYNOTE I
09:30 – 10:30, Tuesday 25th August 2026
Auditorium Ursa Major, Level -1, Tecnopolo

Advancing Children's Participation in The Digital Age through Philosophy of Technology

Young children are growing up in a digital age characterised by technologies that mediate how practices are enacted amongst people in the formation of societies. As this level of digital complexity has evolved over time, so too have the demands on early years education developed to ensure young children have opportunities for agentic digital learning in practice. In this session, philosophy of technology is explored as a viable knowledge base for the early years, advancing thinking from the limitations of technical determinism through to the democratic possibilities of critical constructivism in practice.

Speaker Bio

Susan Edwards is Professor of Early Childhood Education at Australian Catholic University. She has researched young children and their adults using digital technologies, digital media and popular culture in their play and learning for many years. Susan has been awarded over $1.5 million in research funding to develop insights into young children's cultural meaning-making with digital technologies through play. She is interested in advancing knowledge and pedagogical practices that help keep young children safe online. This includes amongst the first work nationally and internationally with colleagues to determine what young children know and understand about the internet. Professor Edwards is a co-author of the Early Childhood Australia Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies. Her publications include over 80 books, journal publications and reports.

KEYNOTE II
11:00 – 12:00, Tuesday 25th August 2026
Auditorium Ursa Major, Level -1, Tecnopolo

Nothing About Them Without Them: Children's Civic Participation and Inclusion in AI

Civic participation is increasingly recognised as essential to data and AI governance, shaping a vision of what Patel describes in her forthcoming book as 'glass box' AI, moving away from the dominant paradigms of surveillance capitalism, black box and deficit models towards empowerment-based models rooted in narratives of stewardship and care. Power dynamics are already asymmetrically structured between parents, teachers and children, and the acceleration of AI presents a new challenge and risk of exacerbating them, excluding children and young people from important conversations about their futures.

The presentation introduces Patel's social model of digital technology, shaped by her practical policy facing research work with governments and policymakers – drawing upon disability rights movements and theory, to explain how digital exclusion for young people in the age of AI is socially produced, not inherent. She argues for a philosophical approach called conceptual engineering to address limiting mental models embedded in technology development so that young people and children are truly empowered. Through case studies and practitioner examples, the talk illustrates how civic participation rooted in conceptual engineering can enable tangible power shifts — redistributing agency, authority, and decision-making capacity.

This talk also presents examples of how children are already being involved in shaping AI governance, drawing on models such as school assemblies, play based models using Lego, arts and creative models, as well as deliberative AI Children's Summit convened by the Alan Turing Institute. It also showcases a practical framework for participation and inclusion in AI that moves beyond consultation toward meaningful power-sharing, adapted for youth practitioners. Integrating insights from youth participatory praxis, Patel's prior research on participatory data stewardship at the Ada Lovelace Institute, and her approaches to public involvement in shaping responsible AI at the ESRC Digital Good Network, the framework reconceptualises both civic participation and inclusion as a pedagogical, infrastructural, social, and technical challenge for children and young people.

Attendees will learn from a structured approach to designing participatory processes that are inclusive, reflexive, and capable of influencing real-world data and AI systems, presented in Patel's self-assessment workbook for including public voices in AI.

Speaker bio

Reema Patel is a social researcher and participatory practitioner based in Cambridge, UK working at the intersection of civic participation, data stewardship, and responsible AI. She co-founded the Ada Lovelace Institute where she established its flagship work programmes on public participation and participatory data stewardship and authored reports on Rethinking Data, the Data Divide, Beyond Face Value and many more. Reema is now the director of Elgon Social Research, where she collaborates with communities, policymakers, and practitioners to design participatory processes that enable meaningful power-sharing in technology and social policy, rooted in methodologies of praxis experimentation and action learning. She has contributed to national research on public involvement in AI through the ESRC Digital Good Network, developing new frameworks for including public voices in shaping AI futures, shaping practitioner materials; and is an advisor to the UK's research and innovation expert resource centre Sciencewise, supporting policymakers to involve the public in emerging science and technology issues. Reema's research focuses on rethinking inclusion in the datafied and AI driven-age, addressing digital exclusion, and developing practical methods that centre young people and marginalised communities in shaping data-driven and AI-enabled futures. She is also a research fellow of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, based in Cambridge University. Prior to her work in AI, she was best known for her work on the UK government Sciencewise public engagement programme, and her leadership of the Royal Society of Arts' Citizens' Economic Council initiative, where she worked with schools and children using Lego based methodologies to engage them in thinking about economic futures. Reema worked closely with the UK central bank, the Bank of England, to embed their regional citizen economic panels as a result of this research.

KEYNOTE III
09:30 – 10:30, Friday 28th August 2026
Auditorium Ursa Major, Level -1, Tecnopolo

Children and Teachers in a Joint Learning Journey for Democracy Development

We know that children's early years lived experiences are central for their development of personal and social identities. We know that societies and educational systems need to optimize their contribution for children's early understanding about the civic power and ethic and aesthetic beauty of democracy. In the daily life of educational contexts, educators can deeply contribute to the democratic experiences of their children. This contribution can be facilitated by many factors, among them the rights of teachers for quality professional development. The connected democratic processes of early years education and teachers' education can represent a hope in the development of a more humanistic society.

Speaker bio

Professor Julia Formosinho has been Professor in Early Childhood Education at University of Minho (1998-2012) where she led the Master's in Early Childhood Education. She is founder and Vice-president of Childhood Association, an independent charity, based in Braga supported by Gulbenkian Foundation and Aga Khan Foundation. She has been since 1996 Director of the Childhood Association Research Centre in Early Childhood Education where she specialised in early childhood research projects that integrate professional development, children's learning and praxeological research within projects such as Childhood Project: Supporting Children' and Families Rights and Context Based Professional Learning.

Julia entered the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field in 1988 having initially studied children's sociomoral civic development. In the initial years of her work in ECE she developed a process for the supervision for early childhood student teachers which began her enduring commitment to the professional development of their supervisors. This led her to the question of how to sustain a type of professional development which had visible impact on the ways young children learn. Since then this has been the central concern of her teaching, research, intervention, publication, activities.

She is co-founder of the Childhood Association, and was director of its research centre. The Childhood Association promoted a socio-cultural-constructivist approach to the education of children and teachers, intercultural understanding and advocacy of children's rights in early childhood settings. In this context she developed, in collaboration with Joao Formosinho and other colleagues, an approach for childhood education (pedagogy-in-participation) as well as a connected approach to professional development (Participatory Context Based Professional Development) and praxeological research as the study of transformation.

Since 1996, she has been the editor of a series for the leading educational publishing house in Portugal and African Portuguese speaking countries – Porto Editora – called Childhood Serieswith 22 titles published. From 2010 to 2013 she coordinated a national project, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, on the development of quality in early childhood education settings emphasizing participatory assessment and evaluation through a deep dialogue with Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram.

Julia has had a long-standing collaboration with Spanish universities and professional associations, namely with the University of santiago de compostela. She is a member of ILADEI (a Latin American network for childhood education) and its Journal. She also has a large interchange with Brazilian universities (São Paulo, Ceará, Rio Grande do Sul) that started with the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo. She has co-coordinated four books in Brazil, written chapters in several books and published in Brazilian research journals. The last one was the translation of an updated version of the first book on EECERA book series.

Julia has been an active participant in EECERA conferences since the early nineties and is currently a member of the Board of Trustees, of the editorial Board of the Journal and the EECERA Editorial Panel. Julia has worked consistently for EECERA and has made a significant contribution to the successful development of the Association.

KEYNOTE IV:
11:00 – 12:00, Friday 28th August 2026
Auditorium Ursa Major, Level -1, Tecnopolo

Grasping Data: Ways to Help Children Understand and Navigate Their Increasingly Digital World

We are becoming more and more aware of how increasingly intelligent and ubiquitous devices are capturing data from our personal, often intimate, interactions with the world. This is particularly concerning when considering how many of these devices are targeted at young children, capturing data from everyday engagement through voice recognition, geolocation software, sensors, or cameras. This enables third parties to 'know' a child's birthday, heart rate or whereabouts, to monitor tooth brushing and attention levels, or capture personal conversations and play routines. Children lack agency in these transactions, as consent for their data is either acquired through adult caregivers (who themselves may lack data literacy) or not at all. Indeed, caregivers can sometimes be complicit in data flows – from teachers using apps to record behaviour to parents keeping their children safe using phone location.

Whilst some progress has been made in tackling this issue through legislation, regulation and even design guidelines, there is lack of guidance or resources to empower children directly. Children are considered too young to understand these complexities. Yet, this assumption should be challenged. In a current UK-funded project, 'Grasping Data', we are exploring the potential to help children as young as 3 to engage, enjoy, understand, and value their personal data – as a foundation to subsequently reflect on who they'd like to share this value with.

The aim of this talk is to provoke critical discussions about emerging technologies and implications for children and their data. Whilst seemingly dystopian, the talk addresses, and encourages participants' thoughts on the key question: "what we can do as adults to leverage the value of emerging technologies for young children, whilst moderating potential harms?"

Speaker bio

Andrew Manches is Professor of Children and Technology at the University of Edinburgh where he directs the Children Interaction and Design cluster within Edinburgh Futures Institute. Since moving to academia from a career as an infant then special education teacher, he has led multiple projects examining the role of body-based interaction in how children think and learn, and the implications for emerging forms of technology. His recent work includes being the lead of 'Grasping Data', a £1.2million UKRI-funded project (2025-2026) looking at the potential of data physicalizations to help children understand and value their personal data. Andrew works closely alongside practitioners and designers and has spun out two early learning companies to sustain and scale impact from his research.

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 GOFE-R (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 GOFE-R 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 GOFE-R 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 GOFE-R for observing EFs in authentic situations. Exploratory factor analysis further confirmed its construct validity, revealing a two-component structure. The GOFE-R 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
Hui-Yun Sung, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan

All Authors:
John Siraj Blatchford, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan
Hui-Yun Sung, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan
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 paradigmThe 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 areongoing; 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 childrens' 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 artciles 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
Urska Fekonja, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

All Authors:
Tina Kavčič, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Katja Kurnik-Mesaric, University Medical Centre Ljubljana,Slovenia
Maja Zupančič, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Urska 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 programApplied 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 adress 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:
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

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 influences 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:
Cristina Mesquita, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal
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
Margarida Marques, Agrupamento de Escolas Miguel Torga, Bragança,Portugal
Cristiana Ribeiro, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal
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 Universit, 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 initiatived and teachers' responses, traingulation 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 alle 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 bythe Association of Independent Schools, Western Australia (AISWA).

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

Presenters:
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

All Authors:
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College,Estonia

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:
Nadine Correia, Instituto de Educação, UIDEF, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal

All Authors:
Adri Pimenta, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Portugal
Cecília Aguiar, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal,Portugal
Nadine Correia, Instituto de Educação, UIDEF, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal

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:
Hilla Villanen, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

All Authors:
Hilla Villanen, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Heli Muhonen, Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland,Finland
Ella Markkola, City of Jyväskylä, Finland
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:
Katrin Helendi, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

All Authors:
Katrin Helendi, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College,Estonia
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

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"
No. 2024-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000254061

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

Presenters:
Alexandra Paquette, UQAM,Canada

All Authors:
Lise Lemay, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
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

All Authors:
Melissa Ruffo, University of Stavanger, Norway
Sara Esmaeeli, University of Stavanger, Norway
Elin Kirsti Lie Reikerås, University of Stavanger, Norway
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, belongingecec, 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 & Mattews, 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 Gjelsten, Volda University College, Norway

All Authors:
Monica Gjelsten, 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 & Danniels, 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 & Danniels, 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.

childrens 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-elementay 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 Bjørnestad, Oslomet, Norway

All Authors:

Tone Rove Nilsen, University of Stavanger, Norway
Elisabeth Bjørnestad, 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

All Authors:
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
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, speace 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

All Authors:
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

All Authors:
Maria Figueiredo, CI&DEI and School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal
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 scopeof the project Refª UID/05507/2025 and DOI identifier https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/05507/2025. Furthermore, wewould 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:
Judy-Ann Connelly, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

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

All Authors:
Shunichi Tazuke, Doshisha University, Japan
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:
Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All Authors:

Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
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 Assoication, Australia

All Authors:
Jennifer Koutoulas, Early Years Intercultural Assoication, 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 by 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?

Presenters:
Anna Elisabeth Kristoffersen, Nord University, Norway

All Authors:
Anna Elisabeth Kristoffersen, Nord University, Norway
Kathrin Olsen, Nord University, Norway

In Norway, student teachers are mentored by a university affiliated ECT working at an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centre during their practicum. The aim of this study explores practice architectures that enable and constrain ECEC teachers' professional learning through mentoring practices and discuss how new understandings can strengthen ECEC Teacher Education. Research indicates tensions and different understandings of how theory should be included in practicums (Ulvik Marit et al., 2021). Furthermore, there are different implicit goals for practicum (Cohen et al. 2013). Mentoring teachers tend to adopt an apprenticeship approach focused on competencies, while teacher educators are emphasising professional growth. The current study is exploring practice architectures that enables and constrains (Kemmis, 2022; Kemmis et al., 2014) ECEC teachers professional learning through student mentoring practices. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) serves as an analytical and theoretical

lens. We are using an interpretive qualitative multiple case study design, which draws on video-stimulated recall interviews and employs reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Participants provided informed consent and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Findings show that ongoing collaborations between mentoring ECEC teachers and teacher educators reduce tension and contributes to common understandings of goals for practicums and professional learning. However, broader involvement of colleagues and a balanced relationship for collaboration is essential for further development of ECEC teacher education. Findings are relevant for strengthening collaboration in, and quality of ECEC teacher education.

professional learning, ECEC teachers, student mentoring, the theory of practice architectures, qualitative multiple case study

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

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 (α = .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 AIi, 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

All Authors:
Hilde Hjertager Lund, University of Bergen, Norway
Maria-Rosa Raphaela Doublet, Western University of Applied Sciences,Norway

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:
Sofia Magalhães, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

All Authors:
Sofia Magalhães, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal
Sara Barros Araújo, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto,Portugal
Filipa Nunes, Centro de Psicologia da Universidade do Porto (CPUP) e Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto (FPCEUP), Portugal
Diana Neto, CIEC - Centro de Investigação em Estudos da Criança, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal, Portugal
Rafaela Rosário, Universidade do Minho, Escola Superior de Enfermagem, Braga, Portugal e Universidade de Coimbra, Unidade de Investigação em Ciências da Saúde: Enfermagem, Coimbra, Portugal, Portugal
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:
Tijana Borovac, Faculty of Education Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia
Alma Škugor, Faculty of Education Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia

All Authors:
Tijana Borovac, Faculty of Education Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia
Alma Škugor, Faculty of Education Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,Croatia
Diana Moslavac Bičvić, Faculty of Education Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia

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 bythe Recovery and ResilienceFacility (RRF; source 581-UNIOS-49 Improving Culture and Quality of the Education System in the Context of Teachers ' Professional Development (KUL-PRO) and581-UNIOS-50Synergy ofTechnology 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:
Roosa Laaksonen, University of Helsinki, Finland

All Authors:
Roosa Laaksonen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki,Finland
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

All Authors:
Marcelle Fenech, University of Malta, Malta

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 iterational, 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:
Elena González-Alfaya, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain

All Authors:
Elena González-Alfaya, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
Rosario Mérida-Serrano, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
María De Los Ángeles Olivares-García, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
Julia Rodríguez-Carrillo, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
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 Unversity, Denmark

All Authors:
Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Elon University, United States
Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark
Clare Petznick, Elon University, United States
Natalie Peeples, Elon University, United States

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

All Authors:
Mary Lachney, University of Alabama, United States
Courtney O'Grady, University of Alabama, United States
Courtney Zulauf-McCurdy, Lurie Children's Hospital, United States
Alison Hooper, University of Alabama, United States
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:
María Cerdeira González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

All Authors:
María Cerdeira González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
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

All Authors:

Arita Lauka, Private Preschool 'Maziņš kā jūra', Latvia
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:
Carla Míguez-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

All Authors:
Carla Míguez-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Almudena Alonso-Ferreiro, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Abraham Rubin-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
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

All Authors:
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:
Giulia Fiorentini, LUMSA University, Italy

All Authors:
Daniela Paoletti, LUMSA University, Italy
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.

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:
Emily Glass, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Claudia Urrea, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

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.

transdiciplinary 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:
Ailbhe Booth, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland

All Authors:
Ailbhe Booth, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland
Ciaran Madden, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland
Paul Gleeson, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland

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:
Adrijana Visnjic Jevtic, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

All Authors:
Adrijana Visnjic Jevtic, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

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.

Symposium Set A (13:15 – 14:30)| Wednesday 26th August 2026

Symposium A01 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS AND AESTHETIC LITERACY EVENTS

Chaired by: Mirja Thiel, University of Osnabrück, Germany

Beyond the Drawing: Rethinking Agency and Participation in Research with Children's Drawings

Presenters:
Mirja Thiel, University of Osnabrück, Germany
Melanie Kubandt, University of Osnabrück, Germany

All authors:
Mirja Thiel, University of Osnabrück, Germany
Melanie Kubandt, University of Osnabrück, Germany

This contribution examines children's drawings within ECEC-research, focusing on its potential to enable children's agency and participation. It questions whether children's drawings facilitate children's perspectives or risk producing only an apparent form of participation shaped by adult-centred research. Research on children's drawings has a tradition in psychology, while ECEC-research has approached drawings with caution due to risks of over-interpretation and adult projection (Borg-Tiburcy 2022). The contribution builds on collaborative studies and a scientific network on children's drawings in qualitative research, which investigated methodological assumptions, interpretative practices, and blind spots in using children's drawings across different research contexts (Kubandt et al. 2025). Children's drawings are conceptualised as aesthetic, multimodal, and performative practices rather than representations of children's inner worlds. The framework draws on New Childhood Studies, visual sociology, and social semiotics, with attention to agency and participation (Hüpping 2025). The paper follows a social constructivist and reflexive qualitative research paradigm, emphasising the limits of understanding children's meanings (Kubandt 2017). Empirical reflections draw on studies using children's drawings combined with drawing-telling or observation, and researcher triangulation, paying attention to production, product, and reception contexts (Kekeritz 2022, Staege 2025). We reflect on power asymmetries, cultural bias, and uncritical transfer of Western concepts of children's agency (Eßer et al. 2016). Ethically, we seek voluntary, informed consent directly from the children. The discussion demonstrates that children's drawings enable expression and reproduce methodological fallacies when treated as inherently authentic or participatory. The contribution calls for reflexive, process-oriented research designs and a critical examination of how agency and participation are conceptualised in ECEC.

children's drawings, agency, participation, early childhood research, methodological reflexivity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Ethics and Relations of Recognition in Research with and by Children in the Context of Children's Drawings

Presenters:
Katrin Velten, Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany
Birgit Huepping, PH Ludwigsburg, Germany

All authors:
Katrin Velten, Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany
Birgit Huepping, PH Ludwigsburg, Germany

This contribution clarifies how forms of recognition and underlying adult conceptions of children and childhood shape ethical standards and situational ethics in research with and by children, particularly in relation to children's drawings. Building on recognition‐theoretical work on participatory research, it draws on studies that highlight dialogical negotiation, transparency, and critical reflection on power and generational relations, and link participation to individual and collective self‐empowerment (Hanson & Spyrou, 2023; von Unger, 2014). The paper adopts a relational understanding of recognition (Honneth, 1994; Prengel, 2019) and conceptualizes research with and by children as shaped by institutional aims, actor constellations, and logics. It distinguishes between formal and situational dimensions of ethics and recognition and their interaction. (Kousholt & Juhl, 2023; Hüpping & Velten, in press 2026). This contribution is grounded in the author's previous empirical work and literature review, using them as a platform to reframe research with and by children (Hüpping & Velten, 2023). Ethical reflection examines power imbalances, cultural assumptions, and how these shape the uncritical projection of children's agency (Kim, 2016). The paper identifies tensions and potentials in the interrelation of ethics and recognition, emphasizing the delicate balance between academic researchers' perspectives, the significance of children's participation, and the conditions that enable genuine engagement in the research process with children's drawings (Hüpping, 2025). It outlines normative and practical implications of an ethics‐ and recognition‐oriented perspective for future research with and by children, underscoring the need for ongoing researcher reflexivity regarding sociocultural and biographical positioning and assumptions about children and childhood.

research ethics, dynamics of recognition, research with and by children, power asymmetries, adultism

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Developing Methodology in the Study of Aesthetic Literacy Events for Cognitive Language-development, Equity and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Liselott Mariett Olsson, Malmö University, Sweden
Robert Lecusay, Stockholm University, Sweden
Lisa Dalsgaard, Malmö University, Sweden

All authors:
Liselott Mariett Olsson, Malmö University, Sweden
Robert Lecusay, Stockholm University, Sweden
Lisa Dalsgaard, Malmö University, Sweden

The digital age demands new cognitive linguistic competencies including children's narrative skills (Cappello & Siini 2024). It also evokes questions of equity and inclusion involving children's agentic creation of and participation in educational commons (Cappello et al. 2024). Our government-funded research-project develops a mixed-methods methodology that joins the two fields and includes pedagogical classroom-factors for studying how aesthetic literacy events (ALEs) affect children's narratives and commons. There is currently no consistent body of research that joins the two fields (Olsson et al. 2023). Both fields call for classroom-level studies and quantitative methods (Dillon et al. 2017; Nilholm 2021). Research on children's narratives and commons is expanding, requiring further research on the aesthetic dimension of these (Pesco & Gagné 2017; Cappello et al. 2024). We draw on philosophical-aesthetical and cultural-cognitive theories (Bergson 1896/1988; Bruner 1991; Nelson 1996) to conceptualize how narratives, commons and pedagogical classroom-factors are mutually constituted in ALEs. Within a mixed-methods paradigm (Corr et al. 2020) we develop and field-test methodology - including ethnographic methods and standardized measures for narrative skills, commons-creation skills and pedagogical classroom-factors - in a purposively sampled group of 54 children aged 2-6. Formal ethical approval, informed consent from caregivers and educators, and

negotiated consent from children were secured. Anonymization and secure data storage procedures were applied. We present results of reliability-tests, methodological reflections and data from a first round of field-testing a mixed-methods approach for studying how ALEs affect children's narratives and commons. Researchers, practitioners and policymakers may use results to study and implement ALEs that stimulate children's narratives and commons.

aesthetic literacy events, methodology-development, mixed-methods, narrative, commons

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

Project funding: The project has received funding from The Swedish Research Council (2023-04428).

Symposium A02 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

CREATIVE METHODS FOR RESEARCHING AND DEVELOPING CHILDREN SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MATHEMATICAL COMPETENCIES

Chaired by: Catherine Gripton, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

Children's mathematics attitudes and experiences in the first years of school: Evidence from 4- and 6-year-olds in England

Presenters:
Catherine Gripton, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

All authors:
Catherine Gripton, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Gabriel Chun-Yeung Lee, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Bethany Woollacott, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Balbir Kaur, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

The aim of this longitudinal research is to better understand patterns in children's mathematics attitudes and experiences as they progress through school. Mathematics attitudes are linked to attainment (Foley et al., 2017) but there is limited research evidence about these for younger children where instrument design can present challenges (Ganley & McGraw, 2016). There are relatively few studies connecting mathematics attitudes with contextual factors experienced in the classroom (Goldin et al. 2016). In this study, a theoretical understanding of children being experts in childhood (Harcourt, 2011), supports quantitative data collection at scale to amplify young children's perspectives on early childhood mathematics. Following a critical quantitative research paradigm, results are presented from c.5,000 children in a representative sample of England's primary schools who completed self-report surveys in their first and second years of schooling (aged 4-6). Video and pictorial information sheets supported informed consent, which was negotiated with children who could withdraw at any time without recourse. Statistical analysis shows that most children reported positive attitudes to mathematics with similar patterns across ethnicity, sex, language and socioeconomic disadvantage groupings but some small differences for children with additional needs and by age. Access to some important play activities was different for some groups of children and less in the second year of school. Paper-based mathematics was more prevalent earlier in particular types of schools. This suggests that more could be done in some classrooms, particularly in the second year of schooling, to encourage participation in activities which support crucial early mathematics learning.

mathematics, mathematics attitudes, mathematics pedagogy, children's perspectives, quantitative methods

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

The Observatory for Mathematical Education was established with a founding grant from XTX Markets.

Feasibility, acceptability, and impact of the Super Skills for Life (preschool version) programme

Presenters:
Cecilia Essau, University of Roehampton, United Kingdom

All authors:
Cecilia Essau, University of Roehampton, United Kingdom

This study evaluated the feasibility, acceptability, and impact of Super Skills for Life – Preschool Version (SSL-PS), a resilience-building programme comprising three sessions focused on play, singing, and behavioral–cognitive skill development. Approximately 8%–13% of preschool-aged children experience significant mental health difficulties (Ford et al., 2017; Sayal et al., 2015), which may progress into persistent problems without early intervention. These findings underscore the importance of resilience-building programs for promoting children's wellbeing. The programme is informed by cognitive-behavioral and resilience-building principles and aligns with task-sharing and implementation science models that emphasize competency-based training and supervised, scalable delivery. A single-arm feasibility study was conducted with 23 preschoolers aged 5–6 years. Semi-structured interviews were completed with three parents and three facilitators to explore perceptions of programme and impact. Ethical approval was obtained, with informed parental consent and age-appropriate assent. Participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Four themes emerged: (1) program acceptability, (2) experiences with training and supervision, (3) barriers and facilitators to delivery, and (4) perceived impact on child's mood and behavior. Parents reported improvements in mood and reductions in disruptive behavior, alongside significant decreases in anxiety symptoms. Facilitators highlighted the value of the task-sharing model, noting that competency-based training and structured supervision were essential for maintaining implementation fidelity. Findings indicate that SSL-PS is feasible and acceptable for preschool settings and demonstrate promising early signals of impact.SSL-PS shows promise as a scalable early intervention. Strengthening training and supervision structures may support wider implementation and help address gaps in early childhood mental health provision.

super skills for life, preschool, emotional difficulties, disruptive behavior, resilience-building

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

Exploring voice and agency through online and in person participatory methods with young children

Presenters:
Arwa Katab, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Arwa Katab, Newcastle University, United Kingdom
Niina Kolehmainen, Newcastle University, United Kingdom
Bronia Arnott, Newcastle University, United Kingdom
Timothy Cheetham, Newcastle University, United Kingdom
Olivia Craw, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

The aim of this co-design study was to explore creative interview methods with children aged 3–5 to discuss the challenges of starting formal education. Children have a right to express their views on matters that affect them (UNCRC, 1989); conducting research on rather than with young children risks undermining this right and reinforcing assumptions that they cannot provide meaningful data. Despite the significant transition that starting school

represents, few studies have positioned young children as active participants in sharing their experiences. The Lundy model (2007) informed the research design to ensure children had Space to express their Voice, were heard by an appropriate Audience, and had opportunities for Influence. Participatory methods, including drawing activities, pictures, and puppets were used across eight co-design sessions with five children from diverse ethnic backgrounds (South Asian British, Arab British, White British). Some sessions took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and were conducted online via video-call, with later sessions held in person. Verbal assent was sought prior to participation, and ethical issues relating to power imbalance and ongoing assent were addressed throughout. Children's responses to the puppets suggested they viewed them as independent agents distinct from the researcher. An online session where only the puppet was visible, raised ethical concerns about encouraging children to disclosure more than intended. Online formats also restricted children's voice and agency compared to in-person sessions, where they could interact with and manipulate materials. These findings highlight the need for careful ethical and methodological adaptation when conducting participatory research with young children in digital environments.

participatory methods, puppets, agency, voice

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research received Garside Bequest Funding.

Symposium A03 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor -2

CHILDREN UNDER THREE AND CARING PEDAGOGIC ACTS

Chaired by: Janice Kim, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

Babies' acts of caring in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Vanessa Neves, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil
Elizabeth Vieira Rodrigues de Sousa, Prefeitura Municipal de Vespasiano, Brazil

All authors:
Vanessa Neves, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil
Elizabeth Vieira Rodrigues de Sousa, Prefeitura Municipal de Vespasiano, Brazil

This research examines babies' acts of caring in a Brazilian Early Childhood Education Center. Care has been conceptualised from various perspectives: social and political (Tronto 2007, Hirata 2022); as a cultural practice (Maranhão 2000); inherent in the relationships between individuals (Noddings 2013, Katz et al. 2020); and as essential to the experiences of infants in the formation of their subjectivities (Vygotsky 1931). We understand care in its biological, cultural, cognitive, and affective dimensions (Vygotsky 1929). It constitutes a relationship with oneself, others, or the environment, involving attention and responsiveness to a demand or need from either the caregiver or the one being cared for (Sousa 2025). Drawing on Cultural-historical Psychology and Ethnography in Education (Green et al. 2018), we videotaped the daily activities of a group of infants in 2017. Using a microgenetic approach, we analysed a set of events in which one infant, Maria, initiated acts of caring. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any stage. When researchers observed signs of discomfort in children or teachers, they ceased videorecording, showed video extracts to participants, and discussed the research's goals. Acts of caring were evident in the practices of the teachers, which Maria imitated and re-signified through the process of cultural appropriation and the development of her own subjectivity. Maria attempted to comfort other infants when they were crying and to feed them. These findings underscore the importance of teachers' practices in fostering a culture of care, enabling infants to engage in acts of caring.

infants, imitation, care, cultural-historical psychology, ethnography in education,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This work was supported by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG): [Grant Number PPM-00675-18]; Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq): [Grant Number 306383/2023-3].

Exploring Interaction and Child Participation in Everyday ECEC Care Situations

Presenters:
Christine Mager, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany

All authors:
Christine Mager, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany
Heinke Hihn, IU International University of Applied Sciences, Germany
Frauke Hildebrandt, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany
Karsten Krauskopf, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany

To better understand interaction patterns between children and caregivers in care situations in ECEC, we ask: How are care situations sequenced and shaped verbally and physically? We focus on nose-blowing and face-cleaning . Research on these situations is scarce: Interaction quality is lower in care than in play (Degotardi, 2010), responsiveness predicts higher child involvement during diapering (Laurin et al. 2021), and post-mealtime face-cleaning often involves limited verbal accompaniment and boundary violations (Hildebrandt et al., 2021). Care situations are where participation and health rights (Art. 12 & 24, United Nations, 1989) intersect, making it crucial that children can express preferences and consent (Gutknecht et al., 2021). This supports autonomy and consent-awareness (Hildebrandt et al., 2021; Mountford, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Based on videographies from BiKA (Hildebrandt et al., 2021), we identified 91 care situations involving 40 caregivers (age: M = 37.5; SD = 12,2) from 29 ECEC centers. We developed a micro-analytic instrument to capture phases and micro-transitions in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2024). Consistent with the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2024), participants were informed about the focus on participation, taking part was voluntary, both the BiKA and our team completed training, and centers received feedback after analysis (Hildebrandt et al., 2021). Preliminary analyses indicate brief care situations and micro-transitions, low verbal accompaniment, and frequent side/behind holding, limiting movement and participation. Next, we will model trajectories and transition probabilities. Findings suggest that guidelines and training should address micro-events within care scripts that shape touch, bodily autonomy, and verbal accompaniment.

care situations, caregiver-child-interactions, nursery education, participation, quantitative sequence analysis

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

Project funding: This project is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space.

Participation as accusations, very young children's agency in ECEC

Presenters:
Nina Johannesen, Oslomet, Norway

All authors:
Nina Johannesen, Oslomet, Norway

In previous works, I have argued for an understanding of participation as an ethical practice (Johannesen, 2015). The aim is to turn from focusing on what the individual receives, to a discussion about how participation is about processes in which communities are created based on complex encounters between different actors, primarily children aged 1-3 and staff, but also place, materialities, and time. I found that: "...is that it is possible to see participation as accusations. When participation is seen as accusations, it means that the children's contributions have consequences for pedagogical thinking and practice. It cannot be measured or documented. It must be grounded in trust; a trust in the children, in educators and to the unknown possibilities of the future." (Johannesen, 2015, p. 123) The presentasion is posistioned in the theoretical work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and the concept of accusation. The data in this study are constructed from observations focusing on what children do as expressions. These exepressions are analysed with Levinas concept of accusations. Parents have given the written consent and staff and researcher have collaborated to ensure the consent of the child in the moment of observations. This discussion is posistioned in neoliberal tendencies where market forces determine which competencies should be emphasized. Tendencies in today's debates are a demand is for tools “that work.” My concern is that pedagogical practice and thinking risk "forgetting" that children express themselves in different ways, and that encounters in ECEC are unique. There is a need for contions debates about participation in ECEC.

participation, accusation, Levinas, children aged 1-3, expressions

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

Project funding: This work is funded by Oslomet, Norway.

Symposium A04 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON ECE PARTICIPATION

Chaired by: Katrin Macha, Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin, Germany

Strengthening Children’s Participation and Democratic Practices in Extended Education: Insights from the EKCO Cross National Collaboration

Presenters:
Gunn Ofstad, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Gunn Ofstad, University of Stavanger, Norway
Inga Kjerstin Birkedal, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study investigates how children’s agency, participation, and democratic engagement can be strengthened within extended education (EE) through cross-national collaboration. It examines how children actively shape, influence, and evaluate activities, and how both digital and non-digital tools can support democratic decision-making in everyday activities. Extended education is an important yet under-researched part of children’s social worlds. Existing studies (Frei et al., 2016) highlight that EE provides unique developmental contexts shaped by play, relationships, and socio-emotional experiences. Recent research shows that the quality of interactions with peers and caregivers is central to children’s development, and that children’s own responses are key indicators of quality. Situated Learning Theory and Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger) frame children as legitimate participants whose agency emerges through relational, iterative, and collaborative activity. These frameworks support shared authorship and democratic participation across intergenerational communities. Using a collaborative qualitative paradigm, researchers and practitioners in five countries co-developed 15 practices. Methods include observations, practitioner documentation, and structured feedback from children 6-9 years old. Practices are tested cross-nationally and adapted locally. Practitioners and researchers acted as co-researchers in an action research

approach, with informed and ongoing consent. Children's perspectives were collected through routine pedagogical feedback under existing institutional consent procedures by practitioners in the project workning with them daily. All data were anonymised, and participation was voluntary, non-intrusive, and transparent. Preliminary findings show that children's active involvement reshapes practice design, enhances inclusion, and deepens democratic learning. Results suggest that cross-national co-creation can strengthen democratic cultures in EE and inform policy frameworks that prioritise children's participation and agency

participation, democracy, extended education, cross-national collaboration

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The presentation is linked to: Extended Education Facilitating Key Competences through Cooperative Learning (EKCO) and is an international research project involving researchers and after school program staff in five countries: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland. The project runs from 2023 to 2026 and is funded with 4 million Norwegian kroner through research grants from Erasmus+. The work is led by Gunn Helen Ofstad, Associate Professor at The Norwegian Reading Centre.

Learning Together about Children's Agency and Interests through Collaborative Research with Parents

Presenters:
Janet Morris, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom

All authors:
Janet Morris, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom

This research aimed to explore conversation with young children in their homes and identify conditions under which sustained conversations may thrive. The current focus in England on children's early language development requires practitioners to ensure sustained back-and-forth interactions (Law et al., 2017; EEF, 2018), yet the more formal, academic language environment of school may create a barrier for some children (Theakston, 2015). By building on children's funds of knowledge-based interests in partnership with families (Chesworth and Hedges, 2023), continuity between home and school can be enhanced. The research took a bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The qualitative, instrumental case study (Yin, 2018) of the conversational environment around three children aged 3-5 was conducted within a constructivist paradigm. Semi structured interviews were used to facilitate joint reflection on conversation logs and specific episodes of conversation, recorded and chosen by the purposive sample of four parents which were analysed thematically (Braun and Clark, 2006). I obtained informed, voluntary consent from the parent participants, providing full information in advance, and giving opportunity for questions, emphasising their free choice to participate, their right to withdraw and minimising impact on family life. The collaborative process identified the agency and active participation of the child as a key component of the 'delicate, shifting ecosystem' in which conversation may thrive and enabled the creation of individual, thematic conversation maps indicating children's interests. The collaborative process provides insights into children's individual, agentive communicative practices, and funds of knowledge-based interests (Hedges, 2022) with implications for the design of inclusive, responsive, language-focussed educational experiences.

children's agency, children's interests, collaborative research, language development, language environments

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

(More) space for democracy. Children's perspectives on participation in ECEC settings

Presenters:
Katrin Macha, Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin, Germany

All authors:
Katrin Macha, Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin, Germany

Democracy and participation for children are core goals in the pedagogical work in ECEC settings. But how do children perceive this in their everyday life in the centre? Research on children's perspectives on quality focusses on how children experience their centres (Einarsdottir & Ólafsdóttir, 2019; Nentwig-Gesemann et al., 2021) and explores methodological approaches to dialogue with children (Clark & Moss, 2011; Macha, 2024). Based on the Lundy-Modell of participation (Lundy, 2007), the Situational Approach (Preissing & Heller, 2009) and Moss three levels of democracy (Moss, 2021), the paper explores how power, participation and autonomy are linked together and experienced and voiced by children in German ECEC centres. The study follows Grounded Theory paradigm and methodology (Charmaz, 2014). It took place in three ECEC centres in Germany, 78 children (3-6) contributed their perspectives in group discussions or spontaneous interviews. Children and parents were informed about the study-aims in advance. Parents gave their written consent. All Children were invited and choose freely to participate or not (Macha et al., 2024). Transcripts were analysed anonymously. Results show that children don't see most participation formats as spaces for participation. Rules and norms have a much greater influence on children's perception of opportunities for participation. The children describe that the teachers make the decisions, and that they have little influence on what happens how. Implications for practice are: Adults focus on participatory practices to strengthen children's democratic competences. On policy level, the system should be a space for democracy for all in which teachers, families and children contribute and negotiate.

children's perspectives, participation, competent system, democracy, grounded theory

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium A05 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATION

Chaired by: Kathryn O'Riordan, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

Nourishing Our Future: A community based participatory approach

Presenters:
Kay Aaronricks, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Kay Aaronricks, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Sanjoy Deb, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Stacy Randall, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Mitzi Harris, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Michelle Wisbey, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Michelle Hawkins, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom
Emily Fallon, Essex County Council, United Kingdom
Susie Threadgold, Essex County Council, United Kingdom

A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was utilised to meaningfully position early years settings as experts within their own communities, fostering co-learning and developing sustained engagement in developing food and nutrition practices. There is a dearth of research on food and nutrition, despite the National Child

Measurement Programme (2024) demonstrating a rise in children's obesity rates. The DfE (2025) recently introduced nutrition guidance, bringing food to the fore of policy attention in the early years, yet persistent inadequate funding significantly affects food provision and education. NOF is framed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological theory and Fraser's (2008) social justice lens, examining systemic influences on early years food environments and practitioner voice. NOF adopts a community-based participatory approach (Minkler & Wallerstien, 2008), facilitating sustained engagement with early years settings across multiple, iterative and practitioner-informed phases. Distinctively, NOF extends beyond data collection, generating impact through ongoing evaluation and continued responsiveness to findings and recommendations as a progressive research partnership. Approved by the University ethics panel the CBPR approach emphasised shared decision making, reflexive, ongoing dialogue, mitigating power imbalances, promoting beneficence in design and respecting voice. Food and nutrition in the early years remains under-researched. Early years educators demonstrate mealtimes as a key aspect of children's learning, exemplifying high-quality practice, yet face limited support, training, and funding to sustain and develop children's health education. There is an urgent need for national and local programs to prioritise food and nutrition as a core area of early years education, building evidence and support to tackle health inequalities in the early years.

food, nutrition, food education, community-based participatory research, nourishing our future

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

Project funding: Commissioned research by Essex County Council, with additional strands of the research funded by Anglia Ruskin University.

Children's Participation in Community -Strengthening the links between ECEC settings and local libraries.

Presenters:
Kathryn O'Riordan, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

All authors:
Kathryn O'Riordan, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

This research sought to assess the delivery and impact of the Little Library Initiative in the Republic of Ireland. The Little Library Initiative links Early Childhood Education and Care to local libraries and connects children transitioning from pre-school to school with an opportunity for library membership, offering book bags with story books and resources to support the child's transition to primary school. This study builds on a body of research showing the value of connecting ECEC to local community and the connections support children's transitions, (Corcoran E., 2021) This research draws on Bronfenbrenner (1995) Ecological Systems Theory Qualitative data analysis was conducted using both thematic and narrative approaches. Data were collected through 31 small group discussions, an online survey and phone interviews with parents. Survey data, researchers' observations and thematic data from interviews were cross referenced to identify emergent themes and issues and to explore the relationships between issues. Participant sampling and data collection continued until no new conceptual insights were generated and the research team felt they had gathered repeated evidence for the thematic analysis, thus reaching theoretical saturation. The research was undertaken in accordance with ethical guidelines, prioritizing participant consent, confidentiality, and integrity of the data. Results of Little Library and Book Bag Initiative 2021, 2022 indicated stakeholders found it conceptually and strategically relevant. The implementation of the initiative faced operational and logistical challenges to be addressed in future delivery. Limitations of the research were identified. There was consensus that the project provided a wide range of positive benefits, and the initiative should continue and suggesting subsequent actions.

participation, connection, community, libraires, transitions

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Care Economy and Early Childhood Community Innovation: Context-Sensitive Adaptation of the Parents' House Model

Presenters:
Judit Regős, Parents' House Foundation, Hungary

All authors:
Judit Regős, Parents' House Foundation, Hungary

This study explores how a community-based, bio-psycho-social early childhood model operates within the framework of the care economy and how it can be adapted across diverse welfare contexts. The research asks: (1) Which elements of the model represent universal core components, and which require contextual adaptation? (2) How does the model influence parental mental well-being and community cohesion? The study builds on care economy theory (Folbre 2001, Himmelweit 2007), social reproduction (Elson 2017), and moral care (Tronto 1993), alongside evidence on the long-term economic returns of early childhood intervention (Heckman 2006). Care is conceptualised at micro (family well-being and parental self-efficacy), meso (community capital), and macro (labour market and demographic sustainability) levels (Korpi 2000, England 2005). Guided by a pragmatist paradigm, the research applies a comparative embedded case study design, combining document analysis, programme evaluation data, and semi-structured interviews with parents and professionals. Sampling follows a maximum variation strategy. Ethically, the study is grounded in relational ethics in line with the EECERA (2024) code. Participation is voluntary and based on informed, ongoing consent. The researcher critically reflects on positionality and power asymmetries. Cultural relativism underpins interpretation, ensuring that care practices are analysed within locally embedded meaning systems. Emerging findings suggest that community-embedded support strengthens parental self-efficacy and reduces isolation, contributing to the sustainable integration of care into social and economic policy frameworks. The study contributes to the structured adaptation of community-based early childhood models and to policy discussions on integrating care economy perspectives into demographic and labour market strategies.

care economy, early childhood, local adaptation, sustainability, cultural relativism

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

Symposium A06 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

ECE PROFESSIONALISM - DECLINE OR DEVELOPMENT?

Chaired by: An Piessens, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

Invisible carers – undervalued care?

Presenters:
An Piessens, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

All authors:
An Piessens, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium
Leen Dom, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

This paper critically analyses digital documentation practices in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and explores whether such practices may contribute to injustice towards ECEC staff. The study is part of a broader

research project examining everyday digital registration practices in ECEC (Andelsman Alvarez & Meleschko, 2024; Stratigos & Fenech, 2021). Grounded in empirical ethics (Mol et al., 2010; Pols, 2023; Pols & Moser, 2009) and a feminist ethics of care (Tronto, 2013), the analysis highlights how different dimensions of care are made visible—or remain unseen. Two qualitative case studies were conducted in Flanders, Belgium (children aged 3 months to 2.5 years). Data include observations, smartphone diaries (Plowman & Stevenson, 2012) and photo-elicitation interviews with staff and parents, and , providing insight into daily documentation practices. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Antwerp University Association. The use of photographic material was strictly limited and carefully negotiated. Where earlier analysis focused on the purposes of digital registration (Dom, Piessens & Lammens, 2025), this paper examines what remains invisible. Findings show how children's distress, the embodied labour of combining care and registration, and the consistent framing of children without staff render crucial care practices unseen. Drawing on Tronto's notion of caring with, we question how digital documentation shapes justice in care. When certain practices cannot be captured, invisibility risks turning into structural undervaluation—affecting whose care is recognised and valued.

digital documentation practices, feminism, caring, empirical ethics, socio-material approach

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The research was funded by internal funds of the University of Applied Sciences.

Professionalising the Birth–Three Workforce as Democratic Praxis: Agency, Policy, and System Reform

Presenters:
Alona Peleg, Levinsky-wingate Acdemic Center, Israel

All authors:
Alona Peleg, Levinsky-wingate Acdemic Center, Israel

This study investigates how professionalising the birth–three workforce through an academic–civil society partnership constitutes a form of democratic praxis that expands educators' agency within early childhood systems. While research links workforce quality to child outcomes, less attention has been paid to professionalisation as a democratic process. Drawing on literature on democratic education (Biesta, 2016), professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), and children's rights, this study reframes workforce reform as a structural condition for democratic participation. Grounded in a relational-democratic and rights-based framework (Osgood, 2010, 2011) , the study conceptualises agency as socially constructed and politically situated. Professionalisation is understood not merely as credentialing but as enabling educators to participate in shaping institutional and policy discourse. An interpretive qualitative case study examines an integrated Bachelor's pathway developed by Levinsky–Wingate Academic College and the World WIZO Organization for approximately 80 childcare workers. Data from fifteen policymakers and stakeholders were analysed thematically, informed by grounded theory and the Input dimension of the CIPP model. Ethical procedures ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and reflexive representation of policy positions. Findings indicate that academic formation repositions educators as epistemic agents who influence organisational discourse and advocate systemic reform. Democratic early childhood systems require formal recognition of birth–three educators as a distinct profession and institutionalised participation in policy formation.

workforce professionalisation, democratic participation, birth–three education, policy reform, academic–civil society partnership

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The Disappearance of the Early Childhood Specialist

Presenters:
Nancy File, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, United States
Nancy Barbour, Kent State University, United States

All authors:
Nancy File, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, United States
Nancy Barbour, Kent State University, United States
Andrew Stremmel, South Dakota State University, United States
Jennifer Mueller, DePaul University, United States
R. Clarke Fowler, Salem State University, United States

We examine early childhood teacher preparation to describe how regulatory bodies define the scope of the field and govern entry to practice. With strong international consensus that early childhood covers the unique span of birth through age eight, we inquire how that definition of the profession fits in regulations promulgated in the United States. Our work is grounded within the literature by Fowler (2019, 2020, 2024, & 2025). This research examines teacher certification variations across the US, including the age/grade overlaps between EC and elementary level preparation, the standards required within the early childhood and elementary fields, and efforts to prioritize EC preparation for teachers in those classrooms. Our conceptual framework focuses on what defines a profession, i.e., specialized knowledge gained through formal education and governed by ethical standards. We question if early childhood as a profession is reflected in teacher licensing regulations. We present case studies of how licensing regulations have changed recently in two states, with attention to rationales for changes and consequent modifications in programs offered in higher education. Case study data are taken from documents in public domain and websites. The authors declare no conflicts of interest. We note changes in licensing regulations are affected by influences that may not reference the children being served. In the case studies, we found variation in requirements that focused on issues of economics, employability, and school configurations. Our case studies are descriptive. We end with a consideration of “what if” questions to spur thinking towards best possible scenarios.

professionalism, teacher preparation, policy, pedagogic knowledge, teaching practice standards

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

Symposium A07 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

WORKFORCE DILEMMAS, DEMOCRACY & DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Chaired by: Dietlinde Willockx, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

Preschool Staff Well-Being: Lessons from Structural Reforms in Iceland

Presenters:
Svava Mörk, University of Iceland, Iceland

All authors:
Svava Mörk, University of Iceland, Iceland
Anna Elisa Hreidarsdottir, University of Akureyri, Iceland

This study aims to examine how structural preschool reforms in two Icelandic municipalities influenced staff experiences and professional well-being. While research (McMullen et al., 2020) documents declining well-being linked to workload and staffing pressures, evidence remains limited on how structural reforms mitigate risks in

Nordic ECEC contexts. Framed by ecological theory (Gallagher & Roberts, 2022), the study conceptualises professional well-being as embedded in structural and policy environments, drawing on the OECD TALIS Starting Strong Survey (2020) to analyse how conditions shape staff well-being and pedagogical quality. Positioned within a quantitative paradigm, the study draws on staff survey data from 17 preschools implementing reform in two municipalities. The survey examined perceived changes in organisational conditions, professional practice, and well-being, and analysed them descriptively to identify variations. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Responses were anonymous, and confidentiality was ensured throughout data collection and analysis. The study received municipal approval and followed national ethical standards. Findings indicate improved professional well-being, characterised by calmer daily rhythms, increased preparation time and greater pedagogical autonomy. Qualified early childhood teachers reported strengthened collegial collaboration and meaningful engagement with children. However, the impact was uneven across settings, influenced by differences in leadership, staffing conditions and local implementation processes. Concerns regarding long-term political sustainability of the reforms were also raised. The findings indicate that collaborative structural reforms can enhance professional well-being and pedagogical quality in ECEC. Sustained impact, however, requires stable policy frameworks, equitable resourcing and consistent leadership. Long-term political commitment is essential to ensure lasting and shared benefits.

early childhood education and care, professional well-being, structural reform, collaboration, policy sustainability

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Working for democracy or for the economy? Working conditions in Flemish childcare.

Presenters:
Dietlinde Willockx, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

All authors:
Dietlinde Willockx, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

Flemish childcare organisations struggle to find staff and pupils in vocational programs are not motivated to actually work in childcare (Grielens e.a. 2025). What role do working conditions play in this? For Flanders, there is a lack of study but in the USA, Kwon e.a. (2022) found poor working conditions and low physical and psychological wellbeing with ECEC staff. Inspired by the ethics of care (Tronto, 2013), I chose to explore working conditions by experiencing them myself. I took a year off from my academic position to work as a childcare practitioner. Thus, I plunged into an autoetnographic adventure, collecting data by writing a diary, both on factual experiences as on their physical and psychological effects on me. I also reflected on the influence of cultural, economic and political systems on my work and on the relational contexts. My project put the organisations and colleagues I worked with in a vulnerable position. I was open about my intentions, worked in several places to avoid focus on one organisation, checked findings with colleagues. In the output, I use fictive charachters and focus on working conditions caused by policies, not by one organisation. Apart from the physical burden, childcare workers in Flanders experience three types of injustice Fraser (2005): economic (low pay, no flexibility, no lifelong learning opportunities), cultural (no representation in culture, assocation with diapers) and political (economic priorities). I analysed injustices in essays and also evoked them in fictive stories. It is time to develop democratic practices instead of exhausting childcare workers to serve economy, not democracy.

working conditions, workforce, democracy, sustainability, care

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Mapping Digital Citizenry Policies in Early Childhood Education in Spain

Presenters:
Carla Míguez-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

All authors:
Carla Míguez-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Almudena Alonso-Ferreiro, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Abraham Rubin-Álvarez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Xabier Martínez-Rolán, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

This study, developed within the CiDiC_EI (Project PID2023-148530NA-I00, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and FEDER, EU), seeks to identify programs promoting digital competence and map early childhood education schools in three Spanish regions to highlight practices that foster digital citizenry. Research shows how digital technologies have transformed knowledge production, communication, interaction and access to information. Schools, as spaces of social justice, should foster critical digital citizenry from early childhood (Schleicher, 2019: 10). In Spain, Organic Law 3/2020 has promoted policies supporting school digitalization. This study is grounded on the concept of critical digital citizenry, understanding digital competence as a critical and socially situated practice that promotes inclusion and equity (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025: 5). A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted. Official calls on government websites were reviewed, identifying thirteen programs and their characteristics. Participating schools were mapped using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). 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. The study highlights the diversity of programs and their uneven territorial distribution and shows important differences in objectives, resources and approaches to digital competence. The map offers a practical tool for educators and policymakers to identify strengths, challenges and opportunities for equitable digital education from early childhood.

digital citizenry, early childhood education, educational policies, digital competence, gis mapping

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

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

Symposium A08 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

EXPLORING THE JOY OF ARTS BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Chaired by: Fran Paffard, Comet Nuresry School and Children's Centres, United Kingdom

The right to joy:engaging children, parents and practitioners in exploring children ownership of joy

Presenters:
Fran Paffard, Comet Nuresry School and Children's Centres, United Kingdom
Rosemary White, London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Fran Paffard, Comet Nuresry School and Children's Centres, United Kingdom
Rosemary White, London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

This ongoing research across 4 nurseries explores the multiple views of joy from all participants, its power in the lives of children and the practitioners' role in enabling this. Expanding on Kingston-Hughes advocacy of joy (2024), researchers explore views from Ahmed, S. 2010, Karjalainen, S. et al (2019) and Nordström, A. (2022). The study draws on dynamical systems theoretical frameworks (Smith & Thelen, 2003; Spencer, Austin, & Schutte, 2012) and sociocultural perspectives Vygotsky (1978) Rogoff (2003) The research investigates children’s occurrences and understandings of joy in a situated interpretivist paradigm (Lave and Wenger 1991). Methods include observations,

video and discussion with children and parents, alongside practitioner analysis. Open-ended action research methodology collaboratively reviews and adapts research foci alongside findings (Rhedding-Jones 2003). The power relationships between education providers and young children are considered. All staff and families involved in research have given informed consent for use of videos, images and data, and pseudonyms used. Children's ongoing consent is monitored and responded to. Engaging children, parents and practitioners in explorations of joy has been both challenging and rewarding; provoking new ways of being together and both questioning and enhancing everyday thinking about what matters. Findings underline the importance of empowering children and parents place in leading the discussions and explorations, while also reinforcing the need for joyful approaches to learning that nurture staff and children alike.

joy, agency, parents, empowerment, community

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

Why Do Children Draw? Looking through a Sociocultural Lens

Presenters:
Vicky Grube, Appalachian State University, United States

All authors:
Vicky Grube, Appalachian State University, United States

This research engages new materialist approaches and sensory ethnography to understand how free painting helps the child make sense of their world. Free painting transforms and subverts preconceived notions of childhood. Like studies by Thompson (2022), Kinchloe & Steinberg, 2008, and Atkinson, 2018, interviews with children offer perspectives on how free painting impacts the young child. Opposing common pedagogy where art making is often the mere assembling of parts to match a pre-ordained product, material encounters occur during the art making, through experimentation, embracing embodied responses and emotional affect (Atkinson, 2022). As the viewer I found the child experiencing a sensory rich creation of images of which I too became entangled. Using a constructivist paradigm wherein individual interactions reveal meaning, the study shows the young child actively building understanding through experience and reflection.The research uses sensory ethnography as methodology. Methods include participant observation, interviews, photographs and video. Human Subjects Review was approved, and parents signed releases and learned options to withdraw. The child's comfort was prioritized, stopping interviews if the child became frustrated or embarrassed. Free art making impacts socialization, self-knowing, and ontology. Learning what happens at easels transcends developmental assessments to include curiosity about each child's free engagement with material and exploration of the world. This work proposes pedagogical transformation through shifting from directive instruction to an emergent curriculum guided by material engagement. Through embodied creations and rewriting social and cultural legacy in the choices of the young artist, open exploration moves beyond what Sakr (2021) calls "developmental tick-lists." The study advocates for a self-directed experience for children.

drawing, bodies, posthumanism, new materialisms, culture

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

The Dances We Dance: Two Children's Journeys of Connection and Belonging

Presenters:
Flavia Ribeiro, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

All authors:
Flavia Ribeiro, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom
Colette Tait, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

This symposium explores how participatory dance sessions within the Pen Green early years setting support children's emotional wellbeing, relational engagement, and practitioner reflection, focusing on two in-depth child case studies. The study builds on previous early childhood research carried out at the Pen Green Centre and presented at EECERA (Tait & Dewsbery, 2019) considering aspects of developing an attuned pedagogy. This also builds on Page's (2018) ideas around reciprocal pedagogic relationships. The research is informed by relational theory (Stern, 1998; Trevarthen, 2002) and psychoanalytic concepts of containment (Douglas, 2007) and connection, alongside early childhood perspectives that emphasise attunement, validation, and being seen (Music, 2017). Located within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, the study adopts a case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Methods include video observations (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) of two children involved in dance sessions and semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the Pen Green nursery. Parents did not participate directly in the research. Ethical approval was secured in line with BERA (2015) guidance. Informed consent was obtained, anonymity assured, and participants' right to withdraw upheld throughout. The key persons gained assent from the children for participation in the original filmed dance sessions. Findings are presented across three strands: practitioner reflections, and two child case studies. Analysis illustrates how children's engagement shifted from hiding and hesitation towards invitation, collaboration, trust, and reciprocity, while practitioners reported increased confidence, insight, and relational awareness. The study highlights the value of embodied, relational approaches in early years provision and suggests implications for inclusive practice, professional development, and wellbeing-focused pedagogies.

early childhood, wellbeing, embodiment, attunement, relational pedagogy, case study

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium A09 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

HOW ENVIRONMENTS SHAPE PARTICIPATION

Chaired by: Nicola O Reilly, Dublin City University, Ireland

A Narrative Study on the Emergence of the space of child participation in everyday relationships in ECE

Presenters:
Enni-Mari Ylikörkkö, University of Oulu, Finland

All authors:
Enni-Mari Ylikörkkö, University of Oulu, Finland

The study aims to deepen understanding of child participation in early childhood education (ECE) as a relational phenomenon, by asking "How is the space of child participation shaped within the everyday ECE relationships?" Although participation has been widely explored through themes such as democracy, interaction, and community, earlier research has largely emphasized adult perspectives or educator–child interactions, offering limited insight into how participation emerges in the broader relational fabric of ECE settings (İçli & Aydos, 2026; Theobald, 2019). The theoretical framing draws on Massey's (2006) and Löw's (2008) spatial theories, conceptualizing participation as a dynamically produced space through social, material, and cultural relations. This perspective enables viewing participation as an emergent, continually shifting spatial condition within diverse ECE relations. The study adopts a

relational, narrative research paradigm situated within childhood studies, positioning the child as both being and becoming. Narrative methods were used to capture children's multimodal narration. Data were produced through video recordings in one Finnish kindergarten, involving children aged 2-5 and two teachers, one also serving as the researcher. Analysis followed narrative approaches. Ethical considerations focused on researcher positionality, power relations, and children's rights. Reflexive work addressed the dual role of teacher–researcher. Consent procedures, transparency toward children, and secure data management ensured respect for children´s wellbeing. Findings portray participation as a dynamic, multimodal, and tension-filled space emerging through children´s actions, peer relations, teacher practices, and the material–cultural environment. Children express participation through embodied means. The study encourages educators to recognize relationality and reflect on how practices and settings shape participation.

participation as a space, early childhood education, narrative, relational childhood studies

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

Play, Participation and Pedagogical Intentionality: Reconfiguring the Preschool Playground through a Community-Based Pedagogical Intervention

Presenters:
Cíntia Ribeiro, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Sara Alves, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Sara Pereira, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Maria José Camacho, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

All authors:
Cíntia Ribeiro, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Sara Alves, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Sara Pereira, Universidade da Madeira, Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, Portugal
Maria José Camacho, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

This study explores how participatory reconfiguration of a preschool playground, centred on free play, supports motor, social, emotional and cognitive development. It builds on research on reduced free play, institutionalised childhood time, and outdoor environments as contexts for wellbeing, participation and learning (Neto, 2004; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2003). The framework draws on pedagogy-in-participation, valuing autonomy, participation and co-construction (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2011; Vasconcelos, 2011). It understands outdoor environments as co-producers of learning (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2003), play as central to childhood cultures (Neto, 2004), children as competent co-constructors (Vasconcelos, 2011), and loose parts as mediators of expression (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1999). This project was developed during a preschool practicum. Three rotating stations combined traditional games, circuits with tyres and tubes, and a loose-parts maze. Participants were approximately 60 children aged 3–6, across three preschool groups, with three master's student teachers and classroom educators. Systematic observation and formative assessment documented engagement, interaction and development. Data were qualitatively analysed through deductive and inductive coding. Safety, inclusion and equitable participation were ensured through supervision, materials, spatial organisation and respect for children's rhythms and initiatives. Observations indicated increased engagement, autonomy, creativity, cooperation, communication, self-regulation

and conflict resolution. The project highlights the playground as a pedagogical space and suggests that participatory, low-cost interventions can support inclusion and children's right to play.

preschool education, playground reconfiguration, free play, pedagogical intervention, participatory pedagogy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This community-based pedagogical project, developed within a preschool practicum placement, did not receive external funding.

Illuminating Creativity: Light and Shadow Play as a Pedagogical Space for Children's Agency, Participation, and Democratic Learning

Presenters:
Ta La, Mongolian National University of Education, China
Tserennadmid Shagdarsuren, "Child Development Mentoring Center" NGO, Mongolia

All authors:
Ta La, Mongolian National University of Education, China
Tserennadmid Shagdarsuren, "Child Development Mentoring Center" NGO, Mongolia
Ariunbold Adiya, "Child Development Mentoring Center" NGO, Mongolia
Bayar Danjin, General Education School "Uy Tsai", Mongolia

This study examines how light and shadow play can foster creative thinking, agency, and participation among five-year-old children by bridging digital and physical learning environments. While previous research highlights the potential of digital tools for engagement and play-based approaches for creativity, these areas are often explored separately, with limited empirical attention to how their integration supports children's voice and participation (Marsh et al., 2018; Fleer, 2020). This study was conducted in two public kindergartens in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (Kindergartens No. 63 and 42), involving 38 five-year-old children from preparatory classes. Informed by constructivist and socio-cultural theories and participatory pedagogy, the study conceptualizes learning as a co-constructed process shaped by relationships, materials, and context (Vygotsky, 1978; Edwards, 2015). A pragmatic paradigm guided a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, using classroom observations, pedagogical documentation of children's creations, and teacher reflections collected over a six-week light and shadow exploration project enriched with simple digital tools (e.g., tablets, projectors). Ethical considerations included informed consent, child assent, and privacy protection. Findings suggest that integrating light and shadow play with digital elements created a responsive pedagogical space for imaginative exploration, collaborative problem-solving, and multimodal expression. Children demonstrated increased agency by initiating ideas, making purposeful choices, and co-constructing narratives with peers, for example, extending shared storylines through projected shadows. Digital tools functioned as mediating resources that extended embodied and social interactions. The study highlights implications for balanced and participatory digital integration in early childhood education.

children's agency, participation, democratic learning

Symposium A10 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 6, floor -2

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON SYSTEM AND PROCESSES AFFECTING QUALITY IN ECEC

Chaired by: Lassi Lavanti, University of Helsinki; University of Jyväskylä, Kokkola Consortium, Finland

Does Recognition Matter? Constructing the Existential Resilience of Preschoolers with an Immigrant Background in Superdiverse Finnish ECEC

Presenters:
Lassi Lavanti, University of Helsinki; University of Jyväskylä; Kokkola Consortium, Finland

All authors:
Lassi Lavanti, University of Helsinki; University of Jyväskylä; Kokkola Consortium, Finland
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study investigates how recognition, a vital human need, helps constructing existential resilience of preschoolers with an immigrant background in superdiverse Finnish ECEC. Focusing especially on one form of recognition, primary relationships, which is considered to be love and friendships. Build on previous research (Lavanti et al., forthcoming), this study aims to deepen the understanding on the construction of the existenial reciliense for children's in ECEC. The concept of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) offers a multidimensional analytical framework that enables us to understand the multifaceted nature of diversity. The theoretical background of the study will be drawn on the existential resilience theory and the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995). This paper emphasises children's agency and participation in the data generation process through an innovative design, utilising children's digital autobiographies that include photos, videos, besides interviews (Stevanovic & Kuusisto 2022). The analysis, guided by Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), aims to illuminate the perspectives of recognition and construction of existential resilience. The study followed the rules of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. The Ethical Review Board approved it. The ECEC centre and families agreed to take part in the research. The Municipality approved the study. The findings revealed that the expressions of recognition were consistently rooted in lasting and reliability constructed the existential resilience. Using the voices of preschoolers with an immigrant background as a starting point, this study seeks to enrich the discourse on recognition and the their lives, offering new insights into the complexities and fluidity of superdiverse ECEC

recognition, superdiversity, children with an immigrant background, existential resilience, ECEC

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

Project funding: Research Council of Finland (2023 – 2027; nro. 356905).

Imagining ECEC Otherwise: Danish Foundations and Canadian Possibilities

Presenters:
Sandra Della Porta, Brock University, Canada

All authors:
Sandra Della Porta, Brock University, Canada
Sally Hooper, Brock University, Canada
Debra Harwood, Brock University, Canada

Three Canadian ECEC scholars met in Denmark to engage in a study tour of four børnehaver (kindergartens). We were curious about the model of education that each of us have admired from afar and were exposed to within our own ECE scholarship. The tour did not solely serve as experience but situated engagement within Danish pedagogical places; similar to Thingstrup et al. (2021), we aim to think of places differently, disrupting or deepening our prior assumptions about ECE in Denmark. Furthermore, as Evans et al. (2022) have in their work, we aim to anchor our narratives in broader questions of educational change, illustrating how encounters with Danish kindergartens become catalysts for reimagining ECEC in Canada. Our work is grounded in the notion that experience is necessary

for learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2018), specifically through immersive experience using a comparative lens (Karalis Noel et al., 2023). Thus, we will engage in a collective autoethnography co-constructing a shared narrative account through self-reflective journalling and dialogic discussions. Reflection and conversation will include our learnings about the people, culture, ethos, and ourselves. Ethical approval for this work is under review recognizing foreseeable risks, possible benefits, and implications. Initial informal on-site discussions include themes such as social-emotional and ethical learning, perspectives of children and childhood, and social pedagogy and democratic education. Thematic findings will be situated within existing literature (e.g., Cerino, 2023; Møller et al., 2025; Moss, 2018), inform comparative research, and offer critical considerations for Canadian pedagogy and practice in ECEC.

early childhood & care education programs, danish and canadian contexts, collective autoethnography, outdoor experiential learning, social pedagogy

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

Classroom Quality at Pre-Primary Level in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Structural and Process Dimensions

Presenters:
Sharmin Hena, Hiroshima University, Japan

All authors:
Sharmin Hena, Hiroshima University, Japan

Analyze classroom quality across structural and process dimensions to understand how it varies and how these dimensions shape the policy-practice gap at pre-primary level. Quality of pre-primary education (PPE) is emphasized in SDG 4.2. In Bangladesh, several initiatives have been undertaken to improve PPE quality in accordance with global commitments (DPE, MoPME, 2019). As a result, pre-primary enrollment has reached a satisfactory level, shifting the policy focus toward improving the quality of PPE (MoE & MoPME, 2020). This study adopted a framework that conceptualizes classroom quality as consisting of structural and process quality, drawing on the work of Harms, Clifford, and Cryer in ECERS-R (1998) and further developed by Pianta in CLASS (2008). A convergent parallel mixed-method research design was employed, collecting data from 24 classrooms and teachers, utilizing purposive and maximum variation sampling. Ethical protocols were followed, including obtaining consent from Head teachers and teachers, ensuring anonymity, and managing data responsibly. The study identified common structural challenges in pre-primary classrooms that adversely affect process dimensions. These problems include large class sizes, inadequate classroom decoration, and insufficient teacher training. Such factors limit effective instructional approaches and lessen opportunities for meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, teachers face difficulties sustaining consistent communication and positive teacher–student relationships, which decrease children's engagement and increase peer conflict. Overall, most classrooms were classified as low-quality, especially in rural areas. The findings recommend urgent, coordinated action of policymakers and practitioners to address structural constraints and strengthen process quality in pre-primary classrooms. It offers practical implications for improving classroom quality by reducing the policy-practice gap.

classroom quality, pre-primary education, bangladesh, structural quality, process quality

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

Project funding: This research is supported by JST Spring, Grant Number JPMJSP2132.

MENTORING PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

Chaired by: Astrid Øien Halsnes, NLA University College, Norway

Cross Mentoring in the Digital Age: Developing Agency and Participation in Early Career Early Childhood Educators

Presenters:
Simone Breit, University of Education Lower Austria, Austria

All authors:
Simone Breit, University of Education Lower Austria, Austria
Michaela Rottmann, University of Education Lower Austria, Austria
Bettina Lenzinger, University of Education Lower Austria, Austria

This study explores how cross mentoring in the first professional year supports early childhood educators in developing professional agency and participation, with attention to digitally mediated mentoring conditions. Prior research frames mentoring as relational learning with flexible, complementary roles and recurring tensions between autonomy and support, proximity and distance (Schneider-Keller, 2020). Evidence on structured mentoring in German-speaking ECEC remains scarce, particularly for cross-site formats. Mentoring is conceptualised as a reciprocal professional learning relationship shaped by role repertoires, trust building and boundary work (Heßling, 2025). Agency is approached as situated professional action capacity and confidence in decision making. Participation is approached as involvement in professional dialogue, collegial learning and network related engagement (Graf & Edelkraut, 2017). A qualitative, cross sectional design was used. Semi structured online interviews were conducted with three mentors and three mentees from an Upper Austrian cross mentoring programme. Data were analysed via qualitative content analysis with deductive categories on roles, relationship quality and perceived tensions. Participation was voluntary with informed consent. Pseudonymisation, secure data handling and careful treatment of potentially sensitive workplace experiences were applied, with particular attention to confidentiality in online interviewing. Mentoring emerges as a trust based space for reflection and orientation that strengthens professional self confidence and supports mentees in taking responsibility for their own problem framing and action choices. Digital conditions gain relevance through distance, expanding access while intensifying boundary setting and process guidance. Cross-mentoring requires relationship-building and mentee agency in focus-setting and casework; mentors need clarify roles and provide process facilitation.

early career educators, cross mentoring, professional agency, participation, digital mentoring

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Mentoring as Being and Knowing: Integrating Eastern and Western Traditions of Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

Presenters:
Astrid Øien Halsnes, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Astrid Øien Halsnes, NLA University College, Norway

The purpose is to explore how reflective mentoring supports the formation of student teachers and how philosophical perspectives, phenomenological, hermeneutic, and relational, can deepen mentoring practices across cultures. This study investigates mentoring as an ontological, relational, and philosophical practice in teacher

education (Søndenå, 2002, 2004) and explored through long-term collaboration between Nepalese and Nordic educational contexts (Halsnes & Goth Småland, 2020) and (Eikeland, 2018). The analysis combines Western theories of reflection and professional judgment (Schön, 1983; Merleau-Ponty 2005; van Manen, 2015) with Eastern mentoring traditions (Das, 2025), Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" and Honneth's theory (Honneth, 1995, 2012) of recognition provide a relational lens for understanding how meaning, visibility, and mutual respect emerge in mentoring relationships. The study employs a qualitative, interpretive design with reflexive thematic analysis, drawing on group conversations (N=12) from Norway (n=6) and Nepal (n=6), mentoring artefacts, and teacher educators' written reflections. The study will be conducted according to the Norwegian Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2021). Group interview participation is voluntary and anonymous. Informed consent will be requested. Reflection emerges as central in both contexts, despite differing cultural norms, underscoring mentoring as a relational and ethical way of being rather than a mere pedagogical method, The study emphasizes culturally responsive mentoring that respects local traditions while fostering reflective inquiry through a dialogue of global perspectives. The study may reflect a European perspective, while sustained engagement with Nepali teachers introduces an Eastern voice, supported by related scholarly work (Eikeland, 2018)and (Halsnes & Goth 2020).

mentoring, reflective practice, teacher education, cultural context, Nepal

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Professional learning for ECEC Teachers through Student Teacher mentoring: Enablers and constraints

Presenters:
Anna Elisabeth Kristoffersen, Nord University, Norway

All authors:
Anna Elisabeth Kristoffersen, Nord University, Norway
Kathrin Olsen, Nord University, Norway

In Norway, student teachers are mentored by a university affiliated ECT working at an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centre during their practicum. The aim of this study explores practice architectures that enable and constrain ECEC teachers' professional learning through mentoring practices and discuss how new understandings can strengthen ECEC Teacher Education. Research indicates tensions and different understandings of how theory should be included in practicums (Ulvik Marit et al., 2021). Furthermore, there are different implicit goals for practicum (Cohen et al. 2013). Mentoring teachers tend to adopt an apprenticeship approach focused on competencies, while teacher educators are emphasising professional growth. The current study is exploring practice architectures that enables and constrains (Kemmis, 2022; Kemmis et al., 2014) ECEC teachers professional learning through student mentoring practices. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) serves as an analytical and theoretical lens. We are using an interpretive qualitative multiple case study design, which draws on video-stimulated recall interviews and employs reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Participants provided informed consent and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Findings show that ongoing collaborations between mentoring ECEC teachers and teacher educators reduce tension and contributes to common understandings of goals for practicums and professional learning. However, broader involvement of colleagues and a balanced relationship for collaboration is essential for further development of ECEC teacher education. Findings are relevant for strengthening collaboration in, and quality of ECEC teacher education.

professional learning, ECEC teachers, student mentoring, the theory of practice architectures, qualitative multiple case study

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

Symposium A12 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Senate Room, floor -2

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Chaired by: Christiane Schulte, University of Galway, Ireland

From Policy to Practice: Examining Barriers and Facilitators to Physical Activity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Ireland

Presenters:
Christiane Schulte, University of Galway, Ireland

All authors:
Christiane Schulte, University of Galway, Ireland
Caroline Heary, University of Galway, Ireland
Colette Kelly, University of Galway, Ireland

This research aims to examine how physical activity and Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) practices are implemented in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) settings, and to identify the behavioural, contextual, and policy-related factors influencing implementation. Building on evidence of policy–practice gaps and persistent barriers in early childhood physical activity (Hesketh et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020), this mixed-methods study systematically identifies behavioural determinants influencing implementation in ECEC settings to inform targeted intervention and policy development. The study is guided by the Theoretical Domains Framework (Michie et al., 2005), enabling analysis of individual, organisational, and systemic influences on physical activity provision. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, the research adopts an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. Qualitative interviews, document analysis, and observations generate in-depth insights, while a quantitative survey phase examines patterns across settings to support integration and interpretation. Ethical approval was obtained, with careful attention to informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respectful representation of educators' professional experiences and voices throughout the research process. Findings demonstrate how educator agency, professional identity, and structural constraints shape physical activity implementation, revealing policy–practice gaps influencing children's participation and democratic opportunities in early childhood settings. Educators' beliefs, confidence, and perceived role boundaries significantly affected practice, while limited resources, time pressures, and ambiguous policy expectations constrained consistent implementation and meaningful child participation in active learning experiences. Findings suggest the need for clearer policy guidance, sustained professional development, and resourced implementation supports to strengthen educator confidence, agency, and consistent physical activity practice in early years.

agency, democracy, physical activity, early childhood, implementation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Israeli parents' perceptions of parent guided outdoor activities and of benefits and barriers associated with them

Presenters:
Michaella Kadury-Slezak, The Academic College Levinsky-Wingate, Israel

All authors:
Michaella Kadury-Slezak, The Academic College Levinsky-Wingate, Israel

Clodie Tal, Hemdat College of Education, The Academic College Levinsky-Wingate, Israel

The aim of this study is to show parents' reports of the habits and frequency of children's parent guided outdoor activities and their perceptions regarding the benefits and barriers associated with them. Spending time outdoors positively affects children's well-being and supports their holistic development. Engagement in outdoor activities allows children to form deep connections with the natural environment (Shurgi, 2018). While parents recognize the benefits of outdoor activity for their children, some express concerns related to safety (Obee et al., 2020). This study is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bioecological theory of development, stating that development of the child is a product of complex interactions between the children and their immediate environment. This was a quantitative study in which 202 parents completed a questionnaire in April 2025. This study is part of a broader international research study. Participants rights were respected as they were informed of the goals of the study before giving consent to participate. Their identities remained confidential as questionnaires were anonymous. The most frequent parent guided outdoor activity was visiting a public garden. Parents claim that when children are in nature, they mostly engage in play with sand and water. Parents identified physical -motor skill , social development and health maintenance and improvement as the main benefits of outdoor activities, while lack of parental time and safety concerns were the main barriers. We recommend informing parents about the additional benefits of their children's outdoor activities, including fostering a connection to nature, promoting scientific knowledge, and improving risk-assessment abilities.

outdoor activities, parents' perception, parents' attitudes, natural environment, benefits of outdoor activities, outdoor activities barriers

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Nature as a Context for Child Participation: Exploring Teachers' Approaches in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Aija Ozola, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

All authors:
Aija Ozola, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia
Gunita Delijeva, Riga Technical University, Latvia

This study examines early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices regarding child participation within nature-based activities and explores how participation principles are enacted in everyday educational settings balancing adult guidance and child agency. Child participation is recognised as a fundamental right from early childhood, and research suggests that natural environments can foster autonomy, initiative, and collaboration. However, limited evidence exists on how participation frameworks are enacted in practice within nature-based early childhood contexts and how teachers negotiate participation within institutional constraints (Waters-Davies et al., 2024). The study draws on rights-based perspectives on child participation and socio-cultural theory, conceptualising participation as relational, context-dependent, and co-constructed through teacher–child interactions within shared activity settings in education (Tsevreni et al., 2023). Adopting a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 teachers from municipal and private early childhood institutions. Data were analysed using abductive thematic analysis informed by established participation models and contemporary child agency literature. Participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was ensured, and ethical standards were followed in accordance with institutional guidelines. Teachers reported practices aligning with multiple levels of participation, including informing children, listening to their views, and involving them in decision-making processes across daily routines and play-based activities. Nature-based activities were perceived as particularly conducive to autonomy and initiative. However, implementation was shaped by institutional constraints and tensions between

structured curricula and child-led exploration. Findings highlight the need for teacher training, sustained institutional support, and flexible curricula to strengthen meaningful child participation in natural environments and to support sustainable, inclusive, and developmentally responsive participatory pedagogies.

child participation, children's rights, early childhood education, nature-based learning, teachers' beliefs

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium A13 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Chaired by: Fatma Yalçın, TED University, Türkiye

"I'm a researcher!" Evaluating GoPro Cameras as a Method for Young Children Researching Participation in an Early Childhood Setting

Presenters:
Chloë Keegan, Dublin City University, Ireland

All authors:
Chloë Keegan, Dublin City University, Ireland

This study explored how children use GoPro cameras as a participatory digital method to investigate and interpret their own lived experiences of participation in early childhood practice. Building on research positioning GoPro cameras as digital research methods for capturing children's mobile, embodied, and sensory experiences (Brown et al., 2008; Burris, 2017; Hov & Negaard, 2020; Richardson, 2019; Green, 2016), this study extends the literature by examining children's experiences of participation when they actively operate the cameras to research their own lives. Through a Foucauldian lens, the study investigates how GoPro cameras functioned as a digital, child-led research method that both revealed and shaped power dynamics influencing children's participation. Situated within a critical paradigm, the research employed child-operated head-mounted GoPro cameras and child-led focus groups, enabling children to investigate and interpret their own levels of participation in early childhood practice (Corsaro, 2011). The study foregrounded ongoing, relational consent, children's right to opt in and out, and reflexive attention on how adult influence over GoPro camera access can unintentionally produce coercion or tokenistic levels of child participation in research and early childhood practice. GoPro cameras are a valuable method for understanding children's lived experiences of participation, while also revealing how adult control, GoPro design, and peer dynamics affected children's level of participation as GoPro researchers. Using participatory digital methods such as GoPro cameras must ensure children fully control the cameras and the data they record, because adult interference can limit or even deny children's participation, reducing it to a tokenistic or superficial exercise.

child participation, digital research methods, gopro cameras, power, early childhood education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Amplifying Children's Voices: Challenges and Opportunities of a Participatory Research Approach with Children as Co-Researchers

Presenters:
Liselot Hudders, Ghent University, Belgium
Marloes de Brabandere, Ghent University, Belgium

All authors:
Liselot Hudders, Ghent University, Belgium
Marloes de Brabandere, Ghent University, Belgium

With this study, we aimed to involve young children aged three to thirteen as co-researchers to refine the research questions and methodology of a five-year, multi-method project on kidfluencers (defined as monetized social media profiles featuring children under thirteen as protagonists). Research on kidfluencing rarely incorporates children's perspectives, and audience-focused studies remain limited (Degroote & Hudders, 2026). Given that kidfluencing is created by and for children, participatory approaches actively involving children are essential (Schweiger, 2024; Sevon et al., 2025). The study amplifies children's voices by drawing on the New Sociology of Childhood (Prout & James, 2015), Lundy's (2007) participation model, and Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia philosophy (1994), valuing children's "hundred languages." We adopted a longitudinal multimodal participatory design based on the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011). Five preschoolers, nine primary schoolers and eleven parents participated in creative, interactive workshops. Data were analyzed using multimodal reflexive thematic analysis. Parental consent, child assent, reflexive journaling, and non-verbal and playful methods safeguarded children's agency. Methodologically, challenges included preventing participants from answering rather than shaping research questions, and ensuring quieter expressions were not overshadowed by dominant voices, including parents. Substantively, algorithms drive early exposure to kidfluencers; around grade three children begin preferring adult creators with child-like content; younger children have greater difficulty recognizing integrated advertising and commercial platform logics; and parental mediation is hard due to platforms' addictive design. This study demonstrates how participatory research with young children can inform research design, offering practical as well as theoretical guidance for future studies of digital childhoods.

kidfluencer, participatory research, digital childhood, agency, social media

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

Project funding: The ERC Consolidator Grant KIDFLUENCER is funded by the European Research Council under grant agreement № 101169786.Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Mapping Methodological Trends in Participatory Research in Early Childhood Education: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review (2015–2025)

Presenters:
Fatma Yalçın, TED University, Türkiye
Cagla Öneren Şendil, TED University, Türkiye

All authors:
Fatma Yalçın, TED University, Türkiye
Cagla Öneren Şendil, TED University, Türkiye

This study aims to explore trends in empirical participatory research conducted in ECEC between 2015 and 2025. Specifically, it asks, "How is participatory research conceptualized and operationalized in ECEC?" To what extent do studies demonstrate genuine power-sharing practices? Education has increasingly adopted participatory methodologies to reduce researcher–participant hierarchies and promote stakeholder voice (Kara et al., 2021). Early years scholarship similarly positions teachers, children, and parents as knowledge producers rather than data

sources (Murray, 2014). Participatory research is questioning whose knowledge in ECEC is legitimized and for what purposes (Murray, 2014). The review is grounded in participatory epistemology. It draws on participatory action research, community-based participatory research, the mosaic approach, and co-research traditions to examine degrees of participation and power redistribution (Murray, 2024). Adopting a qualitative interpretive paradigm, this systematic review follows PRISMA 2020 procedures. Searches were conducted in Web of Science and Scopus using participatory methodology terms ("participatory action research," "community-based participatory research," "mosaic approach," "photovoice," and "co-research") and ECEC terms ("early childhood education," "kindergarten," and "early years"). Data were analyzed thematically. As a secondary analysis of published literature, ethical responsibility focused on transparent reporting, rigorous screening, and fair representation of diverse geographic and methodological contexts. Preliminary findings suggest increased use of PAR with teachers, expanding Mosaic and visual participatory methods with young children, and growing CBPR addressing inclusion and sustainability. The review provides a methodological mapping to guide researchers in designing robust participatory studies and informs policy discussions on democratic knowledge production in ECEC.

participatory action research, mosaic approach, community-based participatory research, participatory epistemology, prisma systematic review

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

Symposium A14 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

PLAYFULNESS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Chaired by: Fliss Dewsbery, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

The Role of Playfulness in the Professional Development

Presenters:
Alessandra Pimentel, Federal University of São João del-Rei, Brazil

All authors:
Alessandra Pimentel, Federal University of São João del-Rei, Brazil
Monica Appezzato Pinazza, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

The subjects of this study were student participants in a university extension program focused on playful activities for children. The objective is to ascertain if and to what extent professional development through three categories: creativity, problem-solving, and autonomy. Part of the Paludicon research group (CNPq), the study analyzes field diaries produced by the students. Drawing from Cultural-Historical Theory, specifically Elkonin's perspective on playfulness in human development, this study investigates its specific role in professional development. Methodologically, the content of these diaries was identified and classified into 'meaning cores' to demonstrate the presence of the three pre-established analysis categories, to which these cores were subsequently linked. Ethical standards were strictly followed. Preliminary findings indicate that diary writing fosters significant behavioral changes. For example, it is possible to affirm that as creativity progresses, instances of problem-solving (e.g., toy disputes, aggression, or unexplained crying) also increase. While further analysis is required for definitive conclusions—especially regarding autonomy, which appears to demand more time to manifest in practice—the results are promising. In conclusion, the study demonstrate the relevance of play-based initiatives for professional development. It highlighted the need to value such programs not only for the direct benefits to children but also for the developmental opportunities they provide to the adults involved.

professional development, playfulness, cultural-historical theory, field diaries, university extension

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

Play, Pressure, and Professional Identity: Exploring the lived experiences of first year Early Career Teachers (ECTs) based in Reception Classrooms in the UK.

Presenters:
Michelle Loake, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

All authors:
Michelle Loake, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

This research explores the experiences of ECTs' during their first year working in Reception classrooms and attending their ECT programme at Pen Green. This research considers Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016) which sets out aspirations for recruiting, training, and retaining high quality teachers. Furthermore, the teacher recruitment and retention strategy (DfE, 2019) explores the need to improve the quality of professional development ECTs receive. This research is informed by ECTs' practice wisdom (Goodfellow, 2003) including knowledge and understanding of child development, and teaching standards (DfE, 2011). This is considered in relation to emotional labour (Elfer, 2012), leadership (Raelin, 2020), and agency (Bandura, 2018). This study was situated within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm incorporating reflective and collaborative enquiry. Utilising a purposeful sample, a focus group was held to capture ECTs' experiences. Data was explored using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This study adopted a principled ethical approach. I followed our institutes internal research processes aligned with Pen Green research base ethical expectations. Informed consent was obtained from participants. Data was anonymised and stored electronically and password protected. Respect, professional integrity and understanding directly informed the research design in line with the EECERA ethical guidelines (Bertram et al, 2024) Emerging themes relate to tensions ECTs experience, including pressure and accountability, extent of autonomy, and balancing organisational expectations with upholding personal values and beliefs. Implications include reviewing training materials for effective professional development and supporting school leaders to have a strong understanding of effective early years practice, aligning to government aims (DfE, 2025).

professional identity, agency, emotional labour, leadership, power

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

The role of emotions in early childhood education leaders' professional learning and the transformation of their leadership practices

Presenters:
Emelie Johansson, Karlstad University, Sweden

All authors:
Emelie Johansson, Karlstad University, Sweden
Susanne Francisco, Charles Sturt University, Australia
Leanne Gibbs, Charles Sturt University, Australia

This study explores how emotions influence the professional learning of ECE leaders and the transformation of their leadership practices. Professional learning (PL) in early childhood education (ECE) is often shaped through collaborative, reflective engagement with peers. While such processes offer important collegial benefits (Sahlin, 2025), they also evoke a wide range of emotions, excitement, frustration, resistance, engagement, and trust. Despite this, the emotional dimensions of PL, particularly for education leaders, remain under-examined (Hökkä et al., 2020). Guided by the theory of practice architectures (TPA) (Kemmis, 2022) and the concept of teleoaffective structures

(Schatzki, 2002), the study investigates how emotions shaped leaders' learning processes and their enactment of new practices. The research draws on an action research project involving 16 ECE leaders developing their approaches to leading digitalisation in early childhood education. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis informed by TPA and the concept of teleoaffective structures. Ethical considerations followed established action research principles, emphasizing participant-driven inquiry, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Participants received written and verbal information in accordance with Swedish Research Council guidelines, and a collaboratively developed agreement helped reduce power asymmetries and clarify expectations. Ongoing feedback loops ensured transparency and enabled participants to review and reflect on emerging analyses. The findings demonstrates that emotions are not peripheral but integral to professional learning, and various ways emotions shaped leadership and practice transformations. Practices for professional learning should recognise emotions' role in leadership and be arranged in ways that fosters emotional awareness and professional judgement.

early childhood education, early childhood educational leaders, emotions, digitalisation, professional learning

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium A15 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

RESEARCH WITH MIGRANT PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Chaired by: Zeynep Isik-Ercan, Rowan University, United States

Supporting the Integration of Immigrant ECEC Professionals in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Noora Ahvenjarvi, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Tiina Suni, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland

All authors:
Noora Ahvenjarvi, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Tiina Suni, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland

The Vakavahva project explores why internationally educated ECEC students struggle to find employment in Finland and identifies measures to support their labour market integration; this article focuses on the strengths and barriers faced by immigrant social pedagogues and their integration into Finnish working life. According to the Demand for Labour and Job Openings -report by Finnish National Agency for Education (2020) the labor shortage in ECEC, influenced by factors such as wage levels, retirements and the increasing qualification requirements, is expected to keep deepening. Especially, the need for social pedagogues in ECEC is increasing. Theoretical frameworks and key concepts of this article are social pedagogy, integration, participation, and integrity. Professional competencies of social pedagogue in ECEC serve as the framework, guiding the work of social pedagogues in ECEC. In this qualitative research data has been gathered via interviews, learning diaries, observations, and scenario-based case workshops. The research project follows legal and organizational regulations considering privacy notice, anonymization of research data, consent of participants, and secure data storage. ECEC offers a unique forum for immigrant ECEC professionals' integration to Finnish society. In addition to building trust and supporting communication in everyday encounters, concrete tools, such as materials and technical applications are helpful. These findings introduce methods and solutions that can be used to support the integration of immigrant ECEC professionals.

early childhood education, integration, integrity, social pedagogy, participation, international students

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

“But nobody has ever asked me“: Immigrant Children’s Educational Pathways to Participation and Equity in Northern Finland from Parents Perspective

Presenters:
Riikka Kess, University of Oulu, Finland

All authors:
Riikka Kess, University of Oulu, Finland
Marika Oikarinen, University of Oulu, Finland
Sara Murtonen, University of Oulu, Finland
Safa Mohamed, University of Oulu, Finland
Saira Rashad, University of Oulu, Finland

This study examines how parents of children with immigrant backgrounds perceive and support resilience needed for educational equity in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Children with immigrant background face diverse stumbling blocks in educational pathways (Lastikka et al., 2025; Kalalahti et al., 2025). Understanding parents’ views on navigating the barriers and expectations of education system is critical in strengthening participation and equity in ECEC. This study is grounded on the concept of resilience (e.g. Arslan, 2024; Estrada-Moreno et al., 2025) which underscores its multilayered nature and development through individual experiences intertwined with educational contexts. We implemented a qualitative study, selected 18 parents with immigrant backgrounds from northern Finland through snow-ball method and conducted theme interviews. Ethical considerations were ensured through informed consent and continuous collaborative verification by the five-member research team. Three themes emerged: 1) Parents express daily care as a way to supports children's continuous resilience, 2) Attitudes, approaches and practices used by professionals in the crossroads of language and culture vary and influence significantly the pathways to equity 3) Being part of a peer-community and having friendships strengthens resilience both for parents and their children. While education aids inclusion and participation, it also presents adversities requiring resilience both from children and parents. The study calls for recognition of pedagogy of hope and resilience as a crucial element that aid educational equity. The study argues that there is a need to address family adversity and systemic risks to support the educational pathways of children with immigrant background now and in the future.

resilience, immigrant families, early childhood education and care, participation, inclusion

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

Professional Stakeholders and Immigrant Parents with Young Children Working Together to Learn

Presenters:
Zeynep Isik-Ercan, Rowan University, United States

All authors:
Zeynep Isik-Ercan, Rowan University, United States
Nicole Edwards, Rowan University, United States

This study aims to document how professional learning opportunities and collaboration with immigrant parents support professional stakeholder 1) awareness about immigrant families’ strengths and challenges, and 2) commitment towards working with families. Previous research on parents of young immigrant children rarely focused on interventions to improve stakeholder capacity (Gregory, 2017). Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological Systems

Theory (2000) framed our understanding of immigrant families and their children's development within their multidimensional networks of interactions in their environment. We utilized a design-based methodological approach from the interpretive paradigm. 15 stakeholders and 10 parents with young children from New Jersey, U.S. joined the project. We implemented pre-post measures, training for stakeholders, meetings with other stakeholders to share learning, parent-stakeholder conversations, journaling, and interviews. We positioned immigrant parents as experts in the study, followed IRB ethics procedures and provided stipends for participants. Analysis demonstrated moderately increased stakeholder knowledge and awareness, improved commitment to provide advocacy efforts, and willingness to advocate for immigrant parents with young children. Stakeholders found learning from parents and meeting with colleagues helpful in serving families' needs better. Parents valued meeting stakeholders and acknowledged learning valuable information about navigating supports and services. Given the lack of training in culturally sensitive care in education, healthcare, and service professionals, interventions for professionals may create a welcoming environment and establish trust with immigrants. Bronfenbrenner, U. (2000). Ecological systems theory. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Psychology (Vol. 3, pp. 129–133). Oxford University PressGregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. The future of children, 117-136.

immigrants, parent engagement, young children, stakeholders, collaboration

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: New Jersey Health Foundation 2024 Grant.

Symposium A16 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

(SoS): CHILD-CENTRED BELONGING: CREATING CURRICULA FOR CHILDREN'S AGENCY AND PARTICIPATION

Chaired by: Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

Participation and Place in a Digital World: How Pupils Express 'Cynefin' in the Curriculum for Wales

Presenters:
Amanda Thomas, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

All authors:
Amanda Thomas, University of South Wales, United Kingdom
Alys Parkins, University of SouthWales, United Kingdom

This research investigates how pupils conceptualise 'Cynefin' (belonging) within the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and how digital and participatory methods can amplify their voices. Phase 1 of this study (Chapman et al., 2023) identified themes influencing pupils' sense of belonging, including people, place, and activities. However, limited attention has been given to how digital tools and participatory approaches can enhance children's agency in expressing 'Cynefin'. This research builds on prior findings and responds to Welsh Government priorities for inclusive curriculum development. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to understand the influences on children's sense of belonging and participatory rights frameworks (UNCRC) to foreground children's voices. Concepts of agency and democratic participation are central, situated within the digital age. A qualitative, interpretive paradigm underpins the research. Data were collected through focus group interviews, object-based elicitation and digital resources, where pupils discussed items representing their 'Cynefin'. Digital tools were used to capture children's perspectives. Data are analysed thematically using NVivo. Children and parents provided informed consent, with clear options for any child to withdraw on the day. Participation was voluntary, and safeguarding protocols were followed throughout. Findings suggest that pupils' sense of 'Cynefin' is deeply relational, linked to family, friends, and activities rather than national identity. Digital tools provided new opportunities for pupils to articulate belonging creatively, enhancing their agency and participation in curriculum conversations. The research

highlights the need for policy frameworks that integrate digital participatory methods to ensure children's voices shape curriculum development. It suggests that fostering 'Cynefin' requires recognising emotional and relational dimensions of belonging alongside digital engagement.

cynefin, belonging, agency, participation, CfW

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

Project funding: This research was funded by the Welsh Government through the Collaborative Research Network for Curriculum and Pedagogy.The Collaborative Research Networks (CRNs) are forums for the development of educational research practice across all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales. CRNs bring together researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, alongside practitioners and other stakeholders, and allow them to share ideas and research interests.

High-quality early childhood curricula – Idealised or Realised Child-Centred Democracy

Presenters:
Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

All authors:
Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

The aim of the research was to identify what are the features of a high-quality early childhood curriculum within the English context. The quality of early childhood education (ECE) has been well researched and theorised, but has lacked specific consideration of a high-quality curriculum (Wood and Hedges, 2016). Bernstein's (1990) Pedagogic Device is a model for analysing how knowledge is converted into curricula. The field of recontextualization is where knowledge is appropriated, relocated and refocused to form its own order. In ECE contexts, this can be taken to be knowledge about child development that is used to inform curricula. Bernstein distinguishes between the Official Recontextualisation Field (ORF) and Pedagogic Recontextualisation Field (PRF), the former being the official 'state' interpretation of knowledge, the latter belonging to those working in ECE. Drawing on a Delphi Survey of experts, a consensus method advantageous for defining constructs such as those relating to quality (Sinha and Saracho, 2014), the focus here is on the tension between the ORF and PRF. The survey was anonymous, but participants were made aware that part of the survey design is to send their full responses to other participants for comment. These responses were redacted as needed, including removing any potentially identifiable information. In analysing the data through Bernstein's ORF and PRF, it is evident that the discursive production of the PRF is shaped by a philosophical child-centred, democratic, discourse, which is contrasted with the ORF as focused on restrictive understandings of child development. The findings have implications for how educators realise a child-centred curriculum, not just idealise it.

curriculum, child-centred agency, contextualisation, Delphi survey

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: Montessori Global Education.

Child-centred Belonging: Creating curricula for children's agency and participation

Presenters:
Wendy Briggs, University of South Wales, United Kingdom
Sharon Phillips, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

All authors:

Wendy Briggs, University of South Wales, United Kingdom
Sharon Phillips, University of South Wales, United Kingdom
Sarah Cook, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

This study examines how the concept of cynefin can be used as a pedagogical lens to support place-based approaches in early childhood education that foster young children's sense of belonging, agency, and participation in a digital age. It explores how engagement with cynefin within the Curriculum for Wales can promote relational, participatory learning through digital and community-based experiences. The study builds on literature in place-based pedagogy that emphasises learning rooted in communities and cultures (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2013), alongside research linking belonging, participation, and well-being in early childhood (Riley et al., 2020). It draws on conceptualisations of cynefin as an expression of place, identity, and community (Chapman et al., 2023). The study is framed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, integrated with cynefin and sociocultural theories of learning. This framework enables analysis of how place-based pedagogy operates across home, school, community, and digital contexts (Adams, 2022; Williams, 2021). Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopts a qualitative, conceptual methodology. It analyses policy documents, research literature, and practitioner resources in early childhood education. Ethical considerations prioritise children's rights to voice, express children's agency, participation, and relational care, ensuring inclusive representation of diverse families and communities, in alignment with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). The discussion suggests that pedagogies grounded in cynefin, strengthen young children's agency and democratic participation by embedding learning in relationships, lived experiences, and place, while complementing digital forms of engagement. Findings suggest that cynefin-informed pedagogies strengthen children's agency and democratic participation by embedding learning in relationships, lived experiences, and place, while complementing digital engagement.

cynefin, place-based pedagogy, belonging, agency, curriculum for Wales

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: Curriculum Research Network (CRN) Welsh Government Funded Research Project.

Symposium A17 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 13, floor -1

SECURING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL SAFETY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETUPS

Chaired by: Lieny Jeon, University of Virginia, United States

The Role of Psychological Safety in Supporting Early Childhood Educators of Color's Well-Being and Relationships with Children

Presenters:
Lieny Jeon, University of Virginia, United States

All authors:
Lieny Jeon, University of Virginia, United States
Xiangyu Zhao, University of Virginia, United States

We aim to understand the role of perceived psychological safety among early childhood educators of color (ECEOCs) in their positive psychological functioning, including resilience and flourishing, and their relationships with children. Despite research showing ECEOCs' vital role in fostering inclusive early care and education (ECE) environments (Glock & Schuchart, 2020), they face challenges stemming from systemic oppression and limited resources (Austin et al., 2019). Nevertheless, ECEOCs are likely developing unique assets and strengths that enable them to thrive in the

ECE field. This study uses the Positive Psychology Framework that helps understand factors that enable ECEOCs to flourish and stay resilient (Seligman, 2011). We examine how external resources (i.e., psychological safety) support positive emotions and relationships with children. Using a sample of 299 self-identified ECEOCs serving children birth to age five across the US, we conducted structural equation modeling to explore direct and indirect associations between psychological safety, flourishing, resilience, and child relationships (conflict and closeness). Participants received informed consent including their privacy, risks, and benefits. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The contact information for gift cards or follow-up interviews was kept separate from survey responses. ECEOC-perceived psychological safety was directly associated with their conflicts with children. Psychological safety was positively associated with resilience and flourishing. In turn, flourishing was associated with closeness with children, and resilience was associated with conflict with children. Our findings highlight that fostering ECEOCs' positive emotions through safe and supportive environments helps build positive relationships with children. This underscores the importance of creating inclusive and trustful ECE settings to strengthen both educator and child well-being.

resilience, flourishing, relationships, well-being, diversity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This work was funded by the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development's Innovation, Development, Exploration Awards (IDEAs).

How arts-based methods can help families (parents and children) to articulate the lived experience of multiple insecurities

Presenters:
Helen Lomax, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Helen Lomax, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom
Sally Pearse, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

To generate evidence about the impact of multiple insecurities on families' wellbeing and opportunities (education, training, employment). The study developed original arts-based methods to support families to voice their experiences and visual vignettes to enable policymakers to 'see'. While previous research has explored the prevalence of individual risks (Biosca et al 2020), few have explored the experience of multiple insecurities, how these impact families and what decision-makers can learn from this. Our theoretical and conceptual work draws on the Capabilities Approach, recognising people's capabilities to positively influence their lives and others around them (Sen, 1999), what supports and what challenges them to flourish. Framed by an interpretivist paradigm and attentive participatory methodology (Lomax and Smith, 2024) our study develops novel image elicitation methods to support parents and children to articulate their experiences through co-produced picture cards (Tunstall, Lomax, Pearse et al, 2025). Our research draws on feminist care ethics (Doucet and Mauthner, 2014), demonstrating how researchers can support families' inclusion throughout the process of knowledge generation and exchange. This includes how arts-based methods can enable participants to narratively and textually document and share their stories while retaining their anonymity (Lomax, 2020). Our paper presents methodological insights from the interviews and focus groups with parents and children. We focus on the affordances of the methods that enabled families to reflect on their experiences of insecurities, their aspirations and their messages for policymakers about what they need to flourish. The arts-based methods and visual outputs are being disseminated to decision-makers to help them recognise the impact of multiple insecurities on families.

parents, children, multiple insecurities, wellbeing, education

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

Project funding: ESRC - Economic and Social Research Council and SYIP (South Yorkshire Innovation Programme, UK).

Collaboration with young children; co-constructing knowledge: what does it mean to feel safe today?

Presenters:
Kerry Holman, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Kerry Holman, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

This study creates new knowledge through young children's voices about what it means to 'feel safe', adopting a participatory and collaborative approach in order to inform a local charity's work with primary schools. Children are experts in knowing and recording their own worlds (Berson et al., 2019); when we collaborate with children, new social structures can emerge in which everyone's voice is heard (MacNaughton, Hughes and Smith, 2007). The research was embedded within a child-centred approach, alluding to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory. The study was conducted within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm. Undergraduate early childhood studies students adopted the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) collaborating with young children to explore 'what it means to feel safe' using child-friendly, participatory methods including drawing, photovoice and videography. Students collaborated with around 20 young children (aged 2 to 13) including working online with some overseas, adopting a convenience sample. The project formed part of a formative assessment for students, thus institutional ethical approval was gained. Students undertaking the research with young children obtained parental consent, and ongoing assent from children in line with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Children could stop the research (and did!) whenever they wished, with decisions and voices respected by the students. Initial findings highlight the importance of emotional safety for children over the physical safety, and findings will be used by a local organisation to support their outreach work with primary schools, supporting age appropriate discussions around human safety in today's world. This presentation acknowledges lessons learned from this project, linking to my own doctoral research.

collaboration, co-construction, safety, participation, experiences

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

Symposium A18 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 14, floor -1

THE ROLE OF PLAY IN DEVELOPING AGENCY, INVOLVEMENT AND WELLBEING

Chaired by: John Siraj Blatchford, TACTYC, United Kingdom

Dialog Games as Democratic Pedagogy: Teacher Educators' Insights into Fostering Participation and Agency in Sustainability Education

Presenters:
Evi Petersen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

All authors:
Evi Petersen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Elias Solheim, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

This study explores how early childhood teacher educators (ECT-educators) experience dialog games as pedagogical tools in sustainability education. It asks: How do teacher educators perceive the contribution of dialog games to student participation, agency, and critical engagement, including the challenges and conditions shaping their pedagogical use? Previous research shows that dialogic pedagogy fosters active participation, shared meaning-making, and democratic learning through structured dialogue (Alexander, 2020; Wegerif et al., 2019), while sustainability education emphasizes value-laden discussions that promote reflection and action (Bjørnø & Aksov, 2023). The study draws on dialogic pedagogy and nature-relatedness (Nisbet et al., 2009) to examine how structured dialogue supports democratic participation in sustainability discussions. We used a critical realist, exploratory qualitative design. Four ECT-educators were purposively selected for their experience with dialog games in sustainability-related teacher education. The small sample enabled in-depth analysis. Data were generated through a 90-minute focus-group, pre-recorded reflections, and teaching materials, and analyzed using Systematic Text Condensation (Malterud, 2012). The study follows the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2025) on informed consent, confidentiality, and transparency. Participants received written and oral information, gave voluntary consent, and were anonymized. Member checking supported accuracy and respect for participants' voices. Dialog games fostered agency by activating quieter voices, deepening engagement, and enabling negotiation of diverse perspectives. Tensions arose between student autonomy and educator scaffolding. Group size, time, and physical space influenced participation. Dialog games worked best in combination with other dialogic activities (e.g., walk-and-talk). The study offers recommendations for designing participatory learning environments that foreground democratic dialogue in sustainability education, supporting agency and ethical deliberation.

dialogic pedagogy, education, student-agency, sustainability, participatory-learning

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Sociodramatic Play and Sustainable Citizenship in Early Childhood

Presenters:
John Siraj Blatchford, TACTYC, United Kingdom

All authors:
John Siraj Blatchford, TACTYC, United Kingdom
Dr Carmela Manas, Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), United Arab Emirates

The research aims to provide a closer understanding and develop a more generally applicable analytic model in the research and promotion of socio-dramatic play in the context of sustainable citizenship. The paper provides a secondary analysis of data collected in the Phd thesis completed by the first author in 2025. The new analysis engages with work by Yrjö Engeström, Marilyn Fleer and others applying Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). CHAT is applied at both an historic, and interactional level, and extends this analysis drawing upon the ecological perspective of Eleanor Gibson and the insights of studies in embodied and extended cognition. The study combines historical–conceptual analysis with practice-based theorising, and analysis of practice vignettes involving poverty, migration, scarcity and discrimination, social roles such as owner, worker and gatekeeper. A multi-method data collection strategy was employed with a group of children in a London preschool, including video recordings, observations, photographs and artefacts, enabling a rich and triangulated account of children's engagement with social sustainability themes. Sessions included at least two teachers, and a rigorous consent process was followed: guardians provided written consent, children chose pseudonyms, and verbal consent was recorded. All permissions were secured, and children were empowered through open dialogue. An expanded analysis of Froebel's concept of 'occupations' offers a valuable framework for understanding sustained, tool-mediated practices in which children repeatedly enter, vary and coordinate enacted roles. This supports a view of sustainable citizenship as participatory capability rather than topic coverage. The study contributes towards providing a conceptual framework for the development of an emergent education for sustainable citizenship.

sustainability, citizenship, sociodramatic play, CHAT, Frobel

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A Case Study of Toddler Narrative Play: Enhanced Involvement and Well-Being

Presenters:
Giedre Sujetaite Volungeviciene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Giedre Sujetaite Volungeviciene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Gabrielė Simanauskaitė, Istoriju namai, Lithuania

The aim of the study was to analyze the expression of involvement and well-being in children aged 1–3 years during narrative play. There remains a lack of evidence regarding how and when play during toddlerhood demonstrates high quality. According to a systematic review (Skene et al., 2022), guided play is the most effective method to support children's learning and development. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of narrative play, which has also been incorporated to enhance practitioners' skills (Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2014, 2018). Within a cultural-historical framework, pedagogical assessment of the quality of toddlers' collective pretend play remains limited. This research employed a qualitative case study design. For three months, narrative play sessions were organized with a group of toddlers. Every three weeks, their well-being and engagement were evaluated using the CEGO KU Leuven scale. Teachers and parents provided informed consents following the university's ethical guidelines. Ethical permit: SA-EK-25-74. Children were aware of cameras and had the right to withdraw at any time. The main findings highlight that both indicators—involvement and well-being—were evident in children during narrative play. Involvement was observed when toddlers focused on the task, were motivated to help, and showed mental engagement. Toddlers' well-being improved as they began to act more spontaneously, demonstrated vitality and self-confidence, felt at ease, and became more open to the world. The case study demonstrated that narrative play for toddlers is a high-quality learning process. This approach, which involves guided pretend play with a story and consistent characters, continuously promotes toddlers' social-emotional and cognitive development.

toddlers, narrative play, quality in ECE, involvement, well-being

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

Project funding: Research project “The Emerging Community of Learners in a Toddler Classroom: Well-being, Involvement, and the Sense of Belonging” (P-EDU-23-4) in Research Council of Lithuania project "Breakthrough in Educational Research" (10-044-P-0001).

Symposium A19 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED TOYS AND DIGITALLY INSPIRED PLAY

Chaired by: Liz Chesworth, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

Reimagining Early Digital Play: Extending the DPF with TETs for Children Aged 1–4 Years

Presenters:
Dimitra Bourha, University of West Attica, Greece

All authors:

Dimitra Bourha, University of West Attica, Greece
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece

This study examines the implementation and refinement of the Digital Play Framework (DPF) (Bird & Edwards, 2015) by exploring how young children under four years of age engage with technology-enhanced toys (TETs) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. While digital play has been shown to support children's cognitive and social-emotional development (Chu et al., 2024; Lawrence & Choe, 2021), existing research has largely focused on screen-based technologies and older children. In contrast, TETs, physical toys incorporating digital or technological features, remain under-researched (Hall et al., 2021). Guided by sociocultural theories of play (Hutt, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978), the study conceptualises young children as active meaning-makers who construct knowledge through interaction, exploration, and play. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm, data were collected through non-participatory observations, including field notes and video recordings, of 70 children during free play with TETs across five Greek ECEC centres. Ethical approval was obtained from the University's ethics committee, ensuring parental consent, child assent, anonymisation, and secure data management. Thematic analysis revealed the presence of both epistemic and ludic play, consistent with the DPF, while also identifying additional forms of engagement not fully captured by the original framework, such as reduced or selective use, emotional attachment to specific TETs, and clear toy preferences. Based on these findings, a revised version of the DPF is proposed. Implications for observing, assessing, and pedagogically integrating digital play for children under four are discussed, offering educators a practical tool for understanding and supporting very young children's digital play experiences.

technology-enhanced toys, digital play, infants and toddlers, digital play framework, early childhood pedagogy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Why do young children's (post-)digital play interests matter for curriculum-making?

Presenters:
Liz Chesworth, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Fiona Scott, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Daniel Kuria, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

All authors:
Liz Chesworth, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Fiona Scott, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Daniel Kuria, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Shabana Roscoe, University of West London, United Kingdom
Yao Wang, University of Newcastle, United Kingdom
Cath Bannister, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

This paper asks critical questions about how children's interests and identities are implicit in their digital play practices at home and why they matter for early childhood settings. Building on research about children's interests (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011) and digital play (Scott, 2026; Scott 2023), we offer new insights about how digital play interests are foundational for meaningful learning experiences and identity development. We use the conceptual lenses of Funds of Knowledge (Moll and González, 1997) and Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014) to inform deeper understandings of how family and community practices mediate digital play interests. These lenses foreground the potential of children's interests for connecting home with settings. We draw on a UK study about digital play and well-being with children and their families, presenting the cases of four children. Broadly interpretivist, the methodology was informed by ethnographic traditions. Multiple qualitative methods were employed flexibly across visits and adapted for local contexts. Ethical practice followed BERA (2018) and AoIR (2019)

guidelines. Consent and assent were understood as provisional and dynamic with researchers prioritising careful attention to body language and ongoing negotiation with participation. We present examples that show how children's digital play interests are inseparable from their everyday worlds in that they both draw upon, and contribute to, sociocultural practices. The findings hold important implications for early childhood curriculum, policy and practice in that the deep interests and identities implicit in children's digital play practices at home can be understood as rich resources for curriculum-making.

digital play, interests, funds of knowledge, funds of identity, family practices

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This research was produced as part of the Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children (RITEC) project. This project was co-founded with the LEGO Group and funded by the LEGO Foundation.

Reshaping Early Childhood Education? evidence from a systematic review of Technology-Enhanced Toys

Presenters:
Anastasia Misirli, Uninersity of Patras, Greece

All authors:
Anastasia Misirli, Uninersity of Patras, Greece
Matina Sakka, University of Patras, Greece
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece
Konstantinos Lavidas, University of Patras, Greece
George Kaliampos, University of Patras, Greece
Christoforos Karachristos, University of Patras, Greece
Vassilis Komis, University of Patras, Greece
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

This systematic review synthesises quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research on Technology-Enhanced Toys (TETs) and their impact on learning and play agency used at school or at home for young children aged 2-8. Previous studies found marketised TETs had limited interactivity, closed designs, and lacked creative opportunities (Hatzigianni et al., 2023). Other research focused only on active play for ages 3–5 (Wang et al., 2022). A gap remains in linking technological affordances to diverse learning goals and play types in school and home settings. This study is grounded in Affordance Theory (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988) and sociocultural theories (Vygotskian perspectives) that emphasise mediated interaction and agency. Content analysis was conducted to answer two research questions: RQ1: What clusters of technological affordances can be aligned with clusters of learning goals and types of play and activity? RQ2: 'What characteristics do TeTs, that were found to promote creative technology-enhanced learning and play, have?'. The review followed the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) ethical standards and PRISMA (BMJ, 2021) guidelines to ensure transparency, integrity, and minimise bias. It identified peer-reviewed empirical studies on children's engagement with TETs. The findings show a prevalent lack of interactive features and few off-screen play opportunities in current research. Ultimately, the study provides evidence-based indicators to assist educators in selecting appropriate tools and offers implications for how TETs can empower children's learning and development of "4C" skills.

technology-enchanced-toys, learning, digital-play, technological-pedagogical affordances

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

Project funding: Funded by the European Union and the scheme Erasmus+ SCH:2025-1-EL01-KA220-SCH-000354487: 'Technology Enhanced Toys (TETs): Educational dimensions of Technology Enhanced Toys in Early Childhood Education and Care and development of 21st-century competencies.

Symposium A20 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

THE ROLE OF REFLECTION AND INTERACTION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Chaired by: Natasha Tania Stansilas, NTUC First Campus, Singapore

From Reflection to Agency: Applying the PERMAH Framework to Deepen Educators' Pedagogical Responsiveness

Presenters:
Natasha Tania Stansilas, NTUC First Campus, Singapore
Cecilia Wong, NTUC First Campus, Singapore

All authors:
Natasha Tania Stansilas, NTUC First Campus, Singapore
Cecilia Wong, NTUC First Campus, Singapore

This ongoing qualitative action research study investigates how structured PERMAH-guided reflection mediates early childhood educators' interpretive sense-making during everyday interactions and how shifts in interpretation reshape pedagogical practice and children's agency. Child agency is increasingly conceptualised as relationally constituted rather than individually possessed (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). Participatory practices remain uneven and are frequently constrained by institutional pressures and behavioural regulation demands (Emilson & Johansson, 2009). While educator wellbeing has been explored (Seligman, 2011), limited research examines how emotional reflexivity shapes the relational conditions through which agency becomes possible in everyday pedagogy. Grounded in sociocultural and relational theories of agency (Emilson & Johansson, 2009), the study conceptualises agency as relationally achieved through educators' interpretive positioning. The PERMAH framework (Seligman, 2011) functions as a reflective scaffold within an interpretivist paradigm, enabling analysis of emotional reflexivity as a pedagogical mechanism. Twelve educators across early childhood centres engaged in iterative reflective cycles over twelve weeks. Surveys, PERMAH-structured journals and semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically. Participation was voluntary with revisited consent, with attention to psychological safety and children's confidentiality Cycle 1 synthesis indicates that structured reflection strengthened educators' emotional reflexivity, reconfiguring interpretive positioning and expanding conditions for children's voice and initiative. Agency was relationally produced through a recursive emotional-pedagogical feedback loop linking educator regulation, participatory structuring and professional identity. Micro-adjustments in language, spatial positioning and responsibility redistribution generated structured autonomy. Findings reposition reflection as relational repositioning, foregrounding emotional reflexivity as conceptual and practical foundation for sustaining meaningful child agency in early childhood practice.

relational agency, emotional reflexivity, participatory pedagogy, reflective practice, professional identity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Promoting early years practitioners' professional learning using a non-manualised flexible evidenced-informed resource

Presenters:
Julia Birchenough, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

All authors:
Julia Birchenough, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom
Soizic Le Courtois, University of Cambridge, 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, United Kingdom

This study explored how to best support early years settings in introducing a non-manualised professional learning resource for early years practitioners: the Early Years Library (EYL). We investigated what implementation without a script looked like and which factors enabled or hindered implementation readiness. Research has neglected to understand how nurseries can mobilise flexible resources for their own learning. A promising facilitator is implementation readiness (Scaccia et al. 2015), yet few studies have reported on its practical application. The study was guided by the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (EPIS) framework (Moullin et al. 2019). With a view to real-world application, we assumed a pragmatist position. Practitioners in participating nurseries completed readiness assessments, weekly dosage surveys and shared their experiences in interviews. We used mixed methods (Creswell et al., 2007) with descriptive measures for quantitative and Framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) for qualitative data analysis. After departmental ethical approval, nurseries signed a Memorandum of Understanding and informed consent was sought from participating staff. All names were replaced with pseudonyms. Rated readiness was high before and after implementation. Knowledge on how to support colleagues in professional development remained relatively low. Interview data showed that readiness enablers were the leaders' commitment to the roll-out, the distribution of roles as well as facilitation of time to engage. The most common reported form of engagement with the EYL was dialogue between practitioners. The findings point to the role of practitioners' agency through collaboration with others in scaffolding their own learning journey.

professional learning, implementation readiness, professional dialogue, leadership role, peer-to-peer support

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This research study was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Effects of a professional development model on infants and toddlers´s agency promotion

Presenters:
Andreia Carvalho, ProChild CoLab, Portugal

All authors:
Andreia Carvalho, ProChild CoLab, Portugal
Silvana Martins, ProChild CoLAB, Portugal
Vanessa Moutinho, ProChild CoLAB, Portugal
Cecília Aguiar, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Portugal
Luísa Barros, Faculdade de Psicologia Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
Ana-Teresa Brito, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Portugal
Joana Cadima, Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação, Universidade do Porto, Portugal
Isabel Soares, Escola de Psicologia da Universidade do Minho, Portugal
Ana Corval, ProChild CoLAB, Portugal

This study assesses the effects of a sustained professional development model (DEC Model) on teacher–child interaction quality in childcare centres. Research consistently shows that high-quality teacher–child interactions

promote children's development, and wellbeing, while also fostering agency through opportunities for initiative, shared control, and sustained engagement (Pianta et al., 2016). However, studies exploring how long-term professional development influences interaction quality in ways that explicitly support children's agency are missing (Buøen et al., 2021; Egert et al., 2018). Quality is understood as a dual construct: structural quality, encompassing the organisational and environmental conditions of childcare centers, and process quality, reflecting the nature of teacher–child interactions, including responsiveness, support for exploration, and the facilitation of children's initiative (Scobie & Scott, 2017). A longitudinal design followed 39 professionals across three years in nine classrooms, including 142 children. Trained external observers conducted 1.5 hours CLASS Infant and the CLASS Toddler assessment at the beginning and end of each academic year. Analysis focused on Facilitated Exploration (Infant) and Regard for Child Perspectives (Toddler) dimensions, reflecting educators' support for children's initiative, shared control, active participation, and the expansion of their ideas. Informed consent was obtained from participating professionals, institutions and families, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data management. Results show a gradual increase in mean scores groups in Facilitated Exploration (2.87 – 3.54) and Regard for Child Perspectives (3.79 – 4.44) scores across the three years, reflecting increasingly responsive, child-centred, and cognitively expansive interactions. Findings highlight the value of sustained, collaborative professional development for strengthening interaction quality and promoting children's agency in ECEC settings.

agency, quality interactions, childcare, professional development, infants/toddlers

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: These work developed by ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – Association was supported by (i) Fundação Belmiro de Azevedo and (ii) Mission Interface Program from the Resilience and Recuperation Plan, notice nº 01/C05-i02 /2022, approved by ANI - Agência Nacional de Inovação, S.A.

Symposium A21 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

WHAT IS PLAY IN A DIGITAL WORLD?

Chaired by: Marianne Undheim, University of Stavanger, Norway

Children's digitally inspired pretend play in ECEC

Presenters:
Marianne Undheim, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Marianne Undheim, University of Stavanger, Norway

The aim of this study is to explore how children (1–5-year-olds) demonstrate their knowledge of digital technology through pretend play. Several studies (Bird, 2020; Chu et al., 2024; Khoo et al., 2025; Pettersen et al., 2025) point at a need for more studies of children's digitally inspired pretend play. Drawing on post-digital theoretical perspectives (e.g., Marsh, 2019), I explore how children make meaning of their everyday experiences in a digital society. The empirical material consists of seven short stories documented by Norwegian early childhood teachers. The teachers were attending a master course about digital competence in ECEC where they were asked to describe an anonymous observation of children in a pretend play situation with or inspired by digital technology. The stories is analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 34-37). All participants and ECEC settings are anonymised. In line with Norwegian research ethics (NESH, 2024), the teachers have provided their informed consent of the use of the anonymised stories. Preliminary findings show that even very young children demonstrate very specific knowledge of, for example, how to operate a smartphone, through their pretend play with "representative" phones. The children use what they have available as "technology", for example, pieces of wood, stones, Duplo blocks, or toy

wheels. All stories are of children's own initiated play. Through the stories, the children's own voices and what they consider important are promoted. Implications for practice is to notice children's digitally inspired pretend play and acknowledge it as meaningful expressions of children's voices.

pretend play, digital play, observations, knowledge of digital technology, young children

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

Computational thinking as social practice: Interactional processes in digital play

Presenters:
Gulsah Ozturk, Federation University Australia, Australia

All authors:
Gulsah Ozturk, Federation University Australia, Australia

This study examines how computational thinking is enacted in eight four-to five-year-old children's peer interactions during digital play with the coding app - Daisy the Dinosaur. Computational thinking (CT) has gained increasing attention in early childhood education, as digital technologies become embedded in play. While earlier research framed CT as individual cognitive skills, recent work recognises its social dimensions (e.g. Bers, 2020; Resnick, 2017). Research on digital play shows children collaborate during tablet use. However, limited research has examined how CT is organised within children's peer interactions during digital play. This study is informed by a sociocultural perspective that views learning as socially mediated meaning-making. Drawing on Goodwin and Goodwin's (2004) interactional approach, it focuses on how children negotiate meaning through talk and affect. It adopts a qualitative, sociocultural approach. iPad screen recordings from 13 play sessions in an early learning centre in Melbourne, were analysed using interactional analysis. Participants were eight 4-5 year-old children enrolled in a 4-year-old kindergarten program. Ethics approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee. Parental consent and child assent were obtained for audio and screen recording, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Children were informed in age-appropriate ways, and could withdraw at any time. CT emerged through talk as children tested and refined block functions. Exploratory talk supported testing; verbal responsiveness enabled shared understanding; and emotional communication sustained engagement. Study highlights how CT unfolds through peer interaction. It suggests that structuring digital play to prioritise dialogue, is as important as introducing CT concepts through coding activities.

computational thinking, digital play, peer interactions, tablet, interactional analysis

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This study was supported by an internal seed grant fromFederation University Australia.

The Paradox of Play: Artificial Intelligence, Play-Based Pedagogy and Cultural Contexts in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Laura James, International Curriculum Association, United Kingdom

All authors:
Laura James, International Curriculum Association, United Kingdom

This study explores how early childhood education can navigate the emerging relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and play-based pedagogy across diverse cultural contexts. This work draws on established neuroscience and child development research positioning play as fundamental to learning (Panksepp, 2007; Brown, 2009; Diamond, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978), alongside contemporary early years frameworks (International Curriculum Association, 2026). It critically engages with emerging global discourse on AI in education, examining its implications for play-based pedagogy in early childhood (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). The paper adopts paradox theory as a conceptual lens, viewing play and AI not as opposing forces but as coexisting tensions requiring ongoing negotiation. Play is positioned as both pedagogy and mindset. This study takes a qualitative approach, focusing on interpretation and understanding in context. It adopts a conceptual and practice-based methodology, drawing on the author's professional experiences across international early years contexts, informed by ongoing engagement with educators in diverse settings. Ethical considerations were addressed through a non-participant, practice-based approach, with no collection of identifiable data. The study aligns with established international safeguarding principles to prioritise children's rights, wellbeing and agency, and critically considers the ethical use of AI. Educator wellbeing and professional decision-making are considered as central to ensure sustainable contribution. Findings suggest that play-based competencies—creativity, adaptability, collaboration—are foundational to engaging meaningfully with AI. Cultural context significantly shapes how this relationship is perceived and enacted. The paper calls for policy frameworks, research agendas, and professional learning that support educators to integrate AI while preserving the integrity of play-based pedagogy.

play-based learning, artificial intelligence in education, early childhood education, pedagogical paradox, cultural contexts

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

Symposium A22 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 24, floor 1

(SoS): BRIDGING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER CHILDREN: EMERGING PATHWAYS WITHIN THE REFORM ON THE INTEGRATED 0-6 SYSTEM IN ITALY

Chaired by: Arianna Lazzari, University of Bologna, Italy

Between Younger and Older Children: promoting continuity in experience for children from 0 to 6 in Centers for Early Childhood in Italy

Presenters:
Mariacristina Picchio, Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione - CNR, Italy
Isabella Di Giandomenico, Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione - CNR, Italy

All authors:
Mariacristina Picchio, Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione - CNR, Italy
Isabella Di Giandomenico, Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione - CNR, Italy

The study investigates educational practices in Centers for Early Childhood (CEC) aimed to ensure continuity of children's experience from 0 to 6 in ECEC services. CEC- which bring together one or more services for 0-3 and a preschool in a single building - were recently established in Italy within the framework of a reform aimed at overcoming ECEC split system both to increase accessibility to ECEC provision and to promote children's smooth transitions from 0-3 service to pre-school (Maselli & Zanobi, 2023; Sannipoli, 2022). These centers provide a favorable setting for implementing a unitary approach to early childhood education from 0 to 6 and guaranteeing continuity in children's social and cognitive experience (Conus, Garnier & Pirard, 2026). An action-research was carried out in a CEC located in a mountainous area of Central Italy. During an educational year, interactions among

children attending the 0-3 service and preschool children were filmed by researchers and documented by professionals by ethnographic notes. Videos and notes were analysed and discussed in periodical meetings. The purpose and ethical principles of the action-research were explained and informed consent was obtained. The analysis showed that a social context in which younger and older children can regularly meet and share activities promoted meaningful social exchanges among them, children's agency and the development of a shared sense of belonging to the center. CEC provided professionals with the opportunity to develop a common understanding of children's social and cognitive potentialities throughout the period 0 to 6 years.

integrated ECEC system, continuity, children's interactions, action-research, CDP development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The reform on the integrated 0-6 system amidst pedagogical experimentation and institutional challenges: developments over the last decade.

Presenters:
Arianna Lazzari, University of Bologna, Italy

All authors:
Arianna Lazzari, University of Bologna, Italy

The presentation analyse trends and tensions underlying the implementation of the reform on the 0-6 integrated system in Italy, enacted in 2015 to overcome the previously existing split between childcare and preschool provision. Following up on the extensive body of literature investigating the issue of ECEC integration in relation to pedagogical (Sannipoli,Falcinelli&Raspa,2022), institutional (Rosa&DeSerio,2021) and policy dimensions (Serapioni,2023), this contribution sheds light on how reform implementation processes unfolds at macro-, meso- and micro-level by identifying path-dependent constraints and factors enabling change (Scheiwe&Willekens,2009). The concept of hybridity is adopted as theoretical lens to further explore current developments in the governance of public services - thus including the ECEC sector – and their impact on institutional cultures from an organizational studies perspective (Denis,Ferlie&VanGhestel,2015;Wenger,1996). The study combines secondary analysis of legislation, policy documents and pedagogical guidelines with primary analysis of data derived from semi-structured interviews to key decision-makers by adopting a qualitative interpretative approach (Lewis,Ritchie,etal.2003). An inductive process aimed at generating themes and sub-themes from qualitative data through framework analysis was used for generating findings that are both grounded in the participants' experiences and accessible to policy-makers. The study was carried out as part of the EU-funded project INTRANS, according to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Research findings show that hybridity between childcare and preschool institutions produces both tensions (professional identity conflicts between educators and teachers; resistance to role redefinition) and opportunities (cross-fertilisation of care and education, pedagogical continuity approaches and smooth transitions). Effective integration would require a better coordination of top-down policy steering and bottom-up pedagogical innovation processes.

ECEC policy, reform implementatioN, hybridity, pedagogical innovation, Italy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The study was supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture through the InTrans project, which is funded by the Erasmus+ KA3 programme (grant agreement no. 612133-EPP-1-2019-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN).

Joint in-service professional development as catalizer of change: sustaining pedagogical experimentation on educational continuity and transitions in Emilia-Romagna Region.

Presenters:
Lucia Balduzzi, University of Bologna, Italy

All authors:
Lucia Balduzzi, University of Bologna, Italy

The contribuition explores how participatory action-research – implemented within a joint professional development pathway involving pedagogical coordinators and preschool leaders – can support grassroots implementation of the reform on the integrated 0–6 system. The research builds on national and international literature on workforce professionalization (European Commission Working Group on ECEC-WG, 2020), in-service professional development (Peleman et al.,2018) and professional learning communities (Sharmahd et al.,2018). The conceptual framework of the study is informed by theories on transformative and situated learning (Mezirow,2018;Lave&Wenger,1991), as well as by theories on transformational leadership in organizational cultures (Bass& Avolio,1996). Participatory action-research for professional development (Asquini,2018) was adoped as paradigm for conducting the study. Pedagogical coordinators and preschool leaders were involved as co-researchers, actively participating in data collection and analysis processes leading to the co-design of innovative transition practices. The data collected included verbatim transcripts of reflective meetings and group-work documentation produced by participants. The study was carried out as part of a larger EU-funded project (INTRANS), according to the principles of European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Research findings delve into key success factors and obstacles experienced by participants in implementing innovative practices fostering educational continuity. Reflexive methods and tools sustaining participatory co-design across 0-3 and 3-6 institutions were identified as key success factors for enabling the creation of inter-professional learning communities sustaining pedagogical experimentation across transitions. Insufficient support/recognition from school directors and local authorities, staff turnover, historically siloed management cultures across multiple providers were pointed out as major obstacles hindering the positive outcome and sustainability of innovative transition practice.

educational continuity, transitions, in-service professional development, Emilia-Romagna

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The study was supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture through the InTrans project, which is funded by the Erasmus+ KA3 programme (grant agreement no. 612133-EPP-1-2019-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN).

Symposium A23 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC CONTEXTS

Chaired by: Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

Curiosity, encounters and the (in)visibility of historical and transnational diversity

Presenters:
Anja Pesch, University of Inland Norway, Norway

All authors:
Anja Pesch, University of Inland Norway, Norway
Florian Hiss, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

Taking the celebrations of Sámi National Day and International Mother Language Day as a starting point, our study investigates encounters of historical and transnational diversity in one educational setting - a kindergarten in the Arctic region of Norway. Specifically, we explore the role of children's curiosity about language and the teachers' response as process of encountering diversities and reimagining decoloniality. The study builds on research on multicultural school events (e.g. DeWilde & Skrefsrud, 2021) and celebration of the Sámi national day in Norwegian schools (e.g. Olsen & Sollid, 2019). Our study is framed by the concepts of coloniality and decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) analyzed as contextualized ideological practices (Rambukwella & Zavala, 2025), and a relational understanding of curiosity (Menning, 2019; Phillips, 2016). We conducted team ethnography in a kindergarten over the period of one year, with participant observation, interviews with staff and parents and documentation of the semiotic landscape as empirical data. We collected informed consent from all adult participants and from guardians for their children. We ensured children's consent through always paying close attention to their verbal and non-verbal utterances. Withdrawal was possible at any time. We argue that while policies keep diversities apart and imply both colonial and decolonial traces, children's curiosity and kindergarten teachers' responses may bring them together and lead to practices of repair and reimagination of relations between different minorities and majorities. The study has implications for pedagogical practices by emphasizing the significance of children's curiosity that brings different qualities to understanding linguistic diversities and encounters between them.

linguistic diversity, minoritized languages, (de-)coloniality, social curiosity, multicultural school events

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

Project funding: The project is funded by the Research Council of Norway, project number 325039.

Unlocking potential: Enhancing language assessment in multilingual contexts through interprofessional collaboration in ECEC

Presenters:
Nina Theis, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Anja Siemens, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

All authors:
Nina Theis, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Anja Siemens, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Bianka Wachtlin, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

This study investigates early childhood education (ECE) educators' self-assessed competencies in evaluating the language skills of multilingual children, their expectations regarding collaboration with speech-language therapists (SLT's) and the potential benefits of interprofessional cooperation in daycare settings. The aim is to highlight the value of such collaboration and explore how it can be applied within ECE contexts. With rising linguistic diversity in German daycare centers, educators face increasing challenges in assessing multilingual children's language development. Research shows considerable variability in educators' knowledge concerning language assessment (Wirts, Fischer & Cordes, 2021) and multilingual children with language issues are often referred late to speech therapy (Wiefferink et al., 2020). Grounded in interprofessional and sociocultural perspectives on language development, the study conceptualizes language assessment as collaborative, context-sensitive process. Using data from the SpraBiL project, the study combined educator questionnaires, case discussions, focus groups, and a piloted multi-component interprofessional assessment procedure conducted jointly by educators and SLT's in four settings. Ethical approval was granted by the university's ethics committee. Participants provided informed consent and were actively involved in a participatory process, allowing them to shape the study's content, timing, and their level of

engagement at any time. Findings indicate that many educators feel insecure in assessing multilingual children. Collaboration with SLT's enhanced diagnostic confidence, provided complementary professional perspectives, and facilitated a more holistic understanding of children's language abilities. Establishing systematic cooperation between educators and SLT's emerges as a key strategy for improving diagnostic quality and language support for multilingual children.

multilingualism, language assessment, interprofessional collaboration, speech and language therapy, professionalisation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The SpraBiL project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

What Do Multilingual Families Need? Voices from Four German ECE Settings

Presenters:
Anja Siemens, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

All authors:
Halah Elkarif, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Bianka Wachtlin, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Anja Siemens, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

This study investigates the perspectives, practices, and needs of multilingual families regarding their children's multilingual development in Germany. It is part of the broader SpraBiL project (2024–2026), which addresses language support for multilingual children in German ECE settings. The research gives voice to multilingual families and addresses an empirical gap, complementing studies in Belgium (Van der Wildt et al., 2023) and Norway (Stąpor et al., 2025). The study draws on family language policy and sociocultural-ecological perspectives, highlighting how parents' beliefs and strategies shape children's multilingual development (Spolsky, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). A participatory research design was employed, including multilingual project materials, iterative consent procedures, feedback workshops, and semi-structured interviews with parents of 26 multilingual children across four ECE settings. Parents provided written and voice-recorded consent after being informed about research aims, procedures, and their rights, ensuring transparency and cultural sensitivity. Project materials, consent forms, and interviews were available in German, English, Arabic, and Turkish, enabling multilingual families to participate fully and express their perspectives with minimal loss in translation. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed five main themes: (1) expectation of support for children's German language development, (2) need for clarity on language proficiency, (3) practice of maintaining first languages, (4) perspectives on nurturing multilingual environments, and (5) experiences with culturally sensitive communication with ECE staff and centers. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating multilingual parents' voices in research and practice, as understanding their perspectives can enhance culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive ECE practices, supporting multilingual children's development and family engagement.

multilingualism, parental perspectives, language diversity, early childhood education, germany

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

(SoS): DIGITAL COMPETENCE AND EMPOWERMENT OF ECE PROFESSIONALS

Chaired by: Sarika Kewalramani, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Digital Competence Development in Early Childhood Professionals: Harnessing the INSPIRE Model

Presenters:
Sarika Kewalramani, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Sarika Kewalramani, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
Weipeng Yang, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece

This study examines innovative recent developments in curricula and pedagogical discourses around early childhood professionals digital competence development via professional development avenues. By expanding the notion of digital technologies integration (Arnott et al., 2020; OECD, 2023), teaching perspectives, and educators' practices in 4 countries - Australia, Hong Kong, Norway and Greece, we conceptualise and apply a professional development model (INSPIRE), and apply the model across cultural contexts. Technologies as the third teacher (Malaguzzi, 1998) is not a novel concept, yet to date, research still debates about how and why technologies can be integrated for transformative teaching practices. Presenting qualitative findings from four cases, we offer tangible examples of teacher-centric professional development – one that inspires early childhood professionals, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers to use a variety of multimodal technologies within their repertoire of play-based practices. Ethics guidelines were followed as per university approvals especially in relation to the pedagogical integration of using AI tools in safe and ethical manner to support teachers. We show evidence of how practitioners can come together to build communities of practice (e.g., STEM-focused play for and with young children, teaching computational thinking and language related outcomes), support their digital competence development as critical pedagogues and integrate a variety of evolving technology-based play (e.g., AI platforms). Implications lie in policy stakeholders to empower early childhood leaders in understanding how digital competence development occurs through cultural learnings, is inclusive, not discipline-based, is holistic. In reframing digital competence development as a naturalistic process, to inspire professionals integrate multimodal technologies in their practices.

digital competence, multimodal, professional development, technologies as third teacher, inspire

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Multimodal and Interactive Teaching and Learning: A New Approach to Early Childhood Biological Science Education

Presenters:
Hadis Salehi Gahrizsangi, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Hadis Salehi Gahrizsangi, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
Sarika Kewalramani, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
Gerarda Richards, RMIT, Australia

This study explores how co-designed multimodal and interactive biological science resources can enhance student engagement, comprehension and educators' professional learning. In early childhood education, science is neglected

because it is often undervalued compared with mathematics and literacy (Guarrella et al., 2022). Limited research has explored how early childhood educators can actively collaborate in creating meaningful and interactive biological science resources. This study is informed by social semiotic theory and multimodality (Van Leeuwen, 2005), focusing on how multiple modes of learning contribute to learning science in early childhood education. Applying an interpretive qualitative co-design methodology, this study involved 20 early childhood educators in Melbourne, Australia. A rich set of data was generated through focus group discussions, collaborative prototyping workshops, and classroom implementation. Ethics approval was obtained from Swinburne University and the Victorian Department of Education prior to the recruitment stage. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent explaining the purpose of this research, mode of data collection and right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality including de-identification of participants was met throughout the study. Initial findings revealed that educators often overlook biological science teaching due to the limited access to interactive and age-appropriate resources and lack of confidence in teaching those topics. Participants strongly valued the multimodal and gamified approaches and described the co-designed biological science resources very engaging and efficient. This study demonstrates how multimodal and technology enhanced approaches can strengthen biological science teaching and learning in early childhood education.

early childhood, biological science, science, multimodality, gamification

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

Cross-cultural perspectives on AI adoption in teacher education

Presenters:
Ahmet Sami Konca, United Arab Emirates University, United Arab Emirates

All authors:
Ahmet Sami Konca, United Arab Emirates University, United Arab Emirates
Ahmet Simsar, Sharjah Education Academy, United Arab Emirates
Reem Alhajji, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Afra Almansoori, Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) UAE, United Arab Emirates

This study examines factors influencing pre-service teachers' adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teacher education through a cross-cultural comparison between Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates. Research on AI in education highlights its potential to support personalized learning, adaptive feedback, and student engagement. Previous studies have identified factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence as important predictors of technology acceptance in educational settings. This study extends existing work by examining how different contexts shape AI adoption among pre-service teachers. The study applies the General Extended Technology Acceptance Model for E-Learning (GETAMEL), integrating cognitive and affective factors such as self-efficacy, experience, and subjective norms. A positivist paradigm guided a quantitative design. Survey data were collected from 846 pre-service teachers and analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed about the study purpose and confidentiality procedures before completing the survey. Subjective norm, experience, self-efficacy, enjoyment, and anxiety significantly predicted perceived-usefulness and ease of use in both countries, with contextual differences observed. Social-influence and self-efficacy emerged as particularly strong predictors, highlighting the importance of supportive learning environments and prior experience in shaping AI adoption among pre-serviceteachers. Cultural-context influenced the relative strength of these relationships. Findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive AI integration strategies and suggest that teacher education programs should strengthen AI literacy and confidence among pre-service teachers. Results suggest that structured training opportunities and guided practice

with AI tools may support more equitable and meaningful integration of AI into future classroom practice across different educational contexts.

AI adoption, GETAMEL, pre-service teachers, Turkiye, UAE

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium A25 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 6, floor 3

(SoS): EXPLORING HOW TEACHERS CAN WORK TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S POSSIBILITIES FOR AGENCY, INFLUENCE AND PARTICIPATION IN EVERYDAY PRACTICES IN ECEC: KIDS AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL RATING TOOL

Chaired by: Lea Ann Christenson, Towson University, United States

How professionals can work to improve Children's possibilities for Agency, Participation and Influence in everyday practices - KIDS as a tool for organizational learning

Presenters:
Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg Univeristy, Denmark

All authors:
Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg Univeristy, Denmark

This paper explores how the professionals can use data from the KIDS environmental rating scale to reflect and work with children's possibilities for agency, participation and influence. According to research children's possibilities for agency, influence and participation is increasingly affected by learning goals and structured activities intended to prepare children for school (OECD, 2017; Sahlberg & Doyle, 2019). Which can result in institutional logics that promote structure and adult control with focus on activities and learning (OECD, 2027). In the theoretical framework of sociocultural developmental theory (Vygotsky, 1978) children's scope for learning is intertwined with society and culture. In ECEC professionals have influence in shaping the conditions that children have for experiencing agency and influence. The study draws on a development project where professional's collected data with the KIDS quality assessment tool (Ringsmose & KraghMüller, 2020) in 34 ECEC settings within a single municipality. Data was collected in 2024 and again in 2025. The intervention was a joined project. The professionals were involved in collecting data in their own practices as well as analyzing and setting goals for improvement in their own practices. The data show substantial variation in across quality domains, with challenges related to relationships, play and activities and the conditions that children have in the physical environment. The efforts of the professionals led to positive impact on the environment with markable effects for the children's agency, participation. Using the KIDS scale as a rating tool can provide the professionals with a tool for analysing and profesional reflections on children's possibilities in the environment .

learning environments, children's influence, improvement wor,. organizational learning

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

How Pedagogues can Support Toddler's Possibilities for Development of Agency, Influence and Participation i Everyday Practices in ECEC - KIDS as a Tool.

Presenters:
Grethe Kragh-Müller, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark

All authors:
Grethe Kragh-Müller, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark

This study investigated how pedagogues can promote toddler's agency and democratic influence in everyday practices in ECEC. Studies show that children's opportunities for agency and influence in ECEC are affected by structured activities and learning goals (OEC, 2017, Broström, 2017, Kragh-Müller et al. 2026). Research demonstrates that learning in the first years plays an important role for later development and that children in disadvantaged positions lack equal developmental possibilities (SFI, 2003, Ringsmose et al, 2012). These findings underscore the need to examine how educators intentionally foster agency, particularly for toddlers facing barriers to engagement. This study employed socio-cultural theories and a dialectical-materialistic approach (Dreier, 2008; Vygotsky, 2004; Schibbye, 2002) positioning children as active participants in their own development within social and cultural contexts. Cultural-historical, subject science. Over three years, pedagogues worked to promote educational quality for toddlers in vulnerable positions using KIDS (a tool to evaluate and develop educational quality) focusing on developing growth promoting relationships that support children's participation, agency and self-regulation. Methods included observations, KIDS observations, group reflections and interviews. Ethical measures included informed consent of participants and respect participants right to withdraw from project. Results showed that KIDS helped pedagogues evaluate and reflect on relationships with the children so that their goals for supporting agency and participation were enacted in everyday practices. Sustained reflections enabled pedagogues to identify interaction patterns and make shifts towards participatory approaches. This study demonstrates that a structured tool like KIDS can help bridge the gap between democratic intentions end enacted practices with toddlers.

toddler development, agency, participation, democracy in ECEC, kids,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

KIDS: Pre-Service Teachers' Gain a Deeper Understanding of Children's Participation and Democratic Influence in Early Childhood Education Settings

Presenters:
Lea Ann Christenson, Towson University, United States

All authors:
Lea Ann Christenson, Towson University, United States

This study illuminates pre-service teachers' use of KIDS as a lens to assist them in developing a conceptual understanding of how to promote children's participation and democratic influence in early childhood education (ECE) settings. ECE teacher preparation programs in the US operate within high-stakes education systems, potentially narrowing conceptions of how to support young learners and neglecting strategies that promote children's participation and democratic influence (Brown, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2020). This study is framed by Vygotsky (1978), which converges in NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (2020). DAP employs a strength-based lens building on children's curiosity through hands-on instructional discoveries which promote children's engagement, participation and collaboration (NAEYC, 2020). This study utilized a cultural-historical paradigm with action research methodology positioning participants as co-researchers. Using KIDS as a tool, pre-service teachers observed ECE classes, wrote reflections and constructed lesson plans. Data was analyzed employing systematic coding where emerging themes were identified through open coding, followed by axial coding to establish category relationships. Data was anonymized, participants could withdraw at any time. This study deepens the understanding of how pre-service teachers can develop a conceptual understanding of principles which enable children's democratic influence. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers developed significantly greater

awareness of which democratic practices were actively fostered and how to replicate them in the future (Warming, 2005; Svinth, 2012). Results can inform the development of ECE methods courses in order to mitigate pre-service teachers' experiences in high-stakes environments which may limit their capacity to foster participation and democratic practices for young children in their future classrooms..

early childhood education, children's participation, action research, pre-service teachers, kids

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium Set B (15:30 – 16:45)| Wednesday 26th August 2026

Symposium B01 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

0-3'S DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

Chaired by: Leen Dom, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

The Living Journals approach: researching the home lives of families with babies, infants and toddlers

Presenters:
Sabina Savadova, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

All authors:
Sabina Savadova, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Rosie Flewitt, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom
Sandra El Gemayel, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom
Lorna Arnott, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom
Julia Gillen, Lancaster University, United Kingdom
Janet Goodall, Swansea University, United Kingdom
Karen Winter, Queen’s University Belfast, United Kingdom
Andrew Dalziell, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom
Min-Chen Liu, Queen’s University Belfast, United Kingdom
Sarah Timmins, Swansea University, United Kingdom

We reflect critically on our experiences of using a new Living Journal (LJ) participatory approach during a UK-wide ESRC-funded study investigating the home-based digital practices of children aged from birth to three years. We address core questions around the opportunities and challenges the LJ approach afforded for families to document their young children's digital engagement at home. The LJ approach offers a participatory method of working with families in ways that minimise researcher presence in family homes while amplifying very young children's everyday experiences (Savadova, 2023). It builds on decades of research into young children’s digital lives (Gillen and Cameron, 2010; Plowman and Stevenson, 2012). This approach is grounded in ecocultural theory, focusing on children's everyday lives (Tudge, 2008). We present data from qualitative case studies (Thomas, 2021) conducted during the Toddlers, Tech and Talk study (Flewitt et al., 2024), detailing how LJ promoted multimedia capture using timed prompts, featured the co-creation of personalised journals, with online family-researcher meetings to finalise the journals. The resultant data were analysed thematically. The study adopted a relational ethical framework (Flewitt, 2020) aligned with EECERA (2024) and was approved by all participating universities. Three key opportunities are discussed: flexibility - how asynchronous structures accommodated family routines while maintaining authenticity; reflexivity - how parents developed new awareness of family practices; and engagement –

how parents invested in LJ as part of daily life. We argue that LJ's asynchronous participatory design can balance academic rigour with family agency, while challenging assumptions about real-time data generation.

living journals, toddlers, tech, and talk, very young children and digital media, participatory research, digital methods

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by Economic and Social Research Council. funded project (ES/W001020/1).

How Did Media Become the "Digital Pacifier"?: Exploring Predictors of Infant Media Exposure Types Using Latent Profile Analysis and Random Forest

Presenters:
Cheawon Goo, Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea

All authors:
Cheawon Goo, Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea
Chunghee Chung, Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea

This study identifies heterogeneous media exposure patterns among one-year-old infants in Korea and examines their multi-level predictors. Although the negative developmental effects of infant media exposure are well documented, its causes and contextual conditions remain unclear. Prior research has focused on older children, relied on screen time as a single indicator, and emphasized maternal factors, leaving its multi-level mechanisms insufficiently explained. To address these limitations, this study draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to conceptualize infant media exposure as a multi-level phenomenon. Using data from the second wave of the Korean Early Childhood Education and Care Panel (n = 1,486), LPA identified exposure patterns among media-using infants (n = 1,005). Including non-users, three groups were examined using one-vs-one random forest models with 106 predictors spanning infant, parental, and household/community domains, supported by variable importance and partial dependence plots (PDPs). Analyses used anonymized secondary data reported at the aggregate level and interpreted within structural contexts to prevent re-identification and stigma. LPA identified three groups: non-users (32.4%), late-low users (59.8%; onset at 13 months, ~30 min/day), and early-high users (7.8%; onset at 11 months, ~130 min/day). Random forest models showed good discrimination (AUC = .759). Key predictors included infants' routine regularity, paternal involvement, and community childcare environments. The findings show that infant media exposure is shaped by multi-level factors and suggest the need for parent media literacy education, institutional support for paternal caregiving, and improved access to safe play and public leisure resources.

infant media exposure, latent profile analysis, random forest, digital parenting, multi-level predictors

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

From avoidance to agency: Empowering ECEC professionals (0–3) to engage with digital media through practice-based action research

Presenters:
Leen Dom, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

All authors:
Leen Dom, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium
An Piessens, Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium
Marie Van Roost, Kdg, Belgium

This study explores how digital play can be integrated in childcare for children aged 0–3. Building on earlier findings that practitioners often avoid digital media due to societal concerns and limited pedagogical guidance, the project aims to strengthen professionals' pedagogical repertoire. Research (Walshe et al., 2025) on the implementation of new pedagogical approaches shows that increased knowledge alone does not ensure sustained practice change. Educators' self-efficacy, beliefs and the value they attribute to an innovation strongly shape its integration. Successful implementation requires addressing educators' confidence, as well as training, resources and experimentation opportunities. These insights are particularly relevant for digital pedagogy, where misperceptions about technology and low confidence may hinder integration. The study draws on concepts of digital pedagogy and professional agency, positioning digital media as pedagogical impulses within rich play environments rather than as goals in themselves. A practice-based action research design was implemented in two case studies. Cycles of observing (webmapping (Edwards, 2015)), collective reflection, experimentation with digital materials, and iterative dialoguesupported teams in integrating digital play into daily routines, including care and transition moments. Data include interviews, team reflections, questionnaires and practice documentation. Ethical protocols included informed consent for practitioners, transparency towards parents, strict data minimisation and anonymisation, and safeguarding children's integrity as indirect participants Preliminary findings show a shift from reluctance to increased confidence and pedagogical intentionality. Team-based reflection, concrete materials and sustained experimentation appear crucial in supporting integration. Professional development initiatives should prioritise collective learning, concrete tools and space for experimentation to foster agency in digital pedagogy.

digital media, ECEC professionals, action research, 0-3 year old children

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

Symposium B02 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

BILINGUAL LEARNERS AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Chaired by: Frida Johanne Holmen, University of Oslo, Norway

Enhancing Early Second Language Acquisition with Educational Games and Social Assistive Robot (SAR)

Presenters:
Aalo Banko, Tallinn University, Estonia
Evelyn Neudorf, Tallinn University, Estonia
Maire Tuul, Tallinn University, Estonia

All authors:
Aalo Banko, Tallinn University, Estonia
Evelyn Neudorf, Tallinn University, Estonia
Maire Tuul, Tallinn University, Estonia

This pilot study was designed to evaluate how a play-based and SAR-supported intervention helps children acquire more complex spatial language concepts early, which are particularly critical in the Estonian language environment. The use of educational games and SARs, such as Temi, could be crucial in meeting these challenges. These tools not only sustain engagement and improve language competencies through repetitive and contextual vocabulary exposure but also enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hunga et al., 2019; Zou et al., 2021). Language development occurs gradually and is closely linked to children's cognitive development, as emphasized in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which highlights the role of social interaction in the development of linguistic skills (Vygotsky,

1978). An intervention grounded in a pragmatic paradigm used a design-oriented mixed-methods approach with 12 children aged 6–7, where a robot guided language-learning activities across eight sessions per child. Data were collected using pre- and post-test language assessments and structured observations during each session to evaluate/ refine the intervention. Ethical approval was obtained from the Tallinn University Ethics Committee, and written parental consent was secured. The study followed the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023). Pre- and post-test comparisons indicate an improvement in children's understanding of spatial concepts following the intervention, and observational data indicate that children engaged positively with the robot and used the second language during the activities. The findings suggest that play-based, technology-supported interventions may support early second language learning in early childhood education and offer preliminary insights for Estonia's transition to Estonian-language education.

second language learning, social assistive robot (SAR), early childhood education, educational games, Estonia

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

Food on the go: interactional affordances of fruit time in a bilingual preschool in Sweden

Presenters:
Olga Anatoli, Linköping University, Sweden

All authors:
Olga Anatoli, Linköping University, Sweden

The study aims to reveal social organization and pedagogical implication of mobile mealtime practices, i.e. "fruit time", in a bilingual preschool in Sweden. Classroom research is dominant in early childhood education, although interactional studies have been demonstrating the importance of mundane encounters, particularly from the young children's perspectives. Previous research has shown that mealtime is an important space for learning and socialization; studies of mealtimes, however, typically examine stationary settings with participants seated around a table. The present study contributes to a less explored practice of consuming food "on the go." A socio-cultural paradigm on human development is adopted. Ethnomethodological multimodal conversation analysis has been applied to a collection of 16 "fruit time" episodes that occurred over a period of one year. The data were collected through ethnographic fieldwork and video recordings of naturally occurring interaction between English- and Swedish-speaking teachers and children aged 1–5 years. The study has been approved by the Swedish Ethics Review Board. Informed and ongoing consent has been implemented. The analysis reveals a complex temporal and socio-spatial organization of "fruit time," demonstrating how multiparty interactions contribute to children's socialization into the local moral order, including acting autonomously, waiting in line, and speaking the relevant language. The interactions reveal how children practice agency, i.e. make choices about food, negotiate eating and not-eating, and how teachers frame these choices as children's democratic right. The findings are relevant for practitioners invested in creating language-conducive contexts for bilingual teaching and learning. The findings illustrate pedagogical practices of listening to children and fostering children's participation and influence.

mealtime, interaction, bilingualism, language socialization, children's agency

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

Inference-Making Among 4–5-Year-Old First- and Second-Language Learners in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Frida Johanne Holmen, University of Oslo, Norway

All authors:
Frida Johanne Holmen, University of Oslo, Norway
Thormod Idsøe, University of Oslo, Norway
Ingrid L. Falkum, University of Oslo, Norway
Kari-Anne B. Næss, University of Oslo, Norway

This study examines inference-making among young second language (L2) learners by comparing inference-making in first (L1) and L2 learners, examining variation across inference types, and comparing inference profiles. L2 learners obtain on average lower scores on measures in their L2 than L1 learners (Melby-Lervåg&Lervåg, 2014), but less is known about their inference-making. Inference-making enables listeners to interpret information that is not explicitly stated, drawing on earlier information, visual elements and background knowledge (Mercier&Sperber, 2017). In this cross-sectional study, a total of 280 four- to five-year-old children attending Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Norway were recruited through convenience sampling: 140 L1 learners, 140 L2 learners. Each child was individually assessed with the digital Oslo Picture-Book Inference Test (OPIT), which comprises 17 inference questions. Responses were scored 0-2 based on adequacy, and the questions were classified into three inference types. Informed written parental consent was obtained. Identifiable data were removed, each child received an ID-number, and participants could withdraw at any time. The L1 group obtained a mean OPIT-score of 15.25 (SD=4.67), whereas the L2 group obtained a mean OPIT-score of 8.50 (SD=4.89), a statistically significant difference, $t(278)=11.86$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $d=1.42$. Both groups responded to all inference types, with the highest proportion of fully adequate responses for visual inferences (L1: 57.14%, L2: 35.89%). Although there is a substantial gap in overall inference-making between the groups, their profiles show similar patterns of relative strengths and weaknesses. Further results on inference types will be presented. Findings suggest that visual information supports children's inference-making, whereas adult mediation may be needed to foster a broader range of inferences.

inference-making, assessment, ECEC, L2, Norway

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

Symposium B03 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor -2

VISIBILITY OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND AGENCY IN ECE POLICY

Chaired by: Maresa Duignan, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland

Exploring Young Children's (Aged 0–5) Participation Rights in Early Years Settings in Wales

Presenters:
Lauren Henderson, Swansea University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Lauren Henderson, Swansea University, United Kingdom

This study explores how children under 5 experience their participation rights within ECEC settings in Wales. While existing research largely focuses on older children's perspectives, this study advances the field by exploring the multimodal and relational nature of participation among children aged 0–5. It extends participation-rights scholarship (e.g., Lundy, 2007; Waters-Davies et al., 2024) into an area that, while gaining interest, remains comparatively underexplored (Correia et al., 2019; Castro-Zubizarreta & Calvo-Salvador, 2024). This study combines the capability approach (Sen, 1999) and children's rights perspective (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011) to examine children's

participation rights and whether these are meaningfully exercised in practice. This study adopts a social constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and a multiple case-study design across three ECEC settings, using observations and child-centred activities to support unstructured interviews. 66 children (12 months–4 years 9 months) were recruited through purposive and volunteer sampling. The research was aligned with EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Informed consent from gatekeepers and parents was obtained. Child-friendly informed consent was sought, as well as ongoing attention to verbal and non-verbal assent, ensuring children's right to withdraw was respected throughout. Preliminary findings indicate children pursued their 'right to be heard' through multimodal, often non-verbal, bids. While some practitioner practices supported these bids, inconsistent responses, limited staff availability, and organisational constraints often reduced children's influence. Children's participation unfolds in ECEC through multimodal bids from children contingent on adult responsiveness and organisational conditions. Practice and policy should embed action-oriented listening and reduce structural barriers to meaningful inclusion.

everyday participation rights, multimodal communication, non-verbal participation, child-friendly research methods, observation-based research

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

The role of the educator in developing agency, participation and democracy in Irish Early Years Settings: Insights from education inspection.

Presenters:
Maresa Duignan, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland
Joanne Roe, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland
Catherine Cullen, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland

All authors:
Maresa Duignan, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland
Joanne Roe, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland
Catherine Cullen, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ireland

This paper identifies factors affecting children's experience of agency, participation and democracy in ECEC settings in Ireland through analysis of education inspection reports. It explores research on the educator role (Basit, 2010) using the lens of the education quality framework (DEY, 2022). It is grounded in Aistear -The National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2024), underpinning research highlighting the critical role of the educator and the potential of intentional pedagogies as powerful strategies supporting children's agency, participation, and democratic competences in the context of a play-based curriculum(French and McKenna, 2021). The theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning practice architecture is used in analysis of educational research data (Salamon et al., 2016) and recognises elements that are material, relational, individual, and social). An advocacy/participatory worldview (Cresswell, 2009) guides this research with the aim of informing national policy by providing insight into complex reality (Queriós et al, 2017). A meta analysis of data collected from inspection reports and reflections from inspectors will be completed to arrive at insights . This study uses information that is publicly available. Reports undergo a rigorous quality assurance and editing process within DEY. No children or educators are identifiable and the synthesis of findings for the EECERA presentation is further anonymised All data is securely stored aligned with GDPR and data protection legislation. Emergent themes identify the role of slow relational pedagogy, the agentic educator and play-based curriculum in supporting agency, participation, and democratic practices. The education inspectorate informs policy in the Irish education system and this research provides recommendations for policy and practice.

citizenship, democracy, professional educators, rights-based curriculum, slow relational pedagogy

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

Symposium B04 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

CHILDREN'S VIRTUAL AND REAL WORLD INTERACTIONS

Chaired by: Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Peer feedback and agency in early childhood between observation and digital support

Presenters:
Paola Zoroaster, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, Italy

All authors:
Paola Zoroaster, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, Italy
Emilia Restiglian, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, Italy

This contribution is part of a project exploring peer feedback in interactions among children aged 0–6, aiming to analyze its types and role in learning and agency development through video recordings and a structured observational protocol. Although peer feedback is widely discussed in the literature, few studies focus specifically on the 0-6 age range. Existing research primarily examines feedback in evaluative contexts in secondary and higher education (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Castoldi, 2012; Grion & Serbati, 2018; Nigris et al., 2019). For this reason, it is important to further investigate peer feedback in early childhood. The study is grounded in a socio-constructivist perspective, conceiving learning as a dialogic, contextually situated process (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This qualitative research employs an ethnographic case study approach (Benvenuto, 2013; Reeves, 2013). Data were collected through video recordings of children's interactions in two Italian preschools and analyzed using a purpose-built observational protocol, supported by digital tools for transcription and categorization of peer feedback. Empirical validation was ensured through researcher triangulation. Ethical considerations were central, including informed consent from school administrators, teachers, families, and importantly, the children themselves, recognized as active participants in the research process. Results indicate that children spontaneously produce peer feedback, fostering cooperative learning, participation, and the development of agency. The observational protocol proved effective in identifying different feedback types. The study highlights the pedagogical value of peer feedback in early childhood and emphasizes the importance of ethical and systematic observational practices to support democratic and inclusive educational contexts.

peer feedback, early childhood, agency, digital observation, ethics

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

ECEC teacher as a supporter of children's peer relationships in a toddler group

Presenters:
Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Titta Kettukangas, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Noora Heiskanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Johanna Heikka, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

The study explores how an early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher supports in practice children's peer relationships in a toddler group while implementing holistic pedagogy, and how this support enables children's active participation. Children construct their peer relationships through a dynamic processes in which social skills are learned and rehearsed (e.g., Kutnick & Colwell, 2024; Köngäs et al., 2022), and in which the support of teacher is crucial (Redder & White, 2017). ECEC teachers support peer relationships e.g., through guiding children's behavior, facilitating children's interactions (Farmer et al., 2011), and modelling (Salminen et al., 2022). However, how ECEC support is constructed in daily holistic pedagogical practices in a toddler group requires further exploration. This qualitative case study follows a sociocultural paradigm. The data were collected through ethnographic shadowing of an ECEC teacher. The data consisted of two days of observation, including video recordings and an interview. A thematic analysis strategy was used in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Informed consent was obtained and participant's rights to anonymity and confidentiality were respected. Consent was assessed situationally during the observation, and ethics guidelines (Bertram et al., 2025) were carefully followed throughout the research. The findings suggest that ECEC teacher supported peer relationships through the use of linguistic, social-emotional, physical, and structural means, and modeling. Although the teacher sensitively responded to the children's needs, the teacher's guidance dominated child group activities, and somewhat limited the children's agency. In order to enhance quality in ECEC, teachers must develop their pedagogical skills in supporting peer relationships through holistic pedagogy.

holistic pedagogy, peer relationships, participation, ECEC teacher, shadowing

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

Implementing Video Self-Modeling in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care: Initial Findings

Presenters:
Meri Liimatainen, School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland, Finland

All authors:
Meri Liimatainen, School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland, Finland
Mika Paananen, Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Vesa Närhi, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Anne Karhu, School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland, Finland

This study examined the implementation of Video Self-Modeling (VSM) to support children's situation-specific behavior and to evaluate its effectiveness and social validity in early childhood education and care (ECEC), investigating whether behavior changed during support and how practitioners assessed social validity. VSM supports self-efficacy and adaptive functioning by enabling prosocial self-modeling (Mason et al., 2016; Buggey et al., 2018) and enhances social engagement, prosocial behavior, although outcomes vary with skill levels and target specificity (Dueñas et al., 2019; Livingston et al., 2023). Prosocial behavior is a core objective in ECEC, as some children struggle with self-regulation. Grounded in social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), VSM offers a strength-based approach by highlighting self-models, observational learning and self-efficacy to support behavior change. This study applied a single-case experimental design with three children aged 5–6, selected based on needs. They participated in VSM sessions targeting situation-specific behaviors within an ECEC group implementing the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports framework. Systematic direct observations (SDO) were collected across baseline, intervention, and maintenance phases, alongside social validity. Behavior change was assessed via visual analysis and non-parametric effect sizes. Fidelity was monitored. Guardians provided informed consent. Data were pseudonymised and securely stored, with video materials managed by practitioners. The intervention showed

promising results although SDO outcomes varied across participants depending on target specificity. Fidelity of VSM procedures was high and practitioners rated VSM as feasible and recommendable. Findings suggest VSM is a promising individualized support in Finnish ECEC, emphasizing target behavior definition and careful implementation.

video self-modeling, single-case experimental design, social validity, situation-specific behavior, positive behavioral interventions and supports

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

Symposium B05 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

APPROACHES TO LITERACY AND EARLY READING

Chaired by: Mosa Khasu, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Attuning ECEC-Students to Literacy through Embodied Experience

Presenters:
Aasfrid Tysvær, NLA University College, Norway
Anette Sofie Bernsen, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Aasfrid Tysvær, NLA University College, Norway
Anette Sofie Bernsen, NLA University College, Norway
Synne Ytre-Arne, NLA University College, Norway

The aim of the study is to foreground embodied experience as an attunement to literacy, and explores how students experiences inform their own creation of practices that attune toddlers to litetature. Previous research emphasizes the need to revitalize the prioritization of reading in ECEC and also that shared attention during reading sessions can be understood as a relational responsibility resting with the staff member (Hoel; Fodstad, Bjorvand& Stangeland 2026, Dybvig, Fodstad & Jæger, 2022). The theoretical and cnceptional framework is inspired by Diderot's philosophical reflections on aesthetic experience (Diderot, 1995); the teaching process by INTRO, an interdisciplinary aesthetic approach (Meyer, 2023). The study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, theoretically grounded in body phenomenology. It employs a/r/tography as methodological approach. Data has been collected both through participant observation and focus groups. The study is approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Sevices in Eduation and Research (SIKT), and written information as well as written consent is obtained from all participants. The study verfies full anonymity during both data collection and publication. The prelimirary findings suggest that the staged and experiential working approach heightened students' awareness of space, relational dynamics, and sensory qualities in their encounter with the text. The study underscores the importance of experiential approaches in ECEC teacher education to strengthen students' embodied and sensory awareness in literary practice.

toddlers, attuning, literacy, emodied experience

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

Teaching reading in Setswana: balancing word recognition and language comprehension skills

Presenters:
Mosa Khasu, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

All authors:
Mosa Khasu, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

The study explored how early-grade teachers teach reading concepts in Setswana, one of the official languages of South Africa. The teaching of reading in South African classrooms remains a concern given the poor performance of learners in national and international reading assessments. A South African study, the Funda Uphumelele National Survey (2025), revealed that only 31% of South African children in Grades 1 to 3 could read in their home language. Similarly, a study by Mokobe et al. (2025) highlighted that Grade 3 teachers struggled to teach reading in Setswana, citing inadequate training and a lack of subject knowledge of Setswana. The active view of reading was employed as a theoretical lens to interpret the findings from the study (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The study employed a generic qualitative methodology, with a case study design. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with a sample of four Setswana Grades 1 to 3 teachers. The data was analysed thematically to generate the themes for discussion. Ethics was granted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg (SEM 1 - 2024 - 002). Despite maintaining confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms for all participants, in small research settings is the risk of participants being potentially identifiable through contextual details. The findings revealed that teachers spent more time teaching phonics and oral language activities. Other reading constructs were not taught adequately. The contribution of this study highlights the need for in-depth teacher training and ongoing professional development support for early grade teachers.

Setswana, early grade teachers, reading, active view of reading, reading comprehension

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study received a South African National Research Foundation grant.

Exploring the Intersection Between Play-Based Learning and Early Reading skills: A Scoping Review

Presenters:
Michelle Iznardo, University of Toronto, Canada
Ruxandra Filip, University of Toronto, Canada
Rachel Ault, University of Toronto, Canada
Angela Pyle, University of Toronto, Canada

All authors:
Michelle Iznardo, University of Toronto, Canada
Ruxandra Filip, University of Toronto, Canada
Rachel Ault, University of Toronto, Canada
Angela Pyle, University of Toronto, Canada

This review maps literature at the intersection of play-based learning (PBL) and early reading skills to identify research and practice priorities. While research has examined how PBL supports early literacy, highlighting literacy-rich environments role in children's participation in literacy activities and oral language (e.g., Roskos & Christie, 2013), limited research has examined its alignment with the Science of Reading (SoR) (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics; Mclean et al., 2026). These skills are critical predictors of reading achievement (Lonigan et al., 2008), which recommends direct, systematic instruction (Ehri, 2020). Simultaneously, the Science of Learning (SoL) underscores the benefits of PBL's benefits (Zosh et al., 2022). Guided play; involving intentional teacher- facilitation within PBL (Weisberg et al., 2016), can bridge SoR and SoL by integrating evidence-based approaches to teaching foundational literacy skills within PBL frameworks. Following established scoping review methodologies, a systematic search of

ERIC and Education Source yielded 15 studies published between 2000-2026 focusing on children ages 3-12. Titles, abstracts, and full texts were screened using predefined criteria. A thematic analysis is used to align PBL approaches with SoR skills. No human participants were involved. Transparent searches procedures and careful interpretation of diverse definitions of PBL will be employed. Preliminary findings suggest that guided play supports SoR-aligned early reading skills. Studies highlight teachers' perceived benefits of PBL learning alongside implementation challenges due to tensions between PBL and explicit instruction. These findings underscore the need for research and guidance onintegrating PBL with systematic foundational literacy skills instruction in early childhood settings.

guided play, science of reading, science of learning, early reading skills, teacher perspectives

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

Symposium B06 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

EXPLORING ECEC WORKFORCE AND CHILDCARE CHALLENGES

Chaired by: Kay Aaronricks, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

Exploring the (in)visible labour of early childhood educators supporting families in England

Presenters:
Nathan Jon Archer, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

All authors:
Nathan Jon Archer, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

This small-scale study aimed to explore the scope and nature of additional services, beyond ECEC, offered in English nurseries as a result of statutory service reduction. The research explored the impact on early educators of delivering these additional services. During the austerity years, post-2010 in England, several hundred integrated children's centres were closed. Following these closures, nurseries are increasingly stepping in to support families as 'social infrastructure and brokers of support' (Benchekroun and Cameron 2023). Building on this understanding, using critical ecological systems theory (Miller at al 2012) and invisible labour literature (Hatton 2017) more detailed analysis of the impact of this additional work on nurseries and early educators was undertaken. Shaped by critical theory, five critical ethnographic case studies (Madison 2011) of ECEC settings were compiled drawing on documentary analysis, and visits to settings, interviews with leaders and educators and focus groups with parents/carers. In addition to institutional ethical compliance, geographical markers were removed, pseudonyms have replaced the names of participants, data is protected, and the study respected regular practices to minimise disruption to the nursery routine. Findings suggest the retrenchment of statutory services has left early educators working beyond brokering support and increasingly filling service gaps as first responders to families. Whilst this additional labour of educators is acknowledged by families it remains unrecognised and unfunded in national policy. Policy recommendations include improved local service integration, building services around places where children and families already attend and greater recognition and compensation for the complex, boundary-spanning nature of early educator work.

early childhood education, nurseries, family support, invisible labour, critical ethnographies

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research is funded by the British Academy.

Vocal health issues in early childhood professionals – an overview of existing research

Presenters:
Janey Maxwell, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Janey Maxwell, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

This Scoping Review explored existing research into the prevalence, causes and suggested methods of reducing vocal health issues in early childhood professionals (ECPs). Teachers are known to be more prone to vocal health issues than the general population (Benšić et al., 2024), but little research has focused on ECPs. This Scoping Review investigates existing research and identifies gaps in research. The methodology meant a focus on positivist theories of learning (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2015). Numerous databases were searched to find peer-reviewed papers focusing on vocal health issues specifically related to ECPs. The initial 469 papers were assessed using the Scoping Review Framework devised by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The resulting final 30 papers were analysed to highlight key themes and issues, plus gaps in existing research. Each stage was value based, evidence-informed and explicit to ensure accountability and reliability. The results revealed vocal issues are common amongst ECPs globally. Recurrent factors impacting on vocal health included age and teaching experience, gender, number and age of students, working environment, noise, teacher behaviours and vocal education. Some contradictory results were revealed, relating to variations in collection methods, pedagogical approaches, participant sample and geographical location. This Scoping Review confirmed no peer-reviewed articles have been published about the vocal health issues experienced by ECPs in the UK. This papers forms part of my doctoral research which aims to clarify the state of the vocal health of English ECPs, highlighting vocal health concerns, training needs and suggest policy improvements for the ECE sector.

vocal health, vocal education, scoping review, classroom environment, teacher health

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Exploring the goodness-of-fit between childcare arrangements and individual characteristics of Finnish 1- and 4-year-olds

Presenters:
Mimmu Sulkanen, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

All authors:
Mimmu Sulkanen, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

This study examines how Finnish 1- and 4-year-olds' early childhood education and care (ECEC) arrangements (type, weekly hours, and entry age) are related with children's behavioral tendencies and enjoyment in ECEC and whether ECEC arrangements modify these relations. Prior research suggests that ECEC arrangements may suit children differently depending on their individual characteristics (De Schipper et al., 2004; van Trijp et al., 2021), although evidence remains limited and mixed. Guided by Thomas and Chess's (1977) goodness-of-fit model, the study conceptualizes enjoyment in ECEC as an indicator of child's socio-emotional well-being within the ECEC context, with higher enjoyment reflecting better fit between arrangements and children's individuality. Following a postpositivist quantitative paradigm, the study analyses parental survey data on Finnish 1-year-olds (parents N = 2696) and 4-year-olds enrolled in ECEC (parents N = 1699) using exploratory structural equation modelling with latent factors of behavioural tendencies (SIDCA; Martin et al., 2021) and enjoyment in ECEC (adapted version of LICW-D; Koivula et al., 2023). Ethical approval was granted by Ethical Committee of the University of Jyväskylä. All participants received privacy notice. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent, with the option to withdraw at any time. All

procedures adhered to EECERA's ethical code (2024). Preliminary findings support the goodness-of-fit model in the ECEC context, showing associations between behavioral tendencies and enjoyment and a moderating role of time spent in ECEC. These results highlight the need to consider children's behavioral tendencies when planning ECEC arrangements and provide practical suggestions for service planners and professionals to support children's well□being across ECEC settings.

individual differences, ECEC arrangements, goodness-of-fit, enjoyment in ECEC, Finland

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

This doctoral research has been funded by the MLL Research Foundation Grant.

Symposium B07 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

FACILITATING CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

Chaired by: Amanda White, New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER), New Zealand

Using digital methods to make children's story competencies visible

Presenters:
Amanda White, New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER), New Zealand

All authors:
Amanda White, New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER), New Zealand

This presentation explores ways that children aged 1-5 years share stories with others, within and across their homes and early childhood education (ECE) contexts, in culturally diverse communities. Previous research has shown that young children's storytelling competencies can easily be overlooked, especially when they communicate in unspoken ways (Doak, 2019). Digital (video) methods can powerfully help reveal children's multimodal (White et al. 2021) contributions as they co-construct meaning with others during story interactions. This research combined sociocultural (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009) and semiotic (Hodge & Kress, 1988) theoretical lenses to consider the multiple and diverse ways people represent and communicate meaning in their social and cultural contexts. This paper draws on findings from two qualitative research studies in diverse ECE settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. Both studies employed multimodal ethnography (Kress, 2011) with video observations, interviews, and visits to family homes and ECE centres as methods. Participants included 1-year-olds (Study 1) and 2–5-year-olds (Study 2) across eight ECE and kindergarten contexts. Participants were culturally and linguistically representative of their wider communities. Relational ethics were at the heart of this study, particularly with regards to the use of video methods with young children. Vigilant monitoring of their ongoing assent was paramount at all stages of the study. Selected findings illustrate ways that young children are active, competent storytellers when their interactions are made visible through use of multimodal ethnography and digital methods. Findings challenge commonly-held assumptions around the participatory roles of young children in sharing stories with others. Use of video methods and sociocultural/semiotic lenses highlighted their active contribution as storytellers.

story, communication, multimodal, video, culture

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

A question of how rather than what: Implementation strategies and children's narrative participation in preschool

Presenters:
Ellinor Skaremyr, University of Borås, Sweden

All authors:
Ellinor Skaremyr, University of Borås, Sweden
Peter Andersson Lilja, University of Borås, Sweden

The aim of this paper is to examine children's narrative development and participation within a language intervention conducted in ten Swedish preschools. Previous research shows that both explicit and implicit instruction can support early language development, but evidence of their impact on narrative competence is mixed, especially in preschool contexts. Implementation and contextual factors also shape outcomes (see Authors et al. 2025). The study draws on a sociocognitive perspective on language, including the distinction between explicit and implicit learning and instruction (Ellis 2015). A mixed-methods design combines quantitative narrative analysis with qualitative analyses of preschool storytelling activities. The study includes ~250 children and 60 teachers using stratified sampling. First, parents gave informed consent, and children were asked during implementation with the option to withdraw at any time. All participant information is confidential. Preliminary analyses show development in children's narrative macro- and microstructure following the intervention, with few differences between instructional conditions. Outcomes instead appear related to how strategies were implemented in practice. The paper discusses the relationship between implementation and children's opportunities to participate as narrators, contributing to discussions of agency and participation in early childhood education. Lilja, P. A., Skaremyr, E., Svensson, A. K., & Andersson, K. (2025). Implementing explicit and implicit narrative instruction in preschool: Insights from a language intervention study. Linguistics and Education, 89, 1-14. Ellis, N.C (2015). Implicit AND explicit language learning. Their dynamic interface and complexity. In: Rebuschat, P. (red.) (2015). Implicit and explicit learning of languages. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

narratives, agency, instructional design, implementation

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

This work is supported by the Swedish Research Council. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors.

Digital Play and Narrative Construction: Young Children's Story Crafting with Bee-Bots

Presenters:
Sini Kontkanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

All authors:
Sini Kontkanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Jasmiina Leskinen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

This study examines how young children's narrative skills manifest within digital play with Bee-Bot robots and story crafting activities. It asks: What kinds of story practices emerge when digital play is embedded in collaborative, embodied design tasks? Prior work highlights how digital tools can support multimodal expression (Deklerk, 2024), yet less is known about how digital play interacts with children's embodied design activities and story worlds (Byman et al., 2022). The study conceptualises narrative activity as emerging through interactions among bodies, materials, spaces and digital tools rather than as a solely linguistic process. Within this framework, narrative agency is understood as distributed across children, Bee-Bots, natural materials and the designed play environment (Burnett et al., 2021). Situated within a qualitative, child-centered and multimodal research paradigm, the study employs multimodal mediated discourse analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Data include video recordings, photographs, ethnographic notes, and children's (5-6 years old) stories collected across seven sessions in the ECEC center. Informed consent was obtained from children, guardians, and staff. Only consenting children were filmed. Children's

ongoing willingness to participate was continuously negotiated. Analysis shows that digital play fostered collaborative sense-making, sequencing, and imaginative story construction. Building huts and paths for the robots encouraged children to create rich narrative settings, while integrating story-listening supported connections between narrative elements and purposeful action. The study suggests that combining digital play with narrative pedagogies can strengthen children's storytelling competence, creativity, and digital literacy, offering valuable insights for play-based ECEC practices.

digital play, story crafting, narrative practices, literacy, multimodal narrative practices

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

Symposium B08 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

INCLUSION AND THE ECEC WORKFORCE

Chaired by: Fay Hadley, Macquarie University, Australia

Learning to Lead Inclusion in the Digital Age: Place-Based Mentoring to Enhance Children's Participatory Rights

Presenters:
Fay Hadley, Macquarie University, Australia
Rebecca Andrews, Macquarie University, Australia

All authors:
Fay Hadley, Macquarie University, Australia
Rebecca Andrews, Macquarie University, Australia

The Supporting Participation of Children from low socio-economic backgrounds in Early Education (SPiECE) Mentoring Project (SMP) aimed to empower educators to develop and enact inclusive practices that improve access and participation for children experiencing structural/geographic barriers in rural Australia. SMP builds on two prior initiatives: the SPiECE Professional Learning and Support Intervention (Harrison et al., 2022) and Mentoring for New Early Childhood Teachers (Hadley et al., 2024; Andrews et al., 2024). SMP extends this work by strengthening leadership capacity and place-based responses to ensure children's participation. Grounded in a Community of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the project conceptualises learning as participatory and socially situated, foregrounding professional agency, democratic dialogue, and children's participatory rights (Clark, 2017). Adopting a qualitative, participatory approach, seven Australian regional ECE leaders engaged in a 2-month hybrid-online/face-to-face-mentoring program. Participants designed and costed strength-based, locally meaningful strategies addressing multidimensional barriers to children's participation. Modules on grant writing and ethical AI use supported digital capability. Focus group data were deductively analysed to refine the SMP. Following ethics approval (Macquarie University), participants received information/consent forms. Participation was voluntary, with withdrawal without consequence. Burden was minimised, data deidentified to minimse risks. Educators reflected on successful participatory practices: reporting structured mentoring combined with digital capability building enhanced confidence and professional agency. Digital tools strengthened advocacy, while collaborative dialogue supported locally responsive planning for children's active participation in shaping their social worlds. The SMP provides evidence that investing in mentoring models that foreground collaborative inquiry, digital literacy, and local decision-making can strengthen inclusion and participation in geographically diverse communities.

mentoring, professional agency, participation, digital leadership, place-based

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funded by NSW Department of Education, Australia.

Neurodevelopmental traits, learning difficulties, and work-related challenges among early childhood educators in Japan: a cross-sectional survey

Presenters:
Kimi Ueda, Kyoto University, Japan

All authors:
Kimi Ueda, Kyoto University, Japan
Satomi Soejima, Okayama College, Japan
Hidetoshi Ishigaki, Hamamatsu University School of Medicine, Japan
Hiroshi Shimoda, Kyoto University, Japan

This cross-sectional survey asks how neurodevelopmental-trait indicators and learning-difficulty indicators relate to perceived work difficulties among early childhood educators in Japan, and whether these indicators differ by age. ECEC workforce studies link wellbeing and retention to job demands/resources, yet individual-difference factors are often not measured in ways that inform support (Farewell et al., 2021). Workplace neurodiversity research suggests ADHD- and autism-related traits can interact with task structure and social-communication demands, motivating context-specific adjustments (Hotte-Meunier et al., 2024). Rather than treating trait indicators (Kessler et al., 2007 and Allison et al., 2012) as deficits, we use a neurodiversity-affirming stance to examine variability in perceived work difficulties and potential support needs (Dwyer, 2022). We administered an anonymous online questionnaire to N=1,306 educators from certified childcare centers and nursery schools. Measures included adapted educator-context items based on the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS) and a brief Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ-10), plus items on reading/writing difficulties, numeracy difficulties, and ECEC task-specific difficulties developed from a pilot. We reported descriptive distributions and cross-tabulations by age group. Participants received an information sheet, provided informed consent, and could withdraw via a stated procedure. No identifying data were collected; responses were anonymized and securely stored. University ethics approval was obtained. ASRS-related indicators, reading/writing difficulties, and numeracy difficulties tended to decrease with age, whereas AQ-related indicators showed no consistent age pattern. Results support non-stigmatizing, needs-based workplace adjustments (e.g., task design, communication routines, reasonable accommodations) rather than assuming experience reduces all difficulties.

neurodiversity, early childhood educators, adhd screening (asrs), autistic traits (aq-10), learning difficulties (literacy/numeracy)

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

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP25K06111.

Inclusive College Innovation in Ghana (ICING)

Presenters:
Michael Subbey, University of Winneba, Ghana
Gideon Justice Adjerakor, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana
Kari Bratland, Oslomet, Norway
Ingvild Alfheim, Oslomet, Norway

All authors:
Michael Subbey, University of Winneba, Ghana

Gideon Justice Adjerakor, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana
Kari Bratland, Oslomet, Norway
Ingvild Alfheim, Oslomet, Norway

The primary aim of this 3-Year Inclusive College Innovation in Ghana (ICING) Project is to enhance inclusion in Ghanaian teacher education by developing practical, context-adapted approaches that support students with disability in selected colleges of education. This project builds on practical models in inclusive education to address gaps identified in prior research regarding accessibility and pedagogical practices (Quendar & Subbey, 2026; Subbey, M. 2025; Lindsay 2003). The framework integrates social change and educational reform theory alongside the social model of disability (Fullan, 2007; Oliver, 1996), converging on the provision of access and full participation of students with disabilities in the learning environment, to equip them with skills to handle young children and the use of digital assistive devices. It emphasizes co-creation and community engagement as central to developing effective practices in teacher education (Hargreaves, 2003). Grounded in a mixed-methods approach, the project will employ document analysis, accessibility audits, and participatory research methods to gather data. The project adheres to ethical guidelines including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all stakeholders are protected throughout the research process. Preliminary findings indicate a pressing need for improved infrastructure in teacher training to support inclusive practices. The project anticipates developing innovative models that can be replicated across similar educational contexts. The outcomes of this project will inform national policy, providing a framework for integrating inclusive practices into teacher training programs, ultimately enhancing educational access and quality for all students with disabilities.

inclusive teacher education, social innovation, accessibility, co-creation, educational policy

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

Symposium B09 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

INTERNATIONAL VIEWS ON ECEC DIGITAL POLICY

Chaired by: Eimear Carron, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

Developing a policy statement on the use of digital technologies in early learning and care and school-age settings

Presenters:
Eimear Carron, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

All authors:
Eimear Carron, Department of Children, Disability and Equality Ireland, Ireland

This project aimed to develop an evidence-informed policy statement to guide digital technology use in early learning and care and school-age childcare settings in the Republic of Ireland, supporting developmentally appropriate, inclusive and safe practice. The policy builds on existing guidance on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for under 5's (World Health Organization, 2019) and Empowering young children in the digital age (OECD, 2023), extending beyond screen-time recommendations to address pedagogy, accessibility and digital inclusion. Grounded in socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and children's rights perspectives (Lundy, 2009; CRC/C/GC/25) recognising children's learning and wellbeing is shaped by relationships, environments and broader contexts. The framework conceptualises digital technologies as elements of the learning environment that require intentional, developmentally appropriate and ethically grounded use. Adopting a pragmatic, participatory policy development paradigm (Morgan, 2014; Gupta et al., 2023), the project employed a multi-phase design (Bradbury,

2015): review of international guidelines, stakeholder consultation through focus group sessions with two existing national ELC and SAC representative forums with 49 participants and iterative drafting process. Ethical attention focused on children's rights, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity in consultations, data protection and equitable representation of marginalised communities. Key tensions emerged between risk mitigation and innovation and between digital skill-building and play-based pedagogy. Findings indicate that unplugged activities should remain a core part of early learning. The resulting policy emphasises intentionality, relational engagement, developmental alignment and safeguards for privacy. The framework provides adaptable guidance for early learning and care and school-age childcare settings seeking coherent research-informed digital technology policies.

early childhood education and care, school-age childcare, digital technologies, policy development, children's rights

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Digital Funds of Knowledge and Identity and Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: A Four Country Analysis

Presenters:
Fiona Scott, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Liz Chesworth, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Susanna Isotalo, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Fiona Scott, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Liz Chesworth, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
Susanna Isotalo, University of Helsinki, Finland
Lennie Barblett, Edith Cowan University, Australia
Tuulikki Ukkonen Mikkola, University of Helsinki, Finland
Ines Vitorino Sampaio, Deakin University, Australia
Maria Enriquez Watt, Edith Cowan University, Australia

This research aims to describe ECEC digital policy paradigms in Australia, Brazil, England, and Finland. It explores how digital technologies are positioned, framed, and enacted (or not) within national ECEC policy frameworks. While comparative studies of ECEC systems (e.g. Paananen et al., 2023) inform policy development, limited research examines how digital technologies are framed in national ECEC policies and how this shapes recognition of children's lives. Drawing on a constructivist lens, this study used an adapted critical curriculum analysis framework (Winter & Hyatt, 20023) to examine how policy texts construct childhood, digital technologies, and pedagogy. Researchers across four countries conducted deductive policy analysis to identify how digital contexts, expectations, and representations of children, families and educators were described. Researchers identified similarities, differences and ideas for future policy development across countries through collaborative analysis. Our analysis examined official curriculum and policy framework texts from each country (n=2-3 policy documents per country). : Ethical use of publicly available information was prioritised to minimise bias and support objectivity. Findings reveal substantial cross-national variation. Policy documents outline distinct digital environments in ECEC and differing expectations of educators, technologies, and young children's learning. Approaches to digital provisions, participation, child safety, inclusion and digital agency also differed. The study highlighted a requirement for more coherent ECEC digital policy to support educators in the digital educational landscape partnering with children and families.

digital citizenship, ecec policy, digital competencies, digital education, digital funds of knowledge

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

Children's Digital Life in ECEC: Practices and Educational Responsibility

Presenters:
Marie-Helene Hebert, TELUQ University, Canada
Yuri Mirsky, Université Laval, Canada
Véronique Pelletier, Association Québécoise des Centres de la Petite Enfance, Canada

All authors:
Marie-Helene Hebert, TELUQ University, Canada
Alexandre Lepage, Université Laval, Canada
Monica Boudreau, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canada
Yuri Mirsky, Université Laval, Canada
Véronique Pelletier, Association Québécoise des Centres de la Petite Enfance, Canada
Sofya Kopichenko, Université Laval, Canada

This study examines how Quebec ECEC conceptualise their educational responsibility regarding digital technologies by analysing reported practices and perceived roles across educators, managers, and parents. Research on digital technologies in early childhood mainly addresses developmental risks and screen-time limits (Toledo-Vargas et al., 2025). While regulations governing ECEC restrict exposure, studies highlight the potential of unplugged and symbolic digital play (Kappeler et al., 2024). However, how families and ECEC perceive and share responsibility for children's digital education remains underexplored. The framework draws on digital culture (Proulx, 2002), research on screen-time and early development (Toledo-Vargas et al., 2025), and the emerging notion of family media ecology (Barr et al., 2024). The study follows a pragmatic paradigm and uses questionnaires completed by educators (n=119), managers (n=40), and parents (n=533) in Quebec ECEC. Staff reported device availability, duration of use, and children's activities, while all groups described responsibilities for digital education. Analyses combined descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis. Participants provided electronic informed consent before completing the questionnaires. Data were stored securely, anonymised at collection, and analysed collectively. Device use is rare and tightly regulated; tablets predominate while television remains marginal, increasing slightly with age. Activities are brief and educator-led. Parents, educators, and managers assign responsibility for digital education to families. Findings highlight the predominance of avoidance-based approaches and invite reflection on policies supporting shared responsibility between families and ECEC, enabling children to engage in educational digital experiences as active participants in contemporary society.

children's digital experiences, digital play, screen-time, family-ecec responsibility, digital education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Symposium B10 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 6, floor -2

MULTILINGUAL APPROACHES IN ECE

Chaired by: Maria Fredriksson, University of Stavanger, Norway

Reading with multilingual children in Nordic ECEC settings – a scoping review

Presenters:
Maria Fredriksson, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Maria Fredriksson, University of Stavanger, Norway
Katarzyna Tunkiel, University of Stavanger, Norway

Marianne Undheim, University of Stavanger, Norway
Trude Hoel, University of Stavanger, Norway

This scoping review aims to (i) map existing research on reading with multilingual children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings across the Nordic countries and (ii) to identify areas where further research is needed to strengthen reading practices for young multilingual children. The study builds on evidence demonstrating the role of shared book reading in supporting multilingual children's language development and long-term academic outcomes (Fitton et al., 2018). Despite this, books in minority languages and multilingual reading practices appear to be largely absent in Nordic ECEC (Hofslundsengen et al., 2018; Tunkiel et al., 2024). This invites to a closer investigation of how research discusses multilingual children's involvement in reading activities in Nordic ECEC. We draw on an ecological perspective of literacy (Barton, 2006) in addition to conceptual principles for scoping reviews (Pollock et al., 2024 Aligned with established scoping review methodology, the study applies PRISMA (Page, et. al. 2020) for documenting, and data extraction is done in a transparent and systematic way, enabling a structured analysis across diverse study designs. The review adheres to ethical standards for transparent scoping literature reviews to reduce the potential of bias. The presentation will report on an ongoing analysis of 29 included studies, highlighting second language learning, reading practices, book choices and book reading dialogues as emerging themes. The anticipated insights into how multilingual children are involved in book reading in Nordic ECEC may clarify which knowledge areas require further attention in research.

reading, books, multilingual, ECEC, scoping review

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

"Flying": A research journey to chronicle multilingual early childhoods from a perspective that honours young children's communicative spaces.

Presenters:
Sarah Yorkstone, Charnwood Nursery and Preschool Group, United Kingdom
Christine Parker, Independent Early Childhood Researcher and Writer, United Kingdom

All authors:
Sarah Yorkstone, Charnwood Nursery and Preschool Group, United Kingdom
Christine Parker, Independent Early Childhood Researcher and Writer, United Kingdom

To investigate young children's communicative spaces through a multilingual lens. How can educators view children's play through a multilingual theoretical lens to respond with praxeological intent (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2012). Learning from past research where multilingualism is celebrated for all children (Smidt, 2013; Martinez-Leon et al, 2024) this study broadens the definition with an holistic approach embracing all communicative styles and spaces beyond a focus on oracy and literacy (Badwan, et al, 2026). Viewing young children's actions and play through a co-constructed multilingual theoretical lens is problematised. This conceptual framework embraces embodiment within space (Malaguzzi, in Gandini, 2012), musicality (Austin et al, 2024) and schema theory (Athey, 2007). Aligned to the qualitative child study tradition (Isaacs, 1930), this project chronicles the creation of ten educators' child studies, from 5 early childhood settings in the Midlands, England. Narrative and video observations alongside focus conversations are principal research methods to illuminate the child's communicative styles and spaces The relationship between child, parent and researcher educator is highly respected. Consent forms are signed and regularly reviewed. This is on-going research. Preliminary findings indicate that honouring young children's communicative spaces through close observation influences praxeological decisions and contributes to the co-construction of a multilingual theoretical framework. A celebratory approach to multilingualism acknowledges the child's multifaceted approach to communicative styles and spaces. Challenges for practice is in problematising what

multilingualism means for all children and families and in identifying effective ways to construct pedagogical approaches collaboratively and from a praxeological viewpoint under workplace constraints.

multilingualism, communicative spaces, praxeology, constructivist pedagogy, close observation

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

Hidden Ideologies in Research on Multilingualism in ECEC Contexts

Presenters:
Gunhild Tomter Alstad, University of Inland Norway, Norway
Anja Pesch, University of Inland Norway, Norway

All authors:
Gunhild Tomter Alstad, University of Inland Norway, Norway
Anja Pesch, University of Inland Norway, Norway

This paper investigates the language ideologies that underpin research on multilingualism in ECEC contexts. Our research question is how ideological orientations influence both research on multilingualism and the policy documents that draw on such research. There is a substantial body of research on language ideologies in ECEC settings, showing how beliefs about language shape pedagogical practices, assessment, and institutional norms (Zheng, 2025; Palviainen & Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). However, while these studies offer important insights into ideological processes in relation to ECEC, it is often more challenging to identify the implicit ideologies that shape the research itself. Our theoretical framework draws on a Bakhtinian understanding of ideology as inseparable from discourse. Following Woolard (1998), we view language ideologies as cultural representations that may be explicit or implicit, deliberate or unintentional, and that possess efficacy by shaping social meanings and institutional practices. The study is positioned within a discourse-analytic paradigm. We apply a qualitative content analysis to two different text corpora: (1) EECERJ articles (2021–2025) addressing multilingualism (N=22); and (2) two recent national Norwegian ECEC policy documents' use of research on multilingualism. Ethical concerns involved avoiding misrepresentation of authors' positions/intentions and ensuring respectful critique. We addressed this through transparent analytic procedures, careful contextualisation of interpretations and documents, and triangulation between the two involved researchers. Our analysis targets textual representations and discursive patterns rather than individual authors. Preliminary findings suggest that implicit and unintentional multilingual ideological orientations framed through implicit monolingual norms influence both research and policy documents. The findings highlight the need for more explicit ideological reflexivity in research and policy.

multilingualism, language ideologies, reflexivity, monolingual, discourse

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

Symposium B11 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 7, floor -2

OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING SIG: LEARNING IN AND WITH NATURE: WISDOM, WELLBEING & SUISTAINABLE PEDAGOGY

Chaired by: Jie Gao, University College London, United Kingdom

Sig Outdoor play and learning- Sustainable pedagogy

Presenters:

Merete Lund Fasting, University of Agder, Norway

All authors:
Merete Lund Fasting, University of Agder, Norway
Shannon McNatty, Otago University, New Zealand
Iselin Aartun, Oslomet, Norway
Ingfrid Mattingsdal Thorjussen, Norwegian sport University, Norway

This exploratory study aims to expand knowledge on sustainable pedagogy by investigating the pedagogical practices of experienced preschool teachers in two different cultural contexts, Norway and New Zealand. The focus is on how four teachers facilitate and support children's play in nature. This research will contrubute with more in-depth knowledge on previous research work (Fasting, Kjær and Bjørke, 2025). Research has highlighted that supporting children's self-directed play, joy of movement, and interaction with both people and nature, can foster a sense of local belonging through “slow pedagogy” (Clark, 2023; Fasting, Kjær and Bjørke, 2025), and sustainability as a relational value (Fasting, Høyem & Ergler, 2025). The study was conducted within a qualitative interpretive paradigme (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Fieldwork is the primary method, and data will consist of field notes generated by both four preschool teachers (co-researchers) and researchers (from academina) while outside in nature, together 8 days. The children are part of the context, but the main focus is on the preschool teacher's role in outdoor play in nature. Information was provided to all participants. Informed consent was negotiated with the teachers, the children, and their parents, and was renegotiated during the research. Participants could withdraw at any time. Two vignettes constructed from the field notes will be presented along with a discussion on the in-depth insight these might provide for pedagogical work with children in nature. By exploring and articulating the embodied, experience-based, and often tacit knowledge the study can support other educators in developing sustainable pedagogical practices rooted in children’s play in nature.

pedagogical competence, facilitate outdoor play, sustainability , local identity

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

“Listening to the wind, watching the children”: Chinese Teachers’ Perspectives on Social-emotional Learning in Nature-based ECE

Presenters:
Ziyi Wan, Zhejiang University, China

All authors:
Junqing Zhai, Zhejiang University, China
Ziyi Wan, Zhejiang University, China
Jie Gao, University College London, United Kingdom

Social-emotional learning(SEL) is recognised as central to supporting children’s agency, participation and democratic engagement in ECE. This study explores the research question of how Chinese teachers conceptualise and support young children’s SEL in nature-based environments, with particular attention to how such settings enable children’s participation, autonomy and relational decision-making. Limited research investigated how ECE teachers support SEL in nature-based settings, particularly in non-Western contexts and in an era where children’s experiences are increasingly shaped by digital environments(Hu et al., 2015;Niu, 2023). Drawing on ecological systems theory and embodied cognition, we conceptualise SEL as a dynamic and relational process through which children develop agency, interacting with others, materials and environments. Taking an interpretivist approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 Chinese ECE teachers of different professional backgrounds through purposive sampling.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021)was conducted. Ethics approvals were obtained from researchers' two institutions. Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously ensured. Findings revealed teachers positioned nature as a co-educator that supports children's emotional regulation, cooperation and empathy through embodied, child-led experiences. Nature-based environments were seen to create opportunities for children to negotiate relationships, express perspectives and participate in shared activities, thereby fostering early forms of democratic practice. Teachers supported these processes through responsive pedagogies. Their challenges included limited CPD, parental scepticism, and ambiguity regarding teachers' roles in balancing curriculum objectives with children's autonomy. Foregrounding teachers' perspectives, this study contributes to discussions on agency and participation in ECE by highlighting culturally-situated understandings of SEL and the potential of nature-based learning as a counterbalance to increasingly digitised childhoods.

social-emotional learning, agency, nature-based ece, teacher perspectives, culturally-responsive

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Learning Wisdom in Forest Environments: Toward Responsibility and the Common Good in Pre-Primary Education

Presenters:
Terhi Ek, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Terhi Ek, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Anu Kuukka, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Eeva K. Kallio, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This study examines whether forest environments can support the learning of wisdom-related capacities among pre-primary-aged children. Wisdom is understood here theoretically as a complex and deeply integrated psychological phenomenon. The conceptual basis of this study lies in psychological wisdom research (Sternberg & Glück, 2019). Through that lens, we see wisdom as a multifaceted concept referring to socio-cognitive capacities (Grossman et al., 2020), positive emotions (Ardelt, 2003), and ethical action toward the common good (Kristjánsson et al., 2021). In practice, wisdom is understood to be based on rich life experiences and reflection on them (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Aligning with this reflective aspect, we see wisdom as a developmental phenomenon, which can begin to accumulate from childhood (Kallio et al., 2024). Furthermore, natural environments promote learning (Kuo et al., 2019). Data (diary and videos) were collected using an ethnographic methodology to observe children's daily play and activities in a forest environments during several weeks in two pre-primary education units (50 children). Observation was based on previous studies of wisdom (Kallio et al., 2025). Children and parents were informed about the study and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary and withdrawal was possible at any time. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. The results suggest that learning in forest environment foster the development of responsibility, reflection and co-operation skills that lay the early foundation of wisdom (Ek et al., in press). The findings increase our understanding of children's capacities for learning wisdom in natural environments and highlight the potential of forest environments as valuable learning spaces in early childhood education.

children, wisdom, learning environment, pre-primary education, nature

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The study was funded by the Metsämiesten säätiö Foundation 2021-2023 (Decision number 20MK034MO, 22MK025KE) and the research area is connected to the Wisdom in Practice project funded by the Research Council of Finland 2022-2026 (decision number 351238) (

Symposium B12 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Senate Room, floor -2

PEACE AND CONFLICT NAVIGATION

Chaired by: Mari Mori, Kobe Shinwa University, Japan

Nested Parent-Infant and Child Communities as a proposal for Montessori Peace Education Implementation

Presenters:
Romali Rosales Chavarria, Willow Montessori, United Kingdom

All authors:
Romali Rosales Chavarria, Willow Montessori, United Kingdom

This study explores Developing a Montessori Parent-Infant and Child (PIC) nested community that reflects Montessori`s peace education principles and supports the emotional growth of young children and their care givers. A community where Montessori's moral philosophy is reflected in the dynamics and as Frierson (2021) suggests contributes to the individual character development expressed in social solidarity through exercising agency. This implementation of Montessori's peace education considers inner, interpersonal and ecological peace through teaching about (content), for (skills) through (pedagogy) peace adding Ezhenzeller's (2023) suggested dimension IN (place-based Montessori Education) peace. It incorporates Narvaez's (2023) Evolved Developmental Niche nine components applied to classrooms to help create wellness informed practices, assisting children and their carer to grow as well as advancing Montessori's educational goal of more peaceful societies. Two PIC communities are considered for the analysis as well as 2 focused interviews to facilitators and interviews to caregivers attending these sessions in the USA and The Netherlands and a playgroup room setting in Glasgow. The analysis is conducted through content analysis with in an ethnographical approach.. Participants written consent to use data in recorded interviews remaining anonymous. PIC communities as evolved nested environments foster independence, autonomy and agency and provide wellness inducive experiences. . In order to help children and families the care givers most also be helped, which aligns with Montessori education. This study supports place-based communities to prevent adverse health and wellbeing outcomes.

Montessori, peace education, ECL, moral education, wellbeing

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

Development and application of the program for promoting young children's positive peer relationships based on restorative justice approach

Presenters:
Seung-ha Lee, Chung-Ang University,Republic of Korea

All authors:
Seung-ha Lee, Chung-Ang University,Republic of Korea
Haemin Lee, Chung-Ang,Republic of Korea

To develop and implement a restorative approach (RA) program for promoting peer relationships and preventing bullying in early childhood, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) what is the overall structure of the program? and 2) how is the program implemented within early childhood educational settings? Traditional social-emotional programs have focused on individuals' social skills (Dong et al., 2023) leaving peer relationship

dynamics under-researched. Although RA prevents bullying (McCluskey, 2018), its application to young children remain rare. As a paradigm for peaceful conflict resolution (Thorsborne & Blood, 2017), RA can foster young children's self-directed problem-solving skills through relational bases (Olkkonen, 2020). To develop the program, literature was reviewed, and the program content was validated via the Delphi method. The study involved an experimental group (N=19) and a comparison group (N=21) from a kindergarten in Seoul. Over seven weeks, the experimental group engaged in 12 classroom and 8 home activities. Participants and guardians provided informed consent with the right to withdraw. Anonymity was ensured via coding and data security via encryption. While quantitative tests showed no significant differences between groups, qualitative findings were noteworthy. Children began to identify emotions and practiced active listening. They reflected on aggressive behaviors, understood others' intentions, and appreciated forgiveness, fostering a sense of community. This study proves RA's adaptability for young children, providing a framework to resolve conflicts and reduce bullying. It serves as a practical model for child-centered education, empowering children to resolve conflicts autonomously.

restorative approach, bullying, young children, relationship, Korea

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) under the Mid-career Researcher Program in 2021

Cultivating culture of peace through dialogue with pedagogical documentation in the past, present with an eye to the future

Presenters:
Mari Mori, Kobe Shinwa University, Japan

All authors:
Mari Mori, Kobe Shinwa University, Japan
Tomohiro Uemura, Tama Art University, Japan
Hisanobu Fujita, Tokyo Seitoku University, Japan
Akiko Gunji, Gunma University, Japan

The study has sought to identify the contribution of pedagogical documentation in cultivating culture of peace in a Japanese nursery-school, from the past, present and with an eye to the future Pedagogical documentation has acknowledged as the essential component of ECEC (Carlsen, Clark, and Mori, 2024; Palaiologou and Biffi, 2021). It yields children's learning visible (Reggio Children, 2001) and listening visible (Vecchi, 2010) and invites anyone to participate in dialogue, interpretation, and transformation (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007). The study is grounded in a socio-cultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978) respecting the hundred languages of children (Malaguzzi, 1996), and UNCRC (1989). The study has guided by qualitative and inquiry based, including the collection of video-taped discussion, photography, artefacts, notes to seek the themes and distinct characteristics regarding the children's interpretation of peace. The study follows the EECERA ethical code, and the ethical guidelines of the Japan Society of Research on ECCE (2023) with written and verbal consent received from the 5-year-old children, their families, and the setting. Emerging findings suggest the children are competent and sensitive agencies to think deeply and express their thoughts on peace. Pedagogical documentation plays the important role for the children, educators, family members to examine, reflect, share the past documentation of graduated children, and look ahead to future for cultivating culture of peace together. Pedagogical documentation is perceived as to create democratic community, reflecting as well as foresee the future, children as agencies to make our lives better. The study will continue to explore the role of pedagogical documentation for constructing democratic society.

pedagogical documentation, peace-project, participation, democracy, pedagogy of listening

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

Kakenhi (Grants-in-Aid-for Scientific Research) of Japan, (B) 23K25653

Symposium B13 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Chaired by: Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland

Supporting Children's Participation Through Reflective Self-Assessment in Early Childhood Teacher Education

Presenters:
Anne Eriksen, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

All authors:
Anne Eriksen, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

This study explores how student teachers in a music and drama course in early childhood teacher education facilitate children's participation during circle times in kindergarten and how adult actions contribute to this process. The project aimed to examine whether structured self-assessment enhances reflective practice and professional learning. Building on theories of assessment as learning (Earl, 2003), transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), and reflective pedagogy (Søndenå, 2004), the study addresses a gap in research on self-assessment in arts-based early childhood education. The work draws on Freire's emancipatory pedagogy and Boal's reflective aesthetics, emphasizing empowerment, critical reflection, and responsiveness to children's voices. The study adopts an action research approach (Postholm, 2007; Gjøtterud, 2020) with qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of student group logs collected over three academic years. Logs documented experiences using the GLL method across three levels: done, learned, and wise. The project was an obligatory part of the study course, and students gave their consent about the anonymous group data to be used in my research. No information about students or kindergartens was identifiable. Students recognized the importance of children's active engagement and highlighted improvisation and flexibility as essential for responding to children's ideas. Adult contributions—such as clear communication, minimizing distractions, and planning inclusive activities—were critical for enabling participation. Some groups, however, struggled to move beyond descriptive accounts, indicating a need for clearer criteria and deeper training in reflection. Embedding structured self-assessment methods like GLL in group work in teacher education can strengthen reflective skills, and foster inclusive and democratic practices.

children's participation, adult support, formative assessment, reflective practice, music and drama education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Acquiring Critical Cultural Awareness: On the Relevance of Practice Placements in Madagascar for Norwegian Early Childhood Teacher Education

Presenters:
Tone Lønseth Davidsen, University of Stavanger, Norway
Gunnar Magnus Eidsvåg, University of Stavanger, Norway
Kjersti Lønning Velde, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Tone Lønseth Davidsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Gunnar Magnus Eidsvåg, University of Stavanger, Norway
Kjersti Lønning Velde, University of Stavanger, Norway

In this presentation we discuss a study on early childhood teacher students' practice placements in Madagascar. We investigate what cultural exchange students and teachers at the Malagasy preschools experienced, and how this knowledge is relevant in Malagasy and Norwegian ECEC-settings. Many Norwegian institutions offering early childhood teacher education include opportunities for international practice, and previous research has shown that a stay abroad in an African country offers experiences with pedagogy and a context that differ significantly from a Norwegian setting (Hoaas, 2016). We draw on theory about Critical Cultural Awareness, which is viewed as a key competence in early childhood teacher education (Kasüscke et al., 2025). The data material consists of group interviews with two different student groups (N=5), one in autumn 2025 and one in spring 2026. The study also included a fieldwork in Madagascar where we interviewed two group of teachers (N=10) in the Malagasy preschools were conducted, and a group of study coordinators (N=2) facilitating the exchange program.The analysis is based on hermeneutic theory (Gilje & Grimen, 1993) and is carried out as a thematic content analysis of the various empirical materials (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The participants were presented with written consent forms explained and translated in their native language, where there their rights to withdraw and the usage of pseudonyms were explained. We present findings on how the participants reflected on meeting culture and pedagogy that differs widely concerning ideology, institutional setting and socio-economic resources. The study emphasize the importance of student practice placements abroad.

critical cultural awareness, practice placements abroad, Malagasy preschool pedagogy, colonialism bildung

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

Supporting self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers during practicums by using video-guided and reflective mentoring discussion model

Presenters:
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Eero Laakkonen, University of Turku, Finland

This study examined pre-service early childhood education teachers' (PSTs) self-efficacy development across two consecutive practicums using either video-guided reflective discussions (VGRD) or immediate streamed reflections (ISR). We hypothesized self-efficacy would increase over time regardless of discussion model, and explored the role of prior work experience. The supervised practicum is a site for professional growth to develop PSTs' self-efficacy through structured practice and feedback (Ma et al., 2025). Research frames practicum as a relational, discursive process situated within the triad of mentor teacher, university educator and PST, shaping what counts as meaningful knowledge (Bruneel & Vanassche, 2023). Teacher self-efficacy is conceptualized as a context-sensitive, dynamic belief shaping motivation, persistence and instructional behaviour (Woodcock & Hardy, 2025). Its development is tied to teachers' reflective interpretation of their own teaching, which can strengthen or reshape efficacy beliefs (Morris et al., 2017). This quantitative, post-positivist study followed PSTs' (n=53), aged 19-45 and predominantly white, across two practicums, comparing VGRD and ISR. Self-efficacy was measured using online TSES after practicums. The data were analyzed using EFA, CFA and repeated-measures ANOVA with Bonferroni correction. Participants gave informed consent and pseudonymized data were handled according to the ethical guidelines of the

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). PST's self-efficacy beliefs increased over time. Video-guided reflection supported earlier and stronger gains in self-efficacy, especially in student engagement. Prior work experience appeared to strengthen classroom management beliefs. Results indicate that supervised video-guided reflection is essential for PST's developing self-efficacy beliefs. Practicums shouldn't be replaced by work-based experience.

early childhood teacher education, practicum, reflection, self-efficacy, video guided mentoring discussion

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium B14 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

(SoS): NURTURING AGENCY AND DEMOCRACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AI EDUCATION: TEACHERS, INTERACTIVE STORYBOOKS AND SOCIAL ROBOTS

Chaired by: Demetra Evangelou, Democritus University, Greece

Developing Children's Creative Agency with AI through Interactive Storybooks

Presenters:
Aikaterini Bagiati, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

All authors:
Isabella Pu, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Aikaterini Bagiati, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Demetra Evangelou, Democritus University, Greece
Sharifa Alghowinem, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Cynthia Breazeal, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

We developed interactive storybooks for AI literacy, where children teach a robot to create art using AI. In a study with 57 families, we investigate how children ages 6-9 exercise creative agency through playful mini-games, develop emergent AI literacies, and expand perceptions of AI and robots. Arts-based approaches can improve STEM engagement (Land, 2013; Liao, 2016) and show promise for engaging underrepresented learners (Kelleher et al., 2006; Peppler, 2013). We apply this to early AI literacy, underexplored in early elementary (Su et al., 2024), by integrating narrative, games, and creative AI interactions. We draw on constructionism (Papert, 1991), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and learning-by-teaching (Bargh & Schul, 1980; Chase et al., 2009), designing activities where children learn about AI by creating with and teaching AI systems. This mixed-methods study involved mailing storybooks to homes and collecting data remotely over two weeks. Data included pre/post surveys (Likert, multiple-choice, free-response), interviews, and AI-generated artifacts. Scaffolded interfaces prevented direct prompts and filtered content. Parental consent and child assent (7+) were obtained, and detailed information sheets provided. Children could withdraw anytime. Numerical identifiers replaced names. Children created AI outputs spanning multiple art forms, incorporating personal interests. Without instruction, they spontaneously refined prompts and described AI learning from examples, demonstrating creative agency and emergent AI literacy. Perceptions also shifted, from describing robots as helpers to envisioning them as creative agents, social companions, and fantastical machines, reflecting expanded definitions. Findings suggest scaffolded AI interactions can support children's creative agency and AI literacy, with design implications for child-AI creative tools in early AI education.

AI literacy, steam, creative learning, experiential learning, constructionism

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Supporting Children's Expressivity and Exploration: Rethinking Dialogic Design in Pedagogical Agents

Presenters:
Claudia Urrea, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

All authors:
Xiajie Zhang, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Hae Won Park, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Cynthia Breazeal, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

With the increasing amount of dialogic AI toys entering children's lives, marketed for learning support, this study examines the efficacy of a popular design paradigm in robot-assisted dialogic reading in supporting children's verbal expressivity. Prior studies on robot-assisted dialogic reading primarily focus on question-asking-and-answering. This analysis extends prior work with empirical insights on children's conversational behaviors when interacting with an embodied conversational agents with contingent non-verbal behaviors. We draw from the interactionistic theory of language acquisition (Bruner, J. S. 1977) as a conceptual framework to understand social agents as a mediational tool in children's expressive language learning. Drawing on exploratory learning theory, we shift focus from learning outcomes to children's learning behaviors, such as expressive speech, inquiry, and exploration, to inform child-centered agent design. We conducted an in situ longitudinal study over one school semester with children aged 5–6 engaging in multi-turn dialogic reading with an embodied conversational robot in their school environment. Mixed quantitative and qualitative analyses examined dialogic pattern, turn-taking, and engagement patterns. The study was approved by the institutional review board. All sessions were supervised by trained researchers, and children's assent was obtained before each interaction. Despite increased amount of turns, children showed reduced willingness to engage with the conversational robot, and their responses became less expressive over successive turns. The findings highlight the need for child-centered dialogic agent designs that actively support expressive and exploratory language behaviors, suggesting that established dialogic reading frameworks alone are insufficient for designing AI-supportive tools for children's expressive language development.

child-centered robot design, child-robot interaction, dialogic reading, usage-based language acquisition, exploratory learning

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

Early Education Teacher Professional Development for AI: A Global Perspective

Presenters:
Aikaterini Bagiati, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

All authors:
Aikaterini Bagiati, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Claudia Urrea, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Sharifa Alghowinem, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Joseph Diaz, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
Maimoona Junjunia, WISE, Qatar Foundation, Qatar
Selma Talha-Jebril, WISE, Qatar Foundation, Qatar

In the summer of 2025 we piloted 5 online courses with 265 kindergarten and elementary school teachers across 7 countries. We study initial expectations, preconceptions, misconceptions, learning gains, and factors contributing to

a successful teacher development program (TPD) Kurz et al. (2025), showed that virtual TPD can significantly influence teachers' perceptions of AI. Past research shows that teachers recognize AI's potential to transform learning, but express concerns about ethical implications, infrastructure limitations, and the need for TPD (Aghaziarati et al., 2022; Sütçü & Sütçü, 2023) We build on the framework of curricular co-design, and the importance of collaboration among teachers, researchers, and policy makers to design new educational experiences (Ravi et.al, 2023; Klopfer et.al, 2024) This is a mixed method study with a pre/post survey and a 3rd survey 3 months later. Instruments include likert scale questions, multiple choice, and open ended texts. In some countries the sample size is small and might not represent the whole community. Teachers today come to TPD from various starting points. Teachers lack systematic education about AI for teaching and learning. Course language, time of offering during the year, pedagogical approach, program duration, and program certification affected course completion. Depending on country and region teachers requested localized and contextualized content, live mentorship, more advanced content, and support with infrastructure and accessibility. They expressed concerns regarding ethical application, and lack of policy and implementation guidelines. Findings can be used to inform development of online asynchronous courses, and to guide development of national policies regarding systematic TPD.

online education, asynchronous education, teacher professional development, multi-country research, policy preparation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research project has been funded by the WISE Qatar Foundation

Symposium B15 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

NURTURING DEMOCRACY THROUGH ECEC RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Chaired by: Helen Lyndon, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom

Measuring the Impact of a Nurture Informed Approach in the Early Years: An evaluation of the Bright Horizons Nurture Approach

Presenters:
Caroline Wright, Bright Horizons UK, United Kingdom

All authors:
Caroline Wright, Bright Horizons UK, United Kingdom
Michelle Demirtas, Bright Horizons UK, United Kingdom

The study aimed to evaluate the impact of the Bright Horizons Nurture Approach on preschool children aged 36–48 months. It examined children's progress in communication and language (CL), personal, social and emotional development (PSED), self-regulation, wellbeing, involvement and learning dispositions, while capturing children's own perspectives and comparing outcomes between Nurture-trained and non-trained settings. The study builds on longstanding evidence from attachment theory (Bowlby; Ainsworth), Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and research on self-regulation. It extends literature highlighting the importance of relational pedagogy, emotionally attuned practice and knowledge of brain development, in early years education by providing systematic, practice-focused evidence of Nurture-informed approaches. The study draws on attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth), bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), and self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1991) highlighting how emotionally attuned relationships, responsive environments, and co-constructed regulation shape learning, wellbeing, and engagement within EYFS contexts. A mixed-methods, comparative design was used across 15 early

years settings. Quantitative tools included Leuven Wellbeing and Involvement Scales, ECAT assessments, CIndLe audits and THRIVE profiling. Qualitative child-voice approaches captured lived experience. Data were collected at baseline and after six months of implementation. Informed consent, confidentiality and children's emotional wellbeing guided the process. Developmentally appropriate methods ensured child-centred participation. Children in nurture-trained settings demonstrated stronger expressive language, balanced self-regulation, higher wellbeing and involvement, and greater independence. Emotional development advances were most notable where Nurture and THRIVE were embedded together. Embedding Nurture-informed, relationship-centred pedagogy, and a knowledge of early brain-development, can enhance children's communication, regulation and engagement. Predictable routines, safe spaces, sustained shared thinking and staff reflective practice are key.

relational pedagogy, neuroscience, nurturing-pedagogy, eyfs, self-regulation.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Peer Play as a Democratic Training Ground: Entanglements Between Self-Initiated Play, Democratic Organisation and Children's Cultures.

Presenters:
Fina Lewenhaupt Vilholm, Absalon University College, Denmark

All authors:
Fina Lewenhaupt Vilholm, Absalon University College, Denmark

This proposal explores how children's self-initiated, adult-free play can be understood as a site of democratic practice and emerging agency within peer communities. The study builds on research that frames play as culturally productive and valuable, and linked to childrens agency (eg. Corsaro, 2012; Goodwin, 2018; Øksnes, 2017; Øksnes & Sundsdal, 2020) Drawing on cultural studies (Mouritsen, 2016; Ehn et al., 2016) and inspired by democracy understood as lived participation (Dewey, 2005), play is conceptualised as fundamentallydemocratic. Sustaining play requires collective negotiation, rule-making, recognition, and meaning-making. Agency is understood as relational and enacted through participation, strengthened as children engage in decision-making and collective practice with peers (Mouritsen, 2016). The study is based on ten months of micro-ethnographic fieldwork in a municipal kindergarten among 41 children and 7 professionals, carried out through participatory observation, interviews, video and audio recordings. It was conducted as part of a PhD project on peer and play cultures (Vilholm, 2022). The research followed established ethical guidelines, including informed consent from parents, ongoing consent from children, and attentiveness to children's perspectives, comfort, and well-being throughout fieldwork. The analysis shows how children collectively initiate, sustain, and transform play through negotiation, argumentation, and boundary-setting. In doing so, they formulate and adjust shared rules and manage disagreements. Peer play creates conditions in which democratic processes unfold and children's agency is enacted and reinforced. The paper argues that peer and play cultures should be recognised as spaces of democratic formation. Prioritising time and space for peer play supports children's participation, agency and experience of democracy as lived practice.

peer play, democracy, peer cultures, agency, participation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The PhD is funded by Roskilde University, Centre for Daycare Research, and VIA University College, Denmark

Being and becoming a Froebelian Community of Practice; democratic research principles supported by the digital age.

Presenters:

Helen Lyndon, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom
Christine Pascal, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom
Tony Bertram, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom

All authors:
Helen Lyndon, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom
Christine Pascal, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom
Tony Bertram, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom
Tina Bruce, Froebelian Educator, United Kingdom
Anne Denham, Seven Stars Kindergarten, Auckland, New Zealand
Sally Cave, Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre, United Kingdom
Sue Bennett, Birmingham Early Years Networks, United Kingdom

The project documents the participatory and democratic development of a Froebelian Community of evidenced practice and supports the agency of early childhood educators as researchers. The digital age provided new opportunities as technology underpinned the evolution of our research community. This research summarises a cross-national project documenting and analysing Froebelian pedagogic practice in England and New Zealand. Three years of research focused on engaging with nature, the 'occupations' and play (Pascal et al., 2026) using Froebelian principles and ethics (Bruce et al, 2019). This project adopted a Praxeological (Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Formoinsho and Formosinho, 2012) and Affirmative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider, 2008), drawing on Froebelian principles and practices (Bruce, 2022) and Clark's (2023) notion of slow pedagogy. Influences were drawn from both nations with a focus on place-based education (Penetito, 2013). Technology assisted this interpretivist project and Trello (Atlassian, 2024) housed the developing case studies providing a curation and analysis space and enabling cross-site asynchronous collaboration. Technology also assisted data collection through imagery, film and ongoing narrative documentation. Ethics permeated every research decision and remained iterative (Lyndon, 2023) as we navigated contentious data storage, anonymity and power issues. Children retained anonymity whilst agentic educators waived this in order to tell their stories to a wider audience (Pascal et al, 2026). The project documents a contemporary account of Froebelian principles and practices as a democratic community of practice sought to reconsider aspects of early childhood education. Educators developed new confidence as researchers reporting both personal and professional gains. Our findings promote a research focused, democratic approach to early education and suggest that evolving technology can extend these possibilities beyond our traditional boundaries.

Froebel, slow pedagogy, practitioner research, praxeology, community of practice

Symposium B16 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

TEACHER AGENCY IN A DIGITAL AGE

Chaired by: Sarsha Mennell, Curtin University, Australia

Teachers' Pedagogical Agency in Integrating Digital Technologies in Western Australian Kindergarten Classrooms

Presenters:
Sarsha Mennell, Curtin University, Australia

All authors:
Sarsha Mennell, Curtin University, Australia
Karen MURCIA, Curtin University, Australia
Madeleine Dobson, Curtin University, Australia

This study investigates kindergarten teachers' pedagogical agency in integrating digital technologies, focusing on pedagogical decision-making processes and how teachers' knowledge and beliefs shape practices. While existing literature documents early childhood teachers' challenges in integrating digital technologies into digital-play (Pollarolo et al., 2024). Research has emphasised skills, access, and implementation rather than pedagogical agency within conditions of practice (Molla & Nolan, 2020). Limited attention has been given to how teachers navigate curriculum and policy expectations while sustaining child-centred pedagogies. The study draws on pedagogical agency concepts (Biesta et al., 2015, 2017; Molla & Nolan, 2020), the TPACK-XK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Mishra, 2019), and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979, 2013). Situated within a constructivist paradigm and interpretive epistemology (Cohen et al., 2018), this qualitative multiple-case study examines five kindergarten teachers (Yin, 2013). Data included semi-structured interviews with teachers, education assistants, and school leaders; classroom observations; classroom mapping and pedagogical documentation. Reflexive thematic approach supported inductive and deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Curtin University and sector ethics approval was obtained, with informed consent from participants and the right to withdraw maintained. Consideration was given to the time and place of the interview to ensure the teacher's ideas were heard, valued and captured respectfully. Findings indicate pedagogical agency is enacted through relational, context-responsive decision-making, positioning digital technologies as pedagogical resources within child-centred, play-based approaches. These findings suggest that targeted professional learning should focus on evidence-informed judgements. Additionally, policy frameworks should be developed to support teachers' pedagogical flexibility in kindergarten digital technology integration.

pedagogical agency, digital technology integration, early childhood teacher, professional learning, teacher decision-making

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

Not applicable

Cultivating Teacher Agency Through Participatory Thinking Spaces: Pedagogical Mediation and Democratic Praxis in the Digital Age

Presenters:
Debi Keyte-Hartland, An associate with Early Education (The British Association for Early Childhood Education) and Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom

All authors:
Debi Keyte-Hartland, An associate with Early Education (The British Association for Early Childhood Education) and Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), United Kingdom

Within neoliberalism, the development of teacher agency and democratic participation is urgent and fragile. This study investigates participatory professional learning, organised through collaborative "thinking spaces" between pedagogical coach-mentors and educators, to cultivate teacher agency through/in arts and creative approaches. The project extends research on pedagogical mediation (Formosinho, 2016; Lyndon, 2019), reciprocal formazione (Giamminuti et al., 2024), and thinking environments (Kline, 1999), situating these within critiques of performativity (Ball, 2003; Moss, 2014) and symbolic languages (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). Drawing on Manning's (2016) concept of artfulness, Bateson's (1972) ecology of mind, and Barad's (2007) agential realism, professional learning is conceptualised as a relational and democratic practice in which agency emerges through dialogic meaning-making. Situated within a postqualitative and performative paradigm (Østern et al., 2023), the study generates knowledge through embodied and diffractive practices (Barad, 2007). Methods include collage, storying and pedagogical documentation. Ethical, ontological, and epistemological perspectives considered the agency of humans as well as

materials and environments. Informed consent, anonymity, and assent were continually negotiated for human participants, ensuring inclusive, non-discriminatory involvement (Bertram et al, 2024). Findings indicate that pedagogical transformation occurs through attention to small stories and subtle perceptual shifts -what Bateson (1972) terms “the difference that makes the difference.” Pedagogical documentation functions as a generative and democratic practice (Rinaldi, 2006). The study argues for professional learning spaces that cultivate reflective slowness (Rosa, 2013), relational depth, and collective agency. Such spaces sustain early childhood education as lived sites of democracy (Biesta, 2013), countering datafication with creativity and shared pedagogical futures.

teacher agency, thinking spaces, participatory professional learning, pedagogical mediation, democratic pedagogy and practice

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

The Mercers’ Company, trustee to the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington.

Autonomy, Shared Responsibility and Digital Ethics in Initial Teacher Education at the University of Madeira

Presenters:
Ana França, Research Centre for Education, University of Madeira, Portugal

All authors:
Carla Gonçalves, Research Centre for Education, University of Madeira, Portugal
Ana França, Research Centre for Education, University of Madeira, Portugal
Inês Ferraz, Research Centre for Education, University of Madeira, Portugal
Valdemar Sousa, Research Centre for Education, University of Madeira, Portugal

In the context of digital transformation, this study examines the perceptions of second-year students in the Master's program in Early Childhood and Primary Education at the University of Madeira regarding the collective construction of teaching and learning processes in technology-mediated environments. The research is grounded in reflective supervision (Schön, 1983; Alarcão & Tavares, 2003), democratic education (Biesta, 2017), and teacher identity and professional development (Kelchtermans, 2009), integrating contributions related to the pedagogical integration of technology and ethical issues associated with Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2021). The study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm and framed by a democratic and reflective perspective on teacher education, articulated with debates on digital ethics and Artificial Intelligence, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs 4, 9, 10 and 16). Adopting a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of closed and open-ended questions. The research process respected the principles of the Ethics Committee of the University of Madeira, guaranteeing informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The results indicate the promotion of professional autonomy, shared responsibility, and digital ethics, recognizing the training path as a space for building professional identity and making shared pedagogical decisions in the integration of technologies. The study highlights that professional development in the digital age requires the consolidation of training practices oriented towards democracy, with implications for curriculum review and teacher training policies.

autonomy, shared responsibility, digital ethics, initial teacher training, professional identity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

THE VALUE AND ROLE OF SUPERVISION

Chaired by: Ilona Tandzegolskiene-Bielaglove, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Supervision as a Conceptual Framework for Strengthening Multifunctional Competencies of Early Childhood Education Staff

Presenters:
Ilona Tandzegolskiene-Bielaglove, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Ilona Tandzegolskiene-Bielaglove, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Leta Dromantiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

This paper aims to conceptualise and empirically explore supervision as a structured group-based intervention for strengthening multifunctional competencies of early childhood education staff in Lithuania. It seeks to identify how supervision contributes to reflective, communicative, collaborative, and emotional competencies within multidisciplinary kindergarten teams. Previous studies highlight the importance of multiprofessional cooperation in kindergarten (Peleman et al, 2018), advantages of supervision for professional development (Abromaitienė, 2025), strategies for managing burnout and stress among kindergarten teachers (Tandzegolskienė-Bielaglovė&Taluntienė, 2025, Tandzegolskienė-Bielaglovė, Čiučiulkienė&Valionė, 2024). Theoretical and conceptual framework is based on experiential learning and reflective practice theories by Dewey (1959), Kolb & Fry (1975), Kolb (1984), and Schön (1991). Supervision is conceptualised as a dialogical space for reflection-in-action and collective meaning-making. Situated within a constructivist paradigm, the study applies a mixed-methods design: legislative analysis, literature review, supervision in three kindergartens, semi-structured interviews, and reflective discussions. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality ensured, and informed consent obtained. Reflexivity and professional equality were maintained throughout the supervision process. Results indicate that supervision strengthened multifunctional competencies at individual, interpersonal, and organisational levels. Participants reported deeper reflective awareness, improved ability to analyse complex pedagogical situations, and greater emotional self-regulation. Communication within multidisciplinary teams improved through more active listening, constructive feedback, and shared problem-solving, while clearer understanding of professional roles reduced interprofessional tensions and increased mutual trust. At the organisational level, supervision fostered a culture of reflective dialogue, ethical deliberation, and collective responsibility. The findings suggest that supervision functions not only as a support mechanism but also as an effective professional development intervention for kindergarten teachers.

early childhood education, supervision, multifunctional competencies, group-based intervention, professional development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

EU ERASMUS + project “Socially Sustainable Early Childhood Education Future – SoSECE”nr. 2024-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000254061; Socially Sustainable Early Childhood Education Future.

Supervision as a Foundation for Professional Growth: A Study of Students in Workplace-Based Early Childhood Teacher Education

Presenters:
Natalia Alfarnes, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Natalia Alfarnes, NLA University College, Norway

This study explores how students in workplace-based early childhood teacher education (ABLU) in Norway experience supervision during practicum periods, and how these experiences influence learning, reflection, and professional identity development. Previous research highlights persistent tensions between theory and practice in teacher education and underscores the importance of coherent practicum models. Studies emphasize supervision as central to professional learning, yet less attention has been given to students' lived experiences within workplace-based models (ABLU). This study contributes empirically grounded insights into this field. The study is grounded in sociocultural learning theory and the master-apprenticeship tradition (Lauvås & Handal, 2007), where learning occurs through participation, dialogue, and reflection on action. Supervision is understood as a relational and meaning-making process (Carson & Birkeland, 2017) that supports professional identity formation. Trust and relational safety are emphasised as prerequisites for learning (Jensen & Aronsson, 2021). The framework also draws on research highlighting the interplay between experiential and theoretical knowledge in ABLU (Lafton & Furu, 2019). The study adopts a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Seven ABLU students were interviewed, and data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The project follows established research ethics guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymisation, and attention to power dynamics. Findings reveal that supervision is shaped by structural conditions (time, expectations, organisation) and relational dimensions (trust, recognition, dialogue). When supervision provides space for reflection and professional dialogue, students experience enhanced confidence and identity development. Conversely, unclear expectations and limited follow-up create uncertainty. Clearer supervisory structures and strengthened collaboration between institutions and practicum sites are needed in ABLU.

workplace-based education, supervision, practicum, professional identity, early childhood teacher education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research received no external funding.

"We Can't Afford Not To Think" Supervision, Containment and Emotional Labour in an Early Years Integrated Setting

Presenters:
Fliss Dewsbery, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

All authors:
Fliss Dewsbery, Pen Green Research Base, United Kingdom

Explore how early years practitioners experience supervision. Examine how supervision contains, supports and improves emotional labour, wellbeing and retention. Identify what makes supervision effective in emotionally demanding work. This work builds on the work of Shohet and Shohet (2020) who have written about supervision in the helping professions and Anita Soni (2019) who has undertaken research on the practice of supervision within the early years sector. Key theorists include, Bion (1962) Containment, Winnicott (1971) Holding, Klein (1940) depressive position, Trevarthen (1993) intersubjectivity, Page (2018), professional love and Archer (2003) reflexive agency. The study followed an Interpretivist/Social Constructivism / Practitioner-Researcher/ Insider Leader Researcher paradigm with a case study methodology and a collective and nested case study approach. Narrative Portraits and Collaborative Reflexive Thematic Analysis (CRTA) were used to analyse the data. Research participants are colleagues, therefore Ellis (2007) 'relational ethics' is applied. Supervision at Pen Green emerges as a systemic act of professional love and reflective containment. It provides emotional scaffolding that enables practitioners to hold anxiety, sustain thinking, and embody relational attunement. By linking lived experience to reflective supervision theory, psychanalytic theory and early years policy, this study contributes an original conceptualisation of supervision as a relational space, where being held, holding others, and co-creating containment form the heart of reflective practice. If we value practitioners' emotional labour, we must institutionalise reflective supervision as a

leadership responsibility, not a luxury. We must provide supervision training in containment and reflexivity, protect time and structure for supervision, ensure leaders also receive supervision and provide a model for the sector.

supervision, containment, emotional labour, early years, integrated setting

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

Symposium B18 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 14, floor -1

RECONCEPTUALISING PLAY EXPERIENCES

Chaired by: Catriona Gill, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

Thinking with Froebelian Unity: Methodological Reflections from Block Play Research

Presenters:
Catriona Gill, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

All authors:
Catriona Gill, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

This paper offers methodological reflections emerging from a doctoral study exploring what a new materialist perspective reveals about the Froebelian concept of unity within unit block play, and what occurs when practitioners attend to the agency of materials and environments. Although Froebel's principle of unity foregrounds interconnectedness between children, materials and environment (Bruce, 2021), it has rarely been engaged as a methodological orientation. New materialist scholarship (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox & Alldred, 2015) and material-dialogic approaches (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2017) extend attention to human–material relations. The study brings Froebelian unity (Froebel, 1826/2001) into dialogue with concepts of assemblage and relational ontology (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Agency is understood as emerging through intra-actions between children, materials, space and practitioners (Barad, 2007; Lenz-Taguchi, 2010). Situated within a qualitative, relational paradigm, the study was conducted in one Froebelian ECEC setting in Scotland. Data included field notes, photographs and video documentation of block play (Pink, 2015). Visual excerpts were curated as relational encounters, selected for unfolding interaction, spatial tension, instability or affective pull. Practitioner dialogue sessions were conceptually orientated, unfolding responsively while sustaining attention to material, spatial and social relations. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Strathclyde. In line with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024), the study prioritised informed consent and ongoing assent. Findings indicate that treating Froebelian unity as a methodological orientation reconfigures attention towards relational, material–spatial entanglements, while generating tensions with developmental and human-centred interpretive frames. The study contributes to renewed methodological engagement with Froebelian thought, offering an alternative orientation to observational practices in ECEC.

Froebel, unity, blockplay, new materialism, methodology

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

Children's Individual Play Patterns in Early Childhood Education: A Person-Centred Approach

Presenters:
Anna Bilgeri, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

All authors:
Anna Bilgeri, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Katharina Kluczniok, University of Berlin, Germany
Wilfried Smidt, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Franziska Cohen, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

This study examines how play contexts relate to children's interaction quality to support their learning and active participation in early childhood education. Play is a key activity in early childhood that influences children's development (Vygotsky, 1967), fostering creativity (Bodrova & Leong, 2015) and problem-solving skills (Pyle et al., 2017) which are foundational to participate in social and digital contexts. From a social-constructivist perspective, children are active participants in their learning processes (Weisberg et al., 2013) and vary in play engagement depending on individual and sociocultural characteristics (Ivrendi, 2020). This observational study analyses interaction quality at individual child-level, using standardized observations of interaction quality (inCLASS, Downer et al., 2012) and activity setting (ZiKiB, Kuger et al., 2006) in a sample of N= 505 children from 152 preschools in Germany and Austria. Ethical guidelines were followed, including parental consent and continuous monitoring of children's signals. Descriptive results indicate differences in children's play behaviour. Multilevel analyses indicate a weak positive association between guided play and interaction quality (β = .08), although guided play was rare (5%). Ongoing person-centred analyses (e.g., latent profile models) aim to explore heterogeneity in children's play behaviour across activity settings (e.g. group structure, play activities, play facilitation) and interaction quality, including links to child characteristics (e.g., gender, migration background). This approach aims to identify different play profiles to reveal how teachers can tailor support to children's individual needs (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011) and foster skills within children's zones of proximal development (Bodrova & Leong, 2015) to achieve high-quality participation in early childhood education.

play-based-learning, play patterns, play facilitation, interaction quality, person-centred approach

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

The data is based on the research project "Interaction Quality of Children in Kindergarten," which was conducted at the University of Innsbruck under the direction of Prof. Wilfried Smidt and funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), as well as the research project "Interaction Quality of Kindergarten Children over the Kindergarten Period," which was conducted at the University of Koblenz-Landau/FU Berlin by Prof. Dr. Katharina Kluczniok and Dr. Thilo Schmidt and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

"Unpredictable Paths" Loose Parts Play in Early Childhood Education: A Scoping Review

Presenters:
Riana Leah Byrne, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

All authors:
Riana Leah Byrne, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Maria Papandreou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

This scoping review systematically maps international research on loose parts play in early childhood education for children aged 3-8 years across formal and non-formal learning environments, examining definitions, themes, contexts and methodologies. Previous reviews have addressed physical activity, intervention outcomes, conceptual definitions, and educational benefits of loose parts play (Houser et al., 2016; Gibson et al., 2017; Gull et al., 2019; Cankaya et al., 2023). However, definitions, theoretical grounding, pedagogical mediation, and methodological designs remain unevenly synthesised, particularly in preschool-focused research. The review draws on Nicholson's loose parts theory, Gibson's affordances, and sociocultural perspectives on play (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003), to

interpret links between materials, space, participation and pedagogy. Using scoping review methodology, the study followed Joanna Briggs Institute guidance and PRISMA-ScR reporting. A database search identified peer-reviewed empirical studies (2010-2025), of which 21 met the inclusion criteria and were analysed through mapping and descriptive synthesis. As a review of published studies, no direct participation of children or educators occurred. Ethical rigour was ensured through transparent criteria, documented screening decisions, accurate study representation. Findings show no shared definition of loose parts, with functional and descriptive interpretations predominating. Research focuses mainly on space design, play affordances, and intervention evaluation with outdoor and naturalised settings dominating, while indoor and hybrid contexts remain under-represented. Overall, the review highlights priorities for practice and policy: clearer conceptual language, stronger educator preparation for mediation, and curriculum integration across indoor-outdoor continuities. These priorities support inclusive, context-sensitive implementation of open-ended play in early childhood settings.

loose parts play, open-ended play, learning environments, play affordances, scoping review

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research stems from an MSc thesis completed within the 'Education Sciences: Research and Practice in Changing Learning Environments' programme at the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Symposium B19 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

(SoS): SUCCESS IN KINDERGARTEN: AN EXPLORATION OF CHILD, PARENT, AND EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES AT AGES 4 AND 5 IN FRANCE AND QUEBEC

Chaired by: Joanne Lehrer, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada

Children’s perspectives of success in kindergarten

Presenters:
Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

All authors:
Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada
Carmen Sanchez, Sorbonne Université, France
Joanne Lehrer, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada
Mathieu Point, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Christelle Robert-Mazaye, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada
Julie Delalande, Université Caen Normandie, France
Annie Charron, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Sophie Levrard, Université Catholique de l'Ouest, France

From a transcultural perspective (France/Québec), this exploratory study focuses on how children perceive success in kindergarten. Public discourse on early education promotes children’s “success,” though the term remains vague. In France, formal learning has gradually come to occupy an increasingly dominant place. In Quebec, discourses of global development and early prevention co-exist. In both contexts, kindergarten is framed as preparation for future schooling, and children’s own understandings of success are rarely considered. The Mosaic approach (Clark, 2011) was used to build a composite understanding of children’s experiences. This approach, by recognizing children's agency and their multiple expressive languages, leads to insight into what “success” means from their perspective. This study followed 56 children in 8 schools (4 per country). The methodology combined filmed observations of children, guided visits where they photographed what is important to them, and interviews in pairs about the photos/videos taken. The interviews were video-recorded, and a thematic analysis of the discussions was conducted

to identify key ideas about kindergarten success. Consent was obtained from the teachers and parents, and a book was read to the children. We insisted on children's right to refuse, and sought children's verbal and non-verbal, para-verbal approval before each activity. Children primarily associate success with integration into the group and meeting academic expectations. Becoming a member of the group appears central. We discuss teaching practices that acknowledge children's diversity and support their success by valuing individual diversity. By considering children's voices, this study sheds light on additional components of kindergarten "success" to take into account when reflecting on pedagogical practice.

success, children's voice, 4 years-old, kindergarten

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This cross-cultural project is funded by two agencies: the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) and the French National Research Agency (ANR). The project title is as follows: Lehrer, J., Garnier, P., et al. (2022–2025). Cross-perspectives on pedagogical and educational practices in France and Québec: Understanding children's success in kindergarten from the viewpoint of its stakeholders.

Children's success from the perspective of professionals working in (pre)schools for 4- and 5-year-olds in Quebec and France

Presenters:
Pascale Garnier, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, France

All authors:
Pascale Garnier, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, France
Alexandra Paquette, UQAM, Canada
Annie Charron, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Sylvie Rayna, Univerté Sorbonne Paris Nord, France

From a transcultural perspective (France/Québec), this exploratory study focuses on how professionals perceive children's "success" in (pre)schools. In France, formal learning has gradually come to occupy an increasingly dominant place (Garnier, 2020). In Quebec, discourses of global development and early prevention co-exist (Lehrer et Fournier (2021). In both contexts, early education is framed as preparation for future schooling. Similar to the concept of "quality" in early childhood education and care (Dahlberg & al., 1999), the concept of children's "success" may be a matter of discords involving different "economies of worth" (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). The study took place in 8 schools (4 per country) over 2 years. 47 professionals participated: teachers, classroom assistants, and childcare staff. Within a video-cued multivocal ethnographic methodology (Tobin, 2016, 2019), we sought to understand the concept of "success in kindergarten" through professionals' spontaneous reactions to the videos. The research received ethical approval and informed consent was obtained from all participants: professionals, parents, and children (Garnier & al., 2026). In both countries, children's success is a concern shared by all professionals, who want to ensure they are "happy to come to school", through positive experiences. However, professionals differ with regards to the importance they ascribe to academic learning or global developmental skills, in line with the timeframe and organization of each school system. This study sheds light on the importance of collaboration between different categories of professionals as well as during the transition from one year to the next.

success, education, early childhood professionals, France, Quebec

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Agence Nationale de la Recherche (France)FRQ (Québec)

Parent perspectives on success in Kindergarten

Presenters:
Joanne Lehrer, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada

All authors:
Joanne Lehrer, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada
Sophie Levrard, Université de Caen, France
Nancy Proulx, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada
Victoria Chantseva, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, France

This project compared French and Quebecois parents' understandings of success in kindergarten, through an analysis of focus group interviews conducted in response to two 20-minute videos, one of daily life in their child's kindergarten class, and one in a similar class in the other context. Recent research on "success" in kindergarten refers to school success, academic success, or educational success (Deloach, 2025) and focuses on school readiness (Macy et al., 2022), successful transitions (Cook et al., 2024), or children's adaptations to kindergarten (Swift, 2022). To our knowledge, there is no common understanding of the concept of "success" in kindergarten and no research on the subject from parents' point of view. Within a critical constructivist interpretative framework (Dahlberg et al., 2013), we sought to understand the concept of "success in kindergarten" through spontaneous reactions to the videos, using Tobin's (2016) polyvocal ethnographic method. The study took place in 8 schools (4 in France, 4 in Quebec) over 2 years (4 year-old prekindergarten/moyenne section and 5 year-old kindergarten/grande section). 47 parents participated in year 1, 33 participated in year 2. Standard ethical procedures were adhered to (informed consent, ability to withdraw, confidentiality). Children's assent to be filmed was obtained through a picture book presenting the research project. Findings highlight children's happiness, pride, confidence, interest, and engagement; effort and learning; relationships with adults and other children; ability to adapt, conform, and comply with rules; and children's imagination, curiosity, and creativity. Together with professional and child perspectives of "success" in kindergarten, these findings can influence practice and policy regarding curriculum, evaluation, and professional development.

parents, families, success, kindergarten, preschool

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funded by the Agence nationale de recherche (France) and the Fonds québécois de la recherche - société et culture.

Symposium B20 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

(SoS): CONDITIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR INCLUDING MEN IN THE ECEC WORK FORCE

Chaired by: Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

Support structures for men working in ECEC - a long-term analysis

Presenters:
Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

All authors:
Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

This paper presents long-term research on a network of coordinators and leaders of working groups for men in ECEC in Germany. It traces the development of these structures over a period of 15 years to shed light on opportunities, challenges and barriers of continuous professional development. The research builds up on research on men in ECEC on national (Cremers et al. 2012, Rohrmann 2013) and international level (Peeters et al. 2015, Rohrmann 2020, Brody et al. 2021). The research combines quantitative analyses with a co-constructive framework and a participatory research approach. Results from continuous research were repeatedly discussed with expert members from the National network, leading to the further development of strategies and methods for supporting men on local, regional and national level. Quantitative surveys conducted annually inform about numbers, participants, and framing conditions of regional working groups for male practitioners. These are contrasted with analyses of documentations of expert group discussions from nationwide network meetings. The research is fully based on anonymized data. Research questions were developed from the network context, and results were led back to this context in a reflexive cycle. All participants agreed in the documentation and publication of results. Ethical consent was approved by the university's ethical committee. The results give evidence for the relevance of support structures for the development of a more gender-balanced workforce. However, these are highly dependent on regional conditions, and on individual engagement of coordinators and group leaders. The research informs stakeholders and policy makers about the importance of support structures for retaining male practitioners in ECEC.

gender, male practitioners, mentoring, professionalization, continuous professional development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

MoMEC: Mentoring Men in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Joanne McHale, Technological University Dublin, Ireland
Jean Plaisir, City University of New York, United States

All authors:
Joanne McHale, Technological University Dublin, Ireland
Jean Plaisir, City University of New York, United States
Ramazan Sak, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye
İkbal Tuba Şahin-Sak, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye
Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany
Kari Emilsen, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway

This international collaboration aimed to create the necessary conditions for developing a gender-mixed work force in ECEC. Research was conducted with men working in ECEC across multiple contexts (Türkiye, Germany, Norway, USA and Ireland) to evaluate and develop mentoring strategies with the aim of increasing participation and retention of men as educators in ECEC. Internationally, men’s participation and retention in the ECEC workforce remains low. Previous studies have indicated that men’s career satisfaction can be impacted by their minority status and reactions to their presence. However, this can be ameliorated by good leadership and supportive mentoring (Brody et al., 2021). This research is framed by understandings of gender as embedded in social structures (Connell, 2009) and influencing men’s career decisions and experiences in women-majority occupations (Schaub, 2015). Mentoring frameworks and their application to men in ECEC are considered. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed in the respective represented countries to establish men’s mentoring needs. Ethical Clearance was granted from the respective university ethics committees of each of the researchers on this project. Considerations such as anonymity (by design), voluntary informed participation, risk mitigation and data storage and retention were of primary concern. The research findings demonstrate the nuanced

nature of men's experiences and the need for targeted mentoring approaches to increase and retain men's participation in ECEC. Based on this research, recommendations for practice and policy will be made, particularly in light of recruitment and retention in ECEC generally internationally.

men in ECEC, gender, mentoring, recruitment, retention

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

From Chance to Career: Recruiting Men into Norwegian ECEC and Keeping Them There

Presenters:
Kari Emilsen, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education (DMMH), Norway, Norway

All authors:
Kari Emilsen, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education (DMMH), Norway, Norway

The aim of this study is to explore how men are recruited into Norwegian ECEC, what supports retention, and which practitioner-identified measures may increase men's participation Men remain a small minority in Norwegian ECEC. Recent national figures show 10.9% men in core staffing (ssb.no). Research on men in ECEC highlights persistent gender imbalance and the importance of organizational conditions, professional status narratives, and gendered expectations (Emilsen et al., 2023; Brody et al., 2021). We draw on gender-as-practice to analyze how everyday interactions and role expectations shape "organizational fit" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and we connect this classic framework to contemporary ECEC scholarship on men, gender flexibility, and workforce sustainability (Warin, 2019; Brody et al., 2021). An ecological perspective frames recruitment/retention across individual–workplace–system levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We used an interpretivist qualitative design.One focus group interview with three male ECEC practitioners and a researcher/moderator; audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Coding was structured deductively by Recruitment–Retention–Measures with inductive sub-themes. The research was conducted with informed consent, encrypted data storage, anonymisation, and no collection of personal data Men's entry was often contingent (substitute work, civil service, reskilling), rather than a planned early career choice. Retention pressures were tied less to pay than to workload, staffing constraints, and moral stress from "not meeting expectations," which also made positive recruitment messaging difficult, alongside gendered role assumptions (e.g., practical/physical tasks) affecting daily fit. Implications was pair pipeline initiatives (school outreach, structured youth placements) with retention-first reforms (staffing and sustainable work organisation) to make recruitment messages credible.

ECEC, men, recruitment, retention, gender-as-practice, Norway, thematic analysis, workforce policy

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

Symposium B21 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

(SoS): EARLY CHILDHOOD MATHEMATICS LEARNING INTERACTIONS

Chaired by: Natalie Flint, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

Mathematical Nursery Rhymes as Interactional Resources for Early Mathematics Learning

Presenters:
Natalie Flint, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Natalie Flint, Loughborough University, United Kingdom
Tim Jay, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Katie Seabridge, Loughborough University, United Kingdom
Elizabeth Stokoe, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom

This study explores how nursery rhymes are used in preschool settings to support mathematics learning. Otchere-Larbi and Amoah (2020) reported that the use of songs in Ghanaian kindergartens supported comprehension of numeracy concepts. Similarly, Hamilton and Murphy (2024) found that UK educators used nursery rhymes to support mathematics learning through repetition, enjoyment, and establishing mathematical ideas. These studies demonstrate the widespread use of nursery rhymes to support mathematics learning; this study examines how such practices unfold in interaction. This study draws on play-based and emergent mathematics perspectives that conceptualise children's mathematical thinking as developing through meaningful play. Mathematical ideas emerge as children engage with mathematical concepts and tools within play, guided by adult mediation (van Oers, 2009). Nursery rhymes serve as one form of embedded play practices. Conversation analysis was used to examine nursery rhyme sequences within over 115 hours of preschool video recordings in England, focusing on expansions in interactions involving mathematical nursery rhymes, all transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions. Practitioners provided informed consent, and all participant data and images were anonymised. Participants retained the right to withdraw. Analysis shows that nursery rhymes function as structured yet flexible interactional frameworks for mathematics learning. Educator-led questions embedded within songs generate opportunities for counting, subtraction, and explanation, while post-expansions following verses offer rich opportunities for extended mathematical talk. These findings suggest that mathematical nursery rhymes are powerful interactional resources for early mathematics learning. Findings from this work have been presented as professional development for early childhood educators.

Mathematic, snursery rhymes, conversation analysis, play, interaction

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

This work was supported by UKRI Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/W002914/1].

What counts as correct? Understanding sociomathematical norms in early childhood mathematics learning interactions

Presenters:
Tim Jay, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

All authors:
Tim Jay, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Natalie Flint, Loughborough University, United Kingdom
Elizabeth Stokoe, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom

The study examines how finger counting norms are introduced in early childhood mathematics, focusing on children's finger-based number representations and how practitioners respond to them. Finger-use and numerical development research has shown the importance of finger gnosis, cultural practices, and embodied representations (e.g. Barrocas et al. 2020). There are similarities with mathematical graphics and mark-making research that value creative, self-generated representations (Carruthers & Worthington, 2007; MacDonald, 2013). The study builds on the sociomathematical norms literature (Yackel & Cobb, 1996). This study extends this theoretical framework to preschool settings, where past work typically involves older learners. Conversation analysis is used to examine real-time interaction, sequence organisation, and multimodal behaviour. Video recordings of preschool interactions

in England (115+ hours across 20 days). Analysis of sequences where norms are established, adhered to, or breached. Transcription used Jeffersonian conventions. Practitioners provided informed consent. Participants' information and image have been anonymised. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Practitioners demonstrate normative ways of representing numbers (e.g., splayed fingers, palms out). Children often adhere to these norms, copying practitioners' gestures. Non-normative responses are treated variably—sometimes scaffolded as incorrect, sometimes praised as creatively valid. These interactions show that sociomathematical norms are co-constructed, not imposed, and are shaped by motor skills, participation frameworks, and practitioner priorities. Early years practitioners should balance creative, child-generated representations with shared, conventional forms that support communication and readiness for formal schooling. Practitioner decisions about whether to enforce or relax norms have social consequences, influencing peers' interpretations of what counts as mathematically "correct."

mathematics, embodied learning, conversation analysis, classroom interaction, counting

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work was supportedby UKRI Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/W002914/1]

Symposium B22 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 24, floor 1

(SoS): IN SEARCH OF REAL UTOPIA'S: EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS AS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATES

Chaired by: Kaat Verhaeghe, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

The educational impact of the HeART of Gaza exhibition: raising the children's voices

Presenters:
Emanuela Pettinari, University of Bologna, Italy
Arianna Lazzari, University of Bologna, Italy

All authors:
Emanuela Pettinari, University of Bologna, Italy
Arianna Lazzari, University of Bologna, Italy

This presentation analyses HeART of Gaza, an initiative that collects drawings by children from Deir Al-Balah, hosted at the University of Bologna and at Erasmus University College in Brussels, as a further sign of exchange and collaboration between the two institutions to find strategies to train educators capable of advocating for children. In relation to previous studies (Veronese et al. 2010) the research shows how drawing can be a tool for treating trauma but also represents a way of raising the voices of children (Clark & Moss, 2014), listening to their point of view and restoring dignity to it. When fundamental rights are denied, creating spaces for sharing and expression means giving children an existential dimension that protects them on a cultural and community level (Sagy-Schwartz, 2012). The participatory approach made it possible to gather the impressions of the children who created the drawings and those of the students, in order to understand the changes in their perception of the ongoing conflict and the need to give a voice to those who do not have one. Attention was devoted to safeguarding children's dignity. The project is not only a place for continuing education (Timraz, Pettinari, 2025), but also a place for emotional processing and an opportunity to promote social justice. This aspect becomes even more significant as a part of the knowledge of future educators. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the capacity for support in both formal and informal educational settings, encouraging practices that consider children's individual pathways at micro and macro levels.

social justice, art, advocacy, education in emergencies, safe learning spaces

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

From traces to mosaics, children's voices and participation in the city

Presenters:
Kaat Verhaeghe, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

All authors:
Kaat Verhaeghe, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium
Sanne Caluwaerts, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

This study examines how education can reclaim its democratic essence by fostering equality and plurality (Sousa & Moss, 2024). Inspired by Arendt (1994/1958) education is seen as an intergenerational proces grounded in natality (Ramaekers, 2018). It explores how adults can meaningfully involve young children in co-constructing a shared world. It operationalizes children's right to be heard and ensure their views carry due weight (Lundy, 2007), while positioning students as emerging children's rights advocates who actively mediate children's perspectives. Building on childhood studies the project challenges developmentalist views that frame children as "adults-in-the-making." It positions children as competent social actors and extends democratic education by foregrounding intergenerational dialogue and advocacy-oriented pedagogy. The framework integrates the notion of natality with a rights-based approach to participation. Particular emphasis is placed on "voice and meaning" as dialogical and co-constructed. Situated within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm, the study employs participatory and arts-based methods, using the mosaic approach. Through drawings, photographs, and shared reflections, children's perspectives were gathered as layered, multimodal expressions by listening, documenting, and amplifying children's perspectives in dialogue with adults. Children were engaged as co-researchers, with adapted assent procedures. Particular attention was given to power asymmetries, representation, and mutual recognition. Findings show that the mosaic method deepens the process of hearing children's voices by valuing silence, expression, and relational meaning-making. Intergenerational encounters fostered shared meaning-making: children's wonder disrupted adult assumptions, while students' advocacy strengthened democratic responsiveness. The study advocates embedding structured, arts-based intergenerational dialogue in education policy and practice, affirming children as present contributors to the common world.

democratic education, children's participation rights, intergenerational dialogue, natality, Mosaic approach

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Children's Rights Manifesto: Children's Drawing and New Tables

Presenters:
Sanne Caluwaerts, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

All authors:
Sanne Caluwaerts, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium
Kaat Verhaeghe, Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Belgium

This study examines the co-creation of a polyphonic Children's Rights Manifesto as pedagogical and political practice. It explores how intergenerational encounters move beyond tokenism to create public space for children's voices. The manifesto, Kindertekening en nieuwe tafels (Children's Drawing and New Tables), emerged through arts-based dialogue, positioning children as present citizens renewing a shared world. The study builds on critical pedagogy and childhood studies challenging developmentalist and neoliberal constructions of childhood. It engages with Korczak's "right to today", Arendt's natality, and Freirean dialogue, translating these ideas into a public text. Drawing on

Arendt's metaphor of the "table" as shared world, children's rights are understood as relational practices balancing protection and participation. Voice is plural and emerging in interaction. Situated within a qualitative participatory paradigm, the research took place during the first Children's Rights Workshop at ErasmushogeschoolBrussel (May 2025). Participants transformed indignation into hopeful imagination, inspired by Moss and Sousa's move from anger to real utopias. Through drawing, poetry, and dialogue, they co-created a manifesto shaped into a poetic text by city poet Ma Neza, designed to travel to new "tables". Children were recognized as equal yet distinct interlocutors. Ongoing consent and shared authorship guided the process. Assent was sought for including their contributions. Arts-based intergenerational encounters disrupted future-oriented narratives of childhood. "New tables" symbolized democratic spaces where plurality and imagination flourish. As the manifesto travels, new interpretations translate aspirations into practice. Children's rights education should move beyond legal frameworks toward dialogical praxis, fostering spaces where children emerge as co-authors of the common world.

children's rights education, participatory research, intergenerational encounter, sarts-based pedagogy, democratic praxis

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

Symposium B23 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): PEDAGOGIES OF BELONGING IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE

Chaired by: Clionagh Boyle, Ulster University, United Kingdom

"Migration Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education: Rethinking Diversity, Belonging, and Inclusion"

Presenters:
Antoanneta Potsi, Bielefeld University, Germany

All authors:
Antoanneta Potsi, Bielefeld University, Germany

This paper examines migration pedagogy as a critical framework for addressing diversity, inequality, and inclusion in ECEC, focusing on how migration reshapes pedagogical practices, institutional norms, and children's experiences of belonging and identity. Building on international research on children's well-being, diversity, and social justice in ECEC, this study foregrounds migration as a constitutive dimension of early childhood. It critically engages with migration pedagogy and connects it to broader debates on equity and professionalism The paper is grounded in critical theory and draws on migration pedagogy, particularly the work of Paul Mecheril. Migration pedagogy is conceptualized as both a pedagogical and political framework that interrogates processes of othering, normalisation, and power within educational institutions. The study is positioned within a critical-interpretive paradigm. It adopts a theoretical and conceptual analysis approach to critically examine dominant discourses and pedagogical assumptions in ECEC. As a conceptual and theoretical paper, no direct research with children or practitioners is involved. Ethical considerations relate to responsible scholarship, reflexivity, and the careful representation of children and communities engaged in migratory moves. Traditional ECEC frameworks often reproduce assimilationist and deficit-oriented understandings of migration. Migration pedagogy offers a transformative lens that challenges these assumptions by recognising children's complex, intersecting identities and positioning migration as a resource for pedagogical reflection and institutional change. The paper highlights implications for ECEC practice, teacher education, and policy, advocating for reflective, justice-oriented pedagogies that actively support plural belonging, democratic participation, and inclusive learning environments in contexts shaped by migration.

migration pedagogy, critical framework, ECEC, children's well-being, diversity, social justice

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

'Being with'- Reflexive slow pedagogy in a community impacted by conflict

Presenters:
Clionagh Boyle, Ulster University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Clionagh Boyle, Ulster University, United Kingdom

The project documents the reflexive exploration of slow pedagogy (Clark, 2023) in a neighbourhood Sure Start programme within a community impacted by conflict in Northern Ireland. The following RQ's guided the study: RQ1 In what ways may conflict impact intergenerationally? RQ2 What is the resonance of a slow approach to pedagogy in this place and time? RQ3 What insights might be gained from practice internationally? Oriented in Action Research (MacNaughten, 2008) Liu (2015), emphasises the critical dimension as challenging pre existing beliefs may mean revising previous judgement that relied on these assumptions. Epistemological approach provides insight into participants' critical reflections, building upon their everyday lived experiences. Reflection to deconstruct knowledge, action to reconstruct knowledge, and collaboration with peers to co-construct knowledge (Stoll et al., 2006). In communities of practice, early childhood educators are anticipatory social actors who actively construct meaning and make sense of their world alongside children and parents (Rinaldi, 2006). The specific method was practitioner pedagogical journaling which is then shared and processed in the wider group (Cottingham, 2019). The research was conducted in alignment with the revised EECERA ethical code (2024) This outlines the ethical importance of sharing power between all participants in a way that facilitates active voice and agency in the research process. Findings included the importance of liminal spaces, cultural embodiment, prevalence of trauma and grief and gendered emotional and physical labour. Implications for practice and policy include attention to the four principles of slow pedagogy: being with; going off track; diving deep and taking the longer view (Carlsen and Clark, 2022).

slow pedagogy, reflexivity, conflict, participatory approach

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

For our children! The paradigm of hope and its influence on the resilience spirit and agency of immigrant families: A critical literacy analysis of stories of immigration

Presenters:
Wilma Robles-Melendez, Nova Southeastern University, United States

All authors:
Wilma Robles-Melendez, Nova Southeastern University, United States

Study explored hope as influential factor in immigrant families' resilience actions through critical analysis of immigration stories. Story analysis aimed at identifying hope's influence on families' agency-thinking and resilience. Study continues presenters' research on immigration experience focusing hope-centered resilience of families in pursuit for children's wellbeing. Study framed by Snyder's theory of hope as agentic factor and Masten's resilience theory as empowerment factors in challenging moments. Grounded in cultural and social justice perspectives (Ladson-Billings; Freire) on immigration experience. Project followed a critical literacy analysis of children's immigration stories (Vazquez, 2014) using paradigm of stories as socially-constructed, unveiling diverse realities

(Bishop). Presenter-created criteria followed for story selections and thematically analyzed from perspectives of hope, agency, social justice. Unstructured interviews with immigrant families provided voice from experiences. Only those who agree to participate in unstructured interviews were selected (EECERA 2025). Hope influences families' migration decisions and agentic-resilient response seeking children's wellbeing and future. Families' hopefulness carries implications for responsive-consideration of actions, efforts, support from practitioners.

hope, immigration, families, agency, resilience,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium B24 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 5, floor 3

(SoS): SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S AGENCY THROUGH PLAY: PEDAGOGICAL MODELS FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Chaired by: Karine Desrochers, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Supporting Language Through Pretend Play: A Heuristic Model and Its Influence on Kindergarten Teachers' Practices

Presenters:
Karine Desrochers, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Karine Desrochers, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Hélène Castany Owhadi, Université de Montpellier, France
Yves Soulé, Université de Montpellier, France

This presentation outlines a heuristic model of teachers' professional gestures within pretend play in kindergarten aimed at fostering children's language development (ages 4-6). It also examines teachers' reported practice changes following its implementation. Pretend play supports children's development and learning through peer and adult interaction (Drainville et al., 2023). Yet teachers often hesitate to intervene, fearing disruption of play's spontaneity (Joigneaux, 2019), and tend to provide limited language support (Dumais and Plessis-Bélair, 2017). This highlights the need to identify gestures that support language while preserving children's central role (Marinova, 2014). Grounded in a socioconstructivist perspective, pretend play is viewed as a child-initiated imaginary situation in which children choose and enact roles governed by implicit rules. Such play supports language, symbolic thinking, and social development (Vygotsky, 1933/1978). The study also draws on professional gestures, teacher playfulness, and language scaffolding to frame adult intervention that respects children's initiative. An action-research training project was conducted in Dijon (2023-2024). Ten kindergarten teachers participated with pedagogical advisors and an inspector. The model was implemented in classrooms, followed by self-confrontation interviews, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews documenting implementation and reported practice changes. Participation was voluntary, and data were anonymized. The participatory design emphasised respect for teachers' expertise and school contexts. Results highlight the value of a playful teaching stance, context-sensitive language support, and practices linking play and structured learning. Teachers' feedback helped refine the model. The model offers a practical tool for supporting language development through play and may inform teacher education and professional development.

professional gestures , language development , kindergarten , pretend play , teacher education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Professional Transformation Through Pretend Play: Teachers' Appropriation of the Learning Situations Drawn from Play Model

Presenters:
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Krasimira Marinova, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Krasimira Marinova, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Camille Robitaille, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

The project pursued three objectives: to accompany a school team in appropriating and implementing the Learning Situations Drawn from Play model in preschool; to document conditions enabling its application; and to examine, based on teachers' observations, its effects on children's Emergence of Written Language and on teachers' capacity to support it in pretend play. Although play-based approaches demonstrate long term benefits over direct instruction (Marinova et al., 2019), teachers experience social pressure to adopt more academic practices and report feeling insufficiently prepared to intervene meaningfully in pretend play (Dumais & Plessis-Bélair, 2017). Few studies examine how teachers develop professional autonomy through appropriating such models. Grounded in a cultural historical perspective, pretend play is conceptualised as a meaningful context for children's participation in knowledge construction. Teacher professional autonomy refers to reflective, context sensitive pedagogical decision making within institutional environments shaped by academic expectations and social pressures. This qualitative action research involved twelve preschool teachers, a special education teacher, and a school principal over three years. Seventeen collaborative meetings structured the process. Data from interviews, logbooks, and children's portfolios were analysed using thematic analysis. Iterative inductive and deductive coding identified stages of appropriation and conditions supporting implementation. Ethical approval was obtained from the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Informed consent and child assent were secured. Appropriation and implementation unfolded in three stages: updating, transformation, and consolidation, strengthening pedagogical security and reflective openness. Findings highlight how action research supports play-based pedagogies and strengthens preschool teachers' professional autonomy in contexts marked by institutional expectations.

pretend play, professional development, teacher practice transformation, play-based pedagogy, action research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC).

Transforming Teaching Practices to Support Children's Agency: The Adaptation of the Play Box Model for First Grade

Presenters:
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Emmanuelle Soucy, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Camille Robitaille, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This study aims (1) to analyse how teachers adapted the Play Box model in first-grade classrooms, and (2) to examine changes in their practices throughout the research process. Pretend play is considered the leading activity for children aged 3 to 7 (Leont'ev, 1978). It is therefore pedagogically relevant to maintain opportunities for play in the first year of elementary school, as children are aged 6 and 7. Pretend play supports educational continuity between kindergarten and the first year of elementary school (Duval et al., 2020). Our research is based on Vygotsky's theory. It draws on an educational model, the play box (Dumais and Soucy, 2022), developed for preschool children (aged 4 and 5). We draw on work related to the transition from kindergarten to first grade and teachers' practices to support children's agency through play. An action research study (Guay and Prud'homme, 2018) was conducted during a year (six meetings) with six first-grade teachers. Questionnaires, group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and classroom practice sharing were analyzed using content analysis. Ethical approval was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and data were anonymized. The study led to a contextualised adaptation of the Play Box model to first-grade classrooms. This allowed children to play while promoting their agency. The teachers involved in the project now devote more time to play. The research provides access to an educational model adapted to elementary schools for initial and continuing teacher training. The results support Quebec programs that seek to give greater emphasis to play in elementary schools.

children's agency, play box model, first grade, pedagogical practices, action research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The research was funded by the Samares School Service Center.

Symposium B25 - Wednesday 26th August 2026 | Auditorium 6, floor 3

(SoS): IT IS ROCKET SCIENCE: AGENCY, PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY FOR EFFECTIVE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE POLICY

Chaired by: Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

Political Inertia or an Act of Genius? Early Childhood Workforce Futures in Northern Ireland

Presenters:
Glenda Walsh, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

All authors:
Glenda Walsh, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

This presentation examines how prolonged policy stasis in Northern Ireland (NI) has shaped the early childhood (EC) workforce and may have inadvertently created space for sector-led innovation. Previous research in NI has highlighted persistent EC workforce challenges across the sector (Curristan et al., 2023; RSM, 2023). Delayed reform, limited investment, and the absence of a sustained early years strategy have reinforced structural inequities, shaping the context in which practitioners operate and innovate. This presentation draws on institutional inertia theory, framing longstanding EC policy stasis as a product of governance, historical legacies, and institutional arrangements (Samadi et al., 2024). Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and doxa illuminate persistent hierarchies while highlighting practitioner agency and sector-led innovation within a policy-limited landscape. An interpretivist

approach was adopted, with interviews and focus groups conducted with expert EC stakeholders. Participants could waive anonymity; to respect choices, interviewees were referenced by role descriptors, and focus group contributions identified using broad sector categories. Findings confirm the paradox: despite workforce pressures, including recruitment and retention challenges, pay inequities, and structural constraints, the early years sector in Northern Ireland persists, showing determination, resilience, and perspective in supporting children's learning and development. The early years specialist role is, in fact, regarded as exemplary, highlighting resilience and ingenuity amid systemic challenges. The workforce cannot continue to carry this burden alone and Northern Ireland deserve much more than a stop gap. The Draft Early Learning and Childcare Strategy (DENI, 2025) offers a critical opportunity to reward, professionalise, and resource practitioners, supporting sustainable, high-quality early years practice.

early childhood workforce, policy inertia, sector-led innovation, institutional theory, Northern Ireland

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Funded by The Nuffield Foundation

A Deficit Discourse or the Lived Narrative of Early Years Education Workforce Policy

Presenters:
Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

All authors:
Verity Campbell-Barr, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

The aim of this paper is to determine if there is a deficit narrative of the early years workforce as being in crisis in England or if this reflects the lived experience of those in the profession. In England, early years educators are self-reporting a workforce recruitment and retention crisis (Sakr, et al., 2024), with sector led research pointing to workforce intensification due to rising SEND needs; concerns with the quality of training; persistent poor pay and conditions; and a pervading feeling of being undervalued as contributing to the crisis (Hardy et al., 2023). The discussion draws on Bernstein's code theory to establish the regulating of social roles and conduct to form narratives that shape how individuals narrate their professional lives (Singh, 2020), while drawing on Foucault to unravel whether a deficit discourse of crisis has been created by the profession or through policies that lack agency, participation and democracy for the profession. Taking an interpretivist approach, interviews and focus groups were undertaken with early education expert stakeholders. Participants could waive their right to anonymity, but as this was not a universal choice, role descriptors were used for interviewees and broad group names to indicate those participating in the focus groups. Some lived experiences of policy are derived from the unintended consequences of policy implementation and policy silences, which have contributed to a deficit narrative among educators. A deficit narrative risks perpetuating a sense of crisis, but structural policy related challenges create the discourse as the lived experience, but could a change in narrative change the discourse?

early years workforce, crisis, professionalism, narrative code, discourse

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Nuffield Foundation, UK

Current Early Years Workforce Policy Capacity in Scotland

Presenters:
Aline-Wendy Dunlop, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

All authors:
Aline-Wendy Dunlop, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom

This paper aims to understand how agency and participation are linked to policy efficacy through a policy capacity lens by drawing on a comparative analysis of early years workforce (EYW) policy across the United Kingdom's four nations. Our shared evidence-base identified the levels of operational success of EYW policy approaches. While the Scottish peer reviewed early childhood policy literature is relatively small, the grey literature of policy and guidance in Scotland is extensive. A number of workforce related studies have renewed this policy focus (e.g. Dunlop, 2020; Joyce et al, 2023; Mills, 2025). This Scottish paper uses the concept of policy capacity (Brenton et al, 2023) as a framework to reflect upon relationships between our research questions, methodology, findings and recommendations. Taking an interpretivist approach, interviews (10) and focus groups (5) were undertaken with a purposive sample of early education stakeholders in leadership positions The main consideration was to offer anonymity. Most Scottish participants agreed to role identification but remained personally anonymous or stated their opinions were their own but not necessarily those of their employers. Early Years Workforce policy in Scotland reflects the relationship between administrative capital, contingent political management and expectations 'satisfiction' in a democratic society. Discussion will focus on levels of agency and participation in policy implementation in Scotland. Perceived lack of status and challenges to professional identity combine with a time of policy overload which suggests that policy capacity in Scotland rests on scaffolding respectful and nurturing pathways to implementation.

Scotland, early childhood 0-8, workforce, policy, agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Funded by Nuffield Foundation awarded to Early Education (British Association for Early Childhood Education.

(SoS): OWNERSHIP OF CHANGE: FOREGROUNDING RECIPROCAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SHAPE PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Chaired by Jackie Musgrave, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

The role of Early Childhood practitioners in promoting young children's health: reporting progress with using the Early Childhood Health Promotion Toolkit

Presenters:
Jackie Musgrave, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

All Authors:
Jackie Musgrave, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

The research aims to explore how the Early Childhood Health Promotion Toolkit can support practitioners to identify, implement and evaluate a health promoting intervention in their setting. This is phase 3 of the research, where the Toolkit was used by a group of ten community workers in a diverse area of high deprivation. This relates to an ongoing body of work exploring ways that practitioners make valuable contributions in promoting and supporting the health of young children (Musgrave and Payler 2021). This presentation reports on phase 3 of the research, phase 1 was presented at BECERA 2023 and phase 2 at EECERA 2024. The work of Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2011) on networked improvement communities and of Arbour et al. 2015 on continuous quality improvement guided thinking and action for a participatory approach to promoting child health. The Early Childhood Health Promotion

Toolkit was co-created by a practitioner and piloted in a setting in an area of high deprivation. The Toolkit uses qualitative methods, questionnaires and interviews. The participants in the research gave written consent to confirm their participation in the research and consented to the dissemination of findings from the research. The Toolkit was produced by The Open University as part of its social justice mission. A downloadable version is available free of charge. The Toolkit is a resource that can make a valuable contribution to improving the health of young children. There is a need to foreground and recognize the ways that practitioners can improve children's health and how their contribution can complement the work of health professionals.

health promotion, child health

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Shaping inclusive practice together; practitioners and researchers co-designing and evaluating a babyNENE toolkit.

Presenters:
Jo Josephidou, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Polly Bolshaw, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

All Authors:
Jo Josephidou, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Polly Bolshaw, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom
Nicola Kemp, Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

Our research evaluates a co-constructed toolkit which supports the development of inclusive outdoor pedagogies. This toolkit is underpinned by the babyNENE framework developed from research findings (Kemp et al., 2026). Practitioners, environmental experts and researchers co-constructed the toolkit following concerns that babies are invisible in policy and practice regarding outdoor environments (Josephidou et al., 2021). We draw on Froebelian thinking about the value of babies being 'in and with nature' from birth (Froebel, 1887:30). Our research fits within a transformative paradigm and adopts a participatory evaluative study, using a practitioner survey and case studies of five diverse settings. Institutional ethical approval was obtained. Our principal ethical concern was that both practitioners and babies were not viewed in deficit ways. Therefore, babies are presented as competent, and practitioners are positioned as experts within this research. Findings suggest that practitioners found working with environmental experts invaluable in developing safe outdoor spaces for babies in the unique context of their setting. Experiential workshops ignited practitioner interest; they evidenced changes made in their nature-based practices with babies and appreciated a 'small step' approach of modest changes, highlighting practitioner knowledge and existing expertise. They recognised that the outdoors offers a unique learning environment valuable for both babies and practitioners. The project demonstrates the value of creating spaces for knowledge exchange between early childhood and environmental specialists, including the value of experiential Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Finding speaks to both policy and practice, positioning practitioners as agents of babies' rights to more inclusive outdoor practices, within the context of concerns for human and environmental health.

babies, infants, babyNENE toolkit, outdoors, pedagogy

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

Funded by The Froebel Trust, Open Societal Challenges, The Open University.

Working with Practitioners to Shape Rights Respecting Pedagogic Practice

Presenters:
Eleonora Teszenyi, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Eleonora Teszenyi, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Eleonora Teszenyi, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Jane Dorrian, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Natalie Canning, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom
Sándor Pálfi, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary
Anikó Varga Nagy, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary
Tamás Szőllősi, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary
Imre Fenyő, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary
Dávid Rábai, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary
Balázs Molnár, Early Childhood at Debrecen University (Hajdúböszörmény), Hungary

The aim of our research is to explore how children's rights are realised in pedagogic practice. The project builds on Lundy's (2007) work on children's rights to be heard and to participation (Article 12 of UNCRC) and responds to concerns about adult-framed approaches to listening to young children. We examined children's lived experiences at the intersection of Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and Lundy's (2007) conceptual model of participation, foregrounding space, voice, audience and influence. Adopting an ethnographically oriented, slow participatory research design, the study used a child-led Mosaic approach to data generation (Clark, 2017). Findings were drawn from a national data corpus analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Institutional ethical approval was secured, and ethical sensitivity to children's ongoing assent was maintained throughout. Findings indicate that a co-designed Listening Toolkit, developed by practitioners for practitioners, supports trusted adults to capture what matters to children in multimodal ways. Crucially, the process of co-construction fostered shared ownership of change: practitioners became active agents in shaping both the project and pedagogic practice through reciprocal opportunities for dialogue between children, practitioners and researchers. Multi-layered dissemination, including a puppet show produced collaboratively with local artists, extended children's voices to their intended audiences, raising awareness and influencing a shift towards child-centred practice from a research informed rights-based rationale. A co-created Code of Practice supports implementation and sustainability. The project demonstrates how slow participatory research connects children's voices, professional agency and institutional change, with implications for policy frameworks that embed practitioner-led, research-informed approaches to children's rights in early childhood education and care.

ownership, participation, children's voice, agents of change

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

Symposium Set C (09:00 – 10:15) | Thursday 27th August 2026

Symposium C01 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

THE BENEFITS OF BIAS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

Chaired by: Juli-Anna Aerila, University of Turku, Finland

Book collections in Finnish ECE groups – Focus on access and suitability

Presenters:
Juli-Anna Aerila, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Juli-Anna Aerila, University of Turku, Finland
Merja Kauppinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The aim is to examine the books in ECEC-groups for children. The research question is: How do the book collections in ECEC groups meet the needs of increasingly diverse groups of children? The book collections of ECE play a significant role in equalizing the disparities in reading opportunities between children and their families (Aerila et al., 2024; Bishop, 1990). They offer opportunities for emphasizing with the content and language (Bailey, 2014; Kajander, 2020). Further, they help to deal with topics related to the growth and bring joy (Barton et al., 2019). The framework highlights the significance of reading materials to 0-3-year-olds for their emotional, cognitive and social development. Following Bishop's powerful metaphor (1990), children should see themselves mirrored in a book to forge a strong bond with reading. The data were collected from ECEC groups (N=10) at daycare centers. It consists of photographs of bookcovers and bookshelves as well as reports from the teachers. The data were analyzed via mixed method approach, examining the individual groups and comparing the groups. Permission was sought from the municipality and consent was requested from both heads of the ECE centers and the teachers. The data has been anonymized. The quality and the number of books vary noticeably (10–146 books/group). The book collections concentrate on popular authors, they are mostly outdated and do not meet with the diversity of children. ECEC-centers' book collections require updating. Building them require financial resources as well as co-operation with libraries in order to enhance knowledge of literature and the goals of literary education.

book collections, literature education, children's book, diversity, reading engagement

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

Development in Children's preferences for Information Sources in Intergroup Contexts

Presenters:
Meytal Horkin Nasie, Tel Aviv University, Israel

All authors:
Meytal Horkin Nasie, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Hagar Sharabi, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Gil Diesendruck, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

This study examined children's preferences for information sources in intergroup contexts by asking: (a) whether children show biases when choosing sources about ingroup versus outgroup topics, (b) how preferences for human versus non-human sources change with age, and (c) what reasons children give for their choices. Selective trust (Koenig & Harris, 2007) and epistemic authority (Raviv et al., 1990) research shows that children evaluate informants based on expertise and reliability, while social identity theory highlights early ingroup biases (Nesdale, 2004). Children also evaluate human and non-human sources differently (Langer et al., 2026).

We draw on theories of selective trust (Harris, 2002), social identity (Nesdale, 2004), and epistemic authority (Kruglanski, 1989) to examine children's source evaluation and how group identity shapes their preferences and justifications. Using a mixed-methods paradigm, 128 Jewish-Israeli children, aged 5-11, recruited through convenience sampling, completed structured interviews about social groups, intergroup relations, and political topics. They selected human or non-human information sources, indicated preferred information amount, and explained their choices. Thematic content analysis was conducted. Parental consent and child assent were obtained; participation was anonymous, and children could withdraw at any time; children's voices were respected. Younger children preferred human sources, particularly for ingroup topics, whereas older children increasingly endorsed non-human sources. Human sources were justified through capacity- and identity-based expertise, while non-human sources were justified through variety and relevance. Older children demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of information sources. Findings support early interventions that promote critical evaluation of information sources to reduce bias and support informed citizenship.

information sources, epistemic authority, selective trust, intergroup bias, children

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was conducted with the support of a Grant from the Israel

Science Foundation (Grant 1022/20) awarded to Gil Diesendruck and Meytal Nasie.

Getting close to stories: exploring young children's engagement with stories through movement and play

Presenters:
Samantha Hulston, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Samantha Hulston, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

This classroom-based study asked what movements young children use to engage with picturebook stories during play, reasserting the importance of physical encounters when there is increased emphasis on the digital. Reader-response studies illustrate how young children use play to agentically respond to stories (Flint, 2020; Rowe, 1998), with multimodal studies showing how children use gesture and whole-body movements to explore stories (Styles & Noble, 2009; Stranden & Ommundsen, 2025). Less attention has been paid to proxemics. Theories of literary experience (Kuzmičová, 2012; Mackey, 2022) frame this study. These theories characterise engagement as involving interiority, with individuals conceptually moving into stories, prompting consideration of how this interiority maps onto movements. This study used an interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) and a microethnographic methodology (Bloome et al., 2005). Five months of weekly video observations of 16 children, aged 4-5, in their English Reception classrooms were gathered. Children were selected using intensity criteria based on their play. Video data were analysed using a multimodal approach (Norris, 2004). Voluntary informed consent was obtained from children's parents, using information sheets and consent forms. Assent was sought from the children and monitored throughout the study. Children could withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used for children and locations. The findings, of value to practitioners, show how children used distance and proximity to gain overviews of stories and connect with characters, illuminating how movement enables children to agentically explore stories. These insights can reinvigorate interest in physical and play-based literacy experiences in the English Reception context.

stories, engagement, movement, proxemics, play

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C02 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

AGENCY IN INDOOR AND OUTDOOR LEARNING CONTEXTS

Chaired by: Louise Kilbane, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

Agency After School: Participation and Democratic Practice in School-Age Childcare

Presenters:
Louise Kilbane, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

All authors:

Louise Kilbane, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

This study examines how agency and democratic participation are conceptualised and structurally enabled within School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland. It asks: (1) How do practitioners understand children's agency in after-school contexts?(2) How do current qualification and competency frameworks enable or constrain participatory practice? International research positions out-of-school contexts as relational, participatory spaces grounded in social pedagogy and youth work (Haglund, 2023; Akiva et al., 2017). Nordic leisure-time pedagogy, Ontario's RECE framework, and Australia's NQF align qualifications, competencies, and regulation to support autonomy and inclusion. In contrast, Irish SAC remains largely structured through Early Childhood Education and Care paradigms, with limited SAC-specific standards The analysis draws on Lundy's (2007) model of participation (space, voice, audience, influence), rights-based pedagogy under the UNCRC, and social pedagogical theory. Professionalisation theory informs examination of how competency frameworks codify and legitimise agency within practice. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study uses mixed methods: a national online survey and practitioner focus groups. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively; qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Ethical approval was obtained through institutional review; the research ensured consent, confidentiality, GDPR-compliant, secure, anonymised data, and addressed practitioner voice, power dynamics, and sector anonymity. Findings reveal strong practitioner commitment to child-led play, inclusion, and relational pedagogy. However, Early Childhood Education and Care-derived qualifications and fragmented competency structures constrain the full realisation of democratic practice. The study argues for the development of a SAC-specific framework that explicitly positions children's agency, participation and autonomy, not as aspirational values but as structuring principles of democratic practice within School-Age Childcare.

school-age-childcare, agency, participation, democracy, professionalisation

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

Bridging Indoors and Outdoors: Encouraging Educators' Reflective Practice in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Ana-Teresa Brito, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal

All authors:
Ana-Teresa Brito, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Mónica Pereira, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Natalie Santos, Unidade de Investigação e Desenvolvimento em Educação e Formação, Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
Carla Fernandes, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Sónia Cabral, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Lourdes Mata, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal

This presentation aims to present data about the pedagogical use of indoor and outdoor spaces in early childhood education and care settings (ECEC). Research highlights the strong connection between educational settings and children's behavioural, cognitive, and emotional development (e.g. Acer, 2016; Berti et al., 2019). More recently, the

role of outdoor spaces—and their complementary relationship with indoor environments—has emerged as a critical area for analysis and reflection in ECE (Åström et al., 2022; Ozturk & Ozer,2022). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Development (2011), it becomes clear that the educational environment must be thoughtfully planned, organised, evaluated, and adjusted. This intentional approach is essential for promoting children's well-being, development, and learning (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016). This research was grounded on a mixed-methods approach with quantitative (Phase1) and qualitative (Phase2) approaches. Data in Phase1 was collected using a questionnaire including 802 educators' perceptions and practices about indoor/outdoor use. In Phase2, 21 ECEC educators participated in focus groups. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, with informed consent obtained and data confidentiality ensured. Quantitative analysis revealed that educators reported significantly lower perceptions and practices regarding the use of outdoor environments and their integration with indoor spaces in the ECEC context. Focus group data analysis highlighted the importance of reflective practice and educational intentionality in addressing organizational, relational, and individual barriers to effectively bridge indoor/outdoor environments. Results support the need to transform the questionnaire into a reflective tool regarding the organisation of the educational environment.

quality in early childhood education and care, educational environments, indoor and outdoor environments, educational intentionality, reflective practice.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work is funded by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, I.P., under the R&D Unit: UID/04853/2025 – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education.https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/04853/2025

Children's Digital Explorations in Smooth Spaces: Emergent Practices and Material Entanglements in Preschool

Presenters:
Tove del Gaiso, Mälardalen university, Sweden

All authors:
Tove del Gaiso, Mälardalen university, Sweden

This study aims to deepen understanding of digital practices in preschool by exploring how children, technologies, and other materialities become entangled. It attends to the practices that emerge through these becomings and to the co-created events, possibilities, and constraints that shape young children's digital explorations. Earlier research (Edwards et al., 2020) shows that digital technologies become entangled with non-digital materialities and play in preschool, and that children's interactions with digital technologies unfold in varied and often unpredictable ways (Arnott, 2016). The study was conducted from a sociomaterial perspective (Fenwick et al. 2011) in combination with rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is a short-term ethnographic study (Knoblauch, 2006) with two preschool teachers and eleven children aged 1-3 years at one preschool. The data were constructed through video observations of events with digital technologies and children. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage was used to analyse the data. The EECERA Ethical Code (2024) and the Swedish Research Council's (2024) ethical guidelines were followed, with voluntary and informed consent obtained from preschool staff and the children's guardians. All participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, and pseudonyms have been used. The results show how digital technologies co-cocreate peer relationships among children and a variety of explorations within fluid, smooth spaces. In these spaces creativity, collaboration, and diverse interactions are enabled, but interruptions and conflicts also occur. The findings have implications for both practice and theory.

digital technologies, digital pen, children's exploration, preschool, entanglements

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C03 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor -2

BUILDING BRIDGES IN DIVIDED COMMUNITIES

Chaired by: Radhika Viruru, Texas A&M University, United States

Supervisory Agency in Early Childhood Education During Mass Trauma: Relational and Moral Practices in Improvised Settings

Presenters:
Hana Zur, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

All authors:
Hana Zur, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel
Noa Laor, BrancoWeiss org., Israel

Following the outbreak of the October 2023 war between Hamas and Israel, many early childhood supervisors responded to urgent calls to accompany educational settings established for families forcibly displaced from their homes and relocated to temporary accommodations. Improvised early childhood education settings were rapidly created in spaces never intended for young children, under conditions of collective trauma affecting children, families, educators, and supervisors alike. This study examines supervisors' lived experiences and their enactment of professional agency while accompanying these settings during the first year of displacement. Agency as emergent, relational, and context-dependent (Priestley et al., 2005), and situated within a trauma-informed framework (Huri & Galili, 2025). Grounded in an ecological (Biesta, et.al., 2015), and moral conceptualization of professional agency (Osterhoff et.al., 2020). The study adopts a qualitative exploratory design. Twelve experienced supervisors participated in semi-structured individual interviews, one group interview, and contributed selected field notes approximately eighteen months after initiating their work in these settings. Data were analyzed thematically Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, informed consent, the right to withdraw, and anonymization. Findings suggest that supervisory agency in crisis was primarily relational and mediated, enacted by creating stability within instability, enabling teams to function , and supporting educators' agency. Agency emerged as value-driven and ethically grounded, particularly as supervisors were guided by responsibility toward children and staff. Rather than merely reflecting resilience, agency functioned as a mechanism through which professional resilience was constructed. Implications highlight supervisory agency as a key resource for sustaining professional resilience during crises.

supervisory agency, improvised educational setting, early childhood education, agency and resilience, agency and ethical dilemma

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

This research was conducted in collaboration with "Brancoweiss"non-profitorganization that was among the initiators of the project

"We need to teach the community as well": Conversations Towards Building an Anti-Caste/Anti-Oppressive Theoretical Framework in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Radhika Viruru, Texas A&M University, United States

All authors:
Radhika Viruru, Texas A&M University, United States
Arushi Mathur, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom
Zinnia Mevawalla, University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom
Shipra Suneja, Azim Premji University, India

This paper develops an anti-caste/anti-oppressive framework in early childhood. Centring children's lived experiences of caste oppression and privilege, we engaged in collaborative auto-ethnographic work as scholar-practitioners, reflexively engaging with our own caste locations. Building on studies of segregation and discrimination in schools faced by children from Dalit communities in India, this paper addresses the invisibilities of caste-privileged childhoods highlighted by anti-caste scholarship. The framework draws on Dalit studies, Dalit feminist and reconceptualist early childhood and anti-oppressive theories to foreground belonging, intersectionality, and children's critical consciousness in studies of childhood. Further, it calls into question the caste-evasiveness of postcolonial scholarship in childhood studies. Located in critical and decolonial paradigms, the paper presents dialogic, collaborative autoethnography among scholar-practitioners, generating data from zoom conversations, where we reflected on data individually collected in India. These vignette-based analyses centered young children's understandings of caste-based practices revealed through their play and everyday questions. We engaged with our positionality, rejected tokenism and cultural appropriation, and followed an ethic of "being-with" Dalit communities through producing action-oriented knowledge rather than practising neutrality to caste. Our discussion suggests that caste shapes early childhood experiences, where, through language, play, stigma, shame and everyday interactions, children internalise caste oppression. Nonetheless, when examined from the dominant multicultural/postcolonial frames, caste gets invisibilised as diversity or history, obscuring ongoing systemic oppression. Thus, conceptualising an anti-caste/anti-oppressive framework, this paper discusses implications for research and educational practice with children and policymakers for dismantling casteist practices in schools.

anti-caste praxiscritical consciousness in early childhood, postcolonial studies, positionalityco-constructing spaces of belonging

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Relational and everyday peacebuilding in the Early Years: Educators' agency in divided societies

Presenters:
Jill Magennis, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

All authors:
Jill Magennis, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

This research aims to explore how early years educators in two divided societies understand and enact relational and everyday peacebuilding, examining how their pedagogical practices support agency and participation in early childhood settings. This study builds on research in peace education, relational pedagogy and everyday peacebuilding (Söderström et al., 2021, Mac Ginty, 2014), extending understanding of how early years educators support peacebuilding and illuminating their role in shaping social cohesion from the earliest educational stages. This research draws on relational frameworks, viewing peace as an ongoing process embedded in trust and dialogue. 'Thick' relational peace emphasises multi-dimensional relationships and mutual recognition, while 'thin' relational peace focuses on limited, transactional interactions aimed primarily at conflict avoidance (Brigg, 2024). Everyday peace complements these frameworks by highlighting informal, grassroots practices (Mac Ginty 2021). Situated within a post-posititivist paradigm, the study recognises educators as co-constructors of meaning and active agents shaping children's experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted across thirty early years settings in

Northern Ireland and Israel, capturing a range of diverse perspectives. Ethical procedures included informed consent, confidentiality and careful attention to the socio-political sensitivities of participants. Contextual awareness guided data collection to respect participants' experiences and local realities. Educators engage in contextually responsive peacebuilding, embedding a spectrum of relational practices that span from thin, transactional interactions to thick, multi-dimensional engagements. These practices foster trust, dialogue and collaboration, supporting children's capacities for peacebuilding. Findings highlight the pivotal role of early years educators in nurturing peace. Ongoing professional learning and policy support should emphasise relational and everyday peacebuilding approaches to create inclusive learning environments.

peacebuilding, relational, everyday, divided societies

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C04 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN DIGITAL SPACES

Chaired by: Christina Pernsteiner-Koller, University of Vienna, Austria

Between Creative Expression and Exploitation - Kidfluencers in digital space

Presenters:
Christina Pernsteiner-Koller, University of Vienna, Austria

All authors:
Christina Pernsteiner-Koller, University of Vienna, Austria

The phenomenon of kidfluencers has increased severely, impacting the lives of families and early childhood educational institutions, particularly in terms of media interaction and its significance on development (Archer/Delmo 2025). The research focuses on the following questions:

- How are children (and adults) represented in the created content, especially in regards of learning and play?
- What policies are currently discussed and implemented to reduce (potential) harm to children as creators and recipients?

Analysing the kidfluencer industry as a form of child labour with high risks of exploitation, Clark/Jno-Charles (2025) point out severe role conflicts when parents create enterprises based on the commercialization of play, expression, and representation of their children. The research is based on studies about children and media culture (Bak 2020, Brody 2012, Messenger Davies 2010) as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The research entails a content analysis (Fazeli/Sabett/Ferrari 2023) of 20 video clips of 8 YouTube channels which were selected through purposive sampling, including a heterogeneous approach to minimize bias. Archer/Delmo (2023) argue that safety regulations need to be reconsidered in theory and practice, with a strong emphasis on the rights of children. Clark/Jno-Charles (2025) propose demonetizing all video content focusing on children under the age of twelve. Findings demonstrate how (sponsored) toys are utilized and promoted in play situations. The analysis also shows how storylines, visual and sound effects, including set design, are used to captivate the attention. Results can provide guidelines regarding protecting children's rights as creators and consumers of digital media.

children's rights, social media literacy, digital competencies, childhood

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

Participative and Dominant Forms of Agency in Finnish ECEC

Presenters:
Laura Niemi, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Laura Niemi, University of Helsinki, Finland
Jyrki Reunamo, University of Helsinki, Finland
Teemu Nikkola, University of Helsinki, Finland
Roosa Laaksonen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Jonna Kangas, University of Helsinki, Finland

The aim of this study is to examine how children's agency manifests within peer relations through participative and dominant forms of social influence. Supporting children's agency is a central principle in Finnish ECEC (Kumpulainen, 2018; FNAE, 2022). Although children have the potential to influence, their opportunities are often narrow, and they may act in norm-breaking or alternative ways not always recognized as influence (Ylikörkkö et al., 2023; 2025). This study identifies participative and dominant forms of agency framed through the Dominance–Prestige model (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Cheng et al., 2013), which describes social influence as collaborative or controlling. The study is quantitative and based on an extensive observational dataset (over 372,000 observations), focusing on 3–6-year-old children whom teachers identified as influential among peers (N = 10,104). Statistical analyses examined differences between participative and dominant behavior. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Helsinki Ethical Review Board, guardians provided consent, and all data were anonymized. Results show that participative behavior was more common. Participative children were more often chosen as best friends and formed mutual friendships, whereas dominant children tended to befriend other dominant or withdrawn peers. Dominant behavior appeared significantly more often in prohibited activities and was linked to negative emotions, while participative behavior was associated with engaged activities and positive emotions. The study raises a broader pedagogical question about which forms of agency are recognized and supported in ECEC. An important implication is the need to acknowledge children's diverse ways of influencing while ensuring that meaningful influence is grounded in shared development with children.

agency, social orientation, social influence, participative behavior, dominant behavior

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

Children's Agency in Dialogue: Children's and Adults' Perspectives on Organisational Life in Early Childhood Settings

Presenters:
Letizia Rota, University of Verona, Italy

All authors:
Letizia Rota, University of Verona, Italy
Chiara Sità, University of Verona, Italy

Within a broader doctoral study examining the relationship between child-centredness and organisational aspects in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, this contribution foregrounds dialogue between children's and adults' perspectives. It investigates how encounters with children's viewpoints may prompt adult reflexivity regarding organisational practices and professional posture. Previous research has positioned children as active cultural subjects (Corsaro, 2003) and highlighted how their perspectives contribute to understanding organisational

life (Wiltz & Klein, 2001; Markström & Halldén, 2009; Hilppö, 2025). Informed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1986) and Morin's epistemology of complexity (2000), this study considers diverse actors within ECEC settings as interdependent within a relational and systemic ecology. Situated within an ecological and participatory paradigm, the study adopts a qualitative ethnographic design. Two case studies were conducted in Italian ECEC settings. Children's perspectives were gathered through the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2011), including photovoice and child-led tours, alongside observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews with educators, auxiliary staff, parents, and a focus group where children's perspectives were discussed. Informed consent was obtained from adult participants and children's parents, while children's participation was supported through ongoing attention to assent. Preliminary findings show how children know and interact with organisational aspects in everyday ECEC experience from a specific perspective that interrogates adult expectations, suggesting that engaging with children's perspectives prompts reflection on professional posture and organisational practices. Children's perspectives on the organisational aspects of services designed for them invite adults to recognise children as legitimate agents in a democratic discourse on daycare organisational decisions.

children's perspectives, organisational dimension, Mosaic approach, photovoice, professional reflexivity

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

Symposium C05 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

CO-CONSTRUCTING UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Chaired by: Paola Pedrelli, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

Co-creation and Cultural Encounters in Transitions between Early Childhood Education, School and Out-of-School Care

Presenters:
Heidi Sandø, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Elisabeth Høidal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Maria Hole-Forsmo, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

All authors:
Heidi Sandø, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Elisabeth Høidal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Maria Hole-Forsmo, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

This study investigates how early childhood settings, schools, and out of school care collaborate to strengthen continuity in children’s educational transitions. It explores how structured cultural encounters function as arenas for cocreation and how national or municipal transition plans are enacted locally. Research on transitions highlights the need for coherent learning pathways and cross-sector collaboration to support children’s wellbeing and participation (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Hogsnes & Moser, 2014). This study extends previous work by examining cultural encounters as professional meeting spaces enabling joint reflection and innovation in transition practices. The study draws on holistic perspectives on children’s learning trajectories and theories of cocreation as collaborative knowledge building. Cocreation is understood as a process in which actors contribute complementary expertise to develop shared understandings. Cultural encounters are conceptualized as dialogical arenas promoting reflection, relational knowledge, and meaning making (Emstad, 2023; Klev & Levin, 2021). Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study employs a mixed methods design. Two surveys (n=145; n=121) were conducted with leaders and educators participating in regional cultural encounters. Qualitative data include ten individual interviews and one group interview. Our analysis uses reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022). The project adheres to national

ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. Findings indicate that cultural encounters enhance awareness of transitions and foster cross-level collaboration. Differing interpretations of roles, responsibilities, and purposes also emerge, revealing tensions that shape cocreation processes. The study suggests that structured cultural encounters can serve as catalysts for strengthening local transition practices.

transition practices, co-creation, cultural encounters, early childhood education, school continuity

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

Continuity, Agency, and Shared Professional Knowledge in the Kindergarten–School Transition

Presenters:
Gunn Ofstad, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Gunn Ofstad, University of Stavanger, Norway
Inga Kjerstin Birkedal, University of Stavanger, Norway
Elisabeth Filbrandt, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study examines how continuity and agency can be strengthened in the transition from kindergarten to school by analysing teachers' perspectives in ECEC and school together with children's accounts of their transition experiences. It investigates how transition objects can support this process. Research identifies discontinuity between ECEC and school as a key challenge (Broström, 2001). Studies show that children's perspectives are essential for understanding transitions (Einarsdóttir, 2010), and that continuity is influenced by relational, physical, communicative and philosophical coherence (Hogsnes & Moser, 2014). Work on transition objects demonstrates their potential to create agency (Hogsnes, 2017). The study draws on continuity theory (Dewey 1974, 2005), sociocultural learning perspectives (Säljö, 2000), and agency as children's capacity to act meaningfully within changing contexts. Hogsnes & Moser (2014), staff play a decisive role in enacting four interrelated forms of continuity. Qualitative design, group interviews with children: in ECEC (n: 26) and again six weeks into school (n: 21). Thematic analysis was employed to identify continuity and agency. Survey to ECEC (n:20) and school teachers (n:22) about their use of transition objects, and focus group interviews with the teachers in ECEC (n: 8) and school (n:16) Informed consent from guardians; children were verbally assented, interviews were conducted with sensitivity to power relations and voluntary participation. Children recognised and engaged with the transition objects, supporting all four forms of continuity and illustrating their agency. Teachers focused mainly on physical aspects, thereby underusing the objects' broader potential to support agency. Effective transitions require collaboration, shared pedagogical tools, and institutional knowledge exchange centred on children's experiences.

agency, transition, continuity, children`s perspectives, collaboration

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Transition from kindergarten to school in Estonia – teachers' expectations

Presenters:
Kerstin Kööp, Tallinn University, Estonia

All authors:
Kerstin Kööp, Tallinn University, Estonia
Teele Saar, Tallinn University, Estonia
Lii Probal, Tallinn University, Estonia

This study explores teachers' experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding learning and teaching in Estonian kindergartens in order to support a smoother transition from early childhood education to primary school. Prior research emphasises continuity, collaboration, and pedagogical alignment between educational levels as key to successful transitions (OECD, 2017; Gonzalez-Moreira, Ferreira, Vidal, 2021). However, studies indicate persistent gaps between theory and practice (Besi, Sakellariou, 2019; De Sousa & Santos, 2021). While kindergarten pedagogy values play, creativity, and child-centred autonomy (Arnott, 2023, Estonian National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, 2025), primary education often remains outcome-oriented and standardised (OECD, 2019). The study is grounded in transition theory and continuity frameworks, viewing transition as a multidimensional process shaped by pedagogical beliefs, institutional expectations, and children's developmental needs. It draws on child-centred and socio-constructivist perspectives underpinning Estonian National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2025). Adopting a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study used semi-structured interviews with 11 purposively selected lower primary education teachers. Data were analysed through inductive qualitative content analysis. The ethical guidelines set by Estonian researches (Eesti…, 2002) were followed, guaranteeing anonymity, voluntary participation and transparent data usage.

Teachers valued play-based and practical learning in kindergarten but demonstrated limited awareness of its pedagogical foundations. Although social and self-regulation skills were considered crucial for adjustment, emphasis remained on children's academic knowledge and its variability. A stronger need for systematic cross-level collaboration was highlighted. Findings suggest the need to strengthen inter-institutional dialogue, mutual professional understanding, and policy support for pedagogical continuity.

transition to school, pedagogical continuity, teacher perceptions, early childhood education, Estonia

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C06 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS AND FOSTERING AGENCY

Chaired by: Amelia Ruscoe, Edith Cowan University, Australia

Preschool children's right to the city?

Presenters:
Katarina Gustafson, Uppsala University, Sweden

All authors:
Katarina Gustafson, Uppsala University, Sweden

This presentation examines the conditions and circumstances of Swedish inner-city preschools – that lack their own playgrounds or have only a "drop-off yard" – and how they conduct outdoor activities and use urban spaces. Research underlines the need of large preschool yards, with natural elements and variation in topography, for children's outdoor play and movement (Moser & Martinsen 2010; Jansson et al 2021). However, due to urban densification trends, urban preschools increasingly lack suitable outdoor environments (Gustafson & Ekman Ladru 2025). By drawing on theories of a relational understanding of space (Massey, 2005) and children's mobility practices (Nansen et al., 2015), mobile ethnographies, documented by field notes, are combined with interviews with teachers and planners. Besides formal consents etc., attention has especially been given to the children's ways of showing whether and how they wanted to participate. The project is approved by the ethical board, name and details are anonymized. The results show how urban planners take on the role of children's rights activists as they

struggle to create space for preschool children in the city. The analyses also demonstrate how preschools "do preschool" in public space through spatial practices, and how children's mobility practices are performed, supported, and constrained in interaction with other children, educators, and the socio-material dimensions of the city. The findings contribute with important knowledge for understanding urban ECEC policies and practices, as well as young children's possibility for actively participating in the spaces of the city as part of their social and spatial rights as urban citizens.

inner-city preschools, outdoor activities, children's mobility practices, public space, urban planning

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

Funded by FORMAS, Sweden (The National Research Programme for Sustainable Spatial Planning), grant no 2019-01929.

Curating for Agency: How Visual Environments Shape Young Children's Participation in Learning

Presenters:
Amelia Ruscoe, Edith Cowan University, Australia

All authors:
Amelia Ruscoe, Edith Cowan University, Australia
Leanne Lavina, Edith Cowan University, Australia
Nicola Wallis, National Portrait Gallery, United Kingdom
Fiona Westbrook, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Clare Murray, Columbia University, United States
Lea Mai, ELC International Schools Bangkok, Thailand

This study aimed to investigate the viscourse, the discursive power embedded in what is made visible to children in learning environments, and its influence on young children's learning engagement. The study builds upon research investigating the transformative potential of the transition to school (Barblett, Boylan & Ruscoe, 2025). Gibson's ecological affordance theory is used to explain the demands of visual elements within the environment, alongside Foucauldian discursive theory of institutional impact upon what becomes visible and thinkable to children. Situated in multi-agency early learning contexts across five countries, this study explores how teacher/curators consider the visual demands in their settings and how these shape children's engagement. Three research questions guided the inquiry: the nature of curators' intentions; what viscourses communicate to children; and how this influences learner engagement. Using a critical-interpretivist, multi-site qualitative case study design, data were collected from six settings. Curator/teachers created video and photographic inventories, while forty children (ages 3–6) commented on the curatorial choices of adults in their settings through dialogic drawing. Ethical safeguards addressed power imbalances, privacy in visual data, cross-cultural sensitivities, and child-led assent using visual opt-out mechanisms. Findings show variation in curatorial intentions and reveal children's interpretations of viscursive demands can diverge from adults' curatorial anticipations. Visualities with the strongest impact on engagement curated 'real', nature-rich, and open-ended provocations, enabling children to mobilise their funds of knowledge and act agentically. The study demonstrates that curatorial decisions are pedagogically powerful, offering actionable insights for educators, museum professionals and policymakers seeking to design visual environments that strengthen early learner engagement trajectories.

early childhood, learning environment, curation, engagement, transition

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

Fostering Children's Agency in Early Childhood Settings: Evidence from OECD TALIS Starting Strong 2024

Presenters:
Janice Kim, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

All authors:
Janice Kim, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

This paper draws on data from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Starting Strong 2024 to examine how early childhood education and care staff from 15 participating countries support children's agency through pedagogical interactions and child-centred planning. Children's agency is increasingly recognised as central to quality ECEC (Esser et al., 2016), yet little is known about the extent to which educators systematically embed agency-promoting practices into their daily work (Scott et al, 2020). The paper is grounded in a socio-cultural understanding of children's agency, drawing on Vygotskian perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978). This is complemented by the concept of intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007). Using comparative cross-national data, the paper analyses the frequency and distribution of two clusters of professional practice: strategies that facilitate children's play, and practices oriented toward child-centred planning. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses are employed to examine cross-national variation in the uptake of agency-promoting practices. This study draws on data collected in accordance with established research ethics protocols (voluntary participation, privacy, de-identification). Data were acessed in accordance with OECD data access protocols. Preliminary findings reveal a cross-national pattern: reactive and observational strategies are more commonly employed than intentional, agency-promoting practices such as involving children in planning their day or designing activities that invite children to take the initiative. The findings suggest that the underuse of intentional, agency-fostering practices reflects systemic barriers including workload pressures, insufficient professional development, and curriculum frameworks. The paper calls for professional development systems to be redesigned to build educators' confidence and competence in implementing intentional, child-led practices.

agency, pedagogy, talis starting strong, teacher professional development, early childhood education

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

Symposium C07 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S VOICE AND AGENCY

Chaired by: Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

What Does It Take for a Young Child to Become an Agent of Their Own Learning? Maternal Metaprocesses, External Regulation, and Children's SRL in Early Childhood

Presenters:
Lihi Sarfaty, The David Yellin Academic College of Education, Israel

All authors:
Lihi Sarfaty, The David Yellin Academic College of Education, Israel

The aim of this study is to examine how maternal metaprocesses contribute to children’s emerging agency, expressed through self-regulated learning (SRL), and whether this association is mediated by two forms of external regulation: co-regulation and other-regulation. Children's development is intricately linked to the relational systems they inhabit and the quality of scaffolding provided within their closest relationships (Vygotsky, 1978;

Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Yet how the parent's inner psychological world shapes children's emerging agency, expressed through SRL (Martin, 2004), the capacity to set goals, monitor progress, and adapt strategies (Pintrich, 2004), remains poorly understood. Drawing on the regulation internalization model (Sarfaty et al., 2025), this study examines how maternal metaprocesses, defined as integrated knowledge about one's own and others' regulation of cognition, emotions, and behaviors (Ben-Eliyahu, 2019), predict children's SRL through two forms of external regulation: co-regulation, in which mothers prompt children to monitor and adjust their own processes, and other-regulation, involving direct instruction on how and when to regulate. This positions the mother as a knowledge-driven architect of her child's emerging agency. Three SEMs (N=135 mother-child dyads, children aged 5–6) examined metacognition, metaemotion, and metabehavior as predictors of children's self-reported SRL (i.e., attention, reappraisal, and planning, respectively). The study received ethical approval, and informed consent was obtained Co-regulation consistently mediated metaprocesses and SRL; metabehavior predicted reappraisal (β=.25, p=.008) and planning (β=.26, p=.044), and metacognition predicted reappraisal (β=.23, p=.019). Other-regulation and metaemotion yielded no significant indirect effects. These findings highlight co-regulation as a mechanism enabling maternal self-knowledge to support children's agentic learning. Practitioners may find mothers' metaprocesses valuable as a focus for early intervention.

agency, SRL, co-regulation, metaprocesses, early childhood

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

English Early Years Practitioners' Perspectives on Promoting Children's Voices in the Classroom

Presenters:
Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

This research aims to: explore early years practitioners' perceptions of the value of promoting children's voices; examine practitioners' confidence in promoting children's voices before and after using the TWiTCH programme; evaluate how effectively TWiTCH supports practitioners in nurturing and promoting young children's voices in practice. This research builds on the findings of a pilot study exploring early years practitioners' perceptions of the Talk with Tales Programme (Fitzfussel et al., 2025). This research uses the COM-B framework (Michie et al., 2019) to explore participants' confidence in promoting children's voices, the opportunities they have to promote children's voices, and their motivations to promote of children's voices. The study uses a qualitative design, combining a survey with Likert-scale and open-ended questions and a focus group discussion. Thematic analysis will be used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within the data. Participants will be provided with an information sheet and a consent form . The survey will be sent on a secure link from the university. The research proposal will be submitted to the university research ethics Anecdotal evidence from the TWiTCH project already suggests that practitioners' welcome the opportunity to nurture children's voices. The findings will be discussed once the data is collected in February/March. Children's voices are an important part of democratic education; therefore, practitioners' views about the value and place of promoting children's voices have important professional implications for the ECEC curriculum and professional development for ECEC educators.

COM-B, children's voices, talk with tales for children (TWiTCH), democratic education, practitioner perspective

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

Open-Ended Questioning as a Tool for Playful and Democratic Learning

Presenters:
Maria Barbara Donnici, Fondazione Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi ETS, Italy

All authors:
Maria Barbara Donnici, Fondazione Reggio Children-Centro Loris Malaguzzi ETS, Italy

This pilot action-research, The Questions Playground, explored how open-ended questioning can function as a tool for playful and democratic learning by exploring the question: how can educators cultivate creativity and recognize children's competences in formal and informal educational contexts? The study engages with recent research on learning through play (LEGO Foundation, 2018; Zosh et al., 2018; Parker & Thomsen, 2019) and contemporary work on pedagogy of play (Mardell et al., 2023). It extends these perspectives through dialogue with the Reggio Emilia educational experience. Grounded in the understanding that play and learning are dynamically interconnected processes, the project frames open-ended questioning as a practice that sustains children's participation and co-construction of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2021; Moss, 2019). Open-ended questions are conceptualized as dialogic tools that resist predetermined outcomes aligning with contemporary theories of democratic and participatory pedagogy (Giroux, 2020; Biesta, 2020). Adopting a qualitative, participatory action-research paradigm, the project engaged thirty educators and doctoral students in workshop-based explorations. Participants generated and reflected on open-ended questions inspired by materials and environments, followed by collective dialogue and post-workshop questionnaires. All participants were fully informed about the aims and intended use of data, participation was voluntary. Educators were involved as co-researchers, thus ensuring a non-evaluative and dialogic environment. Preliminary findings indicate that practicing open-ended questioning reactivates educators' sense of curiosity and supports more playful and inclusive classroom interactions. The study suggests that embedding open-ended questioning within professional development can strengthen democratic learning and position a playful approach to learning as a foundational dimension of quality education.

playful learning, open-ended questioning, democratic education, teachers professional development, children's agency

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

This pilot action-research is part of the wider research project Play Explore Research promoted by Fondazione Reggio Children in collaboration with The LEGO Foundation. P.E.R.is a global platform of exchange and research for teachers, educators, res

Symposium C08 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL

Chaired by: Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

Between Digital Tools and Play: Early Childhood Teachers' Pedagogical Decision-Making in the UK and China

Presenters:
Shuolin He, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

All authors:
Shuolin He, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

This study examines how early childhood teachers in the UK and China make pedagogical decisions about when, why, and how to use digital tools alongside play-based or play-oriented provision. It asks: How do teachers negotiate digital tool use within early years pedagogical values, and what contextual factors shape these decisions? Prior studies highlight tensions between digital technologies and early childhood philosophies emphasising play and hands-on learning (Edwards, 2013; Marsh, 2017). However, little is known about teachers' decision-making processes or how these differ across cultural contexts. This study responds to that gap. A sociocultural perspective (Fleer, 2020) underpins the analysis, viewing digital practices as shaped by cultural norms, institutional expectations, and teachers' professional identities. Working within a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study draws on semi-structured interviews followed by walking interviews with early childhood teachers in Sheffield and Xi'an (n=5). Data were thematically analysed. Ethical approval was obtained from the university. Teachers provided informed consent, pseudonyms were used, sensitive contextual details were removed. Findings indicate that teachers in both countries balance digital tool use with commitments to play and child-led learning. UK teachers emphasised online safety, screen-time caution, and maintaining play authenticity. Chinese teachers described institutional expectations and curriculum alignment as stronger drivers of digital use. Across both contexts, digital tools were valued for documentation and communication but viewed cautiously during free play. The study highlights the need for professional development that integrates digital pedagogy with play-based values, and for policies that support flexible, context-sensitive use of digital tools in early years settings.

digital pedagogy, early childhood teachers, play-based learning, pedagogical decision-making, cross-cultural study

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

Teachers' and Parents' Prioritisation of Digital Competence Areas in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Külli Kallas, University of Tartu, Estonia

All authors:
Külli Kallas, University of Tartu, Estonia
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

This study investigates how early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers and parents prioritise digital competence (DC) goals for young children, analysing similarities and differences across institutional and home contexts and across countries. Digital competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for using digital technologies in everyday life and should be supported in ECEC (Chaudron et al., 2018; European Commission, 2018). Previous research has focused on assessing competence, evaluating teaching strategies, and identifying factors supporting its development (Su & Yang, 2024). The study draws on the DigComp framework (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025) and sociocultural perspectives, conceptualising digital competence as context-dependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003). The study adopts a pragmatic, interpretive approach. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 1992 teachers and parents across four European countries using convenience sampling. Participants rated digital competence goals in kindergarten or home contexts on a five-point Likert scale aligned with DigComp areas. Given the ordinal data, non-parametric methods were used to examine role and country differences. The study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity. Results show that safety-related goals were prioritised across all groups, whereas digital content creation received the lowest ratings. Differences between teachers and parents were mostly related to information management and communication. Significant disparities were observed between countries, particularly in information, communication, and content creation. Policymakers should create frameworks that balance children's safety with opportunities for creative digital engagement, while developing context-sensitive strategies that address local needs and cultural specificities in supporting digital competence.

digital competence, early education, safety, content creation, sociocultural aspects

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The data was collected under the umbrella of Erasmus+ project 2020-1-EE01-KA226-HE-093388 "Developing Teachers' Skills to Educate Pre-School Children with and Through Digital Technologies/DigiKid"

Professional Digital Competence in Norwegian Early Childhood Teacher Education

Presenters:
Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

All authors:
Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

This paper presents key findings from a recently completed doctoral dissertation examining how professional digital competence (PDC) is constructed, translated, and experienced within Norwegian early childhood teacher education (ECTE). PDC is investigated from different angles, and the aim is to develop new knowledge about how digital competence is understood and enacted in ECTE, and to explore how students' use technology use might shape their PDC and attitudes toward digital technology in their future work as early childhood teachers. Previous research show weak conceptual grounding of digital competence in ECTE-programmes (Dardanou et al., 2023; Papavlasopoulou et al., 2024) and limited research in the Norwegian context (Tveiterås & Madsen, 2022) . This dissertation addresses these gaps by combining policy-, curriculum-, and practice-level investigations. Goodlad's (1979) curriculum domains structure the analysis, while translation theory (Røvik, 2016; 2023) illuminates how PDC moves between national policy and institutional study plans. The project adopts a moderately social-constructivist and pragmatic paradigm. Methods include: (1) a literature review; (2) qualitative study-plan analysis; and (3) a design-based VR study using workshops, spatial VR recordings, observations, and interviews. Ethical approval was secured through written informed consent and anonymised VR recordings, alongside considerations for the textual material analysed. Findings reveal limited contextualisation of PDC for early childhood settings, significant variation in how policy is translated locally, and strengthened digital agency through exploratory VR engagement. PDC in ECTE should integrate early childhood values—play, exploration, relationality—to support digital competence development and guide further research on how technology use in teacher education shapes professional attitudes.

teacher education, digital competence, curriculum, translation theory, virtual reality

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C09 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

EXPLORING IDENTITY IN CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

Chaired by: Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

'Children's perceptions of a successful person: an analysis of children's drawings and words using a Bourdieu-sian framework'

Presenters:
Jane O'Connor, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Jane O'Connor, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

This study explores what being a successful person means from a child's perspective, examining the types of capital evident in their drawings and words. It also considers how perceptions differ by age and gender, and what children's representations of success reveal about the social and cultural values internalised as their habitus. Previous studies have used drawings to investigate various topics including career aspirations (Brooke's 2009), perceptions of scientists (Fotakopoulou & O'Connor 2025) and ideal gifts (Kruse et al 2020). No previous studies have focused on children's drawings of successful people. The drawings and words were analysed using a framework adapted from Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of capital. Categories of social, emotional and material capital were generated. Developmental theory (Chaplin 2015) was used to interpret the data according to age. 25 children (4-8) in England were asked to draw a successful person. The data was analysed in relation to age and gender. The children were interviewed about their drawing and their ideas about what makes a successful person. Child and parent consent was obtained. Care was taken to represent children's voice authentically. Approval granted by the Ethics Committee at Birmingham City University. Boys were more likely to depict external markers of success like money and cars whereas girls tended to focus more on affective factors like happiness and family. Older children had a more balanced conceptualisation of success reflecting their developing maturity. Drawings can stimulate discussion/reflection on children's career aspirations, well-being and/or life goals. This approach can be used as part of (pre)school citizenship programmes.

drawings, success, Bourdieu, capital, mixed-methods

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

"Me dressed as a girl": Identity, representation and meaning-making in young children's drawings

Presenters:
Josephine Deguara, University of Malta, Malta

All authors:
Josephine Deguara, University of Malta, Malta

This study explores how young children construct and communicate identity through drawing and narrative, foregrounding their agency and participatory rights within a digitally mediated research context. Building on research on children's drawings and identity construction (Cherney et al., 2006; Deguara & Nutbrown, 2025; Richards, 2018), the study situates drawing and gender within debates on agency, participation and democracy in a digital age, enabling children to express their views about their identities. Grounded in a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and social semiotics (Kress, 2010) to conceptualise drawings as accessible, child-friendly, multimodal signs of meaning-making. Six, five-year old children created two self-portraits over eight weeks. Drawing processes and accompanying narratives were video-recorded and drawings scanned, positioning participation within a digital ecology that captures both visual and verbal expressions. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Institutional ethics approval was obtained, and procedures followed University of Malta guidelines. Educator's and parental consent, and child assent were secured. Participation was voluntary, pseudonyms ensured anonymity and the right to withdraw. Video data were handled confidentially. Three themes emerged: identity through personal characteristics; belonging with family relationships; and emerging understandings of gender. Drawings function as dialogic spaces where children actively negotiated who they are. The study highlights drawing and video-recording as democratic research practices sustaining children's voices. Digitally supported multimodal methods strengthen children's agency and participation in identity-

related dialogue, while educators foster environments that support belonging and sensitive engagement with gender identity.

children's drawings, identity construction, multimodal meaning-making, digital participation, child agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Understanding young children's representations of scientists: a cross-cultural study using visual and interview methods

Presenters:
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Jane O'Connor, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Simin Cao, Xuchang University, China
Minh Trần Kiêm, Hue University, Viet Nam
Anastasia Misirli, Uninersity of Patras, Greece
Quang Vuong Le, Vinh University, Viet Nam
Antuni Wiyarsi, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Torstein Heimdal, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Astrid Wara, Nordnorsk Science Centre, Norway

To investigate how young children in different countries conceptualise who scientists are and what they do, and how this varies according to age and gender. Early encounters with science strongly influence ideas about science and scientists (Thomson et al., 2019). Drawing can reveal children's emerging scientific identities and stereotypes (Ferguson & Lezotte, 2020). The study is grounded in research on early scientific identity formation (Carlone & Johnson, 2007), children's developing sense of belonging in science, and the role of visual methods in eliciting children's perspectives (Ehrlén, 2009). Identity and conceptualisations of scientists is socially constructed and shaped by gender, socio-cultural context and early experiences (Burr, 2015). The Draw-a-Scientist Test (Chambers, 1983) was used alongside interviews with children. Data were collected from 120 children (4–8) across England, China, Greece, Norway, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Research questions: How do young children represent scientists? What do children's drawings reveal about the gender, appearance and scientific specialisms of scientists? How do children's personal characteristics shape their perceptions and stereotypes of scientists? Ethical approval obtained from BCU Research Ethics Committee. Child-friendly consent/assent procedures and developmentally appropriate activities were used. Cultural, developmental, and individual factors interact in shaping children's early images of scientists. There was a significant association between a child's gender and the gender of the scientist depicted. Age predicts children's overall DAST scores. The international scope of the project highlights how cultural, developmental, and individual factors interact in shaping children's early images of scientists. These insights have important implications for promoting equity, representation, and participation in science.

children's perceptions, draw-a-scientist test (DAST), scientific identity, early childhood, stereotypes, cross-cultural research.

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

FAMILY AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES IN RESEARCH

Chaired by: Ellen Fesseha, University of Toronto, Canada

Project WeFEEL in the Digital Age: Facilitating Family Agency, Participation, and Democratic Advocacy in Educational Systems.

Presenters:
Andrea Adelman, Florida International University, United States

All authors:
Andrea Adelman, Florida International University, United States
Daniela Foerch, Florida International University, United States

This study examines how digitally mediated family advocacy training supports families' knowledge development, capacity to apply that knowledge, and agency in advocating for educational outcomes. Building on research in family school partnerships, advocacy, and participatory approaches in early childhood education, we emphasize empowering families from underserved populations to navigate educational systems and exercise voice (Freire, 1970; Vigil & Lopez, 2020; Sheridan et al., 2019). Recent work identifies digital spaces as critical sites for participation, access, and democratic engagement when logistical barriers limit in-person advocacy (Dunst & Espe Sherwindt, 2016; Kumpulainen & Sefton Green, 2021). This research is grounded in Emotional Intelligence theory (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Brackett, 2014), Advocacy Theory (Freire, 1970), and participatory democratic frameworks, which conceptualize agency as the ability to understand, apply, and act upon knowledge within relational, institutional, and digital contexts. Using a participatory action research paradigm, this mixed method study engaged families from underserved communities in digitally facilitated workshops/coaching sessions. Data sources included pre/post surveys analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained to ensure ethical standards. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks through informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained through de-identification and secure data storage. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time. Findings indicate increased knowledge, confidence in application, and advocacy behaviors, particularly through communication with schools and service providers across educational contexts. Results suggest that intentional digital advocacy training can strengthen family agency and participation, informing equitable family engagement practices and policy.

family advocacy, engagement, agency, empowerment, educational equity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Nurturing Agency and Participation for Refugee and Migrant Children Transitioning to Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Presenters:
Sally Peters, University of Waikato, New Zealand

All authors:
Sally Peters, University of Waikato, New Zealand
Hazel Woodhouse, University of Waikato, New Zealand

This study explores how former refugee and migrant children experience transitions into ECE and school in NZ. It examines what supports agency, participation, and inclusion during these transitions. Research highlights the importance of centering children's voices in pedagogy (Dockett & Perry, 2014) and acknowledges the diverse

pathways of refugee and migrant children (UNHCR, 2021). Studies show that positive transitions are shaped by relational, cultural, and structural supports (Gath et al., 2021). This study builds on these insights to foreground lived experiences in a local context. The research draws on socio-cultural theories of learning, participatory pedagogies, and child agency frameworks to understand how children exercise choice, voice, and participation in complex and digitalised learning environments. Situated within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ECE and school leaders and teachers and Settlement Centre staff. Further semi-structured interviews with families and dialogic drawing with children (Ruscoe, 2002) highlight the children's lived experiences. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) identified enablers and barriers. Emerging stories of agency and participation are explored. Underpinned bv an ethic of respect, informed consent was obtained from all adult participants. Following parental consent, children's assent was negotiated throughout. Pseudonyms are used for confidentiality. Participants could withdraw at any stage. Preliminary analysis highlights the importance of relational trust, culturally responsive practices, and opportunities for children's voice in shaping transitions. Children's agency is supported through respect for their histories and identities. Findings inform educators and policymakers on inclusive transition practices that empower refugee and migrant children, and promote participatory, democratic learning environments.

child agency, transition, refugee and migrant children, participation, inclusion

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

Some of the data draws from a project funded by the Teaching Learning Research Initiative [TLRI].

Comparing the cultural perspectives of play-based learning among kindergarten educators and parents

Presenters:
Ellen Fesseha, University of Toronto, Canada

All authors:
Ellen Fesseha, University of Toronto, Canada
Angela Pyle, University of Toronto, Canada

Current global instability and crisis has led to displacement, migration, and rapid diversification of classroom populations. This study explores how cultural values of play impact the use of PBL in classrooms. Pedagogical shifts favour child-centred approaches, like play-based learning (PBL), over didactic instruction in Early Childhood Education. Studies of PBL perspectives demonstrate dichotomized views leading to varied implementation (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Similar to studies of parental perspectives and educational attainment influencing children's learning, educators' perspectives can be influenced by students' families (Fehér & Vida, 2024; Powell et al., 2010). The PBL Continuum (Pyle & Danniels, 2017)Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings,1995) 397 educators and 185 parents/guardians with children enrolled in a kindergarten program in Canada participated. Data was collected using a novel survey instrument drawing from surveys of pedagogical beliefs and cultural practice (e.g., Fogle & Mendez, 2006), and existing play and CRP literature (e.g., Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Questions probed the benefits and use of PBL in diverse classrooms, and relationship between home and school play. Consent was collected and dissent could occur at any time. Responses were anonymous and voluntary. Information explored non-invasive topics involving low/no safety-risk. Preliminary analyses of PBL perspectives show both parents and educators referenced the value of PBL for effective societal membership; educators spoke to broader life skills. Parents, however, were explicit about play providing opportunities to learn "how to fit in," manners, and empathy. Results will unpack conceptualizing PBL as a culturally sensitive pedagogy, connecting diverse understandings of play toward inclusive, equitable, fun ECE.

educator perspectives, parent perspectives, play-based learning, culturally sensitive pedagogy, qualitative methods

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

Novel data collection was supported by funding received from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and secondary data was used from an existing project supported byThe Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Both are Canadian funders.

Symposium C11 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 7, floor -2

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE WITH INDIGENOUS AND MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES

Chaired by: Anja Pesch, University of Inland Norway, Norway

Co-Design in Indigenous Education Policy and Practice in Schools and Early Years Settings

Presenters:
Grace Sarra, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Grace Sarra, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Marnee Shay, University of Queensland, Australia

This project investigates digital technologies for Indigenous and low socio-economic children and their families. It introduces a co-designed digital device loan program aimed at reducing barriers to digital connection and supporting children's play and learning. The co-design methodology is grounded in Indigenous knowledges, to meaningfully inform Indigenous education policy and practices. Existing Indigenous co-design research reveals significant gaps: limited Indigenous leadership, and over relying on Western knowledge frameworks rather than Indigenous knowledges. Robust evaluation processes are rarely documented (Shay et al., 2024). These gaps are addressed in a strengths-based co-design approach that centres and privileges marginalised voices. Research is underpinned by Rigney's (1999) Indigenist principles, particularly privileging Indigenous voices, and resistance as emancipatory imperative. These foreground community expertise and political integrity through strengths-based approaches (Shay & Sarra, 2025). Within an Indigenist research paradigm (Rigney, 1999), Collaborative Yarning Methodology (Shay, 2021) is the primary method. Through yarning with community members, a collaboratively designed digital loan scheme was developed to support children's digital access for play and learning. Collaborative thematic analysis was validated by local Indigenous co-researchers. Ethical practice is grounded in trust and respect, aligned with the AIATSIS Code of Ethics (AIATSIS, 2020) that centres on Indigenous self-determination and leadership, impact and value, accountability and sustainability beyond the project. Findings conceptualised co-design as an ongoing relational process. Four strengths-based principles were identified: Indigenous decision making; capacity building; cultural validation of resources; and reciprocity through community ownership. Strengths-based co-design centring Indigenous voices enables collaborative relationships between schools and communities to develop more sustainable and contextualised local curriculum resources.

indigenous, co-design, digital, strengths based, policy.

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

From Hidden Resource to Pedagogical Asset: The Utilization of Multilingual Staff Members' Linguistic Competences in Finnish ECEC

Presenters:
Maria Tyrer, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Maria Tyrer, University of Turku, Finland

This study examines how the linguistic repertoires of multilingual ECEC staff in Finland are recognized and utilized in everyday pedagogical practices. It aims to clarify the institutional, ideological, and practical conditions that enable or constrain the use of staff members' multilingual competences to support children's participation, identity development, and language learning. Earlier research shows that translanguaging pedagogy can strengthen children's participation and identity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García & Wei, 2014). Studies also demonstrate that educators' language ideologies shape how linguistic diversity becomes visible in daily practices (Alisaari et al., 2019; Woolard, 2020). Yet little attention has been paid to multilingual staff as everyday linguistic resources, leaving a gap that this study addresses. The study draws on translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014) and on language ideology theory (Kroskrity, 2004) to analyze how multilingual competences are understood and enacted in practice. A mixed-methods paradigm guides the research, combining a qualitative interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) with quantitative methods (Holton & Burnett, 2005). The dataset consists of questionnaire responses (N = 35 - ongoing) from multilingual ECEC staff in Finland. Qualitative data are analysed using content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012), while quantitative data are examined through descriptive and inferential statistical techniques in SPSS. Participation was voluntary with informed consent, data anonymized per GDPR. Formal ethics committee approval was not required under ethics guidelines. Preliminary results indicate that multilingual competences are discursively valued but inconsistently supported in practice. The findings have implications for ECEC leadership, teacher education, and professional development as well as Finnish ECEC policy.

multilingual ECEC staff, translanguaging, language ideologies, institutional practices and language pedagogy

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

Children's Questions and Institutional Language Orders: Translanguaging and Multilingual Wellbeing in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Anja Seifert, JLU Giessen, Germany
Christa Kieferle, IFP München, Germany

All authors:
Anja Seifert, JLU Giessen, Germany
Christa Kieferle, IFP München, Germany

This study explores multilingual children's wellbeing from two complementary perspectives: children's own reflections on languages and a translanguaging-oriented professionalisation model in early childhood education. It asks how children conceptualise linguistic diversity and how educational institutions can respond to enhance participation, recognition and wellbeing in multilingual societies. The study builds on translanguaging research (García; García 2012 & Wei 2014; Kirsch 2018) and on cognitive and social perspectives on multilingualism (Gullifer & Titone 2020; Marian & Hayakawa 2021). It also draws on wellbeing research and positive psychology (Diener; Keyes; Seligman 2011; Derakhshan; Sun et al.), linking linguistic experience with children's flourishing. Language is conceptualised as an integrated repertoire rather than separate systems. Wellbeing is understood as relational and participation-based, emerging through linguistic recognition, agency and belonging within institutional language orders. A qualitative multi-level design combines two studies. Study one analyses over 500 written responses from children using content analysis (Kuckartz 2014). Study two examines a translanguaging-oriented professionalisation project in ten early childhood centres using mixed methods (pre–post surveys, video analysis, interviews). The synthesis links children's perspectives with institutional transformation processes. Participation was voluntary and

anonymised. The study follows ethical principles for research with minors and aligns with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Children articulate concerns about fairness, language hierarchies and belonging. Professionalisation expands multilingual participation spaces across macro, meso and micro levels. Multilingual wellbeing emerges where children's linguistic agency meets supportive institutional practices, requiring systemic shifts in pedagogy, teacher education and policy.

multilingual wellbeing, translanguaging, participation, children's agency, professionalisation

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

Symposium C12 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Senate Room, floor -2

LEADERSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING

Chaired by: Ingunn Sælid Sell, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

Early childhood teacher students and professional identity

Presenters:
Ingunn Sælid Sell, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Heidi Østland Vala, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

All authors:
Ingunn Sælid Sell, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Heidi Østland Vala, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

This study aims for strengthening leadership training in EC teacher education and explores students' development of professional identity. Identity and practice are closely connected (Wenger, 1998), and to develop their professional identity the students can explore the leader role through active participation in practical training and classroom teaching (Sell & Vala, 2026). Professional identity develops within the individual in interaction with professional and social aspects (Wittek, 2018). This leads to intentional leadership, where deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful decisions and action are central (Waniganayake & Shepherd, 2012). Theory of identity in practice (Wenger, 1998) and intentional leadership (Waniganayake & Shepherd, 2012) frames the study. The study has a hermeneutic approach (Creswell, 2013), and draws on focus groups with 83 EC teacher students, carried out as theme-based group mentoring (Wikstøl, 2025). Data was abductively analyzed (Tjora, 2026). Being two researchers has brought wider perspectives into the ethical reflections. We have ensured anonymity and informed consent and have been mindful of how power aspects and our positions as teachers and researchers may affect participants and results. Transparency and multiple perspectives have been highlighted (Bertram et al., 2025). Preliminary findings indicate that the students' development of professional identity is a process, where the practice field and the educational institution must create a secure arena for students' experiences with professional and ethical responsibility as leaders. Implications could be to highlight the students ability to ask questions, discuss, negotiate and act as pedagogical leaders during education. This can open for new understandings, experiential learning, and promote the development of professional identity.

professional identity, intentional leadership, practical training, professional development, theme-based mentoring.

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

warm relationships, foster confidence no end, of year review. A poetic inquiry into the normalisation of early years leadership

Presenters:
Kathryn Morris, Better Start, United Kingdom

All authors:
Kathryn Morris, Better Start, United Kingdom
Christine Parker, Researcher, United Kingdom

The research aim is to amplify voices of early years' leaders through poetic inquiry teasing out lived experiences and recurring themes encapsulating emotional and relational responses to professional life. The current pervasive narrative within early years' leadership is fractured by marketisation contributing to significant workforce 'burnout' (Moss & Roberts-Holmes, (2021); Solvason et al, 2025). Poetic Inquiry (van Rooyen & d'Abon, 2025), has proven to amplify the voices of the marginalised, in this context the marginalised voices are the early years practitioners (Davis 2023). The principal theoretical framework applied is that of poetic inquiry where haikus, the research data, are illuminated linguistically (Ross, 2022) and thematically. Identification of themes is an active, interpretive, and recursive process grounded in researcher reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021). Drawing on an interpretivist paradigm, the study engaged fifteen early-years educators and one local authority lead, all volunteering in a focus group exploring experiences and meaning-making. Ethical practice required securing informed consent, respecting participants' right to withdraw, and maintaining anonymity. Early years leaders' participation in research remained a continual ethical focus throughout the process. Findings did not align with the patterns identified in the literature review, yet represents an authentic and valuable analysis, highlighting the complexity of the issue and offering new insights that challenge assumptions within existing research. Creating Haiku gave permission to communicate depth of feeling which mainly focused on Joy, Pride, Community, Love and Belonging. What if haiku writing became more widely known as a conduit for channeling professional responses to work crisis.

marginalised workforce, leadershipart-based research, poetic inquiry, reflexive thematic analysis

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

Self-funding independent researchers

Leading Socially Sustainable Well-Being in Finnish Early Childhood Education: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study

Presenters:
Reija Ahola, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Reija Ahola, University of Helsinki, Finland

This doctoral study develops a model for sustainable well-being leadership by examining the following research question: How does leadership shape occupational well-being and staff retention in early childhood education, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable urban areas? The research responds to workforce shortages and growing spatial segregation that jeopardies quality and equity in ECEC and extends prior research on well-being, retention and leadership (Ahola & Hietajärvi, 2025; Bernelius & Huilla, 2021; Heikonen et al., 2023; OECD, 2025). Four lenses guide the analysis: Allardt's (1989) welfare dimensions updated with "doing" (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2017; Martela, 2025), Lefebvre's social production of space (1991), symbolic leadership (Lahtero & Risku, 2012; Roponen et al., 2024) and a systemic leadership model grounded in ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Heikonen et al., 2023). The study adopts a constructivist paradigm and applies Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)(Charmaz, 2014), using a sequential multi-level design that includes focus groups with ECEC professionals (N=63, 2022) and

interviews with centre leaders (N=10, 2024), area leaders (N=5, 2024) and municipal directors (N=3, 2025), with theoretical and purposeful sampling across contrasting socio-economic contexts. Participants' agency, confidentiality and contextual risk management were carefully considered, and data-related risks were addressed in line with the updated EECERA Ethical Code (2024) (Bertram et al., 2025). Experienced occupational well-being arises from the interplay of team culture, resources, meaningful work and professional autonomy. Leadership translates "conceived" structures into "lived" experiences through symbolic and pedagogical leadership practices (Lefebvre, 1991). By shaping everyday conditions, leadership can counter teacher segregation and promote social sustainability and spatial equity in ECEC.

leadership, sustainable well-being, staff retention, spatial segregation, constructivist grounded theory

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

Symposium C13 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

CREATING RELATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR AGENCY

Chaired by: Aaron Bradbury, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

Relational Conditions for Agency: Evaluating Love and Nurture in Digitally Mediated Early Childhood Contexts

Presenters:
Aaron Bradbury, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Aaron Bradbury, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

This study explores whether relational pedagogical conditions, as measured through the Love and Nurture Rating Scale (LNRS), enable meaningful child agency and democratic participation within digitally mediated early childhood environments. While digital technologies are often positioned as enhancing participation, research on democratic agency emphasises relational recognition (Lundy 2007; Biesta 2010; Dewey 1916). Studies of care ethics (Noddings 2003) and professional love (Page 2018) highlight the importance of attunement, yet limited research connects relational pedagogy with digital participation in early childhood. The paper integrates democratic theory (Dewey, 1916), subjectification (Biesta, 2006, 2010), ethics of care (Noddings, 1984/2003) and children's rights frameworks (UNCRC Article 12; Lundy, 2007) to argue that love and nurture constitute structural preconditions for agency. Drawing on Lundy's model of space, voice, audience and influence, the study positions relational attunement as essential to ensuring that participation in digitally mediated contexts moves beyond expression toward meaningful democratic influence. Adopting a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study utilises small-scale case studies across three early years settings. Participants will include 6–9 practitioners and 12–18 children (aged 3–5), purposively sampled. Methods include LNRS observations, practitioner interviews, and child participatory approaches (drawing, informal dialogue). Data will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Informed consent and confidentiality and careful handling of digital observation contexts will be ensured in line with ethical research guidance. Preliminary analysis suggests that agency in digital contexts is relationally constituted rather than technologically guaranteed. The study repositions relational pedagogy as foundational to democratic participation in the digital age, informing evaluation frameworks for early years practice.

relational pedagogy, agency, democracy, digital childhood, love and nurture

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

The Caring Mind: Pre-service Teachers' Understandings of Care, Teaching, and Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Presenters:
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland

This study examines how pre-service teachers (PSTs) understand care, teaching, and pedagogy in ECEC and how these are enacted in everyday practice. Recent research positions care in ECEC as a relational, ethical, and pedagogical foundation rather than a personal disposition. The study extends work on Noddings' ethics of care and Nordic ECEC pedagogy by foregrounding PSTs' own understanding of care and their views on how these can be enacted in practice. The study is grounded in ethics of care, conceiving care as a relational and responsive pedagogical practice (Noddings, 1988; 1992; Persky, 2021). We link this stance to Shulman's (1987) framework of pedagogical reasoning and action viewing care as pedagogy, teachers' interactions, instructional decisions, and reflection. A qualitative design with a thematic analysis of written responses to five open-ended questions was used. The data was gathered during a teaching session in which participants (N=91) completed an online questionnaire individually and anonymously. Participants provided informed consent to use their writings as anonymous data. Ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) were followed. Findings show PST's highlighting warmth, interaction, and pedagogical sensitivity as essential dimensions of care, reflecting current understandings of care as an ethically grounded professional practice rather than a personal trait. To strenghen the PSTs' caring minds, teacher education should emphasize care-as-pedagogy as a co-constructed, all-day practice enacted by adults and children within an ethical educational community. This emphasis calls for the development of multiprofessional competencies and professional agency during teacher education.

care, early childhood education and care, teaching, pedagogy, pre-service teachers

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

Teacher mentalization as a foundation for agency and democratic participation in kindergarten classrooms

Presenters:
Mariane Chiasson-Roussel, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Mariane Chiasson-Roussel, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

As digital mediation expands in early childhood, sustaining agency and democratic participation depends on relational pedagogy. This study explores how teachers' mentalization may constitute a foundation for agency within kindergarten praxis. Emotional support, measured with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008), is linked to children's outcomes, and engagement with teachers, assessed with the Individualized Classroom Assessment Scoring System (inCLASS; Downer et al., 2010), indexes participation. However, the reflective processes shaping these interactions remain underexplored. Drawing on mentalization theory (Fonagy et al., 2002), we conceptualise emotional support as a democratic space in which children are recognised as epistemic agents contributing to meaning-making. In a digital age marked by acceleration and mediation, sustaining such spaces is critical for participation (Biesta, 2006). An interpretive multi-case study was conducted with three Quebec

kindergarten teachers and classrooms (N = 64 children, age 5). Teachers completed the Mental States Task. Classrooms were video-recorded and coded using CLASS and inCLASS, and semi-structured interviews analysed through cross-case synthesis. Ethics approval was obtained from the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières Research Ethics Committee. Parents and teachers consented, children assented, and video data were anonymised and securely stored. Higher reflective functioning was observed alongside greater sensitivity, warmer classroom climate, and child engagement. Qualitative analyses converged on an "observe–validate–adjust" cycle in which teachers attended to cues, validated emotions and intentions, and adapted demands, integrating children's voices into practice. Findings suggest that reflective supervision and professional learning to strengthen teacher mentalization may sustain agency and participation-supportive classroom life as digital mediation reshapes children's relational ecologies.

mentalization, emotional support, child engagement, agency, democratic participation

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

Symposium C14 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

PARENTAL AND TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Chaired by: Krystyna Heland-Kurzak, The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

How to Promote Communication Between School and Community to Maximise Children's Socialisation: An Action Research Study in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Cláudia Mendonça, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

All authors:
Cláudia Mendonça, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal
Maria José Camacho, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

The study aimed to promote communication between school and community in order to enhance children's socialisation in early childhood education. It emerged from the limited interaction between school and community and explored alternative communication channels through the Green Room Radio. The study is based on action research aimed at improving practices (Coutinho, 2014; Coghlan, 2014), on the critical analysis of educational contexts (Brazão & Tinoca, 2024; 2025), and on the Portuguese curricular guidelines for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2016). The study is based on action research (Coutinho, 2014; Coghlan, 2014), on critical educational analysis (Brazão & Tinoca, 2024; 2025), and on the Portuguese curricular guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2016). Qualitative action research conducted in a preschool setting using participant observation, field notes, and reflective journal records. The researcher assumed a dual role as educator and researcher (Coutinho, 2014; Coghlan, 2014). Ethical principles were ensured throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants. Particular care was taken due to the involvement of children, ensuring their well-being and protection at all stages of the research. The results show that the creation of mediated communication with real audiences enhanced children's participation, socialisation, and sense of belonging. However, institutional constraints limited the school's openness to the community, highlighting tensions between pedagogical intentions and structural conditions, and reinforcing the need for educational practices that promote school–community connection and children's participation. Promoting schools more open to community while overcoming institutional barriers to children's participation.

pesquisa-ação, relação escola-comunidade, participação infantil, comunicação, educação infantil

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Sem financiamento externo.

Long-term Effects of the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program in at-risk Families: Transition to lower secondary Education Programs

Presenters:
Alex Neuhauser, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland

All authors:
Alex Neuhauser, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Isabelle Kalkusch, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Patsawee Rodcharoen, Universitiy of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Lynn Bolliger, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Fynn Siefart, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Andrea Lanfranchi, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland
Peter Klaver, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs Zurich, Switzerland

This research explores whether participation in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) home visiting programme during the first three years of life predicts whether children from at-risk families will attend more demanding educational programmes after transition to lower secondary education. Families facing psychosocial risks often encounter barriers that limit their ability to provide consistent developmental support (Wang & Hassairi, 2025). The long-term effectiveness of home visit programmes in at-risk has rarely been studied to date. According to developmental and ecological theories, the interaction between the child and their proximal environment is central to learning and educational success (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this context, early home visiting programs have become a key strategy to enhance educational opportunities (Filene et al., 2013). Data was collected in the ZEPPELIN longitudinal study in the canton of Zurich, Switzerland. Using a randomised controlled trial design, 248 at-risk families with newborns were divided into an intervention group (n = 132) and a control group (n = 116). As an outcome, the four levels of education programs at lower secondary school were grouped in high and low level education. Intervention effects were analyzed using regression analysis. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and renewed with each wave of the survey. Preliminary results indicate that children from at-risk families benefit from early support with PAT and are more likely to be enrolled in higher level of education programmes at lower secondary school. These findings are relevant in respect of the long-term goal of increasing educational opportunities through measures of early intervention.

at-risk families, early intervention, educational opportunities, school transition, randomized controlled trial

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

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

The role of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) in developing Practitioner–Parent communications in ECEC

Presenters:
Krystyna Heland-Kurzak, The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

All authors:
Krystyna Heland-Kurzak, The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

The project examines the potential of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) as a research and intervention tool for analyzing and improving communication between caregivers and parents in nurseries, focusing on how VIG can enhance the effectiveness of their relations. Studies show that video-stimulated reflection positively affects interactions between professionals and families (Pianta et al., 2008; Fukkink et al., 2011; Marttila, 2023). In intervention studies, practitioners and parents describe the child and reflect on their relationship (Meins, Fernyhough & Harris-Waller, 2014). VIG is grounded in attuned interaction: adults - practitioners and parents - share a focus of attention and jointly negotiate meanings and intentions concerning the child. A quasi-experimental design combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Video data are collected with consent, anonymized, and stored with restricted access. Key issues include anonymity, informed consent from competent adult volunteers, reciprocity, freedom to withdraw, and the absence of sensitive personal data. Practitioners and parents receive video excerpts of their own interactions to reflect on cooperation patterns. Such video-based interventions foster more attuned practitioner–parent communication in early childhood education and care. The findings can inform training programs for practitioners and parents, strengthening partnership in ECEC and enabling individualized interventions tailored to the needs of the child and family.

video interaction guidance (vig), practitioner–parent communication, attuned interaction, early childhood education and care (ecec), video-stimulated reflection

Symposium C15 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

CHILDREN'S INTERACTIONS WITH NATURAL RESOURCES AND DIGITAL WORLD

Chaired by: Rebecca Bartram, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

Fostering Young Children’s Socioecological Literacy Through Tinkering with Bee-bots and Natural Materials

Presenters:
Jasmiina Leskinen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Sini Kontkanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

All authors:
Jasmiina Leskinen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Sini Kontkanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Socioecological crises call on ECEC to strive toward otherwise futures. Drawing on socioecological care and relationality (Jen, 2025), we inquire into how tinkering with Bee-bots and natural materials cultivates socioecological care in children aged 5–6. We ask: In what ways do relational processes between children and social others unfold in tinkering activities? As studies addressing environmental literacy through tinkering in early childhood remain limited, we build on research showing play and the arts foster STEAM engagement through narratives and imagination (Byman et al., 2023), and on maker pedagogy as holistic learning through artifact construction (Marsh, 2019). We view socioecological as a shared, multidirectional literacy practice among human and more-than-human entities. Play is a literacy form children use to make sense of their worlds (Wohlwend, 2025). Relationality is central, as socioecological care requires understanding entangled webs where nonhumans are social others (Jen, 2025). Grounded in sociocultural theory, the study analyzes interactions during a three-week unit in a Finnish ECEC-center. Data include videos, artifacts (huts and paths), and children's stories, analyzed through multimodal mediated discourse analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Guardians received consent forms in Finnish and English. Consent was continuously negotiated, and participants could withdraw anytime. Power dynamics were mitigated through child-centered methods promoting agency and privacy. Children’s relational practices unfolded through embodied interaction, drawings, artifacts, and stories as they constructed huts for Bee-bots, fostering sensing, nurturing, and

collaboration while cultivating socioecological literacy and human–nonhuman interdependence. The findings provide tools for combining young children's technology and environmental education, informing approaches that cultivate socioecological literacy contributing to sustainability transformation.

socioecolocical care, relationality, literacy, sociocultural theory, maker education

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

Loving the Unloved : New perspective on Venomous caterpillars by children

Presenters:
Kei Kihara, The Forest Of Creativity OIKEASHITA Nursery School, Japan

All authors:
Kei Kihara, The Forest Of Creativity OIKEASHITA Nursery School, Japan

This study examines a case in which five-year-old children confronted venomous caterpillars, commonly categorized as “pests,” and reconsidered what it means to live together within ecosystem. Rather than reflexively resorting to exclusion or eradication, this approach invites those in ECEC settings to engage in dialogue and to seek alternative ways of co-existing. It's builds on Silent Spring（Rachel Carson, 1962）, which frame ecological sensitivity as foundational to education, and on In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia (Carla Rinaldi, 2015), which theorises listening and democratic plurality. Drawing on theories of otherness and ethical responsiveness, this study explores how children’s dialogue unsettles adult assumptions and generates relational values, inviting a rethinking of environmental education, democratic pedagogy, and relational ethics in early childhood. Situated in an interpretive, relational paradigm, this study uses documentation with adults and children. During a mass emergence of venomous caterpillars that made the nursery school garden unusable, dialogues, children’s sketches, and reflection trace how ethical reasoning became practice. Ensuring children’s safety while minimizing harm to non-human life. Respecting children’s agency in group decisions, with annual child and parent consent at each school year’s start. The findings indicate that exclusionary responses often stem from fixed conceptual frameworks. By suspending immediate judgment and engaging in dialogue with one another, children were able to think more expansively and consider what actions might be appropriate within ecological and social contexts. This study highlights the importance of educational environments that encourage dialogue and ethical responsiveness, helping develop ways of thinking that resist exclusion and support living together across diverse ecological and social contexts.

otherness, co-existence, ecological sensitivity, democratic dialogue, ethical responsiveness

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

QTrobot Study - using a social assistive robot as an Early Years educational support with autistic children

Presenters:
Rebecca Bartram, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Barbara Sandland, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

All authors:
Karen Guldberg, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Rebecca Bartram, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Barbara Sandland, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Aida Nazari, LuxAI, Luxembourg
Priyanka Mendon, Luxemburg Institute of Health, Luxembourg

Nancy Kouroupa, Luxemburg Institute of Health, Luxembourg
Antia Romani, Luxemburg Institute of Health, Luxembourg
Pouyan Ziafati, LuxAI, Luxembourg
Eduardo Rosales Jubal, Luxemburg Institute of Health, Luxembourg
Manon Gantenbein, Luxembourg Institute of Health, Luxembourg

This study investigates the impact of QTrobot on the cognitive, social and language development of autistic children in the early years, alongside parental self-efficacy. When used at home for ten-months. Despite growing interest in robots, a substantial evidence gap remains concerning long-term, in-home use to support developmental learning for autistic children (Islam, et al., 2023). Existing literature predominantly uses a technological lens, overlooking crucial contextual factors within data analysis (Guldberg, 2026). The research utilises a Theory of Change, focusing on the 'how and why' outcomes occur (Weiss, 1995). Given the literature gap, mechanisms of change were initially unclear; a pragmatic approach supported a dual inductive–deductive strategy. This longitudinal study employs a single-arm, multistage mixed-methods framework (Fetters et al, 2013). 69 families with a child aged 2.6-4.9 years, with a confirmed autism diagnosis or elevated SRS-2 Preschool score, received a QTrobot. MSEL and Vineland-III, alongside a project-specific parental self-efficacy questionnaire at baseline; mid-point and endpoint were used. Data were combined with usage metrics, parental feedback, and observations ensuring contextual understanding of statistical data. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Birmingham. Multiple information books, informed consent and GDPR compliant processes safeguarded participant rights and privacy. Initial findings from baseline to mid-point data will be presented for discussion, and emerging insights into mechanisms of change influencing outcomes. This research has the potential to significantly influence the future of robots within autism Early Years Provision. Contributing to the growing recognition that contextual factors are crucial in maximizing transferability and implementation impact.

autism, early years, socially assistive robots, theory of change, 2-generational support

Symposium C16 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

PROFESSIONALS' COMPETENCIES IN OFFERING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Chaired by: Diarmuid Creedon, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland

Primary Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive and Special Education: An INTO Report

Presenters:
Diarmuid Creedon, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland
Máirín Ní Chéileachair, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland
Aoife Mullen, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland

All authors:
Diarmuid Creedon, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland
Máirín Ní Chéileachair, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland
Aoife Mullen, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Ireland

This study examines Irish primary teachers' confidence in delivering inclusive and special education, focusing on how preparation, resourcing, workload, access to supports, and professional voice shape teachers' capacity to enact inclusive practice. It aims to identify barriers to inclusion and to inform early years policy. The study aligns with

research identifying teacher confidence as central to effective inclusive education (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Mahony, 2016). This study provides evidence from the Irish primary context (4 - 12 year olds), capturing teachers' perspectives amid expanding inclusion policy and increasing system pressures. The study conceptualises teacher confidence as relational and system-dependent rather than individual. Teachers' capacity to deliver inclusion is understood as contingent on structural conditions, including training, time, multidisciplinary supports, and meaningful engagement in policy development. A mixed-methods design with concurrent triangulation was employed. Quantitative data was collected through a Likert-scale survey of 234 primary teachers across five domains: professional preparation, resources and support, workload and planning, confidence and self-efficacy, and professional voice. Qualitative data from focus groups and open-ended survey responses were analysed thematically to contextualise and deepen quantitative findings. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Findings reveal strong teacher commitment to inclusion from early years, alongside fragile confidence, shaped by inadequate resourcing, excessive workload, limited access to specialist services, and a perceived lack of professional voice. The study highlights the need for sustained investment in professional learning, protected collaborative time, improved multidisciplinary supports, and stronger mechanisms for incorporating teachers' expertise into inclusive education policy.

inclusive educationteacher voice, teacher self-efficacy, teacher confidence, teacher workload

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research is based in Irish primary schools. In the Irish context, the professional work of primary teachers spans the education of children from approximately 4 to 12 years of age. As such, this study is situated within both early years and primary education, reflecting how teachers' work is understood and organised within the Irish education system. Thank you.

Preschool SENCOs' Role and Readiness in Inclusive Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Teele-Triin Klimov, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

All authors:
Teele-Triin Klimov, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia
Maire Tuul, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

This study examines preschool SENCOs experiences and preparedness in Estonian ECE. Inclusive education has become a central principle in international education policy, emphasising the provision of equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (Buli-Holmberg et al., 2022; Lindner & Schwab, 2025; Ydo, 2020). Within this context, the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has gained increasing recognition for its contribution to strengthening inclusive practices (Jaspers-van der Maten & Rommes, 2024; Robertson, 2022). In Estonia, the ECE Act established in 2025 the position of preschool Support Services Coordinator, which is the same role as the SENCO in schools. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives, a mixed-methods design was used, including 50 questionnaire responses, five digital diaries, and three semi-structured interviews (two individual, one group with four participants). Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and the anonymisation of participants and institutions. All data stored in Tallinn University's secure and accessible only to the research team. The findings highlight considerable role ambiguity for SSCs, as responsibilities are frequently added to existing duties without allocated time or compensation. Participants reported varying levels of confidence and preparation, largely dependent on the quality of collaboration and institutional support. These results point to a pressing need for clearer policy guidelines, standardized role descriptions, and targeted professional development to ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of the SSC position.

early childhood education (ECE), preschool, inclusive education, support services coordination (SSC), SENCO, Estonia

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

ECE educators' and students' perceptions and self-efficacy toward inclusive education and their associations with reflective functioning

Presenters:
Smadar Dolev, Oranim College, Israel

All authors:
Smadar Dolev, Oranim College, Israel

To examine ECE teachers' and students' inclusion perceptions regarding children with special needs, associations with reflective functioning and teacher self-efficacy, and differences by prior inclusion experience.
Prior work links educators' attitudes and perceived competence to inclusive practice and adaptation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Educators' readiness and self-efficacy are key to effective inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011), yet links between inclusion perceptions and educators' reflective functioning remain understudied. Reflective functioning (e.g., understanding underlying thoughts, feelings, and intentions) may support children's participation and agency. Combining mentalization theory (Fonagy et al., 2002) with ecological perspectives on participation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), educators' self-efficacy and readiness are framed as drivers of inclusive practice in ECE. Reflective functioning is an interpersonal capacity that shapes how educators interpret children's needs and support participation and agency. In quantitative cross-sectional research, N=81 ECE teachers and students completed the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised (SACIE-R), the Parental Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (PRFQ), and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). Pearson correlations tested associations; Welch t-tests compared educators by inclusion experience. Included: voluntary informed consent, de-identified data, secure storage, and institutional ethical approval; for students, participation was voluntary, unrelated to assessment. Educators' and students' perceptions toward inclusion were positive. Positive inclusion perceptions were associated with higher reflective functioning ($r=.30$, $p=.03$) and with better classroom-management self-efficacy ($r=-.28$, $p=.04$). Inclusion perceptions did not differ by prior experience with children with special needs. Yet, experienced respondents reported higher certainty about children's mental states (Welch $t(8.61)=2.36$, $p=.04$). Strengthening educators' mentalizing and self-efficacy may support inclusive ECE climates, expanding children's agency and participation.

ECE, inclusion, special needs, mentalizing, teacher self-efficacy,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C17 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 13, floor -1

ROBOTICS AND DIGITAL PLAY

Chaired by: Gabriel Kappeler, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland

Observing executive functions during pretend play involving unplugged digital materials in kindergarten

Presenters:
Gabriel Kappeler, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland
Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

All authors:

Gabriel Kappeler, HEP-Vaud, Switzerland
Stéphanie Duval, Université Laval, Canada

This study examines how children's executive functions (EF) emerge during pretend play with unplugged digital materials in Swiss kindergartens. It also investigates how the GOFE-R (Duval & Montminy, 2025), an ecological observational tool, can be used to document the mobilisation of EF when children engage with digital materials. EF measured between ages 3 and 6 are recognized as predictors of later educational success (Rosas et al., 2019). EF skills (e.g. inhibition) are typically assessed through questionnaires or performance-based tasks, which, despite their strengths, have limitations, as limited ecological validity. Recent studies therefore emphasise the value of observational tools for capturing EF in naturalistic educational contexts (Escolano-Pérez et al., 2017). Drawing on sociocultural and cultural-historical perspectives (Vygotsky, 1997), the study conceptualises FE as socially mediated processes supporting children's participation in pretend play. A quantitative observational approach is adopted to analyse 22 pretend-play scenarios involving groups of children (n = 76, aged 4 to 8). Each child's mobilisation of executive functions was evaluated with a validated observational instrument (GOFE-R; Duval & Montminy, 2025), which provides scores from 1 to 7 across 10 components assessing working memory, inhibition, cognitive flexibility, and planning. Consent was obtained from the school authorities, teachers, parents and children, with voluntary participation. The study hypothesises that unplugged digital materials support pretend play by creating favourable conditions for observing EF linded to children's participation. Such observations during pretend play provide insights into how the physical and material environments can be arranged to encourage children's engagement and the mobilisation of EF.

executive functions, pretend play, kindergarten, unplugged digital technology, observational tool

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

Living Democracy in the Digital Age: Children's Agency and Intercultural Participation through Co-designed Educational Robotics in ECEC

Presenters:
Alessia Bartolini, University of Perugia, Italy
Anna Allegra Bixio, University of Genoa, Italy

All authors:
Maria Filomia, Link Campus University, Italy
Alessia Bartolini, University of Perugia, Italy
Carmine Recchiuto, University of Genoa, Italy
Anna Allegra Bixio, University of Genoa, Italy
Alice Nardelli, University of Genoa, Italy

This study examines how the SONRIE project introduced a socially and culturally competent robot to support young children's agency, participation and democratic experiences through research–training with teachers in inclusive ECEC contexts. Research on children's participation and democratic pedagogy highlights the importance of recognising children as active contributors to educational life, while Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy underlines the value of sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity. Studies on social robotics show engagement benefits but rarely address intercultural inclusion or teacher co-design in naturalistic ECEC contexts. This study connects these fields. The study draws on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012, 2017), social robotics as relational mediation (Crompton et al., 2018; Neumann, 2020; Rossi et al., 2024) and the Research–Training approach, positioning teachers as co-researchers (Asquini, 2018; Nigris et al., 2020). Within an interpretive qualitative paradigm, participatory action research involved 5 ECEC centres, 43 teachers and 168 children. Observation sheets, structured

journals, field notes and recorded meetings were transcribed and thematically analysed in NVivo (Bogdan et al 2007). Teacher and family consent, child assent and University of Genoa Ethics approval guided relational, non-instrumental technology use, safeguarding children's voice, dignity and wellbeing in intercultural settings. Emerging findings indicate that the robot fostered inclusive peer interaction and children's active participation, especially for lshy or vulnerable children, because activities were co-designed and tailored to each school. Teachers report professional transformation toward reflective, intercultural and democratically oriented practices. Findings stress the need for critically guided, context-sensitive use of robotics and AI in teacher education to sustain intercultural competence and children's experiences of agency and participation.

intercultural robotics, research–training, participatory co-design, children's agency, democratic participation

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.

Montessori based unplugged coding and robotics in early childhood: an Erasmus+ project to promote teachers' and students' digital skills

Presenters:
Valeria Rossini, University of Bari "A. Moro", Italy

All authors:
Valeria Rossini, University of Bari "A. Moro", Italy

The Erasmus+ project here presented aims to support teachers' professional development in digital education. The research questions are: 1) how to develop digital skills in preschool; 2) how to integrate unplugged coding and robotics with the Montessori method. Educational research shows the value of STEM in terms of academic andlong-term career potential for children (Johnston, Kervin, and Wyeth, 2022). One way to expose children to STEM is by coding and robotic manipulatives (Bers, 2008). The Montessori method promotes the sensory, cognitive, motor and social development of the child through scientific materials created by Montessori herself (Lillard, 2008). Although some researchers feel that integration of technology in Montessori classes may hurt the integrity of the paradigm, others argue that new technology materials are needed to reflect contemporary society (Hubbell, 2006). The research was conducted through mixed methods (Schoonenboom, 2018), and the evalutation was both quantitative and qualitative (interviews and standardized tests). The workshops were addressed to 20 teachers in order to create an Open Online E-learning Platform. We used assessments tools to collect data and compare lessons plans in 3 preschool classrooms of Slovenia, Spain and Turkey (60 children). This research prioritizes informed consent and ongoing assent, ensuring that the children's agency is respected. Anonymity and data protection were guaranteed. First results suggest that an effective coding and robotics curriculum in a Montessori classroom should include materials that emulate traditional Montessori tangibles. The impact for school policies concerns the improvement of digital skills and the creation of a teaching network to integrate technology into Montessori education.

Montessori education, STEM, digital skills, coding, preschool teachers

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

The Erasmus+ project "Montessori Based Unplugged Coding and Robotic in Early Childhood" is part of the Action: KA220-SCH – Cooperation Partnerships in School Education, and had a duration of 36 months, from 01/10/2022 to 30/09/2025. It was submitted

SOCIAL COGNITION AND PLAY

Chaired by: Michelle Nelson, University of Brighton, United Kingdom

Interactions in small, child-initiated groups related to socio-dramatic play, self-efficacy and belonging A case study

Presenters:
Iris Galili, Hemdat College of Education, Israel

All authors:
Iris Galili, Hemdat College of Education, Israel

This study examines how participation in a small child-initiated group that emerged from socio-dramatic play shapes children's self-efficacy and socio-emotional development. Research on collaborative learning supports children's academic and socio-emotional development (Tal, 2018). And shows that mediation of peer interactions enhances inclusion and achievement (Hunt et al., 2009). However, less attention has been given to small groups emerging from spontaneous play and to relational processes through which self-efficacy is constructed. The study is grounded in socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which views play as a central context for development. Sociodramatic play enables children to construct meaning, negotiate roles, and develop social and cognitive skills through mediated interaction (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Fleer, 2015). This qualitative case study is one of 52 action research projects and includes five sessions with six children (ages 4–6). Data included Observations and video recordings, analyzed through qualitative interaction analysis. Informed consent was obtained from parents and staff, children's assent was respected, and anonymity was maintained. Findings indicate that sustained scaffolding, involving gradual transfer of responsibility from student teachers to the group, supported participation and the development of self-efficacy through relational processes. The group demonstrated increasing social cohesion, cooperation, and mutual support, alongside a growing sense of belonging and shared commitment. Findings highlight the pedagogical potential of child-initiated small groups as inclusive spaces fostering socio-emotional development and shared responsibility, and the importance of preparing pre-service teachers to scaffold and extend children's collaborative meaning-making.

socio-dramatic play, small group interaction, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, early childhood education

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

A Feasibility Study of the PAX Good Behaviour Game in a Scottish Early Years Setting

Presenters:
Joanne O Keeffe, Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom
Cheryl-lee Brown, Midlothian Surestart, United Kingdom

All authors:
Joanne O Keeffe, Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom
Cheryl-lee Brown, Midlothian Surestart, United Kingdom
Allen Thurston, Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom
Maria Cockerill, Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom
Alison MacKenzie, Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom

1.To evaluate the feasibility of implementing the PAX Good Behaviour Game (PAX GBG) within Early Years settings in Midlothian, Scotland.2. To explore preliminary impacts of the PAX GBG on children's behaviour and peer

interactions. The PAX Good Behaviour Game is an evidence-based classroom based intervention that has shown to improve children's self-regulation, socioemotional development and resilience across studies in US and Europe (Huang et al., 2022; Fuglestad et al., 2021; Iwai et al., 2025). Research highlights that effective implementation often requires cultural and contextual adaptation, making evaluation within specific UK settings such as Midlothian important. The PAX GBG is underpinned by co-operative learning and peer relationships based on the theory of social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Using a qualitative feasibility design, the study gathered practitioner feedback through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and observational logs. Following PAX GBG training, Four Early Years settings participated, with (n = 8) practitioners delivering the programme over an 8-week period. Forty two children (2–5 years) experienced the PAX GBG though no individual child-level data were collected. The study was granted ethical approval by Queen's University Research Ethics Committee and consent for participation was gathered by the setting. The participants reported noted reductions in disruptive behaviour and improvements in peer interactions. It also revealed a number of notable strengths such as its alignment with the principles of UNCRC. The study suggests policy value embedding PAX GBG within professional learning frameworks and Early Years curricula could promote scalable, trauma-informed approaches across Scottish EY settings. Effective implementation requires whole-team consistency and cultural adaptation.

self-regulation, cooperative learning, early years, universal intervention, pilot

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

Making Sense of 'Challenging Behaviour' in the Early Years: An Exploration of the Role of Language and Labels in Constructing Children's Behaviour

Presenters:
Michelle Nelson, University of Brighton, United Kingdom

All authors:
Michelle Nelson, University of Brighton, United Kingdom

This study investigates how Early Years Educators (EYEs) construct and interpret the behaviour of 2-3-year-olds and examines how early years frameworks influence interpretations of 'challenging' behaviour. Research on children's behaviour has been dominated by developmental or behaviourist explanations (Hester et al., 2021). While critical and relational perspectives are emerging (Noddings, 2013), limited research examines how EYEs everyday discourses contribute to the construction of children's behaviour. This study is informed by relational constructionism (Shotter, 1993; Gergen, 2009) and sociology of the child(James and Prout, 1997). A relational pedagogical lens is used to help understand how children's behaviour and identities are co-constructed through dialogue and interaction (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009). Adopting an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative methodology was used. Data are generated through twelve semi-structured interviews and four focus groups with EYEs working with 2-3-year-olds. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis(Braun and Clarke, 2022) was employed. Ethical concerns included EYEs' vulnerability and the indirect representation of young children. To mitigate this, all identifiable details were removed, pseudonyms were used, participants were assured that data would remain confidential and not be shared, right to withdraw was given at every stage, and reflexivity maintained throughout to address power dynamics. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee. Findings suggest EYEs' constructions of behaviour significantly shape children's agency and participation, emphasising behaviour as a key site where democratic practice is enabled and constrained. This study highlights the need for relational, reflective, and democratic approaches to behaviour guidance within early years settings.

two-three-years-olds behaviour, early years education, relational practice, agency, democratic pedagogy

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

Symposium C19 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

TEACHER ATTITUDES TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Chaired by: Christine Elsby, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

Attitudes and Technology: enabling and disabling factors in English PVI settings.

Presenters:
Christine Elsby, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Christine Elsby, Early Childhood at The Open University, United Kingdom

The research aims to identify disabling factors, and to propose some strategies to mitigate against these. The attitudes of educators are known to be a factor in inclusion (Florian and Camedda, 2020). The removal of technology from the EYFS may isolate children with a delay in communication who use technology to communicate from their peers (Campbell-Barr and Tregenza, 2023). A sociocultural approach underpins this study, which takes the stance that 'human development is a cultural process' (Rogoff, 2003, p3). The work fits into the interpretivist paradigm: it considers that 'meaning is culturally defined' (Twining et al., 2017, A2). A qualitative multi-case study was conducted in four ECEC settings, the views of fifteen members of staff, parents and children were elicited. Methods used were observation, 'In the Picture' and semi-structured interviews. Participants were told that taking part was voluntary and non-participation would not have negative consequences for children or families. Consent for children was given by their carers (Morrow and Richards, 1996). To further ensure participants were willingly involved (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012) adults were reminded of their right to withdraw and children's willingness to participate was continually monitored by myself, staff and carers. The findings were that children, families and ECEC staff, are disempowered by multiple factors. These included the model of disability held by educators and their attitudes to technology. A SEASEwall is proposed, adapted from the SEAwall model of institutional discrimination (Swain et al., 2003), to assist policy makers and early years educators identify disabling factors. A flowchart to support the provision of an enabling environment is suggested.

disability, technology, disempowerment, communication, enabling

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Tensions in preschool practices with digital technologies

Presenters:
Anneli Tunberg, University West, Sweden

All authors:
Anneli Tunberg, University West, Sweden
Marie-Helene Zimmerman Nilsson, University West, Sweden
Sara Willermark, University West, Sweden

The aim of this study is to explore preschool practitioners' perspectives on tensions regarding children's use of digital technologies in relation to children's rights. Research shows that adults often focus on either protection or provision, resulting in unequal opportunities for children to exercise their rights in relation to digital technologies (Livingstone,

2016; Lagerlöf, 2024). In this study, children's rights in preschool practices are understood as sociomaterially constituted (Orlikowski, 2007) and situated in a postdigital society where digital technologies are parts of children's everyday lives (Edwards, 2023). The study was conducted within a qualitative research paradigm using action research (Rönnerman, 2022) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Data consists of 41 hours of audio recorded sessions with four Swedish preschool staff teams and 15 participating practitioners in total. The study is approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. All participants received information about the study and gave written consent, which they could withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms are used for both participants and homerooms. The results show that preschool practitioners experience tensions regarding balancing protection with provision in relation to several actors: children, practice, parents/legal guardians, policy. Within these dimensions, a complex array of tensions affects preschool practitioners' approaches to digital technologies. The study highlights tensions regarding children's rights in preschool practices with digital technologies and strategies for handling such tensions, offering guidance for preschool practitioners and policymakers in developing reflective and nuanced stances towards digital technologies in preschool, where children's rights are put firsthand.

children's rights, digital technologies, tensions, preschool, action research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Attitude Profiles of Pre-Service Early Childhood Teachers Regarding Digital Technologies: A Latent Profile Analysis

Presenters:
Olli Merjovaara, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Olli Merjovaara, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Pessi Lyyra, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Tuula Nousiainen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Raija Hämäläinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This study examines whether early childhood [ECE] pre-service teachers form different profiles based on their attitudes towards digital technologies and how these profiles differ between different attitude variables. Previous studies have shown that ECE pre-service teachers have varying digital competence and attitudes towards digital technologies (Merjovaara et al., 2024). Literature also shows mixed attitudes towards using digital technologies in ECE pedagogy (e.g., Madsen et al., 2023; Mertala, 2019). This study is grounded on the definition of attitudes as an individual's predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person or event (Ajzen, 1988). The understanding of attitudes towards digital technologies builds on Davis' (1985) technology acceptance model (TAM). The study was conducted as a quantitative study building upon positivism paradigm (Park et al., 2020). The participants were 304 ECE pre-service teachers from three Finnish universities. The analysis was conducted using a latent profile analysis and a T-test. Following the EECERA ethical code (Bertram et al., 2025) for early childhood researchers, a consent form and information sheet was provided to all participants. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. The data was anonymized for the analysis. Two different profiles were found among the participants: positively oriented and critically oriented. The profiles differed statistically in four attitude variables out of five. However, both profiles shared relatively strong beliefs about digital technologies being harmful for children. These finding are highly relevant for developing ECE teacher education that acknowledges differences in students' attitudes and better responds to children's needs in the modern world.

attitudes, digital technologies, pre-service, teacher education, latent profile analysis

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

This research was partly funded by the Research Council of Finland (grant numbers 353325 and 372920).

Symposium C20 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

THE CHILD, THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Chaired by: Ailbhe Booth, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland

Facilitating and supporting interagency collaboration in a community-based Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme in Ireland, the role of the lead agency

Presenters:
Kappa Grealy, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland, Ireland

All authors:
Kappa Grealy, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland, Ireland
Rhonda Hill, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland, Ireland
Jacqueline Cullen, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland, Ireland
Catriona Flood, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland, Ireland

This paper assesses how the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) charity, facilitates and supports interagency collaboration between local organisation for children and families, as lead agency in an Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme in Ireland. Based on a co-creation interagency model; incorporating expertise of local partner organisations and ELI staff; from programme oversight to administration and research. It leans on local/international frameworks in community based settings with children and families. Engaging a framework applicable to complex, multi-professional settings involving a range of agencies/professional collaboration to develop/maintain supports overtime (Warmington et al. 2004) and recommendations for service provision for children/families experiencing multiple adversities (Davidson et al. 2012). It recognises the importance of local approaches to interagency work (Devaney et al. 2021), namely an Interagency Model developed in another ABC in Ireland with comparable population/structure(Haran et al. 2025). It adopts a Community Action Research methodology, prioritising input from implementers and receivers of programmes (operating within the participatory and transformative paradigms). Taking a mixed method approach (surveys and interviews) with internal staff, partner organisations and local stakeholders. ELI's work is reviewed and approved by NCI's ethics committee, and the ABC's interagency framework centres secure and confidential processes in relation to GDPR, data sharing/ retention and child protection/wellbeing. This paper facilitates reflective discussions on challenges and best practices, outlining processes and case studies, highlighting the importance ELI's role as lead agency and the local/partner organisations input. Grounded in a complex community intervention setting, it outlines simple and effective steps to track and reinforce interagency collaboration applicable to other community-development settings nationally/internationally.

interagency collaboration, family support, community based-interventions, area-based childhood programme

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

Disturbing the notion of immateriality in intangible cultural heritage

Presenters:
Nina Odegard, Oslomet, Norway

All authors:

Nina Odegard, Oslomet, Norway
Tove Lafton, Oslomet, Norway

Intangible cultural heritage is considered important to ensure that knowledge and actions are preserved and passed from one generation to the next (UNESCO, 2003). This study theoretically explores how materiality is woven into intangible cultural heritage. Materials act as agentic participants in children's explorations, including studies of bodily movement, place-relations, and sensory encounters (Hackett & Myrstad, 2025; Manni et al., 2024; Myrstad & Sverdrup, 2018). Through the idea of material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007), where matter is endowed with meanings and thick with stories (Haraway, 2016), we rethink the notion of intangible heritage through sonic bodies as phenomena. Over a period of five months, observations, sound recordings, and field notes were conducted within a participatory paradigm. Sound affects and voices became visible as forces evoking ideas and memories, and inspiring exploration, play and learning among children (Odegard, 2026, forthcoming). The study follows the guidelines of the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics (SIKT) and the EECERA Code of Ethics. Ethical considerations include the safeguarding of children and educators in the participatory research. Informed consent was sought from all participants and issues of power were regularly discussed. Conceptualizing sonic bodies through a relational ontology makes visible how taking part in the ECEC practice produces a living cultural heritage, creating spaces of participation through sound where children intra-act in ongoing democratic processes. How children take part in present everyday life will contribute to developing cultural heritage and thereby affect their future. Recognizing the material–discursive nature of children's sonic practices can inform how we safeguard present and future living heritage.

agency, democracy, intangible cultural heritage, sound affects, matter

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

Research council of Norway, project number336273 (2023-2027).

Evaluating the Parent and Toddler Group Grants Initiative: A mixed -methods study of community-based supports for families with young children

Presenters:
Ailbhe Booth, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland

All authors:
Ailbhe Booth, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland
Stuart Lang, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Ireland

This study examined the Parent and Toddler Group Grants Initiative, exploring its contribution to family well-being, early learning experiences and community integration in an increasingly digital social landscape. It also considered other informal supports available to families with young children. This study builds on international research emphasising the importance of early relational environments, peer support and community-located learning for young children and their caregivers (Trivette & Dunst, 2014). The study was informed by social capital theory (Purola & Kuusisto, 2021), ecological systems perspectives and community development approaches (Fisher & Lombardi, 2025). The study conceptualised parent and toddler groups as relational infrastructures that promote social connectedness, early learning and parental well-being. The study used a mixed-methods approach to capture system-level patterns alongside lived experiences of parents, volunteers and practitioners. Methods included a literature review, consultations with national stakeholders, administrative data on grant applicants, an online survey of grant recipients, and focus groups with caregivers. Data were collected between May and October 2025. Participation was voluntary and all participants provided informed consent, all data were securely handled and de-

identified. Overall, the findings suggest that the initiative delivers substantial social, emotional and development benefits at low cost. Parents reported peer support, reduced isolation and strengthened community ties. Children benefited from early socialisation, play and learning opportunities. Challenges included venue costs, storage constraints, administrative burden and volunteer capacity. The study supports continued investment and recommends digitalising grant processes, improving communication and strengthening links with wider family support networks to enhance inclusion and accessibility.

parent and toddler groups, early learning and development, informal learning environments, community-based supports, mixed-methods research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C21 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

TRAUMA BASED PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETUP

Chaired by: Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Children on the Broken Bridge Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: Loss and Bereavement in Early Childhood

Presenters:
Miriam R. Miller Itay, Efrata College Haifa University, Israel

All authors:
Miriam R. Miller Itay, Efrata College Haifa University, Israel

To explore parents' perceptions of Trauma-informed care (TIC) intervention's effectiveness in their parenting and for their pre-school children (PSC) with history of traumatic loss . Stress affects the parent-child dyad, as children's reactions to stress influence parental responses and the functioning of the dyad (Wolmer et al., 2017). Research on parent-child connection-based therapy indicates that following TIC therapy, children's symptoms decrease, while parental sensitivity and skills improve and children's trust in their parents increases (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Caouette et al., 2021; Moss et al., 2011). The Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) method has been found effective in treating young children with a history of trauma and their parents (Barnett et al., 2014). Parental loss in early childhood is considered a "traumatic loss" (Bowlby, 1980), given the child's dependence on the parent for all basic needs and psychological immaturity in coping with grief (Lieberman et al., 2014). Distress may manifest in somatic and behavioral symptoms, emotional regulation difficulties, and developmental regression (van der Kolk, 2014) . A qualitative study. 15 Semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents as participants after ending therapy with their PSC (2-6). Participants' identities and confidentiality were guaranteed and maintained in full.The research has been approved by the Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs' research commission . The findings highlight the importance of using evidence-based dyadic interventions and parenting therapy to ensure effective TIC treatment of loss and bereavement in early childhood. Parenting TIC therapy -improvements in parenting competency and parental confidence are essential to help PSC recover from traumatic loss.

parental loss, pre-school children, child-parent psychotherapy (cpp), loss and bereavement, trauma-informed care (tic)

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Can AI Care? Reimagining Assistive Technology for Trauma Informed Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Presenters:
Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

All authors:
Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Maria Tsapali, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Esme Sung, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

This project aims to identify, evaluate and map effective assistive technologies, including AI-enhanced tools, that support trauma-informed education in early childhood. It seeks to understand how digital tools can promote safety, emotional regulation and personalised learning, and to develop evidence-based guidelines for their ethical implementation. Research demonstrates the value of trauma-informed practices in improving behaviour, learning and well-being, yet most studies focus on primary and secondary education. Although literature shows that digital tools can support engagement and differentiated instruction, their application in trauma-informed ECE remains underexplored. This study builds on work by Metzler, et.al, 2017, Berger, 2019, Carter, 2024 by addressing the critical gap relating specifically to ECE. The study draws on trauma-informed education principles, safety, trust, empowerment, and responsive relationships, and Adverse Childhood Experiences research (SAMHSA, 2014, Hughes, et. al., 2017). It also uses models (e.g. Cook & Polgar, 2020) of assistive and AI-driven technologies to understand personalisation and sensory, emotional and cognitive support (Nkwo & Vassileva, 2023). This is work in progress that employees a mixed-methods approach, combining a systematic literature review with surveys and interviews involving early childhood educators, parents and technology specialists. Ethical priorities include safeguarding vulnerable participants, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality, and evaluating AI-specific risks such as data privacy, equity and algorithmic bias. The project adheres to EECERA ethical code. Findings are expected to identify high-potential technologies and surface barriers including limited training, cost, and infrastructure constraints. The study will inform best-practice guidelines, enhance trauma-informed pedagogy and shape future policy and research on AI-supported early childhood education.

trauma informed practices, assistive technology, AI, early childhood education, adverse childhood experiences

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

In the Eye of the Storm: Tracing Emotion and Sticky Labels in the Everyday of Kindergarten

Presenters:
Karen Schneider, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Karen Schneider, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

This paper aims to explore what emotions do in children's everyday experiences in kindergarten by shifting away from individual or environmental explanations, to examine how emotions emerge, circulate and stick through entanglements of materials, histories and discourses. While emotions are recognised as central to children's learning and wellbeing, the current convergence of crises creates storm like conditions for examining how emotional atmospheres circulate and take shape. Research highlights intense emotional pressures on early childhood educators in the post-COVID period (Henderson et al., 2025), alongside child-safety failures and concerns for school (un)readiness. Drawing on feminist new materialist and posthuman theories, emotion is conceptualised as relational and emergent. Thinking with Ahmed's affective economies (2014), this inquiry attends to the entangled forces through which emotion becomes in kindergarten settings. This postqualitative inquiry involved an immersive

relational practice of “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998) with children, parents and educators in an Australian kindergarten over two months. Re-turning to fieldnotes, photographs and collage traced shifting emotional movements as they emerged through relations of bodies, spaces and materials. Ethics unfolded as an ongoing, relational practice shaped by formal approvals and attunement to children’s cues within heightened emotional conditions and increasing institutional scrutiny. Collaging COVID-era narratives with field notes showed the stickiness of labels such as “COVID babies,” while a headphone image glowed in analysis, suggesting a material-affective way to unsettle deficit expectations and rethink children’s sensory, and digital engagements. This orientation opens possibilities for pedagogies that attend to emotional atmospheres and recognise children’s material-affective ways of navigating sticky labels.

emotion, sticky labels, affective economies, covid babies, postqualitative inquiry

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

Symposium C22 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 24, floor 1

(SoS): CHILDREN AS MATHEMATICAL THINKERS AND CO-CREATORS. AGENCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD MATHS

Chaired by: Oliver Thiel, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway

'I was zero before I was one' Australian teachers study children's mathematics.

Presenters:
Elizabeth Carruthers, Children's Mathematics Network, United Kingdom

All authors:
Elizabeth Carruthers, Children's Mathematics Network, United Kingdom
Maulfry Worthington, Children's Mathematics Network, United Kingdom
Ebony Strong, Department of Education Nharangga County, Australia

To work alongside Australian early childhood educators and to authentically listen to the teachers’ stories of their unfolding knowledge of children’s mathematical perspectives. This study is a continuation of our previous research over a 30 year period (Carruthers and Worthington, 2006, Worthington, 2021 Carruthers, 2022) on children’s early mathematical graphics. This research is underpinned by Vygotsky’ cultural-historical research (1978;1983) emphasising the significance of social interaction, cultural knowledge and the use of cultural tools, and the importance for young children to use graphical signs for meaningful, personal reasons. It is further supported by Moll et al. 's(1992) research which emphasised the importance of the cultural knowledge that children bring to school. The study underlined a praxeological research paradigm which valued young children’s and teacher agency. The participants were teachers and the children in their classes in eight early years settings in Southern Australia.. The underpinning methodology was participatory, encompassing teachers researching their own classroom practice. A series of online discussions were undertaken with the teachers and the local education lead. Within the research meetings ethics were carefully considered as a collaborative construct using the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2025). Permissions were sought from parents, children and teachers The preliminary findings revealed that teachers’ understanding grew gradually over time, showing clear shifts in their teaching which allowed increasingly open pedagogical approaches. These changes were reflected in the children’s confidence in using their own Mathematical Graphics. The teachers expressed that there was a need for more professional learning in understanding children's own mathematics and their ways of communicating mathematics.

mathematics, mathematical graphics, agency, culture, pedagogy

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

The traditional Ethiopian board game Gebeta facilitates mathematical competencies in early childhood

Presenters:
Oliver Thiel, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway

All authors:
Oliver Thiel, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway

This study examines how children unfamiliar with the traditional Ethiopian board game Gebeta (a mancala-type game) learn to play it and which mathematical competencies emerge. It continues the work by Tesfamicael & Farsani (2024) and Thiel et al. (2024), who highlighted Gebeta's affordances in fostering mathematical exploration and creativity. We use Bishop's (1988, 1991) six fundamental mathematical activities and early number sense (Whitacre et al., 2020) as a theoretical framework. For this microgenetic case study, we conducted video observations of five 5-year-olds in Norway during repeated play sessions. We analysed transcripts, focusing on children's developing strategies and difficulties. The children expressed their willingness to participate orally and had written consent from their parents. They could withdraw from the study at any time. The camera, mounted on a tripod, did not disturb the interactions. Recordings were deleted after transcription. The results show that children quickly grasped the basic rules but struggled with directionality (i.e., maintaining the correct direction of play) and distinguishing between different types of game moves. Over time, they showed clear progress in following the rules. They began treating groups of counters as units, moving from one-by-one counting to bundling and unitising. We conclude that Gebeta provides a playful context in which children can practise directionality and bundling, both crucial for avoiding common errors in later school mathematics, such as off-by-one counting errors and misunderstandings of the number system. The study suggests that Gebeta can be introduced in early childhood settings without simplifying the rules, providing an engaging resource for early mathematics education.

early childhood education, early mathematics, play-based learning, spatial thinking, number sense

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Child as co-creator: The role of early childhood educators when developing and playing games with children

Presenters:
Elena Severina, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

All authors:
Elena Severina, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Magni Hope Lossius, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Daniel Johnsen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

This study explores how ECEC practitioners can support children's creativity, sense of ownership and mathematical thinking when developing and playing games with children. Games are part of all cultures (Bishop, 1988), and are a common activity in ECEC settings. Co-creating games with young children provides a valuable play arena for supporting their social and mathematical development (Doverborg & Pramling, 2001). When fostering mathematical thinking during play, practitioner can adopt roles such as "tour guide" and "travel companion" (Franzen, 2015; Hauge et al., 2018). In our case study, practitioners used Schell's elemental tetrad of game design (2019) while developing games with children. The mathematical activities children engaged in were identified using Bishop's fundamental mathematical activities (1988). We conducted a thematic analysis of student teachers' field notes and reflection logs documenting the design and implementation of a co-creative game design activity in an ECEC setting. All the participants provided informed consent, and the data were handled confidentially. We found that inviting

children to develop the Story element of the game increased their sense of ownership in the co-creative process. Discussing Mechanics and Aesthetics elements encouraged deeper mathematical thinking among the children. Preparatory work on Technology and Aesthetics elements by practitioners, should be specific enough to offer a rich starting point for the Story, yet open enough to incorporate children's ideas and choices. We believe that learning about game design and co-creating games with children can help ECEC practitioners cultivate co-creative play and learning environments that support mathematical thinking.

co-creation, mathematics, game design, role of the ecec practitioner

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C23 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): CONDITIONS FOR PLAY AND CREATIVITY IN ECEC (CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH): INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Chaired by: Igor Shiian, Wisehart Ltd, United Kingdom

Cultural Validation of the Play Environment Rating Scale (PERS) and the Creative Environment Rating Scale (CERS) for the Portuguese Context

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

All authors:
Maria Figueiredo, CI&DEI and School of Education, 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 culturally adapt and validate two scales for the Portuguese context, ensuring that the items accurately reflect the pedagogical realities, standards, and cultural nuances of early childhood education settings in Portugal. While international tools for assessing quality exist, there is a lack of instruments focused on the physical and social affordances of play and creative thinking within the Portuguese landscape. This work builds upon the original PERS and CERS, addressing the need for localised, psychometrically sound tools that align with national curriculum guidelines. The study is grounded in Vygotskian cultural-historical approach, viewing play as creating the Zone of Proximal Development. The environment is conceptualised as a "mediating tool" that stimulates creative thinking and symbolic representation. Adopting a qualitative validation paradigm, this phase utilised two focus groups: one of practising early childhood education teachers (n=6) and another of expert researchers in the field (n=6). Participants evaluated the scale's semantic clarity, cultural relevance, and ecological validity. Thematic content analysis was used. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring data confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice. Preliminary analysis indicates high consensus on the scale's structural dimensions. Additionally, a significant convergence exists between the PERS/CERS items and the Portuguese National Curricular Guidelines (OCEPE), particularly concerning the educator's role as a mediator, valuing children's voices and the environment as a basis for pedagogical work, with a focus on space and materials, and mixed-age groups. Validating the PERS/CERS provides a standardised language for educators and a framework to establish quality.

play, creative thinking, pedagogical quality, portugal, environment

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

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

Exploring and adapting the Play Environment Rating Scale (PERS) in Norwegian ECEC - A pilot study

Presenters:
Anne Grethe Baustad, Nord University, Norway
Elisabeth Bjørnestad, Oslomet, Norway

All authors:
Anne Grethe Baustad, Nord University, Norway
Elisabeth Bjørnestad, Oslomet, Norway

This pilot study explores how the Play Environment Rating Scale (PERS), originally developed in an international context, can be adapted for Norwegian ECEC settings. It examines the tool's relevance and alignment with the Norwegian Framework Plan (FWP), and what emerges when practitioners reflect on conditions for play. The work builds on previous research and development of PERS, as well as findings showing that conditions supporting play are closely linked to children's well-being, development, social competence and learning (Shiyan et al., 2025). It is further related to previous research on quality in Norwegian ECEC suggesting that play holds a strong position among practitioners (cf. Alvestad et. al., 2017; Baustad & Bjørnestad, 2022). The study is grounded in sociocultural perspecitves inspired by Vygotsky's (1979), which also underpin the development of PERS. It adopts a qualitative explorative design. Structured observations using the PERS-manual were conducted in four ECEC centres, followed by a focus-group interview with the centre managers. Data were collected and stored in accordance with the Norwegian Social Science Data Services guidelines. Written and oral informed consent were obtained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. In accordance with the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2024), we ensured balanced participation. The discussion addresses how PERS reflects key values in Norwegian ECEC and how practitioners and managers perceive the tool, before considering possible adaptations of PERS and further directions. The project contributes knowledge into cross-cultural adaptation of tools and how this tool resonates with Norwegian understandings of play, particularly children's agency and democratic participation.

play, rating scales, pedagogical values, adaptation, implementation

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

Shared Creative Problem Solving in ECEC: A Micro-Analysis of Teacher Actions (CERS High Quality Case Study)

Presenters:
Igor Shiian, Wisehart Ltd, United Kingdom
Olga Shiyan, Wisehart Ltd, United Kingdom

All authors:
Igor Shiian, Wisehart Ltd, United Kingdom
Olga Shiyan, Wisehart Ltd, United Kingdom
Irina Vorobeva, MCU, Russian Federation
Anna Iakshina, MCU, Russian Federation

The study is devoted to the analysis of shared problem solving as one of the conditions for the development of creative thinking in early childhood education. Collaborative discussion is essential for solving creative (dialectical) problems, as it allows opposing ideas to be presented within a distributed activity (Shannon et al., 2024).Research shows that adults often fail to support children's reasoning and problem-solving (Perret-Clermont A.-N. & Mehmeti, 2017; Galton et al., 1999; Siraj-Blatchford I., 2002). Theoretical framework: cultural-historical approach on creativity (Vygotsky, 2001, Veraksa, 2019). A video recording of a discussion with children, made during morning circle time, was analyzed as a case study. The high quality of the environment (5.75) was confirmed using the "Creativity Environment Rating Scale (CERS): ECERS extension" (Shiyan et al., 2025). Informed consent was negotiated with teachers, children and their parents. Participants could withdraw from the study any time. Analysis of the videos reveals that challenge and scaffolding, work with cognitive sphere and organization of collaborative work, narrative and logical modes, emotions and intellect are dialectically integrated in skillful discussion. With adults' help, children begin to perceive others' ideas as meaningful and can develop and expand on them. This happens because the teacher, through their responses, connects the children's statements into a broader discussion, relating the children's ideas to one another, helping the children hear and understand each other, connecting individual ideas to the overall flow of the discussion. The study findings reveal the teacher competencies needed to more effectively support the development of creative thinking and problem-solving skills in early childhood.

creativity, shared problem solving, CERS, ECERS, educational environment

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium C24 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 5, floor 3

(SoS): EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY: CHILDREN'S AGENCY, CURRICULUM REFORM AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Chaired by: Jane Spiteri, University of Malta, Malta

Anchoring Change to Drive Social Justice in Early Childhood Education and Care in the UK

Presenters:
June O'Sullivan, June O'Sullivan, United Kingdom

All authors:
June O'Sullivan, June O'Sullivan, United Kingdom

This paper examines anchoring change as a social justice issue in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), drawing on doctoral research exploring how educators embed sustainability-informed practice over time. Recent research shows educational change is most effective when understood as socially embedded, sustained transformation rather than short-term intervention (Kemmis, 2024). Evidence on professional learning highlights that impact depends on how knowledge is enacted in practice, not simply delivered (Sims et al., 2021). This study positions anchoring change as an ethical and equity concern, ensuring improvements reach all children The research is shaped by education for sustainability, critical pedagogy, and social justice theory, drawing on Freire's (1970) concept of praxis emphasising educator agency, relational learning, and collective responsibility. Framed within a participatory praxeological paradigm, the research focused on the anchor stage of the 7As change model. Qualitative data from reflective practitioner inquiry and longitudinal professional learning were analysed, leading to the ACT model: Credible Cognition, Compassionate Conversations, Compassionate Coaching, and Communities of Practice. Guided by EECERA Ethical Code (2025), the study prioritised relational ethics and professional trust. Organisational consent was secured, and researcher's insider role addressed through reflexivity and transparency. Findings show anchoring change is decisive yet fragile, often undermined when professional learning remains content-led and insufficiently relational. The ACT model links knowledge, dialogue, behaviour change, and collective learning, creating conditions

to embed sustainability-informed practice sustaining change over time. Anchoring change must be treated as a social justice imperative, shaping leadership, professional learning, and policy ensuring equitable, high-quality practice for all children.

social justice, anchoring change, education for sustainability, professional learning, early childhood education and care

The Bureaucracy of Abandonment: Reclaiming Democratic Agency for Climate-Displaced Children in European Governance

Presenters:
Jane Spiteri, University of Malta, Malta

All authors:
Jane Spiteri, University of Malta, Malta

This study investigates the structural exclusion of climate-displaced children from state governance to identify how technical climate policy can be reconfigured to restore children's agency. It also validates the Child Climate Migration Framework (CCMF) as a tool for diagnosing how bureaucratic structures actively manufacture vulnerability. Existing research has largely focused on the psychosocial impacts of climate change. There is a paucity in early childhood research around the inclusion of climate-displaced children in climate policy (Spiteri, 2025). Recognising children's rights and agency (UNCRC, 1989), the study presents the CCMF, a framework with three interrelated mechanisms of state failure: recognition gaps (children’s experiences and rights remain juridically marginalised or rendered invisible); institutional discontinuities(fragmented and incoherent educational pathways); and intergenerational feedback loops (policy omissions reproduce vulnerability). The research employs a critical interpretive policy analysis (Fischer et al., 2025). Data was coded against CCMF indicators to measure the extent to which national strategies recognise the participatory rightsand educational needs of future generations. While exempt from formal ethical review due to its exclusive focus on public policy documents rather than human participants, this study adhered to the EECERA Code of Ethics (Bertram et al., 2025) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), ensuring a rigorous ethical and rights-based approach to analysis. The findings suggest a governance deficit at the European level, where climate-displaced children remain invisible, leading to a disconnect between climate ambitions and their lived educational realities. The study argues that restoring children's democratic agency requires a shift from technical compliance to intergenerational governance.

children, climate migration,agency, ,intergenerational justice, climate governance

Early childhood education for sustainability in Malta and Iceland: A comparative analysis of preschool curricula

Presenters:
Jane Spiteri, University of Malta, Malta
Kristín Norðdahl, University of Iceland, Iceland

All authors:
Jane Spiteri, University of Malta, Malta
Kristín Norðdahl, University of Iceland, Iceland

National curricula play a crucial role in shaping the knowledge and skills of children to contribute to a sustainable future (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). Yet the integration of education for sustainability within early childhood frameworks in small island states remains underexplored (Spiteri, 2023). This qualitative comparative study examines how early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS) is conceptualised and integrated in preschool curricula in two small island nations, Malta (the most densely populated country in Europe) and Iceland (the least populated country in Europe). Using qualitative comparative analysis (Rihoux & Grimm, 2006; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009), the study identifies similarities and differences between the two curricula. Conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (Bertram et al., 2024), this study ensures respectful, context-sensitive and transparent analysis of publicly available curriculum documents. Our findings reveal significant differences. In Malta, ECEfS is primarily referenced as an instructional method, often linked to economic development. In Iceland, ECEfS is framed as one of six foundational pillars of education. The Icelandic curriculum's decentralised approach and emphasis on nature-based learning and democracy reflect a holistic, child-centred philosophy. In contrast, Malta's more centralised curriculum adopts a more structured, knowledge-based approach. The study demonstrates how national contexts, governance structures, and educational philosophies shape ECEfS. It offers valuable insights around importance of aligning curriculum design with national values and institutional frameworks to create meaningful for lasting engagement with sustainability from an early age, as well as avenues for future research.

content analysis, comparative study, early childhood education for sustainability, curriculum, SDG4, small islands states

Symposium C25 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 6, floor 3

(SoS): PEDAGOGIES OF CARE AND RISK

Chaired by: Lone Svinth, Aarhus University, Denmark

How ECEC leaders navigate the complexities of care and participation – analysed through an ethics of care framework

Presenters:
Lone Svinth, Aarhus University, Denmark
Sidsel Holst Jensen, ECECs Kokkedal, Denmark

All authors:
Lone Svinth, Aarhus University, Denmark
Sidsel Holst Jensen, ECECs Kokkedal, Denmark

Analysed through an ethics of care lens, this qualitative study explores how ten ECEC leaders navigate the complexities of care and participation. Bloom & Bella (2005) described ECEC leaders as "gatekeepers of quality". Good leadership has a positive impact on children's wellbeing, if institutional conditions are adequate (Røn-Larsen, 2012). How leaders enhance care conditions and address challenging care practices remains underexplored in research (Heikkinen, 2026). This study draws on care ethics and Tronto's understanding of care as inherently conflictual and political (Tronto, 1993, 2013), including her concepts of: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. This study is part of the research project Enhancing care practices in ECECs based on a relational ontology (Stetsenko, 2016), participant observations and interviews in 11 ECECs. This study employs a thematic analysis based on 10 semi structured interviews with ECEC leaders (Braun & Clark, 2006). Informed consent was obtained from the ECEC leaders, and pseudonyms were applied (Zeni, 1998). Participants have been given the right to withdraw from the research at any point (Bertram et.al, 2024). Although the situated negotiation of "good care" unfolds among practitioners, leaders, children and parents, an ethic of care framework enables us to see how care is

inherently political. Enhancing care emerges as a complex and conflictual practice, where leaders navigate moral dilemmas and restrictive conditions. This study calls for collective responsibility for care at the personal, structural, and political levels. Recognizing our interdependence, ensuring adequate care conditions is a shared responsibility of leaders, municipalities, and policymakers.

care ethics, ECEC leadership, conditions, care, children's participation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Illustrating Care: Visualizing Accounts of How Responsive and Proactive Pedagogical Work Take Shape in ECEC

Presenters:
Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus University, Denmark

All authors:
Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus University, Denmark

This project seeks to describe how proactive and responsive care are enacted in ECEC settings for children aged 0–3, as well as how practitioners themselves understand and navigate caring within daily routines. The project builds on scholarship highlighting the marginalization of care in increasingly learning-oriented ECEC systems (Ailwood et al., 2022; Aslanian, 2022). It responds to calls for richer empirical accounts of everyday caring practices (Winther-Lindqvist, 2021). Using Winther-Lindqvist's concepts of proactive and responsive care, this project combines a phenomenological framework (Horberg et al., 2019) with a cultural historical perspective (Hedegaard, 2025) to explore care as embodied, relational, and situated within physical and social environments. The study employs sensory-attuned ethnographic fieldwork (Pink, 2015; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014) across four Danish nurseries, combining participant observation and group interviews. Visual materials supplement observations (Holm, 2014; Vellanki, 2021), generated through anonymized line-drawn illustrations derived from photographs, to spotlight the ways that caring practices are deeply embodied via educator-child relationships. This study is part of the research project Enhancing care practices in ECECs. The project follows the EECERA-2024 code, through parental informed consent, ongoing child assent, and GDPR-compliant data handling. It elucidates how proactive and responsive care unfold across both dyadic and polyadic conditions, nested within routines, spatial arrangements, and embodied interactions. Caring atmospheres are conveyed through touch, melodic vocalizations, and expanding collective communication. Findings expand the professional descriptions and awareness of embodied, relational caring practices, as well as emphasize increased attention on professional competencies and structural conditions in ECEC settings.

ECEC, phenomenology, ethnography, responsive care, proactive care

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

Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives of Risk-Taking: A Scoping Review of Literature

Presenters:
Maria Papandreou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Aggeliki Vellopoulou, University of Patras, Greece

All authors:
Maria Papandreou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Maria Kanaki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Zoi Nikiforidou, University of Ioannina, Greece

Aggeliki Vellopoulou, University of Patras, Greece
Maria Kampeza, University of Patras, Greece

This scoping review maps peer-reviewed empirical research concerning early childhood educators' perspectives and practices on risk-taking. As their perspectives are fundamental to fostering early risk literacy (Nikiforidou, 2017) and navigating professional risks (Cooke & Francisco, 2021), recent research focuses on their views (e.g., Vander, 2023). Considering the growing consensus that highlights the benefits of involving children and educators in risk-taking (e.g., Cooke et al., 2020; Nikiforidou, 2017), this review adopts a holistic conceptualisation of risk-taking as a multifaceted process that moves individuals outside their comfort zone with potential positive outcomes (Cooke et al., 2019). Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework and PRISMA-ScR guidelines, three database searches identified peer-reviewed empirical studies (2010-2025). Fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were analysed using mapping and descriptive synthesis Ethical rigour was ensured through methodological integrity, transparent inclusion criteria, and independent screening of sources to avoid bias. Findings show a prominence of qualitative methodologies. Most studies lack an explicit definition of risk-taking; others conceptualise it through the lens of uncertainty. Only a few studies highlight the breadth of the concept, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive risks. The thematic analysis of the studies' findings revealed three core themes: a) teachers' conceptualisation of risk both with and without training; b) factors influencing teachers' decisions; c) teachers taking professional risks. The review suggests employing alternative methodologies to better understand educators' perspectives and the challenges they face in promoting risk-taking. It also highlights the need for a broader conceptualisation of risk and holistic approaches to empower educators.

risk-taking, scoping review, teachers' perspectives, professional risk, uncertainty

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The research project is implemented in the framework of H.F.R.I call "3rd Call for H.F.R.I.'s Research Projects to Support Faculty Members & Researchers" (H.F.R.I. Project Number: 25802).

Symposium C26 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 7, floor 3

(SoS): YOUNG CHILDREN AS DECISION MAKERS: REIMAGINING OUTDOOR SPACES THROUGH COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Chaired by: Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

Values- Why are They so Important in Early Years Practice?

Presenters:
Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

All authors:
Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Faye Stanley, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

This study forms part of the ongoing 'Reimagining Outdoor Spaces with Young Children' project. It examines Reception teachers' values as they collaborate with children and students to creatively rethink their outdoor learning environments. The study draws on polyvocal ethnography as used by Tobin and Hayashi (2012), Arnold and Brennan (2013), and Stanley and Lalli (2024) to capture multiple perspectives. Grounded in a socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), the research explores how teachers' beliefs and values shape practice. Following Bernstein (2000) and Brookfield (2017), it emphasises the need to make these values explicit through critical reflection. Teachers' values are understood as socially, culturally, and politically situated, forming a 'situated pedagogy.' Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, utilising qualitative methods, the study uses a range of socio-cultural methodological approaches to foreground teachers' voices through collaborative inquiry. The research followed rigorous ethical procedures involving children, teachers, and students, adhering to EECERA and BERA guidelines, with approval granted by the University of Wolverhampton. The study proposes a framework of 'situated pedagogy,' drawing on Habermas' (1984) concepts of system, lifeworld, and communicative action, alongside Rogoff's (2003) three planes of analysis. It argues that making teachers' values visible enables deeper critical reflection and the potential transformation of practice. The 'situated pedagogy' framework offers teachers a way to surface their values and adapt their learning environments accordingly.

pedagogy, values, outdoor spaces, polyvocal ethnography

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

Identities in collaborative inquiry: reimagining selfhood

Presenters:
Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

All authors:
Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Selena Hall, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

Part of the wider Reimagining Outdoor Spaces project with young children, this paper examines undergraduate early childhood students' experiences within a research community of children, teachers, and academics. It explores how these experiences shape identities and considers how participation may prompt praxiological change and a reimagining of selfhood. Drawing upon completed doctoral research this work extends on the theorisation of identities as dynamic fluid and nebulous embedded in the social historical and cultural milieu of experience (Holland et al 1998,Williams 2023). As students navigate their way through the collaborative research 'Figured worlds', (Holland et al 1998), is used to examine notions of identities. Imagination and orchestration of multiple discourses are key to theorising these experiences. Research adopted a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm (Birks 2011). Methodologically, narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) is employed. Analysis was conducted through theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Participant number, 6. Informed consent was gained. Pseudonyms replaced the names, places and events. Participants were continuously consulted to avoid identification by association. This work emphasises how research informed practice shapes undergraduate identities within a neoliberal higher-education context (Bartram, 2021). It explores how listening to the child's voice can create opportunities for praxiological shift and the reimagining of emerging professional identities (Jones et al, 2026. Williams, 2023). This work highlights the value of research-informed practice in developing democratic approaches. It argues that action research should underpin teaching and learning across the entire undergraduate degree, rather than being limited to the final stage

identities, imagination, collaboration, voice, praxis

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

Becoming-With the Outdoors: Reception Class Children's Material Encounters and Implications for Eco-pedagogy Discourse.

Presenters:
Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

All authors:
Karen Williams, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Faye Stanley, University of Wolverhampto, United Kingdom
Glenda Tinney, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, United Kingdom
Selena Hall, University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

This research aims to explore the perceptions of reception children of their school outdoor spaces informed by a range of audio-visual narratives. The analysis will be framed within a posthuman paradigm. /A The work builds upon research by Jones et al. (2026) which foregrounded the interconnection of child and more-than-human. Drawing upon Barad (2007) and Haraway (2016) the research attends to how children's understandings of outdoor spaces emerge through relational attunements with materials and environments. 60, . reception children's drawings, photographs and filmed narratives were collected from three schools in the UK. Diffractive thinking analysis (Barad, 2007) and storying (Haraway, 2016) of the data attunes to the entangled agencies that emerge. Posthumanism contests human dominance and the marginalisation of others (Deleuze &Guattari,1987). Diffractive thinking and attunement to emerging material-discursive moments, therefore, does not apply representational meaning. It allows a different representation of voice to be heard (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012).Whilst this was a privilege it was a significant responsibility. Therefore, respectful representation of children's voices and assent was an on-going process in-line with BERA (2024). Data collection is ongoing; phase one of the project is due to end July 2026. The findings will foster awareness of children's emerging relationships with materials within outdoor spaces and the importance of these to an eco-pedagogy. In developing awareness of the child's becoming-with (Ingold, 2010) it challenges current binary divisions that influence pedagogical approaches. Therefore, supporting professionals to consider reception children's thoughts and feelings that influence changes in practice and policy, moving towards an eco-pedagogy.

post-human, material-discursive practices, eco-pedagogy, reception children

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

Symposium Set D (11:15 – 12:30) | Thursday 27th August 2026

Symposium D01 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

CONSIDERATIONS OF QUALITY

Chaired by: Aizhan Ramazanova, NIS AEO, Kazakhstan

Co-Constructing Quality in Early Childhood Education (ECE): Perspectives of Children, Families, Educators and Leaders in Kazakhstan

Presenters:
Aizhan Ramazanova, NIS AEO, Kazakhstan

All authors:

Aizhan Ramazanova, NIS AEO, Kazakhstan

This ethnographic study tells the story of how the quality of ECE is constructed by leaders, teachers, parents and children in two kindergartens in Kazakhstan. Despite the lack of a universal definition of ECE “quality”, most existing literature adopts an objectivist approach. In contrast, this study uses a relativist approach, where quality is a complex, multifaceted, contextual, subjective, and socially constructed concept (Dahlberg et al., 2013). The study implied a social justice lens. Drawing on Tikly’s (2011) model, it foregrounds three principles —inclusion, relevance and participation. It also aligns with postcolonial critiques linking quality gaps to reproduced inequalities and to the dominance of Western definitions of quality. By emphasising the socially constructed nature of reality, a two-sited ethnography was conducted in public and private settings. The ethnographer explored lived experiences through participant observations (about 200 hours), 33 interviews, document analysis, and 40 children’s drawings to hear their voices. Ethical considerations were integrated into every stage of research. For children, written informed consent was obtained from parents and educators; oral assent was negotiated with children using child-friendly language. The findings highlight that quality is a complex, multi-perspective and context-dependent construct. Across the two sites, six interrelated dimensions emerged: the quality of teachers, pedagogy, interactions, leadership, curriculum and environment. Stakeholders’ views diverged in ways that reflected their lived experiences and the influence of broader postcolonial contexts. These findings underscore the importance of creating stronger alignment between policy, practice and research, highlighting the need for quality frameworks that reflect the lived realities of ECE settings and the diverse perspectives.

early childhood education, quality, ethnography, social justice, kindergartens, Kazakhstan

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This article is based on the first author’s PhD research, which was supported by institutional doctoral study funding. No separate research grant was obtained.

Parental involvment in relation to Kindergarten quality

Presenters:
Armin Schneider, University of Aplied sciences Koblenz, Germany

All authors:
Armin Schneider, University of Aplied sciences Koblenz, Germany

To analyze the parent's view on quality and their institutional involvement to develop conditions of participation for all parents. Experience in "quality development in discourse" in early childhood on the basis of attitudes, diversity and discourse e.g. with parents (Schneider 2015). On this basis we research the parents participation inside institutions. Parents engagement plays a role in ECEC and is crucial for the well-being of the child (OECD 2024). This dependents from their socio-economic status (OECD 2025, Connelly 2024). The study closes a gap of previous research: The perspective of parents towards their involvement in professional day-care centers (Otero-Mayer 2025). Apart from informing and encouraging in the organizations, institutional involvement of parents could engage them (OECD 2025: 130). Web-based Survey (n=1257), descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Open questions are analyzed with Qualitative Content Analysis. Research aims and steps are discussed with an advisory council, with the State Parents’ Committee of Rhineland-Palatinate and the data protection officer of the University. Participants were required to sign a specific consent form. Involvement of parents is not everywhere seen positive. Parents (views) could improve the system. Parents are more involved in the assistance than in pedagogical questions. Quality from parent’s perspective need transparency, qualified staff, comprehensible child-care, reliable opening hours and good interaction. Often they meet resistance of leaders and providers. Digital tools are less used for collaboration.

Complex systems, political framework, role of leaders and providers, openness for participation. Authorities have to support the parent`s committees and should make clear, that all parents are represented.

parent's involvement, quality development, competent systems, family involvement, socio-economic differences.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The project is funded by the State Parents Commitee of Rhineland-Palatinate.

Exploring educators' perceptions of early childhood educational quality: Integrating qualitative focus group insights

Presenters:
Mónica Pereira, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal

All authors:
Mónica Pereira, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Ana-Teresa Brito, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Carla Fernandes, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Natalie Santos, Unidade de Investigação e Desenvolvimento em Educação e Formação, Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
Sónia Cabral, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal
Lourdes Mata, EDUNOVA.ISPA – Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Education, ISPA – Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida, Lisbon Portugal, Portugal

This study aims to analyse educators' perceptions regarding the quality of ECEC contexts. The organisation of the educational environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces and time management, is central to promote quality interactions, well-being, and opportunities for children's initiative and exploration (Berti et al., 2019; Bondioli & Nigito, 2011). Recent studies identify the existence of different profiles about quality perceptions in ECEC contexts (P1 -more adult-centred and routine-based; P4 highly child-centred and stimulating with balanced indoor and outdoor activities; P2 and P3 showing intermediate configurations) (Pereira et al., submitted). The study draws on ecological and sociocultural perspectives, viewing the educational environment as an integrated system of spaces, time, interactions, and relationships. Organisation of space and time is a structuring dimension of pedagogical quality (Bondioli & Nigito, 2011), valuing children's agency, participation, and well-being, adult-child balance, and articulation across contexts (Edwards, 2021; Tongue et al., 2019). The study follows an interpretative qualitative approach. Data presented derive from focus groups, organised with participants with different perceptions about quality in their educational settings. Data were analysed using MaxQda to identify main ideas and categories, and to understand educators' perspectives. Informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Our data present the voice of educators about quality aiming to in-depth meanings, highlighting convergences and divergences, among them and with previous quantitative profile data, particularly regarding order, predictability, stimulation, and adult-child centrality. Findings can guide more intentional and balanced pedagogical practices and inform policies.

educational environment organisation, early childhood education, quality, participation

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

Symposium D02 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF AI FOR ECEC

Chaired by: Elly Thomson, Melbourne Polytechnic, Australia

From Bias to Agency: A Framework for Early Childhood Educators to Challenge AI-Generated Stereotypes

Presenters:
Elly Thomson, Melbourne Polytechnic, Australia

All authors:
Elly Thomson, Melbourne Polytechnic, Australia

This research develops a six-step framework enabling early childhood educators to critically evaluate AI-generated imagery, recognise embedded biases, and challenge stereotypes that undermine equity and inclusion. Thomson et al. (2025) found that DALL-E 3, an OpenAI text-to-image tool, consistently depicts educators as female and nurturing while showing leaders as male. Vargas-Veleda et al. (2025) demonstrated AI systems privilege whiteness and Western norms, reinforcing what Noble (2018) calls algorithmic oppression and Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor's (2015) colonial hierarchies in ECE. The framework integrates Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy positioning educators as critically conscious agents, with Butler's (1990) performativity theory showing how repeated representations construct and can disrupt gender norms. This conceptual framework emerged through synthesis of literature on AI bias, teacher judgment, and critical digital literacy. The six-step tool maps empirical findings onto theoretical principles, awaiting empirical testing across diverse contexts. Ethical considerations focused on fair scholarly representation and transparency about limitations. The work demonstrates how uncritical AI use reinforces stereotypes ECE works to dismantle. Future empirical testing requires informed consent and ethics approval. The framework — a non-commercial academic tool (Thomson et al., 2025) guides educators through six steps: recognising AI content, analysing representation, reflecting on implications, seeking alternatives, implementing critically, and sharing outcomes. Applied to DALL-E imagery, it demonstrates that critical consciousness requires deliberate scaffolding rather than emerging automatically. The framework offers practical guidance for teacher educators and academics. These steps help educators model critical digital literacy and ensure visual resources align with equity commitments as AI-generated imagery becomes common in education.

artificial intelligence, critical digital literacy, early childhood teacher education, algorithmic bias, critical pedagogy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Examining the influence of Creative Illustrations and AI-Generated images on critical Global Citizenship among pre-service teachers

Presenters:
Zayd Waghid, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

All authors:
Zayd Waghid, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
Lebohang Mahlo, Sol Plaatje University, South Africa

The study aims to explore how pre-service teachers' creative illustrations and text-to-image AI-generated images communicate social injustices. A review of the literature reveals a dearth in empirical research concerning the

influence of text-to-image generators on global citizenship education, which makes this study apposite. In addition, many of the limited empirical studies have been conducted in developed education contexts, whereas the present study includes pre-service teachers at two historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa. Andreotti's (2006) Soft vs Critical Global Citizenship Education (GCE) framework was used to critically analyse how social injustices are framed within the context of visual representations. This study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist research design grounded in arts-based pedagogies, allowing pre-service teachers to express personal interpretations of global disruptions while reflecting on how digital technologies influence their understanding of justice, equity, and representation. Participants were purposively selected and comprised third-year Bachelor of Education students in Foundation Phase Teaching across two universities in South Africa. Ethical clearance was granted by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committees at the two universities. Informed consent was obtained from participants, who confirmed their willingness to participate in the research. The study's implications are critical for addressing existing social inequities and understanding how these are reinforced by the outcomes of neo-colonial power structures. Critical GCE remains fundamental in transforming power asymmetries and would be integral to enabling students to scrutinise the images produced by these AI-image generators. If such AI tools are not used carefully, students may accept biased outputs uncritically, reinforcing rather than questioning global inequalities.

artificial intelligence, global citizenship education, pre-service teachers, social justice, teacher education

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

This presentation is funded by the South African National Research Foundation.

AI-Focused Professional Development and its Impact on Educators' Mindsets and Children's Inquiry in Emergent Curriculum

Presenters:
Natalie Lombardi Calleja, University of Malta, Malta
Charmaine Bonello, University of Malta, Malta

All authors:
Natalie Lombardi Calleja, University of Malta, Malta
Charmaine Bonello, University of Malta, Malta

This case study investigates how targeted professional development (PD) in Artificial Intelligence (AI) influences educators' pedagogical mindset and the subsequent impact on children's inquiry-based learning within an emergent curriculum approach. AI in early childhood education prompts important reflection on how it influences pedagogical practice, learning environments, and equitable access (Amelia, 2025; Tao & Nasri, 2025). Within an emergent curriculum, where children's interests guide learning, AI can further enrich inquiry, foster creativity, and support responsive, child-led exploration. This study adopts a multi-dimensional framework that integrates Social Constructivism, and the TPACK model and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978) to investigate the educators' professional mindset within an emergent curriculum approach. Through data gathered from educators' pedagogical documentation and online semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study examines how kindergarten educators' values, knowledge, and skills are shifted following three synchronous AI Literacy PD intervention sessions, and its effects on 3-5-year-olds' learning, thinking and development. Ethical approval was sought from University of Malta and participants were informed that no personal information will appear in the results or any published material. Preliminary findings reveal that the educators' professional development in AI demonstrably enriches their values, knowledge and skills, enabling more confident and effective integration of AI within an emergent curriculum. In addition, the students exhibit enhanced learning, thinking and developmental outcomes, including increased curiosity, deeper inquiry and more sophisticated problem-solving. As such, through its recommendations, this study

contributes valuable insights for policy makers, educators and academics in the understanding of AI's potential to enrich inquiry-based learning in early childhood settings.

professional development, artificial intelligence, pedagogical mindset, inquiry based learning, emergent curriculum approach

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

Symposium D03 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor –2

CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND EMBODIED EXPRESSIONS

Chaired by: Kerstin Angelika Zechner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria; DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, Austria

Dimensions of Embodied Learning: An Observation of Children's Embodied Expressions in ECE Settings in Finland

Presenters:
Margita Sundstedt, The University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Margita Sundstedt, The University of Helsinki, Finland

The aim is to investigate and analytically describe which dimensions of embodied learning emerge in pedagogical activities within early childhood education (ECE), with a focus on children's embodied expressions. The study builds on previous research of Embodied Learning (Jusslin et al., 2022; Kosmas and Zaphiris ;2018). To analyse how embodied learning is manifested, the study was based on the theoretical framework of embodied cognition. The theory emphasizes that learning and understanding should not be seen solely as mental processes, but are shaped through functional systems [domains] that are perceptual, motor, affective, sensory, and situation-based (Barsalou, 2020). A qualitative research design was employed, using video observations as the primary method. An observation framework grounded in the domains of embodied cognition guided the analysis, focusing on children's bodily expressions. The study followed the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity and the ethical standards of the researchers' home university, with ethical considerations prioritized throughout. Informed consent was obtained from the ECE center and the children's guardians, ensuring the children's anonymity and well-being. The results show that embodied learning plays a central role in children's development and that bodily expressions, in which physical, emotional, and social experiences are part of cognitive processes, are crucial for children's learning. Three main categories of embodied learning emerged: 1) understanding and decision-making; 2) social interaction and communication; and 3) self-expression, imagination, and play. The study is expected to contribute to the development of pedagogical methods that help educators notice and interpret children's embodied expressions as part of their learning processes.

ECEC, early childhood education, embodied learning, children, observation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The research was funded by The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland.

Democratic Agency in Early Childhood Education: Mental Health Literacy and Participatory Professional Identity in a Digital Age

Presenters:

Kerstin Angelika Zechner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria; DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, Austria

All authors:
Kerstin Angelika Zechner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria; DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, Austria

This study investigates how early childhood educators integrate Mental Health Literacy, democratic participation, and agency into emerging professional identities within digitally mediated higher education. It examines how students position themselves in relation to participation, wellbeing, and systemic responsibility. Mental Health Literacy promotes emotional awareness, stigma reduction, and help-seeking (Jorm, 1997; Kutcher et al., 2016). Democratic education foregrounds participation and dialogical engagement (Dewey, 1916; Biesta, 2006), while inclusive pedagogy emphasises belonging and shared responsibility (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). However, their intersection in higher education and digital learning contexts, particularly regarding professional identity formation, remains underexplored. The study combines Mental Health Literacy as a preventive competence framework with relational agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) and democracy as lived participation. Professionalisation is conceptualised as a dialogical and reflective process shaped within digitally structured communicative spaces. A hermeneutic-interpretative design was employed. Semi-structured interviews with n = 8 early childhood educators (all female, aged 25–55) were conducted as a purposive initial sample within an ongoing research process, enabling iterative refinement. Data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using qualitative content analysis and reconstructive interpretation, focusing on meaning-making and professional self-positioning. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent and anonymisation. No teaching or assessment relationship existed between researcher and participants, preventing potential power imbalances. Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. No additional demographic data were collected to ensure anonymity. Preliminary findings indicate that students understand Mental Health Literacy as intertwined with democratic participation and inclusive responsibility. Digital study formats shape reflective agency and systemic awareness. Embedding Mental Health Literacy within participatory democratic frameworks strengthens reflective agency in digitally evolving teacher education.

mental health literacy, agency, participation, democratic learning, early childhood education

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

This study was carried out within the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria. No external funding was received for this research.

Preschool Teachers' Knowledge, Perspectives, and Practices Regarding Children's Social–Emotional Well-Being

Presenters:
Merve Tezel, Osmangazi Primary School, Türkiye

All authors:
Merve Tezel, Osmangazi Primary School, Türkiye

The aim of this study is to explore preschool teachers' knowledge and perspectives regarding children's well-being, as well as to examine the practices they implement in the classroom to support children's well-being. Previous research has extensively highlighted the importance of social–emotional well-being in early childhood and its long-term implications for academic achievement, employment, mental health, and life outcomes (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). In addition, recent studies have increasingly focused on the conceptualization of well-being within early childhood education contexts (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2023; Weare, 2015). Social and emotional well-being is a

process that enables children and adolescents to develop as whole individuals, become productive members of society, and build resilience to cope with differences and unpredictable situations in life (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010).Within early childhood education, social–emotional well-being is closely linked to children's ability to form positive relationships, regulate emotions, develop a sense of belonging, and actively engage in learning environments. This study, which aims to reveal preschool teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and classroom practices regarding children's social–emotional well-being, was designed as a qualitative case study.
Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Educational Research at Ordu University on January 21, 2025. The analysis phase of the study is currently in progress, and the final results will be presented at the conference. This study is expected to contribute to the growing body of research on children's social–emotional well-being in early childhood education. The findings may provide insights into how preschool teachers conceptualize and implement well-being-oriented practices in classroom settings.

children's social–emotional well-being, early childhood education,preschool teachers, teacher perspectives, teacher education

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

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Symposium D04 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPING QUALITY IN ECE

Chaired by: Helen Lomax, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

What role do kindergarten owners assume in facilitating the kindergarten into a learning organization?

Presenters:
Bjørn-Arild Fuglesten, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Bjørn-Arild Fuglesten, University of Stavanger, Norway

«What role do kindergarten owners assume in the development of the kindergarten as a learning organization?». Skjæveland (2019) addresses the kindergarten as a learning organization within a political context, while Wadel and Knaben (2021) and Gotvassli (2019b) examine directors' conceptual understanding of the kindergarten as a learning organization and the characteristics that define it. Within the Norwegian context, there is limited research on kindergarten owners contribute to the development of the kindergarten. In the Norwegian context, the early childhood education field frequently refers to Senge in its theoretical discussions on learning organizations (Bøe, 2016; Gotvassli, 2019a; Løkken & Gradovski, 2014; Sønsthagen, 2024; Wadel & Knaben, 2021). I have therefore chosen to use Senge (1990) as the theoretical framework for examining the role assumed by the owner. This qualitative study adopts a social constructivist paradigm and employs semi-structured interviews with five kindergarten owners selected through criterion sampling. Data were analyzed using a stepwise-deductive inductive approach. I reflect on my own pre-understandings and question why Senge's framework holds such influence on interpretations of the kindergarten as a learning organization in Norway. The participants were informed of its purpose before signing consent for data use, personal data processing, and the right to withdraw. All interviews are anonymized, and data are stored according to current guidelines. Findings indicate that time allocation and the articulation of a shared vision are critical factors in fostering organizational learning. These insights contribute to understanding governance roles in organizational learning and have implications for policy and practice aimed at strengthening collaborative structures.

learning organization, time, kindergarten owner, vision, leadership

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Collaborative Partnership between Early Childhood Education and the Practice Field: Win-Win for Everyone.

Presenters:
Ksenia Solheim, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Ksenia Solheim, University of Stavanger, Norway
Elin Kirsti Lie Reikerås, University of Stavanger, Norway

The perceptions of the concept of ‘partnership’ was explored among three partners: early childhood education bachelor’s students, the early childhood education department at the university, and the practice field presented by the municipal leader. Collaboration is a central mechanism in the implementation of new models for local competence development in the Norwegian education system. The key is to create a safe environment to challenge each other's assumptions about practice. The research literature focused on characteristics of the term ‘partnership'. Ten interviews with five bachelor students, five associate professors from the early childhood education faculty, one municipality leader, and logs from one university project leader. A thematic analysis revealed four main perspectives on participants’ perceptions of a partnership: engagement, communication, relationships, and common goals. All participants received written and oral information about the purpose of the study, their role, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Partners need to be engaged, have mutually beneficial goals, have open communication, and, build trustworthy relationships. At the leadership level, a collaborative partnership with the practice field was achieved; however, between university teachers and students, the understanding of the term partnership should be clarified. The balance of power is challenging in partnerships between students and teachers, and that their roles make it difficult to enter genuine partnerships to begin with. There is a need for concept clarification, shared ownership of educational processes.

partnership, collaboration, ECEC, leadership, power balance

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

From Different Consultative Roles to Collaborative Practice: Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Collaborative Consultation Model in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Erika Jokimies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Erika Jokimies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Vesa Närhi, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Noora Heiskanen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland
Hannu Savolainen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

This study examines how Early Childhood Special Education Teachers (ECSETs) enact their consultative roles and evaluates the effectiveness of collaborative consultation in early childhood education (ECEC) settings. Although earlier research has clarified ECSETs' consultative roles and shown substantial variation in practices across settings (Dinnebeil et al., 2009; Linne, 2024), empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness and applicability of consultation remains limited (Buysse & Wesley, 2005; Staffans & Sundqvist, 2023). The study is grounded in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2002) and a behavioral perspective (Kazdin, 2013), conceptualizing children's development as shaped by interacting social and environmental contexts and emphasizing structured support for inclusive practice. Within a quantitative paradigm, phase one used a national survey of Finnish ECSETs (N = 207) to identify three consultative profiles (von Eye & Bogat, 2006). Phase two applies an experimental single-case multiple baseline design to evaluate a collaborative consultation model, integrating observational outcome data with post-intervention group interviews in an epistemological dialogue between quantitative and qualitative findings (Braun & Clarke, 202; Kazdin, 2011). The study adheres to TENK (2019; 2023) ethical guidelines; participation is voluntary, informed consent was obtained, necessary permissions secured, and data handled according to data protection regulations. Phase one results identified three consultation profiles and contextual structures shaping practice (Jokimies et al., 2025). Preliminary findings from phase two (summer 2026) are expected to clarify how collaborative consultation influences child and staff outcomes. The study provides evidence-based knowledge to strengthen effective consultation practices and to support governance, decision-making, and professional development in ECEC.

collaborative consultation, early childhood special education teachers (ECSETs), single-case experimental design, pedagogical practices, consultation effectiveness

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

This project was funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation (Kymenlaakso Fund, Aili and Aksel Kilk Grant) and the University of Jyväskylä.

Symposium D05 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Chaired by: Michael Gaffney, Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka University of Otago, New Zealand

"Hey, are you listening?": Exploring attitudinal barriers to amplifying young disabled children's voice in research

Presenters:
Michael Gaffney, Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka University of Otago, New Zealand
Kate McAnelly, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand - Kuratini Tuwhera, New Zealand

All authors:
Michael Gaffney, Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka University of Otago, New Zealand
Kate McAnelly, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand - Kuratini Tuwhera, New Zealand

Our paper explores attitudinal barriers emerging from assumptions of communicative incompetence that prevent young disabled children from actively participating in research. UNCROC says that it is discriminatory to prevent children from participating in research on the basis of disability (Graham et al, 2013), and expects that a child who can form a view has the right to express it, with adults listening in kind. This is the messaging from the field of disabled children's childhood studies which opposes ableism that limits disabled children's potentials in any way (Runswick-Cole, Curran & Liddiard, 2018). It asks, why is young disabled children's participation in research so often conditional on their verbal communication capacity? We use an autoethnographic approach (Henderson, 2017) to reflect on our experience of submitting an ethics application. Our analysis showed an overall assumption that young disabled children are not capable of participating in research if they do not reliably possess verbal communication

capacity. Assumptions of incompetence that members of research ethics committees and other gate keepers can make in this way adversely impact the fruition of equitable, inclusive research that foregrounds the voices and expertise of young disabled children. Presuming the communicative competence of all children is a fundamental tenet of inclusive research. There are many ways that young disabled children can tell researchers what they want or need them to know within the research experience without verbal communication. Researchers must be ready, willing and able to listen in a multi-modal way to young disabled children's voices to support their active participation in research.

children's rights, research ethics, disability, active participation, inclusion

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Building Capacity in Autism Early Intervention: Evidence from an Asynchronous Training Program for Early Childhood Practitioners

Presenters:
Isabelle Préfontaine, Université Laval, Canada

All authors:
Isabelle Préfontaine, Université Laval, Canada
Myriam Rousseau, Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec, Canada
Anaïs V. Berthiaume, Université Laval, Canada
Jacinthe Bourassa, Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec, Canada
Suzie McKinnon, Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux du Bas-Saint-Laurent, Canada

This project has the overall goal of enhancing the quality of early intervention services for autistic children in Québec (Canada). More specifically, it aims to design, pilot, and document a training program for practitioners and to assess its impact on both practitioners and children. Previous research indicates that naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions are the most effective for supporting the overall development of young autistic children (Schreidman et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2021) . However, a lack of qualified staff and high turnover impede the implementation of these interventions, underscoring the need for solutions that can train practitioners quickly and effectively.. Using Program Theory (Chen, 2005), the researchers and practitioners collaborated to develop an asynchronous training program for early childhood practitioners. The study was conducted within a collaborative paradigm. A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data from questionnaires containing open- and closed-ended questions, completed by 21 practitioners newly working in early intervention with autistic children. Descriptive analyses were conducted on the quantitative data, and thematic analyses on the qualitative data. We obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee. All participants received a consent form and an information sheet and were given the opportunity to ask questions. The results suggest that the training increases knowledge of autism and perceived competence, and that it demonstrates high social validity. This training program has the potential to be scaled up to enhance the quality of public early intervention services for autistic children, particularly in contexts where practitioners often enter the field with limited qualifications.

autism, early intervention, practitioner training, program evaluation, developmental outcomes

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

This research was funded by Fondation Santé Trois-Rivières.

Pedagogical intentions and educators' sensitivity to children's sense of belonging: Evidence from an Italian nursery

Presenters:

Paolo Bertuletti, Università degli studi di Bergamo, Italy

All authors:
Paolo Bertuletti, Università degli studi di Bergamo, Italy

The aim of this case study is to clarify the relationship between educators' strategies and the Montessori framework adopted at an Italian nursery, and to explore how this pedagogical approach shapes educators' sensitivity to children's sense of belonging. This work is based on recent studies, especially from Nordic countries, exploring the sense of belonging in early childhood, understood as a relational issue shaped by power relations (Johansson et al. 2024), often overlooked by educators (Johannson and Rosell, 2021). It draws upon the theoretical sociological construct of 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, 2011) and a thorough knowledge of Montessori's works. Qualitative methods (focus groups, narrative interviews, observations, and video recordings) were adopted within a case study design (Yin, 2018). At the time of writing, several educators have been interviewed and observations of children (24–36 months) are ongoing, with a total sample of twelve educators and sixty children. The data will undergo thematic analysis. All families participating undersigned a consent form with an information sheet. The cameras' function was explained to the children. Where children showed unease, video recordings have been stopped. Results will be anonymised. The data analysis highlights how pedagogical frameworks may lead practitioners to underestimate children's needs to belong to the peer community. This work shows how taken-for-granted categorizations can obscure the social dynamics shaping processes of belonging in the nursery, potentially hindering children's full inclusion within the peer community. By raising awareness of these dynamics, the study aims to support educators in developing strategies that foster inclusion and acceptance.

sense of belonging, case study, education settings and practice, Montessori pedagogy, qualitative research

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

Symposium D06 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AND ARTS-BASED PRACTICE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Chaired by: Marlene McCormack, Dublin City University, Ireland

The Artist-in-Residence and creativity in a digital age

Presenters:
Marlene McCormack, Dublin City University, Ireland

All authors:
Marlene McCormack, Dublin City University, Ireland
Cliodhna Noonan, Dublin City University, Ireland

The study aims to explore the impact of an Artist in Residence with undergraduate ECEC students in a HEI and with young children in preschool and primary schools. In contrast to research that highlights the presence of technology in young children's lives (Palaiologou et al, 2016; Craft 2012), this study aims to explore if creative expression is enhanced through artistic performance (Stevens-Ballenger and Jeanneret, 2024). The impact of having an Artist-in-Residence in early childhood centres in the Irish context is under researched. Hayes et al (2012) advises that the arts tend to be sidelined in early childhood education. The study is underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) concept and theory of play contends that socio dramatic play is complex, providing the basic interplay of emotion, imagination and creativity. The research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm (Creswell and Poth, 2018), and the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011). Study will draw on Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse findings and to answer the research question 'what is your experience of engaging with the Artist-in-Residence. Participants include HEI

students (20), pre-school 20 children and educators (2), primary school 20 children and teacher (1). Data will be collected in April and May. This study will have ethical approval from DCU and will adhere to EECERA's research ethics. In practice there will consent from adults and assent from the children. In hearing directly from educators and young children the experiences of having an Artist-in-Residence will emerge. It is anticipated that The Arts Council in Ireland will continue to support the Artist-in-Residence initiative for young children.

artist-in-residence, creativity, connectivity, expression, children

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

Reframing Observation in Early Childhood: An Ecological Arts-Based Baby Observation Session

Presenters:
Chihiro Nishio, Konan University, Japan

All authors:
Chihiro Nishio, Konan University, Japan

This paper examines the meaning of observation in early childhood through a Baby Observation Session co-created by artists and a developmental researcher as both an art project and a research inquiry. The session gathers parents, pedagogists, researchers, and artists to observe infants and share what they perceive. Observation is central to developmental psychology and early childhood pedagogy. In infancy research, it has been essential for understanding how infants perceive the world(Adolph, 2020), yet it is often subject to challenges of reproducibility(Frank et al., 2017). In early childhood education, particularly within the Reggio Emilia tradition, observation underpins pedagogical documentation and reflective dialogue(Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). However, how observation itself generates knowledge remains under-theorised across disciplines. Drawing on ecological psychology and the concept of affordances(Gibson, 1979), observation is framed as perceiving relations between infants and environments. Positioned as arts-based research, the project treats aesthetic attention, perceptual variation, and dialogical exchange as creative processes that bring new relations into being. Situated within qualitative, arts-based and practice-based research, the study analyses field notes, recorded dialogues, and reflective texts produced through the sessions. Informed consent was obtained and anonymisation ensured respectful representation. Findings indicate that observation functions as a creative act that reshapes relationships and produces new discoveries. Through shared perception, participants' ways of seeing shift. The process also becomes an entry to artistic expression and supports parenting by enabling shared perspectives and recognising infants as active agents engaging their environments. This reconceptualisation contributes to international debates on documentation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and relational approaches in early childhood contexts.

observationarts-based research, ecological psychology, Reggio Emilia, infant development

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

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25K16980.

Art Education in Day Care: Participation and Agency of Infants

Presenters:
Mariana Estrela, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal
Rita Rovisco, Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

All authors:
Mariana Estrela, Universidade da Madeira, Portugal

Rita Rovisco, Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Our research question is: How can art education ateliers, developed in Day Care settings, promote infants' participation and agency in everyday pedagogical practice? Our overall objective is: to analyse how arts education workshops, run within a nursery setting, promote babies' participation and agency in everyday educational practice. This research is grounded in Participatory Pedagogies, recognising the child as a competent and active subject (Estrela, 2023), and draws on literature and praxiological perspectives that understand art education as a lived, processual and relational experience in early childhood. Our theoretical and conceptual framework brings together contributions from Pedagogical Models and Guidelines for Day Care (Marques et al., 2024; Oliveira-Formosinho & Araújo, 2018), UNESCO's Road Map for Arts Education (2006). The study adopts a qualitative action research approach, using participant observation, pedagogical documentation, and learning narratives analysed through content analysis. Participants included 10 infants, a trainer, an educator, an assistant and families, selected through convenience sampling within one researcher's professional context. Ethical measures included informed parental consent, data anonymisation, respect for infants' rhythms and agency (including refusals), and ongoing ethical reflection, in line with the EECERA Code of Ethics (2024). Preliminary findings indicate high levels of involvement and well-being within aesthetically prepared environments. Infants' agency as co-constructors of learning was valued, supported by sensitive mediation, documentation, and critical educator reflexivity. The study highlights continuous training as a lever for professional growth and praxiological transformation, while underscoring the potential of art education in Day Care settings to foster participatory and democratic pedagogical cultures.

art education in day care, participation, agency, action research, professional development

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

Symposium D07 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

Chaired by: Kyunghwa Lee, University of Georgia, United States

Democratic Pedagogical Practices under Normative Conditions: Interpreting the Austrian Educational Framework Plan

Presenters:
Evelyn Kobler, University of Education Salzburg, Austria

All authors:
Evelyn Kobler, University of Education Salzburg, Austria
Simone Breit, University of Education Lower Austria, Austria

Across Europe, curriculum frameworks increasingly shape early childhood education and care (ECEC). This paper examines how early childhood educators in Austria interpret and enact the Federal Austrian Educational Framework Plan in everyday practice. It explores how professional agency and child participation are negotiated within normative and increasingly digitalised European policy environments European research highlights growing curricularisation, governance and accountability in ECEC (OECD, 2021; Kangas et al., 2021), yet practitioners' perspectives on policy enactment remain underexplored (Viernickel et al., 2013). This study contributes empirical insights into how democratic and participatory pedagogical practices are sustained within standardised European policy frameworks and governance contexts. Drawing on professional agency, participation and democratic pedagogy, curricula are conceptualised as reflexive governance instruments actively interpreted, negotiated and

enacted by practitioners in institutional contexts (Faas & Kluczniok, 2023; Loudová Stralczynská et al., 2023). Guided by an interpretative paradigm, the study uses cross-sectional survey data from 114 early childhood educators collected within the international ECED project. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis to examine planning, documentation and justificatory practices. Ethical standards included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and responsible data management Results show strong child-centred and participatory orientations. Educators use the framework as flexible professional guidance, sustaining pedagogical autonomy while meeting institutional documentation and accountability requirements. Findings highlight the importance of curriculum frameworks enabling professional agency and democratic pedagogy. European ECEC policy should strengthen professional trust, support structures and reflective capacities to balance accountability and pedagogical autonomy sustainably.

agency, participation, professionalism, governance, democracy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Shifting narratives of student-centred curriculum enactment in Kenyan early childhood education

Presenters:
Daniel Kuria, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

All authors:
Daniel Kuria, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

This study explores how teachers in two schools employ agentic practices to meet and surpass the requirements of the Kenyan early childhood curriculum framework to provide contextually relevant child-centred learning. Following the introduction of a student-centred curriculum in Kenya, research has highlighted a persistent mismatch between the intended and experienced curriculum (Muchira et al., 2023). This paper advocates for a shift from policy-led student-centred rhetoric to teacher-enacted practice (Madondo, 2021), foregrounding teachers lived experiences, pedagogical knowledge and children's interests. Adopting teacher agency as the conceptual framework, this study explores how the triad of teacher's experiences; past experiences, current school contexts and future aspirations inform curriculum decision-making (Priestley and Biesta, 2014). Situated within the qualitative research paradigm (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), this study utilises decolonial and co-production approaches (Smith, 2012; Williams et al., 2020) using talking circles, reflective journals and photography as methods of data generation and co-analysis with six purposefully selected teachers. Ethical considerations included institutional approval, informed consent from the teachers, children and parents, negotiated continuously during the research. Protocols and ways of working were agreed upon with the teachers and shared with the headteachers to prevent sharing of sensitive information and singling teacher's out for their comments. Preliminary findings suggest that individual and group reflective practices reposition teachers as active agents, willing and capable to resist dominant narratives of curriculum enactment to provide contextually relevant child-centred learning. This offers new insights into how teachers can be actively engaged in curriculum change by utilising teacher's lived and professional experience and children's interests.

teacher agency, children's interests, child-centred pedagogies, reflexivity, co-production

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

1+3 WhiteRose DTP funded student.

Korean Teacher-Parents' Conceptualizations of Children's Agency and Competency

Presenters:

Kyunghwa Lee, University of Georgia, United States

All authors:
Minjung Lim, Kyungpook National University,Republic of Korea
Eunae Son, Daegu National University of Education,Republic of Korea
Kyunghwa Lee, University of Georgia, United States
Jooeun Oh, Incheon National University,Republic of Korea

This study examines how the dual identities of Korean early childhood teachers, who are also parents, shape their understandings of children's agency and competency. The Revised 2019 Nuri Curriculum marked a shift toward child-centered, play-based learning in Korea (Jin et al., 2024). Influenced by the OECD Education 2030 Learning Framework emphasizing "student agency, student well-being and competencies" (OECD, 2018), this reform has unfolded within a cultural context where traditional values intersect with global discourses (Kim, 2022; Lee, 2013). This study is set against this backdrop. We draw on Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action and Latour's (2005) actor-network-theory. As part of an ongoing photovoice study (O'Malley & Munsell, 2020; Wang & Burris, 1997), data for this paper were generated with six teachers in Daegu, Korea, in December 2025. Following Institutional Review Board guidelines at the PI's university, we obtained teacher consent for photograph use and disclosure while using pseudonyms and obscuring identifiable features. Teacher-parents tended to conceptualize agency and competency as individualistic traits while experiencing internal conflicts arising from their dual roles, such as tensions between permissive and social norm-focused caregiving. Participants also reported tensions between their professional commitment to pluralistic, diversity-oriented competencies and social pressures emphasizing academic achievement-oriented competition. This study reveals that contemporary Korean teacher-parents hold a meritocratic understanding of agency and competency shaped by neoliberal discourses (Moss, 2019). This perspective has intra-actively emerged through the Korean translation of "agency" (주도성), which (mis)leads to being ahead of others, and rapid modern/westernization that promotes individual success through competitive educational achievement.

Korean early childhood education, children's agency and competency, photovoice, cultural beliefs and values, modern/westernization

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

Symposium D08 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS AND PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE

Chaired by: Hiba Abou-Taouk, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

A Child-Centred Perspective on Linguistic Diversity in Finland's ECEC

Presenters:
Margherita Potrich, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Margherita Potrich, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study asks: how do non-migration-background children in Finland's ECEC emotionally and socially participate in peer-led activities conducted in migration-background languages? How can these participation patterns inform inclusive pedagogical practices? Research in Finnish ECEC has examined participation and social roles of children with

migration backgrounds (Arvola et al., 2017; Kangas et al., 2025) and teachers' inclusive practices (Bergroth & Sopanen, 2024), particularly in relation to the use of national languages. However, less attention has been paid to how children without migration backgrounds engage with migration-background languages and how such encounters influence participation and belonging, especially when linguistic leadership shifts. The study draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and the GECE framework (Kultti, 2021, 2022) to conceptualise multilingualism as a shared practice in peer interaction. Within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, the study adopts a participatory design in 2–3 Finnish- and Swedish-medium ECEC groups (children aged 3–5). Data include video-recorded sessions of co-developed activities with teacher and families, and ethnographic fieldnotes. Analysis combines coding of participation patterns with multimodal interaction analysis. Procedures include parental consent, child assent, secure data storage, avoidance of assumptions about linguistic categories, alongside attention to language and cultural awareness within Finnish ECEC pedagogical frameworks. The presentation introduces the analytical framework for examining children's responses to migration-background languages while also considering how such practices may create spaces for children with migration backgrounds to exercise agency as linguistic leaders. The study highlights the potential of such activities to supporting participation and valuing linguistic diversity in ECEC. It offers insights for developing pedagogical practices that engage all children.

multilingualism, interaction, participation, linguistic diversity, inclusive practices

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

Children's responses to preschool teacher's multilingual interactional offers in narrative play

Presenters:
Hiba Abou-Taouk, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

All authors:
Hiba Abou-Taouk, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

How do children respond to a preschool teacher's multilingual interactional offers in narrative play, and how do these responses contribute to the unfolding of the play? Research on multilingual practices in ECEC has largely focused on teachers' strategies (Zheng et al., 2021), while less attention has been paid to how children respond to teachers' multilingual interactional offers in play. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding children's responsiveness and agency in narrative play. Drawing on sociocultural perspectives on language and communication (Vygotsky, 1978), languaging is understood as situated social action. The teacher's use of Arabic is approached as an interactional offer that makes Arabic available as a resource for participation, whose meaning emerges through children's responses. The qualitative study draws on video-recorded play involving 11 multilingual children aged 4–6 and one preschool teacher. Four children spoke Arabic. Multimodal interaction analysis (Goodwin, 2018) was used to examine how children responded to the teacher's multilingual offers. Written informed consent was obtained from parents and participants. Children gave ongoing assent and were reminded that participation was voluntary. Care was taken to support the inclusion of all children, regardless of linguistic background or level of participation in play. All data were anonymised, and the study conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). The findings show that children selectively integrate, transform, redirect, or disregard teachers' multilingual offers, thereby shaping participation and the direction of the play. These findings highlight children´s responsiveness as central to multilingual pedagogy and show how participation and agency is co-constructed through interaction.

ECEC, multilingualism, children's agency, responsiveness, narrative play

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

Supporting bi/multicultural children's identity and inclusion in the digital age: a case study

Presenters:
Maria Lobytsyna, Crown Institute of High Education/ Macquarie University, Australia

All authors:
Maria Lobytsyna, Crown Institute of High Education/ Macquarie University, Australia
Nicole Jamison, Macquarie University, Australia

This study aims to develop a pilot model and professional development resources for supporting bi/multi cultural inclusive practices for ECE settings. What barriers and enablers determine young bicultural children's inclusion? Many children encounter vast differences between home and education cultural and linguistic experiences. While the international literature suggests a strong bicultural identity could help to create children's sense of belonging and enhance their mental wellbeing and emotional security (Gómez-Parra, M. E. & Huertas-Abril, C. A., 2018; D'warte, 2023) Australian educators' practices have been rarely investigated. Through a lens of a post-migration ecology model (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016), this paper examines the live teaching experiences and innovative approaches in diverse early childhood settings. This study analyses educators perspectives and refers to Interpretivism. The pilot study involves 3 Early Childhood Education centres. Through semi-structured interviews, survey, observations, classroom audit open-ended responses, it explores diverse perspectives on challenges and enablers to facilitate young bicultural children's inclusion The CERD ethical framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) will guide researchers' ethical and holistic decision making, specifically navigating ethical challenges by considering the broader environment, reciprocity and adhering to ethical principles, such as consent and confidentiality. There is urgency for more effective professional education and development of innovative resources and toolkits for ECE staff. This will help to build connections, bidirectional links or bridge between home and ECE community. This study will develop the dialogic pathways for self-reflection and identification of practice and will help build bidirectional links and continuity of experiences between home and ECEC settings. This practice will enrich the collective assets.

inclusion, diversity, bicultural children, cultural competence, bicultural identity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium D09 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

GATHERING AND UNDRSTANDING PARENT PERSPECTIVES

Chaired by: Elizabeth Rouse, Deakin University, Australia

Understanding School Readiness: Perspectives from Parents (UK)

Presenters:
Alys Parkins, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

All authors:
Alys Parkins, University of South Wales, United Kingdom
Amanda Thomas, University of South Wales, United Kingdom

This research aimed to co-produce knowledge by engaging parents in discussions about expectations for children transitioning to school. Workshops created a collaborative space for dialogue between parents and researchers. This

research builds upon previous research around school readiness and family resilience. This project complemented the previous study by engaging with parents and exploring their voice and perceptions of school readiness e.g. what it means to them and their children, expectations and challenges. Related theory includes Bourdieu's (1979; 1986) theories of Field and Capital and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. These are used to explore key themes in supporting children to be school ready, agentic and fully participatory in their transition to school. A qualitative, interpretive paradigm underpins the research, data were collected through focus group interviews with parents. Digital recording of the focus groups was used to capture the voice of Early Years parents/care givers. The research enabled democratic participation from the parents. Informed, voluntary consent was gathered from all participants who were able to withdraw up until the point of transcription of data. Parents from a diverse range of backgrounds were approached and the focus group sessions used a transparent and respectful approach. Some of the key findings included areas such as means of communication, relationship building and societal impact. The research highlights the need for professionals and parents to work effectively together to ensure children's readiness for school. Knowledge and understanding of what school readiness is and the expectations on both parents and practitioners need to be presented clearly through digital platforms which are well informed and reliable.

school readiness, agency, participation

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

Learned Society of Wales - Grant Funded Research.

Parents' perceptions on children as learners in inquiry-based classrooms

Presenters:
Elizabeth Rouse, Deakin University, Australia

All authors:
Elizabeth Rouse, Deakin University, Australia

This study focused on parents' perception of their children as learners within an inquiry-based schooling context. The research question: how do parents perceive their child as a learner when schooled through an inquiry-focused pedagogy framed the study. Whilst there is some research examining the perspectives of teachers concerning inquiry learning on learner outcomes (Sam, 2024), research examining the perceptions of parents regarding inquiry-based learning is limited (Mousoulides, 2018).. The study was framed by van Manen's (1997) understanding that parents are in a 'pedagogical relationship' with their children. They know their children in ways that are unique and view their child through a lens which is different to that of researcher and teacher. An interpretivist paradigm, and case study design was used. Three parents with children attending a whole of school Reggio Emilia inspired, inquiry-based setting, responded to an invitation to participate in a semi-structured interview, sharing their perceptions of their child's learning as they engaged in an inquiry-based pedagogy. A reflective thematic approach was used in the analysis. Ethical clearance was approved by the University Ethics committee, and participants provided written consent. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Findings revealed that children's agency and creativity were valued. Parents wanted "children to be well prepared for life" and their measures of children's success focused on resilience, problem solving and creative thinking rather than academic achievement. This study presents implications for engaging with parents in ways that value parents' perspectives on what learning is valued and how success is measured.

inquiry learning, parent perceptions, pedagogical relations, Reggio Emilia in schools, quality education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was supported by Frank Leydon Trust.

Anti-democratic conspiracy ideologies and motherhood – a focus on mothers with young children

Presenters:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

All authors:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

The focus of this contribution examines the effects of populist-authoritarian conspiracy theories on mothers, especially with small children (age 0 – 7/8 years of age), concerning their development and education. The spread of conspiracy ideologies, especially through digital media, has an impact on democracy (Dilling et al. 2023). On an interpersonal level, they affect relationships, especially within families (see Farrokhzad et al. 2025; Douglas et al. 2017). The theoretical and conceptual framework refers to critical theory and democracy theory (see Dilling et al. 2023; Schließler et al. 2020). A mixed-methods design was used including an online survey of 698 professionals from social work and 46 qualitative interviews. The topic of motherhood and young children repeatedly features prominently in the data collected (see Farrokhzad et al. 2025). Participation in this study is voluntary. Informed consent is obtained in advance and can be revoked. Contact with counselling centers specializing in conspiracy ideologies can be made. The sample includes mothers who report on conspiracy-prone (ex-)partners and the effects on them and their (young) children – especially concerning their health, education, and democratic development. In addition, the data includes mothers who themselves spread conspiracy narratives and whose motherhood and their actions towards their children are shaped accordingly with great effects on their children. Those effects are strongest when children are small (aged between 0 – 7/8 years of age). The research findings illustrate that ideologization related to conspiracy narratives is relevant to early childhood education, for example with regard to health and democratic development. Educational and advisory organizations should therefore be informed about conspiracy ideologies and their relevance to early childhood education.

conspiracy ideologies, mothers, children, mixed methods

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The research was funded by the BMFTR (Germany).

Symposium D10 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 6, floor -2

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSION

Chaired by: Barbara Maria Sageidet, University of Stavanger, Norway, Norway

Can natural science related activities promote inclusion in the kindergarten's sand box?

Presenters:
Barbara Maria Sageidet, University of Stavanger, Norway, Norway

All authors:
Barbara Maria Sageidet, University of Stavanger, Norway, Norway

This study will explore if and how early childhood teachers use their kindergarten's sand box to guide children's play and natural science learning, and if they have planned eller experienced any activities in the sand box that link science learning to the promotion of inclusion in diverse groups of children. The study builds on theory about inclusion (e.g. Meland, Esmaeeli & Sageidet, 2025), on soil literacy (Brevik et al., 2019) as essential to promote sustainable development (United Nations, 2015), on natural science didactics in kindergarten, and on global citizenship (e.g. Sageidet & Heggen, 2021). Within a sociocultural paradigme, sand box practices and experiences from early childhood teachers in kindergartens with a focus on sustainability, will be gathered by help of a qualitative questionnaire with open and closed questions (Beckett & Clegg, 2007). About 10-30 filled inn replies are expected. The data will be analyzed by qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014), and discussed in light of pedagogy for inclusion, soil literacy, sustainability and global citizenship in kindergarten. Ethics include the confidentialily of all answers and secure data handling, ensuring that no child is identifiable. The study may reveal an untapped potential to use natural science learning in pedagogical activities with children to promote environmental and social competences, and also inclusion. The study may increase early childhood teachers awareness about the tools, natural science learning can supply to help acknowledge each individual child's experiences and competences, even if her/his physical or social competences, or those within the kindergarten's main language, may be constrained.

soil literacy in kindergarten, natural science learning, inclusion, global citizenship, sustainability

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

Filiorum - Centre for research in early childhood education and care, University of Stavanger, The Research Council of Norway, No. 275576.

Amplifying Children's Voices in Theatre: Applying the Lundy Model to Investigate Participatory Experiences in Theatre for Very Young Audiences

Presenters:
Catherine Kilburn, University of Hull, United Kingdom

All authors:
Catherine Kilburn, University of Hull, United Kingdom
Joanne Traunter, University of Hull, United Kingdom
Kerrie Lee, University of Hull, United Kingdom

The aim of this research was to understand how very young children (0-2 years) access and demonstrate agency within an immersive theatrical experience. Over the past 10 years there has been increasing interest in developing theatre for the very young (TVY) (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014). In response to early critiques about the appropriateness and accessibility of TVY, there has been an increasing focus on designing productions focusing on developmentally appropriate sensory stimuli (Kapstein & Goldstein, 2019). However, theatre experiences are still usually designed for children, rather than with or by them (Maguire, 2021). This is particularly relevant when considering TVY. The conceptual framework for this research used the Lundy model (Lundy, 2007) to investigate and examine very young children's experiences. This research utilised qualitative methodologies and is situated within a social constructivist paradigm. Observations were recorded of the children, focusing on their interactions with the theatrical experience and supporting adults. Ethical approval considered the ability of very young children to provide assent. Parental consent was gained prior to observations and the children's non-verbal communication was observed for signs of distress. All children's names were anonymised. The children engaged with the sensory aspects of the production, and the actors, and other adults, responded to the children's interaction and responses, adapting their responses within the show to the individual children. The Lundy model offers a practically applicable

framework for investigating and enhancing TVY. Very young children are able to demonstrate agency, engage in and influence the production of TVY.

Theatre, agency, babies, Lundy, toddlers

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

Using sociodramatic co-play to support the development of higher mental functions (HMFs), and early Science and Maths learning

Presenters:
Nicola O Reilly, Dublin City University, Ireland

All authors:
Nicola O Reilly, Dublin City University, Ireland

This research aimed to establish whether involvement in a Professional Learning programme could support educators to use sociodramatic co-play as a pedagogical approach to help children's development of HMFs, and early Science and Maths learning. Sensitive sociodramatic co-play by educators allows them to capitalise on learning opportunities, whilst respecting children's right to ownership and control of their play (Pramling Samuelsson & Björklund, 2023). Co-playing educators can follow children's emergent interests and inquiries, whilst also supporting STEM learning that arises during play (Carruthers, 2020; Fleer, 2017). From a cultural-historical perspective, co-playing educators can scaffold HMFs such as self-regulation, symbolic thinking and imagination, which develop through sociodramatic play (Bodrova and Leong, 2015; Vygotsky, 2016). This research, grounded in a social-constructivist paradigm, involved workshops, mentoring and video analysis of practice, and data collection involved audio- and video-recordings of 6 educators working with 20 children (aged 2-5). Educators provided informed consent, parents provided proxy consent for their children, whilst children provided provisional assent to take part in the research, as approved by Dublin City University Ethics Committee. Initial findings suggest participation in the Professional Learning intervention supported educators to understand how they could: sensitively engage in sociodramatic co-play whilst respecting children's right to ownership and control of their play; follow children's emergent interests and inquiries; support the development of HMFs and support early Science and Maths conceptual and process learning. These findings suggest that sociodramatic co-play, where educators follow children's own interests and inquiries in play, could be an effective pedagogical approach for supporting the development of HMFs and early Science and Maths learning.

STEM, science, maths, sociodramatic, play

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

This research was funded by a doctoral scholarship from the Naughton Family Chair of STEM in Early Years/Primary STEM education.

Symposium D11 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 7, floor -2

RELATIONAL PRACTICES, PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Chaired by: Kirsi-Marja Heikkinen, University of Helsinki, Finland

Leading an Early Childhood Community of Practice

Presenters:

Debra Williams, Alphacrucis University College, Australia

All authors:
Debra Williams, Alphacrucis University College, Australia

The study investigates the implementation and impact of critical reflection in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), addressing a persistent gap identified in prior research between its policy mandate and limited conceptual and practical understanding among educators. The study extends existing literature by examining how critical reflection operates within a faith-based context The study is grounded in critical reflection theory (Fook; Schön; Dewey), framed by the National Quality Standard (NQS) and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), positioning critical reflection as a mechanism for continuous improvement and praxis. An interpretivist paradigm underpins the research employing a qualitative case study design using grounded theory methods. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analysed through iterative coding, constant comparison, and thematic development to allow theory to emerge from practice. Ethical approval was obtained. Participant consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were ensured. Insider researcher positioning was critically managed through reflexivity, triangulation, and member checking to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. Findings reveal that, when systematically supported, critical reflection enhances professional practice, educator understanding, and learning environments. A model of critical reflection and the SCHEMED implementation approach emerged from the data. The study contributes a contextually grounded framework for implementing critical reflection, offering practical guidance for improving ECEC quality and bridging the gap between policy and practice.

context, critical reflection, leadership, early childhood, professional learning

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Early Childhood Education and Care Centre Leadership Through the Lens of Complexity - From Wicked Problems to Integrated Resources

Presenters:
Kirsi-Marja Heikkinen, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Kirsi-Marja Heikkinen, University of Helsinki, Finland

The purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of complexity leadership theory in ECEC. Leadership in ECEC has shifted from the teachers' pedagogical responsibility towards a complex administrative and relational role shaped by increasing demands for efficiency and professionalization. Despite this, leadership is exercised within inadequate structures and education opportunities. This creates tensions between formal expectations and the everyday realities of leadership (Gibbs, 2022). The study is based on CLT. Leadership is an emergent, socially constructed practice. The concepts of leadership emergence and adaptive space highlight the development of leadership through collaboration, informal practices, and the negotiation over tensions (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2016). In a narrative framework, leadership arises from human interaction. The data were collected as focus group interviews and written essays from ECEC leaders (N=81). The data was analyzed with structural narrative methods. The study process has been perceived from the research ethics perspective. Participants, data collection and storage, analysis processes, and publishing of the results were planned and executed according to ethical principles. Leadership in ECEC centers is a complex and tension-filled task. This study identified eight elements, significant for leadership emergence and adaptive space among ECEC centres. These elements are interdependent and contextual, and may function either as resources or as barriers to the leadership enactment. Lack of systematic development of

leadership education, added with high turnover staff identified as a key challenge in ECEC leadership. To understand complexity, further research and systematic collaboration between local and national systems will be essential in the future.

early childhood education and care, complexity leadership, theory leadership emergence, adaptive space, narrative study

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Dramatic Expression as a Pedagogical Strategy for Child Development and School–Community Connection in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:

Laura Noronha, University of Madeira, Portugal
Cláudia Mendonça, University of Madeira, Portugal
Sara Costa, University of Madeira, Portugal
Inês Vasconcelos, University of Madeira, Portugal
Maria José Camacho, University of Madeira, Portugal

All authors:

Laura Noronha, University of Madeira, Portugal
Cláudia Mendonça, University of Madeira, Portugal
Sara Costa, University of Madeira, Portugal
Inês Vasconcelos, University of Madeira, Portugal
Maria José Camacho, University of Madeira, Portugal

This study aimed to promote interaction between preschool groups and strengthen school–community connections through dramatic expression. Based on the observation of educational practice, the project explored dramatic activities as a strategy to support children's holistic development, participation, and social interaction. The study is grounded in action research and reflective practice (Ferreira, 2020), as well as in the Portuguese Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines, emphasising observation, participation, and intentional pedagogical intervention (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2016). The project is based on the principles of child-centred education and holistic development, recognising dramatic expression as a form of communication, symbolic representation, and social learning, supporting emotional expression, cooperation, and community participation (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2016). The study followed an action research approach, integrating observation, planning, action, and evaluation (Ferreira, 2020). Data were collected through observation records, pedagogical documentation, and reflective analysis of two dramatic interventions carried out in four preschool classrooms. Ethical procedures included institutional approval, confidentiality, data anonymisation, and respect for children's well-being and participation throughout the intervention. The findings highlight the value of dramatic expression in promoting children's engagement, emotional expression, and social interaction, strengthening shared experiences across preschool classrooms and reinforcing the school's community dimension. Destacamos o valor da expressão dramática na promoção do envolvimento infantil, da expressão emocional e da interação social,fortalecendo as experiências compartilhadas entre as salas de aula da pré-escola e reforçam a dimensão comunitária da escola. The results support the integration of dramatic expression into early childhood education practice to promote participation, holistic development, and stronger relationships between school and community.

dramatic expression, action research, early childhood education, participation, school–community relationship

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

MUSIC AND MUSICALITY

Chaired by: Clarice Bourscheid, Autonomous, Brazil

Singing identities and composing belonging: voice, songs and stories in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Clarice Bourscheid, Autonomous, Brazil

All authors:
Clarice Bourscheid, Autonomous, Brazil

This study aims to investigate and promote possibilities of singing songs and reading together with children (4-6) living abroad as a way of affirming diversities and building a sense of belonging having Portuguese as heritage language. An online educational experience called "sing, play and and learn in Portuguese". Considering singing, and storytelling in Early Childhood Education as a way of coexisting and learning through music, stories and cultures, leading to a sense of belonging. (BOURSCHEID, 2019); (BOURSCHEID, ZORZO, 2025);(RAMOS, 2021). Singing and reading together is a way of knowing the world and being part of it. Long before we learn the words, we learn the melody of our native language. A singing body is a body which listens to itself (TOSTO, 2009), and also considering that dancing is the normal result of poetic listening! (ZUMTHOR, 2018). Searching relations between connecting patterns, giving support to the listening process (VECCHI, 2019) in 4 + 4 online meetings with the author/researcher and a small group of children. Methodology is an action research (NAUGHTON;HUGHES, 2008). Methods are analizing the recorded lessons and all kinds of expressions from the children (drawings, singing, playing, dancing). Before the beginning of the project,families and children are informed of the academic aim of this research, agreeing to be part of it. This is a research project in the initial phase of searching participants. Therefore there is no findings yet. Provide inspiration and digital possibilities to work with bilingual children who live in multicultural contexts to foster their ability to learn, think, sing, communicate and play in portuguese.

songs, stories, voice, cultural experiencies, heritage language

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

Bodyworlding through kinesthetic musicality and materiality

Presenters:
Nina Odegard, Oslomet, Norway
Ebba Theorell, Stockholm University, Sweden

All authors:
Nina Odegard, Oslomet, Norway
Ebba Theorell, Stockholm University, Sweden

Theorell’s concept of kinesthetic musicality (KM) (2021), developed through analyses of children’s war play, it describes their poetic and sensory attunement to the world. In what ways can kinesthetic musicality unfold, theoretically and methodologically, when studying children's companionship with open-ended materials? Previous research highlights how children’s agency in early childhood education emerges through dialogues with materials and environments. Blomgren (2023) show that objects are active participants in children's learning. Hultman (2011) and Magnusson & Elm (2023) frame children’s engagement in entanglement with educators, materials, peers, and space. We situate KM, movement and play in relation to Odegard’s research on children’s companionship with

materials (2021). Manning's concepts of objectiles and bodyworlding (2013) and Ravn's (2009) incorporated music orients the study. This theoretical dialogue enables an expansion of the concept of KM, exploring what bodies and materials can do and produce. Methodologically, the study draws on preschool teachers' everyday observations of 20 children. Attentive to the agencies of the empirical matter we explore where and how KM emerges. Ethical procedures includes informed parental consent, the use of pseudonyms, image anonymization, and participants' right to withdraw at any time. Combining process philosophy and feminist new materialism, we conceptualize kinesthetic musicality as a democratic and plural practice where children and material worlds co-emerge. We acknowledge that body contours of materials and children can be thought of as porous thresholds (Rouhianien, 2003). This research identifies additional ways of attending to children's embodied knowledge production in pedagogical spaces, extending previous research by exemplifying children's bodily sensitivity towards the world.

bodyworlding, kinesthetic musicality, materiality, objectiles, playfulness

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

Learning engagement in preschool music lessons

Presenters:
Heddi Reinsalu, Tallinn University, Estonia

All authors:
Heddi Reinsalu, Tallinn University, Estonia
Inge Timoštšuk, Tallinn University, Estonia
Inkeri Ruokonen, University of Turku, Finland

To develop and describe an SDT-informed learning engagement tree (model), this study asks:
1. What are the main elements of learning engagement supportive music lessons in preschool? 2. How do teachers perceive and support children's learning engagement in music lessons? 3. How do children perceive and explain their own learning engagement in music lessons? Learning engagement is multidimensional, malleable, and subject-specific (Fredricks et al., 2004), yet our literature review revealed that in early childhood music education it is still often understood primarily as participation (Reinsalu et al., 2022). We adopted Self-Determination Theory (SDT), viewing engagement as the visible expression of motivation quality and interpreting classroom processes through autonomy, competence and relatedness support (Jang, et al 2016). Situated in a post-positivist realist paradigm, this exploratory case study built on findings from our earlier integrative literature review and analysed observation and interview data from five teachers (N = 5), their students (n = 92) using abductive qualitative content analysis. We obtained written consent from teachers and parents, ongoing child assent, emphasising voluntary participation, the right to withdraw. Data, including video, were anonymised, securely stored, and confidentially reported (Bertram et al., 2025). Our earlier integrative literature review proposed an initial learning engagement tree. The case study refined it through observation and interview patterns, showing that teachers supported behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement, whereas agentic engagement remained weakest. Video-stimulated interviews revealed missed opportunities to support children's initiatives in autonomy-supportive ways, further refining the tree. The learning engagement tree offers a practical model for planning and reflecting on need-supportive music teaching.

preschool music education, learning engagement, motivation, self-determination theory

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

Symposium D13 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

PARTICIPATION AND DIVERSITY

Chaired by: Eija Sevón, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Situated inequality and possibilities for participation among diverse children in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Presenters:
Emma Koitto, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Emma Koitto, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Niina Rutanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Mari Vuorisalo, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Eija Sevón, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This study asks how opportunities for participation are constructed in everyday life in ECEC from the perspective of equality among 0-3-year-old children. Children's opportunities to influence in ECEC are limited due to inflexible institutional order and adult-led educational practices (Kivioja & Puroila, 2017; Salonen et al., 2023). Contemporary demands for efficiency and productivity in everyday life of ECEC may override unhurried presence and individualized interaction (Hjelt et al., 2024; Salonen et al., 2025), thereby jeopardizing the realization of participation. Challenges particularly affect children whose ethnic background or language differs from group majority (Arvola et al., 2017; Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019). Children's participation is approached through the politics of everyday life and situated inequality, understanding inequality as a dynamic and contextually produced phenomenon in everyday ECEC (Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021; Røn-Larsen & Stanek, 2024). Qualitative, interpretive paradigm and ethnographic approach is used with intersectional analysis. One under-threes' group is observed (free-form half-day observations and video, 1–3 days/week, 9 weeks) from March to May 2026. Selection criteria was children's multiple home languages. Aligned with EECERA ethical code (2026) informed consents are acquired from adults (e.g. using interpreters). Acceptance is interpreted in-situ being sensitive to children's nonverbal expressions. Data collection is still ongoing, but preliminary findings indicate that children's opportunities to negotiate their participation in daily practices vary depending on individual differences of children and the specific context. The study informs how inequality is constructed within the situational culture of ECEC and could be redressed by reconsidering the institutional practices from the perspective of equity and children's diversity.

participation, situated inequality, politics of everyday life, equality, diversity

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

Diversity-reflective play materials. App-supported practical guidance in daycare centres'

Presenters:
Peter Cloos, University of Hildesheim, Germany

All authors:
Peter Cloos, University of Hildesheim, Germany

The project 'Diversity-reflective play materials. App-supported practical guidance in daycare centres' deals with the conditions for teaching diversity-reflective skills to educational professionals with the help of play materials. The

materials used are diversity-reflective because they make diversity characteristics visible and reflectable. The question is how the use of these play materials can support children's agency and participation against the backdrop of diversity. Studies show that the use of diversity-reflective play materials represents the diversity of family and children's lifestyles, improves children's opportunities for participation (Wagner, 2017) and can contribute to diversity-conscious professionalisation (Cloos and Garbade, 2026). Daycare centres should ensure the comprehensive participation of all children, taking diversity into account (Bätge et al., 2021). Diversity-oriented concepts (Wagner, 2017) emphasise the importance of countering discrimination and teaching democratic values. From a social constructivist perspective (Fenstermaker and West, 2013), they focus on social differences and the associated opportunities for participation. The project uses ethnographic methods to investigate how diversity is addressed pedagogically in ten daycare centres. The participant observations and interviews collected are evaluated using grounded theory (Strauss, 1994). The findings are used to develop an app-supported training concept. The studies were reviewed by the ethics committee and judged to be ethically unobjectionable. A signed informed consent was obtained from all participants. The results of the study show that the dilemmatic challenges observed in educational practice when dealing with diversity can be used in the app developed in the project to train professionals in diversity skills. The app-based training concept for professionals is available free of charge.

app-supported training, diversity, play materials, ethnography, professionalisation

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

The project is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education, Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus) as part of the ‘Integration through Education’ programme.

Ambiguities in responses to children’s superdiversity in early childhood education and care in Finland

Presenters:
Eija Sevón, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Eija Sevón, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Mari Vuorisalo, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Niina Rutanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and languages has led to greater diversity among children and their families in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland. This highlights the need for research-based understanding that examines how ECEC institutions respond to diversity and address the vulnerabilities minoritised children and their families face in ECEC. This presentation draws on superdiversity, viewing diversity as multidimensional, relational and context-dependent. It combines ECEC research with language policy research and diversity science as theoretical foundations. Diversity science conceptualises (super)diversity as the recognition of differences within and across groups while foregrounding the structural inequalities through which these differences are produced and maintained. Methodologically, the Social Inclusion and Diversity in ECEC (SITES) project, with an ethnographic design, aims to explore superdiversity in ECEC by combining the views of children, parents and professionals in four ECEC settings. This demands reliance on ethical principles to develop considerate ways of conducting research with these participant groups (Bertram et al., 2025). These ethical considerations encompass clear and accessible communication during the recruitment of participants, continuous ethical reflection on voluntariness, dignity and privacy throughout data collection, and sensitivity to children’s embodied responses as expressions of consent and assent. The preliminary findings suggest ambiguities in responses to children’s superdiversity in ECEC institutions in Finland. These include language and understandable communication, equity in children’s participatory rights and learning, professionals’ cultural competence and awareness, and collaboration with parents. The SITES project, thus,

contributes to the discussions concerning equity, wellbeing, and the possibilities of participation for diverse children and their families in ECEC.

equity, ethnography, language, participation, superdiversity

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

Symposium D14 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

PLAY AND AGENCY IN STEM

Chaired by: Jenni Vartiainen, University of Helsinki, Finland

The function of play in preschool science education: A curriculum emphasis perspective

Presenters:
Angelica Siverskog, Mälardalen University, Sweden
Johanna Larsson, Mälardalen University, Sweden

All authors:
Angelica Siverskog, Mälardalen university, Sweden
Johanna Larsson, Mälardalen university, Sweden

This study examines how play appears in teachers' descriptions of science teaching in preschool. Although play is central in preschool, research raises concerns about "schoolification" and children's participation in science as democratic citizens. Play and learning can be understood as intertwined processes in which features of play - particularly imagination - support children's agency, engagement and understanding (Broström, 2017; Fleer, 2019). This study draws on curriculum emphases for science teaching (Leden et al., 2025; Roberts, 1982) and conceptualizations of play (Pramling et al., 2019). The study is situated within a qualitative interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).Eight preschool teachers participated, recruited through convenience sampling based on geographical accessibility and availability. Data consist of interviews and science walks (Fleer et al., 2014) where teachers described their science-teaching practices, analyzed using directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Ethical guidlines from the Swedish Research Council's (2017) were followed and informed consent was obtained. Four emphases were most prominent: (a) correct explanation, (b) everyday coping, (c) scientific methods, and (d) self as explainer. Play appeared as (a) a bridge between children's experiences and scientific knowledge, (b) a way of embodying science experiences, (c) an ambivalent strategy for encouraging exploration, (d) a source of curiosity and interest. Findings show that teachers value play but often struggle to integrate it meaningfully into science teaching. By combining curriculum emphases with theories of play, the study contributes to discussions about schoolification and clarifies how teachers draw on play in ways that both challenge and reproduce disciplinary expectations in preschool science.

science education, play, ECE teachers' perspectives, curriculum emphasis, science walk

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

Materially Enacted Agency: Toddlers' Embodied Science with Water in ECEC

Presenters:
Beatrice Hansen, Stockholm University, Sweden

All authors:
Beatrice Hansen, Stockholm University, Sweden

This paper argues that toddlers' embodied and non-verbal engagements with water in ECEC expand what counts as science education by showing how agency and participation are materially enacted through sensory experimentation. It asks how 1–2-year-olds' bodily encounters with water can be understood as participatory forms of early science learning. Research shows that scientific concepts emerge through children's playful material engagements (Areljung, 2019; de Freitas & Palmer, 2016; Günther-Hanssen, 2020), and that infants and toddlers demonstrate early capacities for causal reasoning and exploration (Gopnik, 2012). Relational approaches further reconceptualise water as an active pedagogical participant (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016; Elkin Postila, 2019, 2023). However, toddlers' embodied participation in scientific phenomena—particularly among 1–2-year-olds in ECEC—remains under-theorised within science education research. Drawing on posthuman phenomenology (Neimanis, 2017), bodies are conceptualised as relational and transcorporeal, with agency emerging in encounters rather than residing within the individual child. Situated within a qualitative interpretive paradigm and informed by post-qualitative methodology, the study employs sensorial ethnography in two ECEC settings. Data were co-produced with 21 toddlers and educators over four months through video and fieldnotes. Informed consent and ongoing assent were negotiated through situated responsiveness in collaboration with educators. Preliminary findings indicate that toddlers' repeated yet never identical variations—pressing, pouring, immersing and throwing—generate embodied expectations of force, resistance, buoyancy and flow. Agency materialises as rhythmic coordination between bodies and materials, where anticipation, stillness and sensory immersion constitute non-verbal forms of participation. Recognising these materially enacted practices broadens epistemic possibilities for science learning and supports more inclusive and democratic participation in ECEC.

posthuman phenomenology, toddlers, embodied science, material agency, non-verbal participation

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

Task deviations in young children's science education

Presenters:
Jenni Vartiainen, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Jenni Vartiainen, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study investigates young children's deviations from task-oriented activity during playful inquiry in science education. Previous research has examined children's participation in scientific literacy practices from multiple perspectives (Roy et al., 2025). However, children's participation that emerges through task deviation remains underexplored. Task deviations have the potential to illuminate what kinds of knowledge children find meaningful to produce and how their participation in scientific culture unfolds. The study is grounded in a cultural-historical perspective (Roth et al., 2012) and Third Space theory (Moje et al., 2004), which conceptualizes spaces where marginalized knowledge and discourses can be bridged. Young children are rarely positioned as capable agents who can participate in and transform scientific culture; consequently, their participation can be seen as marginalized (Shamos, 1995). The video data (810 minutes) were collected from six children (ages 4–5). The volunteer teacher implemented a program with her group comprising nine inquiry-based science units. All children participated, but only those with consent were recorded. Data were analyzed using multimodal interaction analysis. Research permission was obtained from the municipality, guardians, and children. Children could stop recording at any time, and filming was halted if they showed signs of discomfort. Data were stored on a password-protected drive, and anonymity was carefully protected. After transliteration, all identifying information was removed. Three types of

scripts were identified when a child deviated from a task: merging, convergent, and parallel. Children's scientific literacy practices benefit if the teacher seeks to form merging scripts with children. This study highlights the openness of playful inquiry, which respects different scripts.

scientific literacy, cultural-historical, third space, science inquiry, qualitative study

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

Symposium D15 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

PROGRESSING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS INECE PRACTICE

Chaired by: Ingibjorg Sigurdardottir, University of Iceland, Iceland

"I Can't Believe That We Didn't Ratify It, But I Can": U.S. Early Childhood Educators Making Sense of the UNCRC

Presenters:
Em Clark, Drexel University, United States

All authors:
Em Clark, Drexel University, United States

This study investigates how early childhood educators in the United States produce meaning around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC influences early childhood policy internationally, yet the United States has not ratified it (Blanchard, 2015). Although educators' interpretations of rights are recognised as crucial to implementation (Bae, 2010; Banko-Bal & Guler-Yildiz, 2021; Barros et al., 2024), research examining contexts where children's rights lack formal policy mandates is limited. The study is guided by childism (Biswas et al, 2024; Wall, 2008), which foregrounds children as rights-holders and interrogates power relations shaping whose knowledge and interests prevail in educational systems. The study employed narrative inquiry. Ten educators working across a variety of early childhood settings participated in three rounds of focus groups, journaling, and researcher reflexive memoing. Ethical procedures received IRB approval and included informed participant consent, voluntary participation, pseudonyms, and member-checking. Reflexive thematic analysis showed that educators encountered the UNCRC as newly visible yet morally urgent. Limited prior knowledge quickly shifted toward sadness, anger, and an awareness that recognising children's rights would demand confrontation with entrenched commitments to parental rights, neoliberalism, and compliance-oriented systems. Participants linked non-ratification to fragile public investment in early education and to doubts about whether institutions would stand behind educators attempting rights-based practice. By examining educator sensemaking in this context, the study advances international discussions by demonstrating how rights commitments are understood without legal policy mandates or cultural support. The findings highlight the need for professional and political infrastructures that support enactment without isolating individual educators as risk-bearers.

children's rights, UNCRC, teacher sensemaking, childism, implementation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Rights on Paper, Rights in Practice? Integrating the UNCRC into Early Childhood Teacher Education in Croatia, Iceland and Ireland

Presenters:

Ingibjorg Sigurdardottir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Adrijana Višnjić-Jevtić, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia
Rita Melia, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

All authors:
Ingibjorg Sigurdardottir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Adrijana Višnjić-Jevtić, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia
Rita Melia, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

This study aims to examine how children's rights — grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) — are conceptualized, integrated, and enacted within initial early childhood teacher education (ITE) programs in Croatia, Iceland, and Ireland. While scholarship on children's rights education has grown substantially, its intersection with ITE — particularly in early childhood contexts — remains underexplored (Quennerstedt, 2016). Existing studies highlight persistent gaps between policy commitments to the UNCRC and translation into teacher preparation programs, noting that student teachers lack knowledge of and confidence in rights-based approaches (Višnjić-Jevtić & Rajić, 2024). The study draws on a rights-based education framework anchored in the UNCRC, which frames children as rights-holders and positions teachers as key mediators of rights realization in practice (Lundy, 2007). The analytical coding matrix operationalizes rights integration across five dimensions: rights framework, teacher education focus, pedagogical approach, policy and curriculum embedding, and student voice and participation. The study adopts interpretive, qualitative-comparative paradigm based on document analysis of official ITE programs and learning outcome frameworks from Croatia, Iceland, and Ireland. The study relies on publicly available academic literature and institutional policy documents, and all sources were properly cited. Preliminary findings reveal that across all three contexts, rights-based pedagogy and student voice in ITE remain underdeveloped, with theoretical knowledge prevailing over applied, participatory competencies. Findings advocate for intentional UNCRC embedding in ITE, aligning policy commitments with practice. Teacher educators are urged to adopt participatory, rights-based models that foster transformative professional formation across European ECE contexts.

children's rights, rights-based education, comparative study, initial teacher education, UNCRC

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

The presentation is part of an Erasmus+ funded project no.2025-1-IS01-KA220-HED-000351705.

Enacting the UNCRC Across Educational Levels: Patterns of Continuity and Discontinuity in Children's Rights in Iceland

Presenters:
Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Margrét Björnsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland

All authors:
Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Margrét Björnsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Anna Magnea Hreinsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland

The aim of the project was to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in preschools, compulsory schools, and after-school centres in Iceland by examining how children's rights are understood and enacted across educational levels. The work builds on Nordic and international research indicating

that, despite formal commitments to participation, children's influence in educational settings is often limited to predefined choices rather than genuine shared decision-making (Einarsdóttir, 2022; Johansson & Emilson, 2016). Grounded in the principles of the UNCRC and democratic education, the analysis draws on Roger Hart's (1992, 2008) Ladder of Participation to examine the depth of children's participation and variations in influence. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach, data were collected through interviews with educators/staff across the three educational settings at two points in time, enabling analysis of developments in perceptions, practices, and implementation. Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation guided the project, and anonymity was ensured (Codes of Ethics for Research in Icelandic Universities, 2020). Findings show patterns of continuity and discontinuity in children's rights education within and between school levels. Although respect for children and their competences was widely expressed, participation varied across contexts, moving up and down Hart's Ladder. Discontinuity was most visible where structures were unclear, knowledge limited, or tensions arose between promoting participation and ensuring safety and professional responsibility. The findings underscore the need for coherent structures, sustained professional development, and systematic follow-up to ensure consistent rights-based practice across educational settings.

children's rights, participation, continuity, preschool, primary school, after-school centre

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The project is funded by the municipality of Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.

Symposium D16 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

ROLE OF DIGITAL RESOURCES IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Chaired by: Sally Peters, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Inclusive Play and Agency in ECEC: Special Educators' Perspectives on Physical Environments

Presenters:
Tone Rove Nilsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Tone Rove Nilsen, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study examines how indoor physical environments shape inclusive play opportunities for children with special educational needs in Norwegian early childhood education and care. It investigates how special educators perceive spatial design, material availability, and environmental affordances as supporting children's participation, agency, and sense of belonging through play. Research underscores the importance of play for children's well-being, development and participation (Berti et al., 2019). However, the role of the physical environment and its influence on inclusive play remain underexplored in early childhood inclusion research (Moore & Zweig, 2021). The study draws on sociocultural theories, emphasising Vygotsky's (1978) view of play as a key arena for agency and collaborative meaning-making, and on affordance theory (Gibson,1979), which highlights how environments invite or restrict participation. Concepts of inclusion and belonging connect the study directly to democratic values in early childhood settings. An anonymous digital questionnaire comprising closed- and open-ended items is distributed to approximately 50 special educators. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) are used to identify environmental enablers and barriers to children's inclusion and participatory agency in play. The study adheres to the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Participants received sufficient information and gave consent. The study is approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research, and data is securely stored Preliminary insights indicate that physical environments, with layouts, interior and play materials, shape children's

ability to initiate and negotiate play, which are fundamental expressions of participation and agency. Findings may contribute to practices that promote equitable participation and playful agency for all children.

physical environment, agency, inclusion, play materials, SEN

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

Now, Next… or Swipe? Rethinking Visual Supports in Early Years Practice: A Comparative Action Research Study Exploring Low-Tech and High-Tech Visual Supports on Children's Development in London Nurseries

Presenters:
Maria Goncalves, London Institute of Early Years, United Kingdom
Conor Bathgate, University of East London, United Kingdom

All authors:
Maria Goncalves, London Institute of Early Years, United Kingdom
Conor Bathgate, University of East London, United Kingdom

This study investigates the comparative role of low-tech and high-tech visual supports within Ordinarily Available Provision across 15 London nurseries. It examines the impact on children's communication, engagement, independence and emotional regulation, alongside educators' confidence, implementation fidelity and anchoring of practice. Visual supports are recognised as evidence-based practice for autistic children and those with communication needs (Wong et al., 2015; Hume et al., 2021). Traditional tools, including visual timetables and Now & Next boards, are associated with improved predictability and engagement (Dettmer et al., 2013; Meadan et al., 2018). Digital approaches, including tablet-based schedules, show potential for promoting independence (Fage et al., 2016). However, comparative research within authentic Early Years contexts remains limited, particularly in mainstream settings. Framed within a critical participatory action-research paradigm, educators are positioned as reflective co-researchers shaping inclusive pedagogy. Visual supports are conceptualised as relational and environmental practices rather than neutral tools. A two-phase action-research design was implemented: six weeks of low-tech use, followed by a two-weeks transition and six-weeks of high-tech implementation. Data includes repeated communication assessments, educator questionnaires and weekly reflective logs. Quantitative data will be analysed descriptively; qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis. Informed consent was obtained from parents/staff. Participation is voluntary, and data will be anonymised and securely stored in line with EECERA (2024) ethical guidelines. SENCOs will act as co-researchers to support shared decision-making. The study expects to identify strengths, limitations, and contextual factors influencing sustainable visual support integration. The study aims to generate educator-led evidence to inform equitable and sustainable integration of visual supports in inclusive Early-Years practice.

inclusion, action-research, send, early-years practice, visual support

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

Fostering Children's Agency through Hybrid Play: Educators' Perspectives on Inclusion in the Digital Age

Presenters:
Stefania Torri, Free University of Bolzano/Bozen, Italy

All authors:
Vanessa Macchia, Free University of Bolzano/Bozen, Italy
Stefania Torri, Free University of Bolzano/Bozen, Italy

Silvia Maggiolini, Catholic University of Milan, Italy
Moira Sannipoli, University of Perugia, Italy
Gianluca Amadori, European Univesity of Rome, Italy

This paper examines how hybrid configurations of analogue and digital play materials may foster children's agency and inclusive participation in ECEC. Drawing on findings from the ThinkINg Big research project, it analyses Italian educators' perceptions of play materials as mediators of engagement. Play is recognised as a fundamental right (United Nations, 1989) and a key site of meaning-making within socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978/1933). Research on digital play highlights expanded possibilities (Fleer, 2016), while studies on material affordances emphasise the creative value of open-ended resources. Policy discourses remain cautious about digital integration in ECEC (OECD, 2023), and this contribution reframes hybrid play beyond a digital–analogue divide as a pedagogical space for agency. Within a socio-constructivist paradigm, the study frames inclusion through the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, focusing on interactions between children and environmental factors, including technological affordances (WHO, 2007). Mixed-methods design used an adapted Inclusive ECEC-Environment Self-Reflection Tool (Björck-Åkesson et al., 2017), completed by 215 Italian ECEC professionals. Area 5 ("Materials for All Children") was examined using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; informed consent was obtained electronically, and data were securely stored. Findings recognise materials fostering peer interaction, creativity and agency through collaboration, yet reveal gaps in accessibility, adaptation, cultural diversity, finances, training. Interactions with digital tools hold potential for hybrid play by extending analogue activities and supporting shared exploration, collaboration, imagination. Hybrid play is proposed as a practice enhancing children's agency and participatory rights in ECEC, provided educators receive targeted professional development and policy support.

children's agency, hybrid play, inclusive education, digital age, ECEC

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

Symposium D17 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 13, floor -1

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Chaired by: Sabiha Üzüm, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

Preschool teachers' perceptions related to children's social competence (SC)

Presenters:
Clodie Tal, Hemdat College of Education, Lewinsky-Wingate Academic Center, Israel

All authors:
Clodie Tal, Hemdat College of Education, Lewinsky-Wingate Academic Center, Israel

The goal of this presentation is to show Israeli ECE teachers' perceptions of social competence (SC) and its components, and of their role in enhancing children's social-emotional (SE) competencies. Bierman & Erath (2006) explore how SC develops in early childhood, why it matters for long-term adjustment, and what kinds of interventions, classroom practices, and family supports effectively promote it. Sroufe's ecological definition of SC (Sroufe et al, 1996) is employed, and Hinde's (1997) foundational distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. A quantitative study based on a questionnaire filled in by 300 ECE teachers before professional development courses focused on SC and 27 ECE student teachers addressing their perceptions of foundational attributes of SC and their and the parents' role in promoting SC in preschoolers. Percentages of

agreement/disagreement with statements defining attributes of SC and adults' roles were calculated. Questionnaires were anonymous, and participants provided consent to participate in the study. About a third of participants identified SC as social dominance and friendships as bearing the same meaning as SC. Variation was found to be related to participants' perceptions of teachers' and parents' roles in promoting SC. It is important in the guidance of ECE teachers to emphasize the symmetrical nature of peer relationships and the distinction between friendship and social competence, and to discuss their and the parents' roles in promoting SC. It seems worth investigating possible cultural variation related to teachers' perceptions of SC and of dominance characterizing peer relationships in particular.

social competence, peer relations, preschool children, social competence, enhancement, teacher perceptions

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Programme for Early Years Practitioners

Presenters:
Shirley Martin, University College Cork, Ireland

All authors:
Shirley Martin, University College Cork, Ireland
Aoife Lynch, University College Cork, Ireland

This study evaluates the effectiveness of an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) training programme in enhancing Early Years Practitioners' (EYPs) knowledge, skills, and practices to support young children's social-emotional development. A growing evidence base highlights the importance of practitioner capacity-building in supporting early development, particularly in contexts of socio-economic disadvantage. IECMH-informed approaches are associated with improved child outcomes in emotional regulation and relationships (Brocklesby and Scales, 2022). The study is informed by IECMH theory, attachment theory, and relational pedagogy, emphasising responsive caregiving, co-regulation, and early relationships. It also draws on Ireland's national early years curriculum and quality frameworks and the Nurture Programme. A mixed-methods evaluation design was employed across three training rollouts (2021–2024). The programme was delivered by Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG, a community-based organisation in Cork city working to reduce child poverty and promote early childhood development through prevention and early intervention. Pre- and post-training questionnaires assessed changes in EYP knowledge and practice. EYP-child interactions were observed using the Child Caregiver Interaction Scale (CCIS) at baseline and follow-up. Ethical approval was granted by the University College Cork Social Research Ethics Committee with procedures in place to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Findings indicate significant improvements in EYPs' understanding of IECMH, confidence in supporting emotional regulation, and engagement with parents. Interaction quality improved, and mentoring supported reflective practice and sustained change. Findings highlight the value of community-based IECMH training and mentoring models in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts & supporting investment in workforce development to enhance children's social-emotional well-being

infant and early childhood mental health, professional development, community-based intervention

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The Elusive Link Between Temperament and Emotional Competence: A Meta-Analysis of Early Childhood Research

Presenters:

Sabiha Üzüm, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye
Mert Nedim Mercan, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

All authors:
Sabiha Üzüm, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye
Mert Nedim Mercan, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

This meta-analysis aims to synthesize empirical findings on temperament as a predictor of emotional competence in early childhood. From a theoretical perspective, temperament and emotional competence are predicted to be related (Denham, 2003); nevertheless, empirical findings remain inconsistent (e.g., Thompson et al., 2020; Yağmurlu & Altan, 2010), and no quantitative evidence synthesis has yet explored the magnitude and direction of this relationship. Emotional competence is a multidimensional construct involving three interrelated domains: emotional expression, emotion knowledge, and emotion regulation (Denham, 2007). Research has indicated that emotional competence is critical in children's well-being (Bisquerra-Alzina & Pérez-Escoda, 2007), and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011). Temperament has been conceptualized as a biologically grounded trait-based framework encompassing reactivity and self-regulation (Rothbart, 1989). Within the PRISMA framework, systematic database searches (e.g., WoS, Scopus) were conducted to find the correlation coefficients between the constructs, with typically developed children between the ages of zero and eight. For the analyses, publicly available published data were used in line with EECERA's ethical standards. Results revealed a null overall effect (r=0.0074, p=.762, 95% CI[-0.0404, 0.0552]). While there was a high degree of variation between studies (I2>92%), the tested moderators (mean age and trait-type) failed to explain this variance. The high residual heterogeneity (p<.0001) suggests that other unmeasured factors are likely driving the differences between study outcomes. Possible unmeasured factors that may cluster in two categories, as theoretical (e.g., parenting styles, and socialization agents) and methodological (e.g., file-drawer effect between published and unpublished studies), are discussed with limitations and future research implications.

temperament, emotional competence, early childhood, meta-analysis, moderation

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

The authors received no funding for the research.

Symposium D18 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 14, floor -1

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Chaired by: Jackie Brien, The University of Melbourne, Australia

Lesson Study as a professional development strategy in the training of early childhood education teachers

Presenters:
Elena González-Alfaya, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain

All authors:
Elena González-Alfaya, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
Rosario Mérida-Serrano, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
María De Los Ángeles Olivares-García, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
Julia Rodríguez-Carrillo, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain

This study explores Lesson Study as a professional development strategy in the training of early childhood education teachers. The research aims to examine how participation in collaborative Lesson Study cycles (Planning, teaching and observing, debriefing, revising, and reflecting) influences pre-service teachers' pedagogical knowledge, reflective practice, and instructional competence in early childhood settings. Lesson study, originating in Japan (Lewis, 2014), is widely recognised as an effective model of collaborative professional development. Research by Pérez and Gómez (2021) highlights lesson study as a powerful approach for fostering reflective inquiry and professional dialogue in teacher education. The study is grounded in social constructivist theory and reflective practice theory. The conceptual framework positions collaborative planning, observation, feedback, and reflection as interconnected processes that support professional growth and pedagogical competence. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative case study methodology was employed. Data were collected through lesson plans, classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to professional learning and pedagogical development. Ethical approval was secured. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Findings in the case study developed in Spain indicate that Lesson Study improves importance elements of the professional development (reflective practice and collaborative competence). Additionally Lesson Study fosters professional collaboration and bridges the gap between theory and practice in teacher education programmes The study supports integrating lesson study into early childhood teacher education programmes and institutional policies that sustain collaborative professional development models.

lesson study, early childhood education, initial teacher education, professional development, reflective practice

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

Children's Voices and Culturally Sensitive Teacher Development

Presenters:
Manon Boily, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

All authors:
Manon Boily, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada
Nathalie Goulet, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada
Sara Lachance, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada
Tamie Jean-Baptiste, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada
Mahdjouba Abbas, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

The research aimed to examine how the professional development program implemented supported the development of multicultural competence. Adopting a culturally sensitive approach can improve the quality of the educational experience for children from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds (Gay, 2018). The professional development of early childhood educators plays a crucial role in deepening this approach by fostering the development of their multicultural competence (Lin et al., 2025). Multicultural competence includes awareness, knowledge of diverse teaching strategies, and skills for culturally sensitive practices (Spanierman et al., 2011). A professional development system has been put in place to support this competence. Fifteen preschool teachers, each with about 15 children per class from diverse cultural backgrounds, participated in the study. A sequential mixed methodology was adopted (Briand & Larivière, 2014). The first phase used two assessment instruments: the Multicultural Competency Scale for Teachers (Spanierman et al., 2011) and the Multicultural Attitudes Scale (Ponterotto et al., 1998). The second phase constituted communities of practice aimed at highlighting development levers. Practice stories were integrated to encourage reflection while providing access to children's experiences with new approaches implemented in the classroom (Silo et al., 2025). Teachers and parents gave informed consent, with attention to cultural sensitivity and psychological safety. Participation is voluntary, and both children and adults can refuse or withdraw at any time. The results show that each stage of professional development strengthens

multicultural competence and, improves children's educational experience in a culturally sensitive approach. The discussion focuses on the importance of taking children's voices into account.

preschool teachers, professional development, culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural competence

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Engaging in professional reading: Inspiring agency, learning and professional practice in early childhood

Presenters:
Jackie Brien, The University of Melbourne, Australia

All authors:
Jackie Brien, The University of Melbourne, Australia

My doctoral research aimed to explore how a range of early childhood professionals experienced the contribution of professional reading to their engagement with evidence-informed practice. Australian educators and leaders are expected to engage in evidence-informed professional practice (COAG, 2009; DET, 2016; ECA, 2016) that reflects the best interests of young children (ECA, 2016; UNCRC, 1989). Professional reading of early childhood professionals, unlike schoolteachers, has not previously been researched (Powell, 2006; Rickinson et al., 2021; Rudland and Kemp, 2004). My research was informed by ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and professional learning theories (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Rickinson et al., 2021). Using an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methodology, research methods included questionnaires followed by individual interviews. 43 educators and leaders self-selected to participate in this research following advertisement of the study in national e-newsletter. This research met Australian research requirements (NHMRC, 2025) through provision of informed consent for both questionnaires and interviews, and guarantee of anonymity. Participants had the right to withdraw but none chose to do so. For educators and leaders, professional reading was found to be integral to concepts of being ‘professional’ and led to deepened understanding of children and of evidence-based professional practice. For leaders, professional reading enabled them to support colleagues to understand concepts and evidence and be challenged to improve practice, positively influencing children’s learning, development and wellbeing. Specific examples of implications and potential actions to support professional reading will be outlined in the presentation - for educators, leaders, centres, professional organisations, universities and governments.

professional reading, professional learning, educator and leader professional practice, chid outcomes, policy implications

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium D19 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

THE ETHICS OF AI IN ECEC PRACTICE

Chaired by: Karen Murcia, Curtin University, Australia

Who cares? Artifical intelligence, ethics and early childhood education

Presenters:
Karen Murcia, Curtin University, Australia

All authors:
Karen Murcia, Curtin University, Australia
Sarsha Mennell, Curtin University, Australia
Emma Cross, Curtin University, Australia
Madeleine Dobson, Curtin University, Australia

Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) present opportunities and challenges for early childhood education. We aimed to interrogate AI and ethics in the early years. Reviewing research and key ethical frameworks guiding AI in education, this study critiques the ethical implications of AI integration in early childhood. Including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's ethical AI principles, alongside Australia's national early childhood education curriculum and policies. Framed by humanistic philosophy, this study emphasises the whole child and the importance of relationships and social connection in learning (Rogers, 1969; Maslow, 1959; Freire, 1972). Relationships between children and educators are fundamental to humanistic practices. Noddings' (1988) ethic of care highlights that empathy and responsiveness are essential to quality early childhood education. By synthesising international frameworks through a humanistic lens, this study highlights the importance of protecting children's rights, digital privacy, and developmental needs in AI era. Empirical research on the use of AI in early learning was critically examined. Children's rights in the digital era are central to this qualitative synthesis, integrating multiple sources, including frameworks, policies, and empirical studies, to generate higher-order ethical insights and guidelines. AI technologies have the potential to support teaching and learning experiences; however, their use raises ethical concerns. Central to this discussion is educators' pedagogical agency and their role in making informed decisions about AI integration. Guiding principles for teacher education are proposed (Murcia et al., 2025). Professional learning should support educators in ethically engaging with and critically reflecting on AI capabilities, limitations, and challenges in early years education.

artificial intelligence, ethics, early childhood education, informed decision making, humanistic philosophy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was funded by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child.

When AI Profiles the Child for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Critical Analysis of AI-Generated Representations

Presenters:
Sung Eun Jung, University of Arizona, United States

All authors:
Sung Eun Jung, University of Arizona, United States
Young Soo Ko, University of Arizona, United States
Go Eun Heo, Yonsei University, Republic of Korea

This qualitative study examines how large language model–based AI systems construct and represent profiles of young children in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy and analyzes AI-generated child profiles to identify embedded cultural assumptions, identity markers, and potential stereotypes. AI in education has been critically examined as a form of "engineered inequality" (Benjamin, 2019; Selwyn, 2022), in which sociotechnical systems may reproduce stereotypes of minoritized students (Perrotta & Selwyn, 2020), normalize overgeneralized cultural assumptions (Tao & Wang, 2024), and reinforce existing power imbalances (Noble, 2018). Guided by a Foucauldian lens that conceptualizes AI as "soft surveillance" and an "apparatus of domination" (Aradau & Bunz, 2022), this study approaches AI outputs not as neutral artifacts but as historically situated sociotechnical productions. Using a critical qualitative framework (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), the study employs the Marked Personas method (Cheng et al.,

2023) to generate 100 descriptive profiles and corresponding images through Gemini and ChatGPT. Textual data were analyzed using critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2011), and images were examined through critical content analysis (Short, 2017). Ethical considerations were ensured through systematic AI prompt documentation and cross-validated analytical procedures for enhancing transparency and interpretive credibility. Preliminary findings suggest that both systems over-associate children with simplified racial and linguistic markers and demonstrate patterns of hyper-visibility of children of color, emphasizing essentialized physical features in ways that may reinforce reductive representations relevant to culturally responsive pedagogy. The study highlights the need for equity-centered frameworks to evaluate AI in education beyond efficiency-driven metrics.

artificial intelligence, algorithmic representation of childhood, large language models in early childhood education, culturally responsive pedagogy, stereotypes in technology

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

AI in early childhood documentation and assessment: Voice and authorship

Presenters:
Kate Highfield, University of Canberra, Australia

All authors:
Kate Highfield, University of Canberra, Australia
Kelly Bittner, Southern Cross University, Australia

This research project examines current understandings of documentation and assessment within early childhood education and care and the place of digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) within these practices. This research builds on previous work that examines the impact of new technologies on the effectiveness of documentation and assessment (Blaisdell et al. 2021; Cowan & Flewitt, 2021; Goodman & Cherrington, 2017; Hooker, 2017). It extends current knowledge by creating discussion and debate around how this translates in an AI world. The study draws on postdigital theory which acknowledges the embedded and ubiquitous nature of digital technology, with its presence often unnoticed and unremarkable to users (Edwards, 2022; Kramer, 2014). This research is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, recognising that there are many ways of knowing and being. A scoping review methodology was employed (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), drawing on Saldaña's (1995) code-to-theory approach for thematic analysis. Ethical considerations focused on transparent methods, bias minimisation, privacy, and conflicts of interest, guided by the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics and AI-ethics frameworks when interrogating research. Findings from this review reinforce the importance of voice and inclusion when using AI. They demonstrate the evolution of digital technology as a tool and resource that can support effective documentation and assessment. However, questions arise about whose voice GenAI replaces in documentation and assessment processes. Findings from this research inform a larger study that examines the place of AI within and alongside other approaches. This includes careful consideration of the digital literacy needed to engage with AI effectively.

early childhood educators, assessment and evaluation, digital technology, GenAI, artificial intelligence

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

Symposium D20 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Chaired by: Grethe Kragh-Müller, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark

Parents' Temporal Perspectives of Prekindergarten/Kindergarten

Presenters:
Kristin Whyte, DePaul University, United States

All authors:
Kristin Whyte, DePaul University, United States
Beth Graue, University of Wisconsin-Madison, United States

We aim to show how temporally informed views of childhood in the U.S. shaped how parents made sense of their child's prekindergarten and kindergarten experiences. We put sociological theories of childhood into conversation with Bourdieu's (1986) work, roles played by emotional and racialized capital (Calarco, 2020; Cartwright, 2022; Underhill, 2019), and home-school relationships literature that is concerned with resource acquisition and readiness (Graue,1993; Lareau, 2003, 1993). We brought Uprichard (2008) and Hanson's (2017) work on temporality into conversation with ideas about children's agency (Gunnarsdottir, 2014; Prout 2011) to show how temporally informed views of childhood can help us better understand parental actions and experiences. This paper comes out of a case study on families' decision-making about public prekindergarten enrollment. We drew from semi-structured interviews with parents (N=51) on their prekindergarten and kindergarten experiences. We used an iterative thematic analysis process, moving between inductive and deductive coding and memo-writing. This study is IRB-approved. Consent was acquired and data de-identified. Issues of transparency and representation have been addressed throughout. The findings explain how parents' decisions were grounded in their pasts, as well as their children's more immediate moments/needs, imagined futures, and the relational nature of prekindergarten/childcare and kindergarten. Race, class, and language shaped families experiences, including the types of resources accessed. Implications call for schools to: design language policies that do not isolate children; understand how and why families seek diverse school settings, and ground their responses to families in equitable access; reimagine the alignment between prekindergarten and kindergarten expectations/practices by pushing early childhood pedagogies into kindergarten spaces.

home/school relationships, capital, temporality, agency, qualitative studies

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Agreements with our partners require that funders remain anonymous until paper is accepted for publication. (This paper is currently under review with Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education, we are working on revisions.)

Parents' Perceptions on Cooperation in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care: Associations with Parental Gender and Service Satisfaction

Presenters:
Lotta Saranko, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

All authors:
Lotta Saranko, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Eija Räikkönen, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Maarit Alasuutari, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

This study examines parents' perceptions of cooperation with early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators and how these perceptions relate to their service satisfaction. Parental gender is considered in both analyses. Parents are generally satisfied with cooperation (Drugli & Undheim, 2012), but their experiences vary depending on how their concerns are acknowledged (Almendingen et al., 2022). As well-functioning cooperation has been

associated with parent's satisfaction (Aleksić et al., 2024), we aim to explore these associations further. The study draws on theoretical models of the parent-educator relationship (Epstein, 2010; Lang et al., 2017) and applies the concept of cooperation. Service satisfaction is considered through dimensions of ECEC access and location and Educational preconditions principles (Saranko et al., 2025). Guided by postpositivist paradigm, quantitative methods were applied. The study applies survey data collected in the CHILDCARE project in 2016. Participants of the present study are parents of one-year-old children attending ECEC (N = 798). In accordance with EECERA ethical code (2024) prior ethical approval was obtained, participants received information on the study's purpose, procedure, and their rights; informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and withdrawal was possible at any time. Preliminary Mann-Whitney U-test results indicated no differences by parental gender in overall perceptions of parent-educator cooperation, although item-level analysis suggests that mothers are more initiative in cooperation. Exploratory structural equation modelling indicated that better-perceived cooperation is associated with higher service satisfaction across both dimensions, with no gender differences in these associations. These findings highlight the significance of well-functioning parent-educator cooperation for parents' perceptions of ECEC services.

parent-educator cooperation, service satisfaction, parents, mothers and fathers, Finland

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

This work was supported by grants from the Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä and Finnish Concordia Fund to Lotta Saranko. The research project was funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Research Council of Finland (SA293049).

Initiating and Developing Sensitive Topics in Early Childhood Education Plan Meetings

Presenters:
Mervi Riehunkangas, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

All authors:
Mervi Riehunkangas, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Maarit Alasuutari, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Miia Sainio, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Tanja Vehkakoski, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland

This qualitative study examines how sensitive topics are introduced and addressed in children's early childhood education and care (ECEC) plan meetings between educators and parents. The interaction between parents and ECEC educators has been examined particularly from the perspectives of advice-giving, adherence to a child's ECEC plan templates, and parental participation (Alasuutari, 2020; Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Hancock & Cheatham, 2021). Although sensitive topics and bringing up concerns with parents have been addressed in professional guidelines to educators (Eriksson & Arnkil, 2012; Petrovic et al., 2019), there is still little research on this matter. The theoretical framework of this study draws on professional-parent discussions (Pillet-Shore, 2015) and the concept of giving first information, which are used particularly in medicine (Taylor, 1988). The study is based on ethnomethodology as a research paradigm, examining how social order is produced in everyday interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). The data consist of 32 audio-recorded, naturally occurring ECEC plan meetings (38 parents and 33 educators) collected in four Finnish ECEC centers and analyzed through conversation analysis. Participants received a data protection notice, and informed consent was obtained from both educators and parents. They were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. The study generates knowledge about how sensitive topics are initiated in ECEC plan meetings and deepens understanding of interactional practices used in professional conversations. The findings have practical relevance for both pre-service and in-service early childhood teacher education, particularly in supporting teachers' competence in addressing emotionally charged topics.

conversation analysis, early childhood education, ECEC plan meetings, professional-parent interaction, sensitive topics

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

The Foundation for Municipal Development (KAKS) has granted my research €20,000 in funding, which covers full-time work from August 1, 2025, to September 30, 2026. I am currently applying for funding for full-time work for the period after that.

Symposium D21 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

(SoS): A SNAPSHOT OF PLAY IN ECEC THROUGH POLICIES, RESEARCH, AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Chaired by: Annerieke Boland, University of applied sciences, Netherlands

The state of play in Dutch ECEC: policy, research and practical experiences

Presenters:
Annerieke Boland, University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

All authors:
Annerieke Boland, University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands
Marjan Kan, IPABO University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands
Elizabeth Wynberg, IPABO University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

This study explores systemic conditions, professional needs, and pedagogical challenges in integrating play-based practices in Dutch ECEC. It contributes to a cross-national comparison within the Erasmus+ EDUPLAY project, promoting high-quality ECEC through education and play. Many Dutch ECEC professionals are uncertain about their role in play (Prins et al., 2025; Tajik & Singer, 2021; Van Rossum et al., 2025), reflecting an international trend. This study emphasizes the teacher's role in facilitating and guiding play (Loizou & Trawick-Smith, 2022), but not in isolation. From an ecological perspective, the quality of play-based ECEC emerges from cultural, relational, and institutional factors. Systemic policy and pedagogical conditions shape how play is enacted in practice. Play itself is conceptualized through socio-cultural theory and children's rights (see position paper of the SIG Rethinking play, Avgitidou et al., 2017). Following the transnational protocol, Dutch policy documents and research on play were reviewed. Interviews with 19 ECEC-teachers and 5 headteachers, and observations by pre-service teachers focused on professional needs. Data were thematically analyzed. Participants gave informed consent. The interview protocols ensured all voices were heard. Play is highly valued in Dutch ECEC but inconsistently implemented due to fragmented policies, academic pressures, and unclear national guidelines. Teachers face time constraints, limited resources, and uncertainty in guiding play. High-quality play depends on teacher presence, responsive interaction, and well-designed environments. Enhancing play-based pedagogy requires systemic change: integrating play into curriculum and inspection frameworks, protecting time, and investing in professional development. Alignment between policy, leadership, and practice is crucial to ensure all children access high-quality play supporting holistic development.

play, ECEC policy, teacher education, netherlands, transnational research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project is funded by Erasmus+ KA2.

From Policy Vision to Pedagogical Practice: Play in Portuguese Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Sofia Magalhães, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

All authors:
Sofia Magalhães, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal
Silvia Barros, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal
Sandra Nogueira, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal
Luis Ribeiro, Association of Professionals in Early Childhood Education (APEI), Portugal
Cristina Mesquita, Transdisciplinary Research Center, Portugal
Sara Barros Araújo, Centro de Investigação e Inovação em Educação (inED), Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

Within the Erasmus⁺ EDUPLAY project, this paper examines the systemic conditions, professional needs, and pedagogical tensions shaping the enactment of play-based practices in Portuguese ECEC, contributing to a shared cross-national analysis of play. European research highlights tensions between rhetorical endorsement of play and increasing accountability and school-readiness pressures (Pyle & Bigelow, 2014). High-quality ECEC is foundational for lifelong learning, and play supports cognitive, social, and emotional development (Melhuish et al., 2015). Yet sustaining play-based approaches remains challenging. Informed by socio-cultural and rights-based perspectives, as well as by the SIG Rethinking play position paper (Avgitidou et al., 2017), play is conceptualized as a culturally situated, relational, and pedagogically mediated practice embedded in institutional and policy contexts. This lens shifts analysis from individual teacher capacity to the policy–practice ecology shaping play enactment. Using a harmonized transnational protocol, the study combined desk research (23 policy documents, 12 empirical studies) with qualitative fieldwork (4 focus groups, 5 interviews, 10 observations). Data were analyzed thematically. Participants gave consent, children gave assent, and all voices were encouraged. Results indicate that Portuguese policy positions play a foundational curricular role. However, enactment varies across settings, shaped by curricular intentions, administrative priorities, resources, and pre- and in-service teacher education on play. Despite inclusive frameworks and initiatives, cultural hesitations and uneven resources remain. Overall, these results reflect transnational patterns while highlighting distinctive governance and inclusion features. Findings highlight the need to align structural conditions and teacher education with curricular commitments to sustain play-based pedagogy.

play, ECEC policy, teacher education, Portugal, transnational research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project is funded by Erasmus+ KA2

From Policy to Practice: Challenges to Play in Lithuanian ECEC

Presenters:
Milda Bredikyte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Milda Bredikyte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

As part of a cross-national study on play, this paper examines the systemic conditions, professional needs, and pedagogical challenges shaping play-based practices in Lithuanian ECEC settings. The analysis is situated within the Erasmus+ EDUPLAY project, which aims to promote high-quality ECEC through education and play. In the absence of extensive research on teachers' attitudes toward children's play in Lithuania, international research is used to highlight the importance of teachers' roles in facilitating and guiding play (Loizou & Trawick-Smith, 2022). Drawing on cultural-historical and sociocultural theory, as well as the position paper on play by the Special Interest Group (SIG) Rethinking Play (Avgitidou et al., 2017), play is conceptualized as a central mode of children's learning, development, and participation in culture. The study employed a harmonized transnational protocol combining desk research, field observations, and individual and focus group interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study was conducted in accordance with the EECERA Ethical Code. All participants gave informed consent and could withdraw at any time. Interview protocols ensured all voices were heard. National data analysis revealed that play is supported in Lithuanian ECEC policy (ages 1–6) but remains weak in pre-primary education. Limited teacher preparation, time constraints, and parental pressure hinder play-based practices. The findings highlight the need for practical, play-focused teacher training for pre-service and in-service teachers and headteachers, as well as for strengthening teachers' confidence and parental understanding of the value of play-based pedagogy.

play, ECEC policy, teacher education, Lithuania, transnational research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project is funded by Erasmus+ KA2

Symposium D22 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 24, floor 1

(SoS): CHILDREN`S WELL-BEING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

Chaired by: Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Children's well-being in Norwegian ECEC from child and teacher perspectives: Associations with individual and contextual factors

Presenters:
Catharina van Trijp, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Catharina van Trijp, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ragnhild Lenes, University of Stavanger, Norway
Dieuwer ten Braak, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study examines children's well-being in Norwegian ECEC from child and teacher perspectives, exploring associations with background characteristics, ECEC center, teacher–child relationships, and teacher well-being. Children's well-being in ECEC reflects individual characteristics and children's comfort with the physical setting, caregivers, and peers (De Schipper et al., 2004). However, research on child well-being is dominated by adult reports (Fane et al., 2016). Therefore, this study includes both child- and teacher-reported well-being. The study follows Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework, conceptualizing well-being as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Guided by a post-positivist paradigm, patterns are examined quantitatively while acknowledging well-being as complex and context-dependent. Data were drawn from the SELMA project including 1,150 children aged 4.5–5.5 years from 111 ECEC centers. Children's well-being was measured using HIFAMS (Allen et al., 2017), while teachers reported children's well-being with LICW-D (De Schipper et al., 2004), relationship quality (STRS-SF; Pianta, 2001), and their own well-being (Workplace PERMA Profiler; Butler & Kern, 2016). Analyses

included correlations, t-tests, ANOVA, and intraclass correlations. The study was approved by Norwegian SIKT and followed ethical guidelines (e.g., caregivers' written consent, children's oral consent, secure data storage). Preliminary results indicate high child well-being. Gender and parental education were weak predictors. Teacher-reported child well-being varied between ECEC centers, whereas child self-reports did not. Teacher–child relationship quality and teacher well-being were strongly associated with teacher-reported child well-being, but not child-reported well-being. Policies and practices should promote multi-informant approaches including children's perspectives, and support teacher well-being and teacher–child relationships.

children's well-being, teacher well-being, ECEC, teacher–child relationships, Norway

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

Examining the association between children`s self-reported well-being and the quality of Norwegian ECEC

Presenters:
Ragnhild Lenes, Associate Professor, Norway
Svanaug Lunde, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Ragnhild Lenes, Associate Professor, Norway
Svanaug Lunde, University of Stavanger, Norway
Thomas Moser, University of Stavanger, Norway
Rasmus Kleppe, Kanvas Competence, Norway

This study investigates associations between different aspects of children`s self-reported well-being and key dimensions of ECEC quality. It is important to include children`s perspectives in research (United Nations 1989). Prior studies demonstrate that children`s subjective well-being is related to ECEC centers` process quality (Sluiter et al., 2025). The Norwegian Framework Plan emphasizes to foster children's well-being as a central aim of high-quality practice. The study draws on theories of subjective well-being (e.g., Seligman, 2011) and research on ECEC process quality (Mashburn et al., 2008), viewing well-being as multidimensional and shaped by children's everyday interactions and environments. Situated within a post-positivistic paradigm, the study includes 235 children aged 4-5 years who completed the EQUAL CHILD, which involves a structured conversation with the teacher. ECEC quality was assessed in 26 ECEC groups using the structured observational tool EBBA. Quantitative analyses in SPSS examined associations between well-being indicators and quality dimensions. The study is approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. Ethical procedures followed national guidelines (NESH, 2023), including written consent from parents and staff, oral assent from children, and secure data storage. Preliminary results show that children`s self-reported well-being is associated with ECEC quality, with varying strengths across sub-scales. For example, "Total well-being" shows significant positive correlations with the EBBA sub-scales for "Caring behaviour" (.31) and "Group management" (.26). In contrast, it is not significantly associated with "Availability of play materials". Final results will be presented. Findings emphasize the importance of including children's perspectives on well-being in research striving to improve ECEC quality.

child well-being, child perspective, ECEC quality, quality dimensions, Norway

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

This study is a part of a larger project, "Children`s well-being in ECEC", which is funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training

Children's Experiences of Well-Being in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presenters:
Marianne Ree, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Marianne Ree, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study aims to deepen understanding of how 2- and 5-year-old children experience well-being in their everyday lives in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Although research on children's well-being is increasing, there remains limited knowledge about young children's own experiences and understandings of well-being (Fane et al., 2020; Stoecklin, 2021). This study is positioned within a contemporary developmental psychological paradigm and adopts a subjective approach to well-being, using Seligman's (2011) PERMA model as an interpretive framework. The study employs a qualitative design based on fieldwork conducted in three early childhood centres. Data were generated through dialogic conversations with 2- and 5-year-old children and observations of everyday interactions and activities. Ethical considerations included informed consent from all participants, ongoing negotiation of assent with children, the use of pseudonyms, and the possibility to withdraw at any stage of the research. Findings show that relationships, participation, and structural conditions are central to children's well-being. The analysis also demonstrates that well-being is dynamic, shifting across situations and shaped by how responsively, appreciatively, and inclusively children are met. For both age groups, feeling seen, heard, and recognized as meaningful contributors is essential to their sense of well-being. These findings highlight the need for political attention to how regulatory structures shape children's opportunities for meaningful participation. They also underscore the importance for practitioners of creating relationally responsive environments that actively foster children's well-being in ECEC.

well-being, children's perspectives, 2-year-olds, 5-year-olds, ECEC

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium D23 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: PERSPECTIVES FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN MALTA

Chaired by: Eliza Cachia, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

Democratic Participation through Conversational Artificial Intelligence: Fostering Children's Agency in History Education via the TIMEtalk Project

Presenters:
Heathcliff Schembri, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

All authors:
Heathcliff Schembri, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

This study examines how a co-designed conversational artificial intelligence platform (TIMEtalk) supported Maltese young learners' agency, voice and democratic participation through enquiry-based historical dialogue. History education frequently prioritises transmission over enquiry, limiting children's epistemic agency (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Participation scholarship emphasises children's rights to influence educational processes (Lundy, 2007; Sargeant, 2017), while research on artificial intelligence in education highlights transformative potential and ethical

risks, including automation bias, opacity and diminished professional accountability (Holmes et al., 2019). The study integrated enquiry-based historical thinking (Wineburg, 2001), dialogic pedagogy and democratic participation (Alexander, 2008), and child-rights participation frameworks (Lundy, 2007). These perspectives were situated within socio-technical conceptualisations of AI in education, which position digital systems as mediators of participation (Schembri, 2026). Situated within a participatory socio-constructivist paradigm, the study adopted a design-based co-design methodology grounded in participatory design research (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Data were generated through co-design workshops with children, focus groups with educators, and children's drawings as visual elicitation methods. Ethical safeguards included institutional approval, parental consent and child assent (Alderson & Morrow, 2011), pseudonymisation, withdrawal rights and prohibition of unsupervised child–AI interaction, aligning with European guidelines for trustworthy artificial intelligence (European Commission, 2019). Findings indicate conversational AI enhanced children's inquiry, perspective-taking, and dialogic participation, while revealing tensions between technological affordances and educator interpretive authority. The study proposes principles for democratic AI integration emphasising educator mediation, participatory design, and rights-based safeguards for early childhood contexts.

children's agency, conversational AI, democratic pedagogy, historical inquiry, participatory design

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Teacher Agency in Formation: Insights from a Multi-Strand National Study in Initial Teacher Education.

Presenters:
Eliza Cachia, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

All authors:
Eliza Cachia, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta
Ann Marie Cassar, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta
Melanie Darmanin, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta
Shirley Ann Gauci, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta
Heathcliff Schembri, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

This study introduces the Responsive Teacher Formation Framework (RTFF), situated within Malta's superdiverse educational context and informed by international debates on professional capital, care ethics, inclusion, and ecological conceptions of agency. The framework proposes four interdependent pillars of professional formation: belonging, wellbeing, autonomy, and agency. Research highlights the central role of ITE in shaping teaching quality and responding to diverse educational contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Studies also emphasise collaboration and practice-oriented preparation within ITE (Scortescu & Sava, 2024), while global teacher shortages and attrition continue to challenge systems internationally (UNESCO, 2024; Eurydice, 2021). The study draws on scholarship on professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), teacher wellbeing (Day & Gu, 2014), and teacher autonomy and agency (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley et al., 2012), conceptualised through the four interdependent pillars. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study involved a multi-strand study involving children, families, newly qualified teachers, learning support educators and school leaders. Data were collected from artefact elicitation, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and cross-strand configurational meta-synthesis (Gough et al., 2012). Institutional ethical approval and research authorisation were secured; data collection involving participants provided informed consent, was pseudonymised, and participants could withdraw at any stage. The synthesis identifies tensions across the ITE–school interface, procedural versus lived belonging, attention versus neglect of wellbeing, nominal autonomy versus fragile system supports, and policy endorsement versus constrained agency. The RTFF offers a framework for ITE programme development and policy reflection in teacher formation.

initial teacher education, teacher formation, belonging wellbeing, autonomy, agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Educator Agency in AI-Supported Curriculum-Making: Designing Generative Artificial Intelligence for Blue Skills in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Shirley Ann Gauci, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

All authors:
Shirley Ann Gauci, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

This paper reports on SELBI (SupportingEarly chiLdhood education inBlue skills with generative artificialIntelligence), a Malta-funded interdisciplinary project researching how generative artificial intelligence can support early childhood educators in embedding blue skills into curriculum-making while sustaining professional agency. Educators' curriculum-making entails pedagogical decisions and contextual adaptation under policy and time pressures (Waltzer et al., 2025). Artificial intelligence is increasingly used for early childhood planning (Jambunathan & Jayaraman, 2025), yet guidance cautions against opacity, automation bias and weakened accountability (European Commission, 2019). This study draws on TPACK (Mishra, 2019), conceptualising effective technology integration as the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, emphasising educators' professional judgement in aligning digital tools with pedagogical intent and curriculum aims. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the project adopts a five-phase mixed-methods design-based research approach (Wang & Hannafin, 2005): national survey; repository curation; platform development, including retrieval-augmented generation and internal testing; educator training; and validation and evaluation centred on educators' professional judgement. Institutional ethical approval and research authorisation were secured; trial-testing participants provided informed consent, were pseudonymised, and could withdraw at any stage. The project complies with the European Commission's Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI (European Commission, 2019). Findings indicate limited educator knowledge of blue skills and a need for structured support for early childhood curriculum-making using artificial intelligence. Persistent tensions include uneven digital confidence and balancing automated suggestions with pedagogical agency. The paper argues for ECEC-sensitive artificial intelligence design that foregrounds educator judgement, offering implications for professional learning, digital governance, and democratic curriculum-making.

educator agency, curriculum-making, generative artificial intelligence, blue skills, responsible AI design

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

SELBI is supported by Xjenza Malta's Research Excellence Programme through Grant REP-2024-005.

Symposium D24 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 5, floor 3

(SoS): ENHANCING SUPPORT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SOCIAL PEDAGOGUES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Chaired by: Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

Strengthening Social Pedagogical Support in Early Childhood Education: Insights from Finland and Estonia

Presenters:
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia

Johanna Holmikari, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland

All authors:
Katrin Saluvee, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Johanna Holmikari, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Lehte Tuuling, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Katrin Helendi, University of Tartu Narva College, Estonia
Johanna Kurki, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland

This study investigates the development and evaluation of online and face-to-face training programs designed to support ECEC professionals in Finland and Estonia. Both studies aim to enhance the role of social pedagogues and improve multi-professional collaboration in early childhood settings. Previous research has primarily focused on ECEC teachers' competencies, leaving the expertise of social pedagogues underexplored. This study builds on earlier findings from the SoSECe project, addressing practical barriers to multi-professional collaboration and highlighting the need for clearer role definitions. The studies draw on theories of multi-professional collaboration, social pedagogy, and child-centered education. They emphasize the importance of recognizing diverse pedagogical expertise and the preventive roles of social pedagogues in supporting children's development and well-being. Utilizing a design-based research paradigm, both studies involved iterative development of training programs. Data were collected through questionnaires and qualitative feedback from participants, focusing on perceived usefulness and pedagogical conditions for collaborative online learning. Both studies adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity, ensuring responsible feedback use. Participants in both studies found the training helpful in clarifying professional roles and enhancing understanding of multi-professional collaboration. The results indicate a strong desire for knowledge in areas such as social-emotional development and teamwork. Findings suggest that well-designed training programs can significantly improve multi-professional collaboration within early childhood education, thereby enhancing support for children's development and well-being.

multiprofessional teamwork, social pedagogical support, early childhood education, child well-being, in-service training

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"

No. 2024-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000254061.

Enhancing Development of Innovative Multiprofessional Competences for ECE Teams: Case of Lithuania

Presenters:
Ilona Tandzegolskiene-Bielaglove, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Leta Dromantiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Giedre Kvieskiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Ilona Tandzegolskiene-Bielaglove, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Leta Dromantiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Giedre Kvieskiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

The presentation aims to examine what key innovative competencies early-childhood educators (ECE) should develop to strengthen multiprofessional teamwork, apply innovative education practices, effective methods for

developing children's competencies, and create innovative teaching tools and environments. The article is based on reform "School2030'' analysis in Lithuania, previous studies of researchers on multiprofessional cooperation in kindergartens (Abromaitienė, 2025; Neifachas, 2021; Ališauskienė, Miltenienė, 2018; Monkevičienė, 2023). Applied a Child-Centered Approach reflects the principle that children thrive when their perspectives, needs, and rights are at the center of multiprofessional collaborative practice (Bastian, C., Dunk-West, P., & Wendt, S. 2021). Lifelong learning paradigm, which refers to the personal commitment of ECE to professional development and lifelong learning, document analysis, reflective case-based discussion methods; semi-structures interviews (11 experts), quantitative surveys, gathered from 137 ECE professionals: managers, educators, psychologists, etc. from Lithuania pre-school institutions. Obtained participants' consent to participate in the research, their agreement that they understand their rights, the purpose of the research, and how the results will be used. Anonymity and confidentiality of responses were protected by the organizers. The main findings show the ECE need for development communication, collaboration co-decision making, co-learning competences and confirm that the innovative and creative teacher is one who has mastered information and communication technologies for continuous professional development. The presentation contributes to ongoing discussions on ECE need for innovative competences; the clearer role definitions in early childhood education; targeted training to enhance multiprofessional collaboration.

multiprofessional competences, child-centered approach, multiprofessional team, collaborative skills, innovative education practices

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

EU ERASMUS + project “Socially Sustainable Early Childhood Education Future – SoSECE”

nr. 2024-1-FI01-KA220-SCH-000254061.

Rethinking Support for Early Childhood Social Pedagogues in the Digital Age: Case of Latvia

Presenters:
ILze Ivanova, University of Latvia, Latvia
Liga Aboltina, University of Latvia, Latvia
Gunta Krage, University of Latvia, Latvia
Kaspars Kiris, University of Latvia, Latvia

All authors:
ILze Ivanova, University of Latvia, Latvia
Liga Aboltina, University of Latvia, Latvia
Gunta Krage, University of Latvia, Latvia
Kaspars Kiris, University of Latvia, Latvia

The study aims to rethink professional support for early childhood social pedagogues in the digital age, focusing on the system of Education in Latvia in rapid digital transformations. Research is related to the baseline analysis in ERASMUS + project “Socially sustainable early childhood education future “(2025), frameworks Mishra and Koehler’s (2006) TPACK model and Redecker’s (2017) DigCompEdu, OECD (2023),Heiskanen & Franck (2023), Erstad (2021), Yang et al. (2025),Daniela (2021). It is grounded in socio-cultural learning theory (Vigotsky, Bruner) and critical digital pedagogy (Freire). However limited scholarship examines professional support structures in response to digitalization in early childhood settings. This study conceptualizes digital competence as relational and ethically grounded within national policy and cultural contexts. The study follows a constructivist paradigm, examining practitioners’ experiences within Latvia’s evolving digital education landscape.A qualitative and quantitative research, and document analysis were employed, including 21 interviews of early childhood social pedagogues. Limesurvey tool was used in quantitative research (73 participants). Social pedagogues participated voluntary

responding to the invitation. Informed consent was obtained from all social pedagogues,participating in the research. Confidentiality and secure digital data management procedures were strictly maintained. Main findings reveal gaps between national digital policy ambitions and institutional-level support, highlighting the need for structured supervision, continuous training in the practical use of digital tools, and contextualized digital guidelines for early childhood education. Research calls for guidelines and policies in Latvia preschool settings balancing the benefits of technology with attention to children's social and emotional development, helping institutions to choose digital tools supporting active learning.

early childhood education, digital competence, professional support, social pedagogues, digital tools

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium D25 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 6, floor 3

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON CHILDREN'S AGENCY

Chaired by: Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria, Austria

Developed, not taught: Digital judgement, moral agency, and early childhood in the digital age

Presenters:
Gila Hammer Furnes, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Gila Hammer Furnes, NLA University College, Norway

This essay addresses an underexplored paradox in early childhood research. Children are increasingly protected from digital technologies through restriction and control, while expected to develop digital judgement at an early age. The essay examines pedagogical responsibility when judgment cannot be transmitted as a skill, but must emerge through children's lived digital moral experiences. Research on digital childhood has focused on competence, risk management, and regulation (e.g., Choi, 2016; Fernández-Prados et al., 2021), framing judgment as a future-oriented capacity. While strengthening protection, these approaches marginalise children's present moral responsiveness. This essay builds on relational and ethical traditions that conceptualise agency as lived and responsive, moving beyond skills-based accounts of digital participation. The framework draws on Lévinas' (1981) ethics of responsibility, Biesta's (2020) concept of subjectification, and Lipman's (1981) understanding of judgment as a relational and ethical practice developed through lived inquiry rather than instruction. Rather than empirical data, the essay presents analytical vignettes constructed and informed by existing research. The analysis follows a Levinas-inspired, essayistic approach, informed by Otherwise than Being (Lévinas, 1981). It moves in a non-linear, spiral manner between illustrative vignettes and philosophical reflection to explore the ethical dimensions of digital childhood. Ethical responsibility is addressed through a non-deficit representation of children as moral subjects in the present. Digital judgment cannot be taught as a transferable skill without displacing children's moral agency. It develops through lived moral experience and relational responsibility. Educational practice and policy should move beyond restriction and skills-based models toward approaches that recognise children as morally responsive subjects in the present.

digital judgement, moral agency, early childhood, ethical responsibility, digital childhood

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

Relational Agency and Community Learning: Care and Democratic Participation in the Digital Age

Presenters:
Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria

All authors:
Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria

This paper examines how children's agency develops through community learning and shared sense-making, and how digital environments reshape the conditions under which democratic participation becomes possible in early childhood. Research on children's voice, participatory pedagogies and digital literacies often emphasises individual autonomy and skill acquisition. Building on transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2012) and enactive–iconic–symbolic approaches to meaning-making (Wiesner & Slavik, 2025), this study extends previous work by distinguishing lived sense from symbolically stabilised meaning and reframing agency as relational and community-embedded learning (Wiesner, 2026). Drawing on a structure-phenomenological distinction between lived sense and symbolically stabilised meaning, agency is understood as communal processes of sense-making and learning rather than acquisition of symbolic competences. Bruner's enactive, iconic and propositional modes (1990), together with Wiesner's theory of sense-formation (2026), illuminate differentiated dimensions of participation across embodied, imaginal and conceptual registers. A relational ethics of care frames community as the living ground of democracy, constituted through shared attention, responsiveness and affective attunement. The paper follows a structure-phenomenological (Wiesner, 2023) and phenomenognostic paradigm (Brentano, 1874). It reconstructs relational interactions in early childhood as communal sense-formation and analyses how digital-symbolic environments reorganise horizons of meaning and participation. Ethical considerations were addressed through transparent criteria in the selection and reconstruction of texts and careful academic representation of sources. Democratic agency emerges in embodied and affectively shared sense-making within community. Digital environments privilege symbolic and algorithmic structures that may support or fragment communal learning. Early childhood education should cultivate communities of care where digital tools enhance shared learning, responsiveness and lived democratic practice.

agency, community learning, care, democratic participation, digital childhood

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

This study was carried out within the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria. No external funding was received for this research.

From Implementation to Intentionality: Educator Reflections on Post-Digital Practice in Early Childhood Communities

Presenters:
Eleanor Milligan, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom
Janet Morris, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom

All authors:
Eleanor Milligan, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom
Viki Veale, St Mary's University, United Kingdom
Janet Morris, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom
Lorna Williams, University of Worcester, United Kingdom

How are educators facilitating children's agency and participation through technology in early years settings?

How can professional development shape ethical and intentional post-digital practice? Edwards et al. (2020) and Edwards (2023) describe the subjective shift in narrative regarding technology use in early childhood, exemplified by Goodwin et al (1986) and Flewitt and Arnott (2024), as three 'eras of thinking'. They also propose five concepts in post-digital practice. This study explores how these relate to the English context. Operating within the theoretical framework of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), concepts proposed by Edwards (2023) are used to reflect on how educators facilitate children's agency and participation with technology in early years settings. Conducted within a constructivist paradigm, qualitative insights gathered from a purposive sample of 44 practitioners through conference posters, comments on Padlet and qualitative feedback surveys underwent abductive thematic analysis. Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participants' contributions, we obtained informed consent, anonymised all data before analysis, and provided clear guidelines on voluntary participation. Educator reflections illustrate variation in how children's agency and participation with technologies are enabled. Recognition of and engagement in post-digital practices was seen to afford a child rights approach, increase inclusive strategies and benefit connection with the wider community. Professional development opportunities provided by the Reception Class Teacher Network were seen to prompt shifts in practitioners' thinking, confidence and pedagogy. Opportunities for CPD and reflection through communities of practice support professional growth and the confidence to navigate the challenges, ethical considerations and transition to the post-digital.

collaborative research, technology, post-digital practice, professional development, professional growth

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium D26 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 7, floor 3

(SoS): DEVELOPING MATHEMATICAL MEANING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: THINKING, TALK, AND PLAY

Chaired by: Chrystalla Papademetri, European University Cyprus, Cyprus

Children's probabilistic thinking in the early years: a scoping review

Presenters:
Zoi Nikiforidou, University of Ioannina, Greece

All authors:
Zoi Nikiforidou, University of Ioannina, Greece
Sotiria Tsoultsidou, University of Ioannina, Greece
Maria Papandreou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
Maria Kampeza, University of Patras, Greece
Aggeliki Vellopoulou, University of Patras, Greece

The current scoping review aims to explore the emergence and development of preschoolers' probabilistic thinking. Traditional work stems from the seminal studies carried out by Piaget (1975) and Fishbein (1975). Thus, more recently (i.e. Batanero & Álvarez-Arroyo, 2024) there has been growing interest in understanding the origins of probabilistic thinking and its linkage to pedagogical practice. A scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) was applied, across 3 databases, to identify theoretical and methodological approaches on children's probabilistic thinking (peer-reviewed studies in English from 2010 to 2026). A PRISMA approach (Sage et al., 2021) resulted in 32 studies for in-depth examination through thematic analysis. Ethical rigour was ensured by establishing methodological integrity The findings indicate that probabilistic thinking in children aged 4-6 is associated with intuitions, heuristics, creative thinking, and statistical and inferential reasoning. The majority of studies adopted experimental designs, with comparatively few conducted in naturalistic contexts. The scoping review underlines developmental trajectories, subjectivity, collective sense-making, and addresses methodological implications and

limitations. Such findings provide a deeper understanding as to how young children develop their probabilistic thinking and in what ways they can be empowered in the context of early childhood education, in confronting information and data in a world of uncertainties.

probabilistic thinking, early childhood, scoping review

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

The research project is implemented in the framework of H.F.R.I call “3rd Call for H.F.R.I.’s Research Projects to Support Faculty Members & Researchers” (H.F.R.I. Project Number:25802).

Preschool Teachers’ Views on Talk Moves for Supporting Mathematical Conversations

Presenters:
Pernilla Sundqvist, Mälardalen University, Sweden
Benita Berg, Mälardalen University, Sweden

All authors:
Pernilla Sundqvist, Mälardalen University, Sweden
Benita Berg, Mälardalen University, Sweden

We study how preschool teachers in Sweden view talk moves as a tool for having productive mathematical conversations where all children are included and invited to participate. Mathematical problem-solving and reasoning are important components of mathematics teaching in preschool, particularly when carried out collectively to support learning together (Sumpter & Hedefalk, 2023). However, Hedefalk et al. (2024) have shown that children prefer to reason individually rather than in groups. Talk moves (Kazemi & Hintz, 2014) is a didactical framework that could help educators promote collective reasoning. Although it was originally developed for school settings, it has recently been suggested for use in preschool (Justnes & Mosvold, 2022). The study was conducted within a qualitative interpretive research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Within an action research context, we video-recorded four meetings with five preschool teams to capture their thoughts and experiences regarding the use of talk moves. A content analysis, departing from the talk moves framework, was conducted on the transcripts. The participants were informed, both orally and in writing, about the aim of the study, their right to withdraw at any point and that their information would be handled confidentially. They consented in writing. Early results show that the preschool teachers are open to using talk moves. They note that they already employ some of them, while expressing an interest in trying others. The study will contribute knowledge about how talk moves can be applied in preschool and thereby improve mathematics teaching and further children’s ability to communicate in mathematics.

mathematics, conversation, communication, talk moves, preschool teachers

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

Play and Mathematics in Early Childhood Education – Perspectives, Practices and Epistemologies across Countries and Cultures

Presenters:
Chrystalla Papademetri, European University Cyprus, Cyprus

All authors:
Chrystalla Papademetri, European University Cyprus, Cyprus
Oliver Thiel, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway
Elizabeth Carruthers, Children's Mathematics Network, United Kingdom

The research aims to provide a multifaceted understanding of the relationship between play and mathematics, examining how mathematical meaning emerges in early childhood contexts and how practitioners' epistemological readiness emerges as a crucial factor in shaping children's mathematizing. This presentation forms part of the second international collaboration of the EECERA SIG Mathematics, Birth to Eight Years, bringing together cross-country studies that explore play-based mathematical inquiry. Adopting a pluralistic stance informed by complexity theory and praxeology, the chapter conceptualises learning as emergent, relational and non-linear, positioning children, practitioners and learning environments as dynamically interconnected co-constructors of knowledge. Situated within a constructivist, constructionist and sociocultural paradigm, the chapter draws on narrative inquiry and autoethnography centred on a documented block-play vignette in a STEAM programme, combined with cross-chapter synthesis. Guided by a praxeological framework, the authors' primary ethical commitment was to actively encourage participation and exercise power relationally and responsibly, foregrounding and empowering the voices of practitioners and children. The vignette illustrates how children transform simple constructions into complex structures, articulating spatial reasoning and generalisation. Drawing on cross-country contributions, the closing chapter synthesises shared patterns and contextual variations, positioning the vignette as a lens through which culturally situated mathematical meaning-making can be examined and theoretically integrated. Findings suggest that play mirrors the epistemology of mathematics—iterative, exploratory and socially mediated—and that practitioners' epistemological awareness is central to extending mathematical meaning, particularly within contexts shaped by prescriptive curricula. The presentation argues for flexible, documentation-informed curricula and practitioner development that position mathematics as participatory, exploratory and creative inquiry.

play, mathematical meaning-making, pedagogical documentation, epistemological readiness, block play

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium Set E (13:45 – 15:00) | Thursday 27th August 2026

Symposium E01 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

EDUCATOR UNDERSTANDINGS OF PLAY

Chaired by: Evelyn Neudorf, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

Estonian and Finnish Early Childhood Teachers' Understanding of Children's Play and Their Agency Supporting It

Presenters:
Evelyn Neudorf, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia
Marita Neitola, University of Turku, Finland
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Evelyn Neudorf, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia
Marita Neitola, University of Turku, Finland
Aino Ugaste, Tallinn University, Estonia
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland

This study examines ECEC teachers' understandings of play, their roles and practices in supporting it, and cross-country differences, through the lens of teacher agency and pedagogical knowledge. Although play is widely

regarded as central to learning in early childhood education, there is no clear epistemological consensus on how learning occurs within it. Conceptions of play—and of the teacher's role—remain theoretically diverse and grounded in differing ontological and pedagogical assumptions. Sociocultural perspective emphasizes play as a leading activity that promotes children's learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). As children do not conceptualize play and learning as distinct domains, a central professional responsibility and agency of teachers is to design pedagogical environments in which learning is inherently and seamlessly enacted through play (Pramling-Samuelsson, 2025; Pramling-Samuelsson & Björklund, 2023). This study follows a pragmatic paradigm (Morgan, 2014) and a mixed-methods approach. Teacher questionnaires with quantitative and qualitative questions examined Estonian (n=116) and Finnish teachers' (n=317) experiences using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. The study adhered to national ethical guidelines in both countries (Eesti …, 2023; TENK, 2023) and the EECERA ethical code (Bertram et al., 2025).Participants were volunteered and informed about the study and transparent use of data. The questionnaire was anonymous, non obligatory questions were used and the responder could quit answering at any time. Preliminary findings indicate that teachers understanding of children's play and their own agency to support play is diverse. Cross-country results will be presented in the conference. The findings have implications for practice and policy, informing teacher education and supporting curriculum implementation in ECEC.

play, teachers, agency, support, understanding

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

Playful Primary Classrooms: Conceptualising and Enacting Playfulness in Primary Education

Presenters:
Andrea Doherty, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

All authors:
Andrea Doherty, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom
GLENDA WALSH, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

This research collated perspectives of primary school teachers and children to examine how playfulness is conceptualised, how it is lived out in classrooms, and the value and challenges of adopting playful approaches in primary education. Recent scholarship argues that play in education should extend beyond play activities towards the broader concept of pedagogical playfulness. However, a persistent play–work dichotomy remains in primary education with curricular pressures, assessment demands, and perceptions of play continuing to hinder the integration of playfulness at this level (Sproule et al. 2021; O'Sullivan et al., 2025). This study draws on post-Vygotskian theories highlighting the role of play in developing higher mental functions including memory, abstract thought and logical reasoning (Bodrova & Leong 2015). It recognises that children "act a head taller" in playful contexts enabling children to access and engage with learning in a more meaningful way (Vygotsky 1967, p.16). The study combined a baseline survey with an immersive intervention, collecting data through video-stimulated reflective diaries, focus groups, and conversations with children. Ethical rigour was assured throughout. Parental consent and child assent were secured prior to participation. Teachers and children were informed of their rights to withdraw and to anonymity. Analysis led to the development of the SPARC framework; five interconnected dimensions of playfulness: Spontaneity, Purposefulness, Active engagement, Relational connection, and Curiosity. Classrooms demonstrating these elements showed increased creativity, confidence, collaboration, motivation, and deeper understanding. Playfulness is both valuable and feasible in primary education when supported by the SPARC framework, reflective practice, and whole-school commitment.

playful pedagogy, primary education, Northern Ireland, curriculum innovation, creativity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The project was funded by the schools involved in the research.

From Priorities to Practice: How Teachers Navigate Play Based Learning in Kindergarten

Presenters:
Angela Pyle, University of Toronto, Canada
Ellen Fesseha, University of Toronto, Canada
Rachel Ault, University of Toronto, Canada

All authors:
Angela Pyle, University of Toronto, Canada
Ellen Fesseha, University of Toronto, Canada
Betül Alaca, University of Toronto, Canada
Rachel Ault, University of Toronto, Canada

This study examined the relationship between teachers' priorities, perspectives, and classroom practice of play-based learning (PBL). While play is recognized as a core element of early childhood and increasingly as an effective pedagogical tool, conceptualizations of PBL, its connection to learning, and the role of teachers in its implementation vary (Pyle et al., 2017). Science of Learning research demonstrates that PBL enhances children's cognitive, social, and academic development by leveraging agency and meaningful engagement, yielding stronger learning outcomes than more didactic approaches (Alfieri et al., 2011). Data were collected in 33 kindergarten classrooms in Ontario, Canada using a Q-sort task with teachers' narrations of decision-making (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006), semi-structured teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Qualitative thematic analysis and triangulation of data is ongoing. After university and school board ethics approval, teachers and parents provided informed consent, and children provided assent. Findings revealed tensions between teachers' prioritized statements, perspectives and classroom practice, particularly when forced to identify their highest pedagogical priorities and translate perspectives and priorities to play-based instruction. Many teachers hesitated to name play as the locus of learning and, though they acknowledged their role in play, often favoured direct instruction of academic skills outside of play. These data provide insight into sometimes hidden tensions between perspective and practice, support deeper understanding of teacher conceptualizations of PBL, and highlight how pressures from curricular standards can lead to prioritizing less developmentally appropriate practices. Understanding these tensions within teachers' classroom practice is critical for the development of effective play-based pedagogy, policy, and teacher education.

play-based learning, teacher perspectives, classroom-based research, teacher practice, kindergarten

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Symposium E02 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Chaired by: Deirdre Horgan, University College Cork, Ireland

Technology as a facilitator of children's participation in early years settings

Presenters:
Deirdre Horgan, University College Cork, Ireland

All authors:
Deirdre Horgan, University College Cork, Ireland

This paper considers the participation of children from birth to 5 years and how this can be embedded in early childhood education and care settings with a specific focus on the potential of supporting their participation through digital technology. This builds on previous work on children's participation as everyday, relational and situated (Cassidy et al., 2022; Correia et al., 2019) This paper has a strong conceptual basis in socio-cultural and child rights-based theories, human rights theory, theories emanating from childhood studies, theories of social materiality and embodiment, as well as educational theories including Reggio Emilia (Thorpe et al., 2020). The paper maps contemporary research on early childhood participation. The search strategy used key terms to search databases (ERIC International, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) for scholarly work published in English from 2000-2023. Studies meeting inclusion criteria – children's right to participate in ECEC settings – were considered for review. A hand search identified sources that had not been captured by the electronic search. All ethics related to secondary research were followed in this project Integrating technology engages young children, can increase motivation and is a recommended strategy in early years settings. Its value in supporting children's language, expression and engagement is highlighted, in particular, for younger children with English as an additional language and shy children. It provides a new modality of representation for young children. This requires a reconceptualisation of young children's engagement and participation and a re-examination of how early years curricula and staff can facilitate children's learning, expression and participation through digital means.

digital, participation, young children, ECEC settings, facilitate

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Hib na NÓgHub na nÓg | Young Voices in Decision-making

Children's Digital Agency as a Motivator for Parent–Teacher Partnerships in Saudi Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Maha Alharbi, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

All authors:
Maha Alharbi, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

This study investigates how children's digital agency, expressed through preferences and digital interactions, motivates parent-teacher partnerships in Saudi early childhood education, including shifts in parental roles, and how such partnerships are shaped by children's digital engagement. Chen and Rivera-Vernazza (2023) showed how digital tools support parent-teacher communication in U.S. ECE, but little is known about how children's digital agency drives such partnerships in non-Western contexts. In Saudi Arabia, Mohammad (2024) addressed recent ECE reforms but overlooked how children's digital engagement might bridge the home-kindergarten relationship, focusing instead on teachers' perspectives. This study draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to frame child-led interactions and parent-teacher partnerships as interconnected across home and kindergarten contexts. A qualitative, constructivist case study was conducted in two kindergartens, using semi-structured interviews with three teachers and three parent sets, ECE policy documents, and children's digital artefacts. Data were analysed thematically. Informed consent was obtained from adults, and child assent was sought using age-appropriate methods. Participants could withdraw their data or artefacts at any time. All data were anonymised. Children's digital expressions consistently motivated new forms of parent-teacher partnership. Increased father involvement was notably significant in the Saudi context, where children acting as digital agents stimulated adult partnerships. Digital agency functioned not only as a child-centred capability but as a driver of home-kindergarten partnerships. As parents engage with children's digital expressions, children's agency is further

reinforced. Policy must embed digital agency into early childhood strategies, recognising it as a partnership driver rather than a standalone pedagogical tool.

children agency, digital tool, sparent–teacher partnerships, educational-reform, sociocultural perspective

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

Individualised Self-Regulated Learning in a Digital Environment for Children Aged 5–6

Presenters:
Maija Kulinska, University of Latvia, Latvia

All authors:
Maija Kulinska, University of Latvia, Latvia
Liga Aboltina, University of Latvia, Latvia
Andis Kulinskis, University of Latvia, Latvia
Renars Neimanis, University of Latvia, Latvia

This research aims to explore the potential of individualised self-regulated learning in a digital environment for the development of children aged 5–6. This study builds on the first-phase findings of the project CFLA "Artificial Intelligence Tool for Exploring Children's Cognitive Development Models", as well as previous research by Zimmerman (2002), Pintrich (2000), Efklides (2011), Livingstone et al. (2017), Davis & Pino-Pasternak (2021), Yao (2024), Grüneisen et al. (2024), and Kersna et al. (2025). The theoretical foundation draws on self-regulated learning theory (Zimmerman, 2002), the framework incorporates the motivation a goal-orientation approach (Pintrich, 2000), metacognitive development (Efklides, 2011), also considers the role of digital learning environments in child development (Livingstone et al., 2017). Children aged 5–6 completed tasks on tablets while their attentional focus, perceptual processes, information processing strategies, and cognitive load during task completion were observed using eye-tracking, facial landmark tracking, and facial expression analysis. Informed consent was obtained from all parents of participating children. Strict confidentiality protocols and secure digital data management procedures were followed throughout the study. The findings indicate that individualised self-regulated learning in a digital environment promotes autonomy in children aged 5–6 when they can choose their own pace, difficulty level, and type of activity, thereby developing their ability to plan and monitor their learning process. Individualised self-regulated learning in a digital environment can significantly influence early childhood education practice by promoting children's autonomy, motivation, and digital skills, while requiring educators to thoughtfully integrate technology into the learning process and provide appropriate pedagogical support.

self-regulated learning, individualised learning, digital learning environment, preschool children

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E03 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor –2

CHILDREN'S CHOICES AND ENACTMENT OF RIGHTS

Chaired by: Asta Cekaite, Linköping University, Sweden

"We have a say too!": Children’s narratives of participation across a pedagogical change process

Presenters:

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

All authors:
Cristiana Ribeiro, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal
Cristina Mesquita, Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal

This study examines children's perceptions of their right to participation in early childhood education. It aims to understand how pedagogical transformations throughout the study were reflected in the ways children interpreted power, rights, and opportunities for influence in their everyday educational context. It emerges from a review of research indicating that, despite formal recognition of children's participation, their voices remain insufficiently integrated into pedagogical decision-making processes (Torremorell et al., 2021; Correia et al., 2021). The study is grounded in a children's rights-based pedagogy, drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Laura Lundy's participation model (2007). It conceptualises children as competent, active participants in their educational processes. The study adopts an interpretative paradigm grounded in action research. It uses data from semi-structured interviews with 35 children aged 3 to 6, organized around six dimensions: rights, space, voice, audience, influence, and evaluation. It was conducted before and after a formative, reflective process involving educators and the staff team. Informed consent was obtained from families and children, ensuring their voluntary participation, anonymity, and the possibility to withdraw at any time. The results show shifts in children's narratives. Initially centred on adult authority and the kindergarten as learning space, they later highlighted play, choice, negotiation, listening, and influence in group decisions. These changes reflect in-context training and a stronger focus on rights-based pedagogy, aligned with Lundy's four participation dimensions (space, voice, audience, influence). Children's roles and agency were reconfigured, although challenges remain. Children's narratives guide curriculum, space, and negotiation, supporting inclusive pedagogy and educators' development.

children's participation, agency, democracy, early childhood education, narratives.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This work has been supported by FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologiawithin the Project Scope: UID/05777/2025.

Children's affectionate touch in Swedish preschools: close social relationships, bodily integrity and children's agency

Presenters:
Asta Cekaite, Linköping University, Sweden

All authors:
Asta Cekaite, Linköping University, Sweden
Olga Anatoli, Linköping University, Sweden

This study investigates children's embodied practices when 1–5-year-olds approach children or teachers with affectionate touch in preschools in Sweden. It aims to investigate children's embodied agency and expressions of emotional needs through touch. Touch is a debated issue in institutions, as demonstrated by interview studies with teachers who conceptualize it normative terms (good vs. bad touch). Previous research on touch practices deals with teacher-initiated touch (Cekaite, 2015), showing that it is essential for educare. Thus far there is little understanding

of young children's embodied touch conduct and agency, especially their own affectionate touch initiatives towards peers or adults in institutional contexts. Investigation of children's own agentive affectionate touch is important to understand how children express their emotional needs and develop their notion of bodily integrity. A socio-cultural paradigm (Rogoff, 2003) on human development is adopted. Data are video recordings of everyday practices in 4 preschools. 40 episodes of 1-5 y old children's affectionate touch were analyzed in detail using Multimodal Interaction Analysis, examining when, how, and with whom children engaged in physical contact, and what responses (acceptance or rejection) they received. Informed and processual consent from teachers, guardians, and children was implemented. Analysis shows that children sought affectionate contact and support primarily from adults (sitting in lap while reading), and teachers typically responded positively, providing children with affectionate physical contact. Children's touch towards peers was carefully monitored and scaffolded by teachers who thereby socialized children's understanding of bodily integrity. Implications for practitioners: raising teachers' awareness of children's naturally occurring touch behaviors, embodied agency and emotional needs.

children's interactions, touch, bodily integrity, embodied agency, close relations

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

This research was funded by the Swedish Research Council.

Assessment for learning: Creating pedagogic space for children to shape their own learning

Presenters:
Linda Kelly, Early Childhood Ireland, Ireland

All authors:
Linda Kelly, Early Childhood Ireland, Ireland
Liz Kerrins, Early Childhood Ireland, Ireland

This research investigated strengths and challenges in assessment practices in Irish Early Education and Care (ECEC) settings. In the literature, inconsistencies emerge in educators' conceptions of assessment as a participatory and collaborative process that is used to plan for children's learning, ensuring practice remains responsive, intentional, and aligned with children's interests, strengths and needs (e.g., Paananen and Lipponen, 2018; Roe, 2020). Ireland's ECEC frameworks, Aistear and Síolta, underpin our understanding of assessment as a formative practice which makes learning visible, supports children to actively shape their own learning, and the role of the reflective educator in this process. The concepts of teacher assessment identity and assessment literacy (e.g., Looney et al., 2018; Meijer et al., 2023) provide a lens for interpreting the findings. The study adopted a qualitative methodology, including literature reviews, documentary analysis of inspection reports, and focus groups with 11 ECEC professionals responsible for leading and implementing assessment. An ethics review was undertaken based on EECERA and ERIC guidelines. Participants' informed consent was obtained. The findings suggest diverse conceptions of assessment as a participatory process, which may reflect different conceptions of the purpose of assessment and even early education. Barriers to participatory assessment included insufficient time, while strong leadership enabled. Assessment using digital technologies was described, with documentation often used as a kind of product for parents. Developing educators' assessment identity and literacy may have potential to enhance practice and strengthen professionalism. System and setting features like non-contact time for pedagogy is critical to meaningful assessment within a reflective cycle.

assessment for learning, pedagogical documentation, reflective practice, educator professional identity, child agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was funded by Ireland's Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Symposium E04 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

COLLEGIAL NETWORKS TO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

Chaired by: Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Baden, Austria, Austria

Exploring the development of professional knowledge within a supervision network

Presenters:
Ebba Hildén, Department of Educational Studies, University of Karlstad, Sweden
Jehona Tahiri-Berg, Department of Educational Studies, University of Karlstad, Sweden

All authors:
Ebba Hildén, Department of Educational Studies, University of Karlstad, Sweden
Jehona Tahiri-Berg, Department of Educational Studies, University of Karlstad, Sweden

The aim of this ongoing study is to contribute knowledge on how professional knowledge can be promoted through supervisory conversations in the ECE. Professional knowledge, understood as the integrated competencies and knowledge required for effective and ethical professional practice (Barenthien et al., 2018), is often heterogeneous and limited among both pre-service and in-service teachers (Blömeke et al., 2017). Research suggests that supervision strengthens professional knowledge, but how this can be performed needs to be further investigated (Huffhines et al., 2025). This study addresses that gap. The theoretical framework is grounded in pragmatism and theories of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), emphasizing the interplay between past experiences, present conditions, and future aspirations in supervisory practice. Methodologically, the project is designed as a three-year action research study combined with qualitative focus group interviews with ECE professionals (e.g., principals, teachers, and special educators). Data will be collected via focus groups and complementary written reflections, then analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Ethical procedures follow Swedish Research Council guidelines, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymization, and secure data storage. Preliminary findings suggest that supervision functions as an arena where professional knowledge is shaped through collegial dialogue, identifying supervisory conversations as key contexts for making tacit knowledge, norms, and values visible. Early data indicate that trust, relational practice, and the interplay between theory and practice are central conditions for developing professional knowledge through supervision. The study ultimately seeks to generate empirically grounded inplications for practice about how supervision can function as a vehicle for developing professional knowledge in ECE.

professional knowledge, supervision, network of professionals, teacher agency, action research

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

Collegial Case Consultation as a Democratic Learning Space: Agency and Participation in Early Childhood Higher Education

Presenters:
Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria
Simone Breit, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria

Kerstin Angelika Zechner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria

All authors:
Christian Wiesner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria
Simone Breit, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria
Kerstin Angelika Zechner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria
Tanja Prieler, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Austria

This study examines how collegial case consultation fosters agency, participation and democratic professional learning among early childhood educators in higher education. Collegial case consultation is described as a structured method for addressing challenging situations and reducing workload (Schlee, 2019; Kleiner-Wuttke, 2017; Asam-van den Boogaart, 2022). It is framed as informal team learning (Schmid et al., 2023) with documented effects on problem-solving, competence and literacy development, and emotional relief (Wind, 2022; Methlagl et al., 2025; Breit & Wiesner, 2025). However, its differentiated learning dynamics, participatory character, and democratic potential remain underexplored. Collegial case consultation is conceptualised as a democratic micro-space with a participatory character (Breit & Wiesner, 2025). Agency is relationally constituted action within dialogical structures. Participation is shared sensemaking and meaning-making sustained through trust, resonance, and structured reflective practice across personal, group, and professional levels. Within a hermeneutic-phenomenological paradigm, more than 30 students in an inclusive early childhood BA and MA programme conducted six consultations in six teams. The data consist of written reflections exceeding 30,000 words, analysed through hermeneutic-phenomenological text analysis. Participation was voluntary, reflections were anonymised, and participants could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Findings reveal six learning configurations: practicing, practice-oriented, existential, methodical-structural, critical-institutional and systemic-reflexive. Learning unfolds across personal, collective and professional dimensions and is shaped by trust, relief, resonance and structural clarity. Collegial case consultation can function as a democratic learning infrastructure strengthening reflective agency and institutional quality development.

collegial case consultation, agency, participation, democratic learning, early childhood education

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

This study was carried out within the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria. No external funding was received for this research.

Recognising Professional Competence Through Dialogic Conversation in ECEC multiprofessional Teams

Presenters:
Annu Göös, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Annu Göös, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Merja Koivula, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Jenni Salminen, Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Finland
Kaisu Peltoperä, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Pessi Lyyra, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Janniina Vlasov, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, Finland

This study investigates how professional competence recognition is constructed in interprofessional early childhood education and care (ECEC) teams and how it connects to shared pedagogy and division of labour. Previous research

has shown that recognising staff expertise is essential for collaboration quality and pedagogical coherence (Duhn et al., 2016; Sinai-Gavrilov et al., 2019), while team interaction and role clarity remain recurring challenges (Anderson, 2013; Kahila et al., 2023). The study draws on relational expertise as its conceptual framework, which is well-suited for analysing interactional processes that build professional understanding (Nuttall, 2013). Studies on relational expertise emphasise that expertise becomes visible through dialogue, reflection, and acknowledging others' knowledge (Edwards, 2005, 2011), offering a lens for understanding competence recognition as a relational rather than individual process. A relational paradigm guided the methodological choices. Quantitative data were collected through the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's Valssi system, where ECEC teams evaluated interaction, pedagogical practices, and division of labour. Participants included staff from municipal ECEC centres. An ordinal confirmatory factor analysis and a structural equation model were estimated to examine hypothesised relations among team climate, professional conversation, competence recognition, and division of labour. Ethical considerations included ensuring anonymous participation, securing consent, and protecting staff confidentiality throughout analysis and reporting. Findings show that psychologically safe team climate supports professional conversation, which strengthens pedagogical understanding and competence recognition. Competence recognition, in turn, predicts clearer division of labour. These results highlight the importance of practices for enhancing collaboration and guiding pedagogical development in interprofessional ECEC teams.

professional competence recognition, multiprofessional team, relational expertise

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study is funded by the Research Council of Finland (EDUCA flagship #358924) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (Doctoral school pilot #VN/3137/2024-OKM-4).

Symposium E05 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN A DIGITAL AGE

Chaired by: Rose Piccinino, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

Ways of Engaging Children in a Modelled Context that Support Visual Expression

Presenters:
Birute Vityte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Ona Monkevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Birute Vityte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Ona Monkevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Lina Statkevičienė, Kaunas Kindergarten of Arts "Etiudas", Lithuania

The study aims to identify ways of engaging children in a modelled educational context that support graphic, colour-based, spatial, and performative expression. Research on Reggio Emilia pedagogy shows that a designed environment shapes children's engagement and creative action (Moss, 2016), while inquiry-based activities foster creativity and independence (Gardner & Jones, 2016). Creativity in early childhood education is linked to psychosocial development and problem-solving, underscoring visual expression (Rudienė et al., 2021). However, limited research examines how modelled contexts support specific engagement modes related to distinct forms of visual expression. The study draws on a child-centred paradigm and Reggio Emilia philosophy within experiential learning (Lindsay, 2015). The educational context is understood as a physical, social, and cultural environment encouraging play and exploration. A modelled context is treated as an organising factor of creative action (Guidelines, 2023). The research followed a qualitative interpretative paradigm. Data were collected through

participant observation of children aged 2–5 (n = 16) in modelled contexts, analysis of artworks, and documentation of pedagogical situations. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Written parental consent was obtained; voluntary participation and anonymity were ensured. Modelled contexts supported experiential, sensory, problem-based, adaptive, imitative, and co-creative modes of engagement. These modes functioned as mechanisms initiating directions of visual expression: sensory exploration favoured graphic expression; inquiry- and risk-based activity encouraged colour expression; problem-solving dominated spatial expression; and co-creation activated performative expression. Deliberately modelled contexts can purposefully activate engagement modes that support diverse forms of visual expression and inform pedagogical decisions in early childhood art education.

didactics, modelling, engagement, expression, visual education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Everyday Technologies and Democratic Culture: Practices of Agency and Participation in Arts Education

Presenters:
Arantza Gaztañaga Garabieta, Universidad del País Vasco, Spain

All authors:
Arantza Gaztañaga Garabieta, Universidad del País Vasco, Spain

This study examines how everyday digital technologies function as pedagogical infrastructures for democratic participation in arts education. In contemporary debates on childhood and digitalisation, agency is often associated with access to devices or technical competence (Biesta, 2015). This research focuses on the pedagogical conditions that enable digital tools to support the collective construction of meaning and shared responsibility (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Based on a relational and reflective perspective (Schön, 1983) and informed by democratic conceptions of participation (Rancière, 2008) and visual culture education (Freedman, 2003). The study employs a qualitative case study design. The audiovisual and narrative documentation of the arts education sessions was analysed using a document camera and a projector. The participants were students taking part in collaborative drawing activities. Informed consent, anonymisation of materials and adherence to institutional research guidelines. How do sequential interventions and collective observation mediate shared responsibility and deliberation in technology-assisted creative learning environments? The thematic analysis explored how sequential interventions, the verbalisation of decisions and collective observation shaped dynamics of shared responsibility and participation. The findings suggest that publicly showcasing creative processes fosters early forms of deliberation, argumentation and mutual recognition. Technology does not replace manual practice, but acts as a mediating device that amplifies presence and redistributes the voice. The study argues that agency in the digital age depends less on technical proficiency than on the design of learning environments that foster active listening and the practice of democracy in everyday life, with implications for teacher training and early childhood education.

arts education, digital technologies, democratic participation, agency, visual culture

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

Heritage as Provocation: Developing Creative Agency and Democratic Participation through Expressive Arts in a Digital Age

Presenters:
Rose Piccinino, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

All authors:

Rose Piccinino, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta

This study investigates how arts pedagogies, through visits to historical and cultural sites across Malta and Gozo, contribute to heritage education and deepen cultural awareness in teacher preparation. It explores how heritage encounters, conceptualised as aesthetic and imaginative provocations, foster creative agency among pre-service early years teachers, supporting participatory and democratic pedagogical interpretations. Emerging literature suggests that engagement with historical and cultural sites can foster professional agency and democratic dispositions in teacher education. Jaramillo (2017) highlights how partnerships with heritage organisations model collaborative practitioner agency, while Barton and Levstik (2004) show that inquiry-based historical engagement cultivates civic reasoning. Grounded in John Dewey's (1916) 'Democracy and Education', this framework reflects on how lived experience, inquiry and communication underpin democratic life, and that education cultivates participatory dispositions. The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm focused on meaning-making, agency and affective engagement. It employs a qualitative methodology using structured visits to historical and cultural sites, creative arts workshops, digital tasks, reflective journals, multimodal artefacts, focus groups and interviews. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) identifies recurring patterns and themes. Institutional ethical approval was obtained, and participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms ensured non-identifiability, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage. Preliminary analysis indicate a shift from replication-based art activities related to history and culture towards open-ended processes that position young children as cultural interpreters and co-constructors of meaning. The findings propose a developing conceptual framework linking heritage, imaginative transformation, creative agency and democratic participation, highlighting implications for teacher education in an increasingly digital context.

creative agency, democratic participation, heritage education, expressive arts, pre-service teacher education

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

Symposium E06 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALISM IN ECEC

Chaired by: Mary Delany, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

Shaping Curriculum Identity and Agency through Currere: Lived Experience in the Practice of Democratic Curriculum Making

Presenters:
Gisselle Tur Porres, Swansea University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Gisselle Tur Porres, Swansea University, United Kingdom

This presentation discusses a teaching-led research initiative (Harland, 2016) embedded within modules of a BA Early Childhood Studies programme in Wales. The project explores how currere can operate as an autobiographical-reflective methodology that supports students in developing democratic and agentic curriculum identities. Smith's (2022) articulation of autobiographical inquiry is a meaningful curriculum pathway in the Welsh context. This work is situated within theoretical traditions that view curriculum as lived, relational, and political. Pinar's (1975; 2012) reconceptualisation of curriculum provides the foundation for this positioning, while Freire's (2005 [1970]) account of critical consciousness and Rancière's (1991) conception of emancipation inform the study's focus on agency and ethical/political responsibility. Through a qualitative–exploratory design, students engaged with the four moments of currere: regressive/progressive/analytical/synthetical through reflective writing and dialogic encounters. These

activities invited participants to examine their histories and aspirations and to consider how personal experience shapes professional identity and curriculum decision-making. Ethical considerations centred on confidentiality and respect for students' rights (Bertram et al., 2025); reflective journals remained private, with only anonymised evaluations used for analysis. Preliminary findings show that the process enabled students to articulate emerging agentic-professional identities, recognise curriculum as an ethical and political endeavour. The presentation discusses how autobiographical curriculum inquiry can enhance reflective capacity and prepare early years practitioners to navigate participatory, relational, and democratic curriculum work within rapidly shifting digital and policy landscapes. The study argues that integrating currere into early childhood studies programmes strengthens critical awareness and agentic curriculum making, positioning future practitioners as co-creators of democratic educational practices.

Currere, agency, autobiographical curriculum inquiry, dialogic encounters, democratic curriculum-making

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

An exploration of Advocacy towards the Professionalisation of Early Years Educators (EYEs) within Early Childhood Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Degree programmes.

Presenters:
Mary Delany, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

All authors:
Mary Delany, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

The aim of this research was to explore the perspectives of graduates, lecturers, and experts on advocacy to identify core influences, catalysts, constraints and opportunities for advocacy expertise towards the professionalisation of EYEs. The research focused on the lived experience of EYEs, Hence, this researcher sought, where appropriate, qualitative literature such as Urban et al., (2011), Mevawalla and Hadley, (2012), Vandenbrock and Peeters', (2014) Gardner-Neblett et al., (2020) which had a key focus on EYE and ECEC experiences. The research was guided and informed by theories and ideas from Foucault (1972, 1974) and Freire (1974, 2013) which critiqued conditions of domination such as neoliberalism, caring and ECEC professional identity, status and power. A interpretative qualitative approach using interviews and focus groups was undertaken to explore the perspectives of three highly informed groups of participants. A group of expert ECEC advocates, HEI lecturers and graduates (Total N=36). The participants provided informed consent and could withdraw from the research at any stage. To mitigate the impact of Covid-19 some of the research had to be completed online. To avoid bias, possible assumptions were prevented through ongoing critical reflection and reflexivity. Findings revealed neoliberal tensions, difficulties and resistance in the implementation of current policy to practice for EYEs. There is ambiguity about professional advocate identity and a severe lack of 'tribal' identity in ECEC. The current education approach to EYEs training may not sufficiently develop critical thinkers, socio-political understanding, professional identity or advocacy for the profession. HEI (EC) programmes should consider adapting a critical pedagogy approach. Conclusions and recommendations may promote consideration within the ECEC and HEI systems towards a more political, agentic and relational professional identity.

advocacy, professionalisation (EYE), policy, higher education

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The Joys and Challenges of Teaching on a Transnational (TNE) Online Masters of Education (Early Years Leadership) Course with students based in South-East Asia

Presenters:
Paola Pedrelli, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Paola Pedrelli, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Rebecca Snape, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

This article explores the opportunities and challenges presented by teaching on an Transnational Education (TNE) online Masters course, specialising in early years leadership in the UK with students based in South-East Asia The research takes a holistic approach, considering a range of factors such as power identity and experience (Bista 2019a; Bista 2019b; Risager 2020). We use Foucault's (1975) conceptualisation of power as a lens to explore our experiences The South African concept of Ubuntu (Tye, 2017) informed how we lectured and run the course. This philosophy has informed how we see ourselves, and our international MA students. Situated within a social constructivist and interpretivist paradigm (Teater 2015) this small-scale, qualitative-led case study explores negotiated meanings and individual perspectives (Cohen et al., 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis, allowing attention to patterns of discourse, power relations, and moments of resistance within participants' narratives Following EECERA and BCU ethical guidelines, the ethics were approved by BCU Ethics committee. A particular emphasis was placed on ensuring informed consent, anonymisation and risk mitigation as we work at the institution This article specifically draws on the concept of power to illuminate underlying power relations in TNE provision. It shows how academics like ourselves can find pockets of resistance and joy in an unpredictable neoliberal education system. Rather than centring the negative connotations of power, this paper offers hope and resistance It offers some valuable insights into lecturers' experiences. Recommendations are offered for sustaining and reimagining TNE to support early years professionalism and leadership.

transnational education, online international MA course, South-East Asia, lived experience, power,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E07 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

EMBRACING INNOVATION AND UNCERTAINTY IN DIGITAL AGE

Chaired by: Lesley Wood, North-West University, South Africa

Unlocking Hidden Resources: A Participatory Framework for Agency, Democracy, and Sustainable Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Lesley Wood, North-West University, South Africa

All authors:
Lesley Wood, North-West University, South Africa
Mariette Koen, North-West University, South Africa

To develop a participatory framework to foster agency, participation, and democracy in the professional development of early childhood practitioners, enabling quality and sustainable ECE in resource-scarce contexts. Research question: How can participatory research help address the challenges facing ECE in resource-scarce contexts to ensure early learning programmes are high quality and sustainable? Existing studies often take deficit-based views of scarcity (Scheidecker et al., 2022). This research draws on the hidden potential of practitioners (Murray, 2024), highlighting collaboration and indigenous knowledge as drivers of sustainable improvement.

Padayachee et al. (2023) show that participatory research supports practitioners to effect positive change. Grounded in a participatory and transformative paradigm (Wood, 2020) and theories (Mertens, 2025; Fleming, 2022), the framework positions practitioners as co-researchers, promoting agency and shared decision-making. To address the research question, we qualitatively analysed eight participatory action research ECE projects that used methods such as workshops, reflective dialogues, and co-design with practitioners, parents, and community members to support transformative ECE practice in resource-scarce contexts. The chapter authors gave consent for their studies to be included for analysis in the framework. All chapters, including the analysis received ethical clearance from the respective universities. Findings reveal that mobilising hidden human, social, cultural, and pedagogical resources through participatory processes strengthens ECE systems. Key mechanisms include practitioner well-being, resilience, play-based pedagogies, and community engagement. The framework offers a pathway for professional development that enhances practitioner agency and democratic participation. Policy should support participatory approaches to build sustainable, contextually responsive ECE systems in resource-scarce settings.

practitioner professional development, early childhood education for sustainable development, resource-scarce contexts, participatory paradigm, ECE systems

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was conducted in collaboration with and funded by ETDP SETA Research Chair in Early Childhood.

ECEC leaders' moral agency in ethically challenging situations

Presenters:
Kaisu Peltoperä, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Kaisu Peltoperä, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Suvi Heikkinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Itala Ballaschk, Fachhochschule Südwestfalen, Germany

This study examines early childhood education and care (ECEC) leaders' multifaceted moral agency in ethically challenging situations. Previous research highlights that ethical dilemmas in ECEC are inherently relational and often stem from competing interpretations of the child's best interest (Tirri & Husu, 2002). In this context, an ethical problem refers to a challenging situation in which conflicting views about the appropriate course of action create uncertainty (Geva, 2006). Such dilemmas lack clear right or wrong solutions, allow multiple defensible responses, and have significant consequences for colleagues, subordinates, parents, and children. Moral agency is understood as the capacity of individuals, including leaders, to act in pursuit of ethical practice and in alignment with their own evaluations of what is right (Wilcox, 2012). The data (13 focus-groups) analysed in this study form part of the Finnish Education and Evaluation Centre's project "Leadership in Early Childhood Education: The current state, strengths and areas of development." A discourse-analytic approach was used, with particular attention to episodes as meaningful analytical units (van Dijk, 1981). In line with ethical research practice, informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. The analysis identified two intertwined ethical problems that ECEC leaders frequently encounter: the equitable distribution of limited resources and the tensions arising from leadership role strain. These findings underscore the need for ethical sensitivity and strong moral agency as integral components of ECEC leadership. Such competencies should be systematically recognised, supported, and developed across all levels of professional education, including leadership training

ECEC leadership, ethical dilemmas, ethical sensitivity, focus-group, moral agency

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

The possibilities of early childhood education practice from valuing uncertainty of 'maybe' in a digital age

Presenters:
Hiroaki Kurihara, Seishin-kindergarten, Japan

All authors:
Hiroaki Kurihara, Seishin-kindergarten, Japan
Mari Mori, Kobe Shinwa University, Japan

The aim of the study is to explore being comfortable with uncertainty as expanding the possibilities of ECEC practice focusing on pedagogical tact and children's agencies at a kindergarten in Japan. The study is inspired by Reggio Emilia Approach, in which Malaguzzi states (2016) uncertainty can be turned into something positive when we start to test it and see it as a state of ferment, a motor of knowledge. Moreover, the notion of slow pedagogy (Clark, 2023) and pedagogical tact (Van Manen, 1991) are embedded. The theoretical/conceptual framework draws on discourses on pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2021), UNCRC (1989), and critical thinking (Moss, 2022) . Employing cultural-ecological paradigm with qualitative way, the study illustrates how the questions of "maybe" from 4-5-year-old children during everyday walk brought for exploration of their community including making meanings of sculptures they encountered. Thematical analysis has carried out searching for aspects of being comfortable with uncertainty. The study was carried out in accordance with the ethical code of EECERA and the Japan Society of Research on ECCE (2023). Informed written and verbal consent were obtained from the participants of the study. The study is ongoing, though, the teachers' pedagogical tact, including respect, listen to, trust, and believe in the children with having the sense of wonder could support and value questions and wonder of the children which empowering them as seeing agencies to make practice more interesting. The study raises the needs for further inquiries of the relationship between teachers' pedagogical tact and children's agencies in a digital age.

uncertainty , maybe, pedagogical tact, slow pedagogy, agency

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

Symposium E08 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY AND INCLUDING FATHERS

Chaired by: Neil Guterman, New York University Silver School of Social Work, United States

Intergenerational play and participation: Interactions between young children and older adults

Presenters:
Sarah Young, The University of Melbourne, Australia

All authors:
Sarah Young, The University of Melbourne, Australia
Lisa Murray, The University of Melborune, Australia

This research aims to systematically map and classify a range of activities used in intergenerational programs (IGP) and the corresponding observable interactional behaviours between young children and older adults to understand how facilitation supports inclusive participation. While the community and social benefits of IGPs are well established, research examining the characteristics of interpersonal interactions across different IGP contexts is limited, leaving gaps in understanding about how young children and older adults engage (Jarrott et al., 2022;

Murray et al., 2025). Social Capital theory (Lin, 2001) was used to examine the unique benefits for young children and older adults engaged in intergenerational activities. This research is situated within a co-located early childhood service and aged care facility in a major Australian city. Young children (6 months-5 years old) participate in the intergenerational program throughout the year, with weekly activities as part of their educational program. The project used a mixed-methods case study design, including an intergenerational evaluation measure to assess the types of interactions between generations and the activities that promote intergenerational inclusion and collaboration. Research participation was voluntary. Consent forms, plain language statements, and oral explanations were provided to older adults, staff, and children's families. Ongoing assent was negotiated with children. University and state government ethics approval was obtained. The findings indicate that the environment and facilitation practices accommodate diverse abilities and foster connections, which in turn affect how the young and the old interact and engage in the program. The findings identified how the environmental and facilitation practices impact intergenerational interactions and how different generations participate.

intergenerational, young children, older adults, facilitation, participation

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

Grandparents interacting with young children in playgroup

Presenters:
Ann Farrell, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Ann Farrell, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Cathy Nielson, Play Matters Australia, Australia

The research aims to reveal the play interactions of grandparents and grandchildren in an intergenerational playgroup. Research questions are: (1) How do grandparents and children interact in playgroup? (2) How does interaction impact grandparent-grandchild relationships? (3) What are the benefits/challenges of participation in playgroup? Established research attests to naturalistic observations and interviews for understanding children's participation in early childhood settings (Danby & Farrell, 2015). Evidence reveals grandparents' caregiving roles/desires for meaningful engagement with grandchildren (Baxter, 2022), intergenerational play strengthening relationships, wellbeing and problem-solving (Pardoe, 2022). Play Matters Australia's Ageless Play initiative shows supported playgroups fostering intergenerational connection and social inclusion (CFCA, 2017). Conceptual understandings of intergenerational play interactions affirm adults and children as contributors to and participants in play. Fraser's (2008) framework (recognition, representation and redistribution) informs analysis of the affordances/challenges of play across generations. A participatory paradigm positions old and young as active agents in play. The multi-year study uses non-intrusive observations and audio-recorded conversations with ten grandparents, applying thematic analysis (Naeen et al,, 2023) to interrogate data from a weekly playgroup that targets grandparents (under the auspices of Play Matters Australia). Informed voluntary consent of adults and children underpin the ethical conduct and dissemination of research, in line with protocols of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval # 9234) and Play Matters Australia. Early findings show the conditions and benefits of intergenerational play. Notable affordances for grandparents are interaction with generational peers and a range of other children. Explicating intergenerational play can inform intergenerational policy and practice, with possible translation to wider early years settings.

grandparents, children's play, play research, interactions, participation

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

Promoting Fathers' Verbal Communication with their Infants: Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial of Dads Matter-HV

Presenters:
Neil Guterman, New York University Silver School of Social Work, United States

All authors:
Neil Guterman, New York University Silver School of Social Work, United States

This study examines whether Dads Matter-HV, a father-inclusion augmentation to perinatal home visiting, increases fathers' verbal communication with their infants and, secondarily, whether it strengthens mothers' verbal engagement. Early parent–infant communication predicts later cognitive and socio-emotional development (Madigan et al., 2019). Although home visiting improves child and family outcomes (Cibralic et al., 2025), major models center the mother–infant dyad and overlook fathers. However, fathers' positive early involvement predicts children's cognitive development (Gulotta et al., 2019) and later behavioral difficulties (Choi, 2010). This study tests whether intentional father inclusion strategies enhance parent–infant communication within home visiting. Grounded in family systems (Minuchin, 1974), social support and stress theories (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and emerging co-parenting frameworks (Feinberg, 2003), Dads Matter-HV trains home visitors to engage fathers, strengthen co-parenting, and support fathers' direct parenting. Using a prevention research paradigm, we report findings from 59 mother–father–infant families (drawn from 204 enrolled across 19 Chicago-area programs) randomly assigned to standard home visiting or home visiting plus Dads Matter-HV. In-home audio-recordings were analyzed using LENA technology, yielding adult word counts per five-minute segment at baseline, four months, and one year. Families provided informed consent, confidentiality protections were implemented, intervention access was staged to ensure all programs received the enhancement. At four months, fathers' verbalizations increased relative to controls (d = .20), sustained at one year (d = .33). Mothers' verbalizations increased (d = .39), and parent-infant conversational turns increased (d = .47). Structured ather inclusion within home visiting may magnify early parent–infant communication impacts, strengthening foundations for children's development.

father inclusion, early home visiting, parent-infant communication, co-parenting, intervention research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E09 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

EXPLORING ROUTINES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Chaired by: Iulia Moisi, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom

Institutionalized Progression of Sleep and Rest in Norwegian Kindergartens

Presenters:
Kristin Severinsen Spieler, University of Agder, Norway
Tina Binfield-Skøie, University of Agder, Norway

All authors:
Kristin Severinsen Spieler, University of Agder, Norway
Tina Binfield-Skøie, University of Agder, Norway

This study examines how sleep and rest are constituted as a progressional organized institutional practice in Norwegian kindergartens, asking: How is the sleeping/resting child constructed in the Norwegian kindergarten context? Building on institutional logics (Gulløv, 2017) and previous research, sleep is discursively framed and governed through adult practices (Leirpoll, 2023; Gehret, 2021; Kuukka et al., 2024; Nothard et al., 2015). Ulla (2017) demonstrates that the sleeping child becomes a deviation from the ideal active, learning and productive child. We analyze the authors' self-experienced narratives from careers as ECEC teachers (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Three composite narratives reveal a patterned progression of sleep/rest. Ethical principles were followed, such as anonymization and critical reflections on the analytical prosess (Bertram et al., 2024). Because the authors themselves contributed with the narratives, consent was an implicit given. Our findings illustrate an institutional continuum of sleep/rest: from pram-sleeping to mattress-sleeping, from the individual sleeper to the mass rester, and from the sleeping child to the non-sleeping child. These transitions reflect institutional valuations of activity and productivity, and how adult governance and disciplinary practices shape children's institutional routines of sleep/rest. The study highlights a potential disconnect between political intentions emphasizing children's need to sleep/rest (Ministry of Education, 2017), and local enactments that may reinterpret or undermine those intentions, creating practices that conflict with children's participation rights. Accordingly, political implications are that policymakers and practitioners should anticipate how policy language will be interpreted and operationalized locally to better align institutional practices with children's rights and wellbeing.

institutional sleep, institutional rest, norwegian kindergartens, critical perspectives, narratives from kindergarten

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

Changing Lives Through Relationships: Parents' stories of the impact of holistic and co-designed ECEC on their lives and wellbeing

Presenters:
Sally Pearse, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom
Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Sally Pearse, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom
Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

This study explores families' experiences of trauma informed, community-based ECEC in a disadvantaged area and examines how this provision influences family wellbeing. Evidence shows that integrated, relational, community support can reduce health inequalities (Blair 2025), address wider family needs (Demissie & Pearse 2025; Skoutaris et al. 2022), and benefit families affected by trauma (Signorelli et al. 2017). However, parents' perspectives on the impact of co-designed, community-led ECEC remains under examined. In the UK, ECEC in disadvantaged areas is characterised by restricted access to high quality provision, policy focused on working parents, and top-down interventions (Sandher & Stephens 2023). Ongoing social and financial pressures highlight the need for more responsive approaches (Archer, Demissie & Pearse 2024). Drawing on Capabilities Theory (Sen 1998; Robeyns 2006), the study explores how place-based, relational practices support change and expand families' opportunities. A qualitative design was used. Six parents shared experiences of community ECEC offering holistic, trauma informed support. Storytelling methods (Sherwood & Nind 2014), combined with a capabilities lens (Hartas 2014), enabled respectful participation without reducing families to their challenges. Parents participated on the basis of anonymity, with dissemination plans discussed and agreed collectively. Institutional ethical approval and informed consent were secured (BERA 2018). Parents valued non-judgmental, trauma-informed relationships that built trust and addressed immediate needs. These relationships supported increased confidence, wellbeing, social connection, and engagement in co-designed projects. Community based ECEC grounded in relational, trauma informed practice can strengthen family wellbeing and inform policy supporting place based, co-designed services.

co-design, trauma, parents, capabilities, community

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Patterns and Pressures: Exploring shifts in early learning routines from 2019 to 2025

Presenters:
Iulia Moisi, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom

All authors:
Iulia Moisi, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom
Christina Clark, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom
Katerina Stoumpou, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom
Irene Picton, National Literacy Trust, United Kingdom

This UK-based research explores shifts in carer-child engagement in early learning across six years of compounding nationwide pressures, including Covid-19, rising living costs, a strained early years system, and a rapidly digitalising world. It also investigates demographic, attitudinal, and structural factors shaping parents' agency to support early learning today. Complementing established evidence that shared early learning interactions are foundational for children's development (Hoyne & Egan, 2022; Lehrl et al., 2019; 2020), this study expands insight into changes in UK families' early learning routines over time. This research foregrounds shared early routines as a key driver of child learning that must be understood within broader structural contexts. The theoretical rationale is rooted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach, interpersonal approaches to early learning, including Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and the EPPE framework of early learning behaviours. Situated within a post-positivist paradigm and framed by transformative-pragmatist narratives, our analysis compares nationally representative quantitative data collected through national UK carer surveys between 2019 and 2025. Informed consent, anonymisation, and sample representativeness were ensured by independent polling agencies. Survey content reassured parents that data collected was not used to judge parenting quality. Findings reveal a notable cross-year decline in shared engagement in activities such as reading, chatting, and playing, with structural barriers constraining engagement despite high parental confidence and knowledge. This research highlights the need for support and policies responsive to the complex realities of family life and the structural factors shaping agency to engage in early learning, at home and in the community.

home learning environment, parental engagement, early language development, early years, shared early learning

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The 2025 survey was supported by KPMG.

Symposium E10 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 6, floor -2

GENDER IDENTITY IN ECEC

Chaired by: Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

Making female scientist with children visible in the digital age

Presenters:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Carolin Quenzer-Alfred, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

All authors:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Carolin Quenzer-Alfred, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Franka Metzner-Guzca, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

The BMFTR-funded Moms@Science project highlights the challenges and achievements of female scientists with (young) children. The aims are to reveal structures that influence their potential and visibility and to derive sustainable measures from this. (Inter)national studies show that women in science experience discrimination more often than men. Mothers are particularly affected by structural barriers that impair their career and their visibility (Von Hippel, et al. 2018). Many are forced to limit their careers due to family commitments, reduce working hours, or give up their scientific ambitions. The study draws on feminist institutionalism (Waylen, 2014) and visibility as a dimension of democratic participation within academic systems (Gill, 2009). In this qualitative study, narrative interviews with female scientist with children (n = 20) examine their situation. Participants are chosen via snowball effect, social media posts, universities and women organisations as gate keepers. The data is interpreted using the coding procedures of the Grounded Theory Methodology. On this basis, a campaign is developed to raise awareness of mothers in science and a catalogue of measures for universities and other research institutions is published. Participation is voluntary. Informed consent is obtained and can be revoked any time. Data is anonymized. However, some interviews touch sensitive subjects. Contact to counselling specializing in issues affecting women and mothers can be obtained. Preliminary findings reveal patterns of discrimination, intensified self-exploitation especially when children are at a very young age (between 0 and 7/8 years of age), strong solidarities among mothers, and active engagement in institutional change. By creating digital visibility spaces, the project contributes to strengthening mothers' professional agency and proposes structural measures for more democratic and inclusive academic institutions.

female scientist, mothers, visibility, children, social media

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

The porject was fundeD by the BMFTR.

Children's gender constructions in Brazil

Presenters:
Ricardo Gonçalves, Uppsala University, Sweden

All authors:
Ricardo Gonçalves, Uppsala University, Sweden
Sandro Vinicius Sales dos Santos, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil

This paper explores how four-year-old children in a Brazilian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting construct gender. Traditional beliefs and conservative ideas that can reinforce gender stereotypes are prevalent in many spheres in Brazil and may have consequences on how children construct gender in ECEC (Gonçalves de Sousa & Nogueira, 2023). Gender is used as a theoretical approach to understand that children's different notions of gender are shaped by the social practices through which they are socialised and by the contexts in which they participate (Connell & Pearse, 2015). A qualitative case study was conducted, including observations and interviews with 15 children, their female and male teachers, and other adults closed to the children both inside and outside the ECEC setting. Data analysis was performed through thematic analysis with an inductive approach. Participants were

informed both orally and in writing; their anonymity was maintained, and consent was negotiated throughout the research process. The findings show how the organisation of pedagogical activities and the varied roles taken by male and female teachers may shape children's ideas about gender. Children's interactions with teachers and adults reveal that stereotypical gender beliefs are both reinforced and challenged during play and other activities in the ECEC environment. These results suggest that the lack of a systematic pedagogical focus on gender may impact children's perceptions of gender when they interact with adults and even other children in ECEC. Broader educational policies adressing gender, together with ongoing teacher training in Brazil, can support children in expanding the diverse ways in which they construct gender.

gender, Brazil, constructions, children, context

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Embodied Intersections of Gender and Professional Practice in Early Childhood Education: A Multi-Sited Video-Ethnographic Study

Presenters:
Isabela Fernandes, University of Geneva, Switzerland

All authors:
Isabela Fernandes, University of Geneva, Switzerland

This contribution examines how the inter- and intra-relations between doing professionalism and doing gender are accomplished within everyday practices in Early Childhood Education (ECE). While scholarship has examined the gendered organisation of routines, spaces and professional identities in ECE (Osgood, 2012; Peeters, 2013; Tennhoff et al., 2015), less attention has been paid to how these arrangements are enacted and reworked through educators' embodied practices. The professional body remains largely treated as neutral (Gamelli, 2016), despite calls for empirical attention to how bodies shape professional identities (Roberts, 2020) and sustain or constrain gender negotiations (Fernandes & Bianchini, 2024). Grounded in ethnomethodology and multimodal interaction analysis (Garfinkel, 1967; Mondada, 2016), and drawing on doing gender and performativity (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990), the study explores how gender and professionalism are jointly accomplished through the coordination of discursive, embodied and material resources in situated practice (Greco, 2025). The study employs multi-sited video-ethnography in Switzerland (francophone region) and Italy. Data derive from semi-structured interviews and focus groups, video-recorded observations of bodies-in-action, and collective video-reflection sessions, enabling analysis of discursive constructions, embodied micro-coordinations and reflexive re-articulations of professional practice. Procedures include informed consent, negotiated video use, anonymisation and careful management of children's visibility. Preliminary analysis suggests that gender and professionalism become differently salient across embodied interaction, narrative accounts and video-mediated reflection. The study advances gender- and body-sensitive professional development by demonstrating how legitimacy in ECE is interactionally constructed through embodied practice, and how bodily and discursive positioning shape perceptions of professional and pedagogical competence.

body, professionalism, gender, video-ethnography, early childhood education

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

This research is funded by the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship awarded by the Swiss Confederation.

INTERACTIONS WITH UNDER THREES

Chaired by: Tale Irgens, NLA University College, Norway

Embodied Adult–Toddler (2 Years) Encounters in Outdoor Early Childhood Settings

Presenters:
Astrid Øien Halsnes, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Astrid Øien Halsnes, NLA University College, Norway
Tale Irgens, NLA University College, Norway

This study examines how toddlers aged 2 years communicate through embodied, pre-verbal expressions. This study builds on previous research on embodied communication and early intersubjectivity (Nome, 2024), extending this work by focusing specifically on toddlers aged 2 years and adult responsiveness in outdoor kindergarten contexts (Halsnes, 2024) The study draws on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment (1994) and Stern's theory of early intersubjectivity (Stern, 2003) to conceptualise toddlers aged 2 years as embodied subjects who communicate meaning through pre-verbal, affective and sensory-motor expressions. This examines how embodied interaction in outdoor environments facilitate shared meaning-making and relations between adults and children. An ethnographic study involving observations and conversations with 6–8 children and 2–3 adults from a university-affiliated kindergarten. The study follows the NESH Guidelines (2021). Parental consent and institutional permission were obtained, and toddlers' ongoing assent guided participation. All data will be anonymized and stored securely, prioritizing children's well-being, dignity, and ethical protection throughout the ethnographic fieldwork. The project is currently in its initial phase, and to date only one field visit to the forest and one preliminary conversation with the kindergarten teacher have been conducted. This study underscores the importance of recognizing toddlers embodied, pre-verbal communication and enhancing adults' attunement to these early forms of meaning-making. The findings suggest a need for professional development that supports sensitive, bodily-aware interaction strategies in both everyday routines and outdoor environments. At a policy level, the study highlights the importance of ensuring time, stability, and relational continuity in early childhood settings so that practitioners can engage responsively with toddlers aged 2 years.

embodied communication, outdoor early childhood settings, adult-toddler

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

Scaffolding cleanliness: Pedagogue-toddler interaction in preschool

Presenters:
Camilla Rindstedt, Stockholm University, Sweden

All authors:
Sofia Frankenberg, Stockholm University, Sweden
Camilla Rindstedt, Stockholm University, Sweden

The aim of this study is to explore how the scaffolding of toddlers' bodily cleanliness practices can be performed in line with the institutional setting of Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Previous research convincingly shows the importance of contingent scaffolding in ECEC (van de Pol, 2010), yet how this is performed in ECEC group settings needs further exploration. Ethnomethodology and participant framework analysis (Goodwin,

2006) are used in combination with scaffolding and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) highlighting signs of toddlers' agency in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Participant observations and video-recordings were carried out over a period of two years. This single case multimodal interaction analysis portrays one preschool teacher together with toddlers, selected from a collection of episodes. In order to safeguard the children's right to integrity and privacy while investigating bodily cleanliness practices, a number of ethical strategies were used. Informed consent was for example treated as an ongoing and dynamic process. The ethnographer monitored the pedagogue-child interaction in order to identify if there were signs of discomfort. The analysis shows how the children and teacher co-construct and negotiate a framework of collaboration focused on cleanliness. Toddlers show multiple signs of self-determination. The analysis illustrates the complexity of how contingent scaffolding supports the child's development and bodily cleanliness skills. These findings highlight mundane everyday activities of great importance of children's participation, agency and well-being. They also illustrates the complexity of high-quality individual scaffolding within a group setting. The visualization of these processes can inform pedagogical practices.

bodily cleanliness practices, ECEC, scaffolding, integrity, self-determination

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

Swedish Research Council, VR2022-02928

Adult–Child Feeding Interactions in Daycare (0-3): A Qualitative Study of Agency and Self-Regulation in Children under Three

Presenters:
Dulce Martins, Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) -Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal, Portugal

All authors:
Dulce Martins, Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) -Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal, Portugal
Carolina Branco, Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal
Ana Mourato, Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) - Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal
Beatriz Henriques, Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal
Àngels Geis, Grup Recerca en Educació, Didàctica i Aprenentatge Universidade Ramon Llull-Blanquerna,Barcelona, Spain
Helena Luís, Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) - Santarém Polytechnique University, Portugal

This study forms part of a larger research project (PAPAR) examining feeding practices that support children's agency, participation, well-being, and self-regulation. At the micro-level of PAPAR, this study examines adult–child interactions during mealtimes and their role in agency development. It aims to understand how interaction quality supports children's participation and emerging self-regulation. Feeding interactions are increasingly recognised as relational and pedagogical contexts through which emotional security, autonomy and participation are negotiated in early childhood settings (Swindle et al., 2018; Sutherland & Mukadam, 2018; Marques et al., 2024). Nevertheless, research remains limited regarding how these everyday interactions pedagogically foster agency among children under three years of age in daycare contexts (Quiñones, Li & Ridgway, 2023). Informed by sociocultural and democratic pedagogies, agency is understood as a relational and embodied process that emerges through children's participation in everyday pedagogical interactions, where bodily action, communication and adult responsiveness shape opportunities for initiative and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003, 2007; Moss, 2018) A qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative approach was adopted. Data were collected through systematic observation of feeding interactions in two nursery rooms and one toddler classroom using an observational grid focusing on emotional responsiveness, autonomy support, and regulatory processes. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for children's well-being were ensured. Findings indicate that responsive and autonomy-supportive interactions promote participation,

agency, and self-regulation, while more directive adult practises were associated with reduced opportunities for children autonomous participation. Feeding interactions should be recognised as democratic pedagogical opportunities supporting agency, participation, well-being and long-term health.

agency, feeding interactions, autonomy, self-regulation, 0-3

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

Projet funded by Quality of Life Research Center (CIEQV) -/ FCT.

Symposium E12 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Senate Room, floor -2

LITERACY LEARNING: RESEARCH FROM CANADA, SINGAPORE AND THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Chaired by: Dina Al-Madhoun, McGill University, Canada

Toward Diversity in Children's Literature: Across Canada and Nordic Contexts

Presenters:
Dina Al-Madhoun, McGill University, Canada

All authors:
Dina Al-Madhoun, McGill University, Canada
Teresa Strong-Wilson, McGill University, Canada

In a world shaped by movement, difference, and distances from belonging, this paper brings Canada and the Nordic countries—Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland—into dialogue to re-imagine teachers' subjective and social formation through contemporary children's literature, in support of teaching for diversity and social justice. Children's literature is "the very site" where social subjectivities emerge (Manderson, 2003, p. 93). Building on Meek's (1992) claim that stories open "other complete worlds" for children's questioning (p. 174), we attend to children's texts that move beyond the "security of home" (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 10). Drawing on pedagogies of discomfort (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2023) and imagology (Leerssen, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2005), this paper examines how "challenging stories" mobilize feeling in relation to historical consciousness, and how such encounters can support teachers' deeper, contextualized engagement with implication. This paper presents a dialogic literature review of studies from 2005–2023, when diverse children's literature expanded in availability to researchers and teachers and sparked related conversations. Given its use of English translations of foreign-language texts, this study approached these texts with caution, recognizing that translation can alter meaning. As both Canada and the Nordic countries are described as ancestral homes for Indigenous peoples and places that have attracted migrants, this cross-national dialogue can break down boundaries and critically reflect on what it means to prepare teachers for diversity in a neoliberal and neoconservative North. We conclude that asking who we are when not ruled by others is a question of subjective and social reconstruction, best taken up in classrooms through unsettling subjects and counter-storied representations.

children's literature, diversity, Nordic, imagology, pedagogy of discomfort

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Lingering with literacies: Slow and affective pedagogies in a Finnish ECEC center

Presenters:
Alexandra Nordström, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Alexandra Nordström, University of Helsinki, Finland
Jenny Byman, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study explores how slow and affective pedagogical approaches unfold within everyday literacy practices in a Finnish ECEC centre with 25 children aged 1–3. The study builds on theories of affective intensities (Kuby&Rowsell, 2021; Leander&Ehret, 2019) and emerging Nordic scholarship on slow pedagogy (Clark, 2022; Dýrfjörð&Hreinsdóttir, 2025), situating the work within a growing conversation on temporalities, equity, and embodied learning in early childhood. Slow pedagogies resist the fast-paced, outcome-driven nature of contemporary education by attending to children's rhythms and emergent moments (Clark, 2022; Ulmer, 2017). Literacies are understood as relational, affective, and more-than-human practices that are lively, playful, and imaginative (Hackett, 2021). A postqualitative paradigm foregrounds affective intensities and relationalities that are entangled with children's literacies beyond cognitive outcomes and linear developmental trajectories. Employing sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015) and 'thinking with theory' (Jackson&Mazzei, 2022), data were created through four months of video observations, interviews, fieldnotes, and children's artefacts. Analysis focuses on moments that "glow" (MacLure, 2013). The study follows the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023), emphasising children's voluntary participation. Ensuring children's consent involved continual attunement to children's embodied ways of being. The postqualitative approach highlights researcher's intra-active role in the research process and knowledge production as well as inseparability of knowing and being (Gunnarsson&Bodén, 2021; Ulmer, 2017). Preliminary findings show literacies emerging through lingering, attunement, and affective engagement with materials, environments, and others. The study offers conceptual and practical insights for educators by highlighting how slowing down and cultivating sensory attunement can expand what counts as literacies in ECEC.

slow pedagogy, affect, literacies, postqualitative inquiry, sensory ethnography

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

This project was funded by Svenska kulturfonden.

Supporting Children's Participation Through Educator Empowerment: Evaluating Curriculum Design Features for Inclusive Literacy Learning

Presenters:
Deniece Toh, NTUC First Campus, Singapore

All authors:
Deniece Toh, NTUC First Campus, Singapore

This study examined how educators of varying expertise adopted curriculum enhancements featuring differentiated whole-class instruction, integrated reinforcement time, and curated literacy resources. Children's literacy outcomes were also analysed to determine whether the enhanced curriculum translated into measurable gains. Prior research used educator surveys and focus groups to examine curriculum reform implementation and associated challenges (Brodin & Renblad, 2015; Gregoriadis & Tsigilis, 2008; Chee et al., 2015), and mixed-methods to explore factors influencing curriculum uptake (Lieber et al., 2009). Building on this work, the present study integrates educator perspectives with children's literacy outcomes to examine both curriculum enactment and impact. Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify patterns in educators' implementation experiences grounded in participants' own accounts. Using a mixed-methods design, the study included educator surveys (n=316) across 125 preschools, educator focus groups (n=16), and literacy outcomes from 29,230 children aged 4–6 across

intervention groups and two cohorts. The primary ethical concern was response confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained. Responses were not linked to performance evaluation. All data were de-identified and reported in aggregate. Educators reported strong implementation, with curriculum enhancements improving engagement with mixed-ability groups. Novice educators reported greater instructional confidence, and experienced educators deepened student engagement. Children with high literacy needs who did not receive additional intervention demonstrated comparable outcomes to peers receiving additional support. Among 4-year-olds without intervention, grapheme-phoneme correspondence improved against the previous cohort. Findings suggest that incorporating explicit, differentiated instructions and structural supports into the curriculum can enable educators across experience levels to foster inclusive literacy participation.

differentiated instruction, curriculum implementation, instructional support, educator empowerment, inclusive participation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E13 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

NAVIGATING ETHICAL CHOICES IN ECE DEVELOPMENT

Chaired by: Anne Marie Villumsen, VIVE, Denmark

Voices at Play: Democratic and Play-Based Methodological Approaches to Children's Participation in Early Childhood Research

Presenters:
Anne Marie Villumsen, VIVE, Denmark
Katrine Noehr, VIVE, Denmark

All authors:
Anne Marie Villumsen, VIVE, Denmark
Katrine Noehr, VIVE, Denmark

This paper examines how democratic and play-based methodological approaches can support young children's participation and voices in early childhood research. It addresses how researchers can ethically elicit children's perspectives on peer relationships in ECEC, recognising their embodied, visual and relational modes of expression. The paper is grounded in research on children's participation and voice (Koch, 2021; Villumsen et al., 2024), sociocultural and relational understandings of children's wellbeing (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014; Villumsen & Koch, 2023), and traditions conceptualising children as competent social actors (Christensen & Prout, 2002; James & Prout, 2015). We conceptualise wellbeing as participation opportunities (Koch & Jørgensen, 2025). The work is part of the Danish project TRoLD, exploring children's flourishing through play. The work is situated within a qualitative paradigm and draws on participatory methodologies. It reflects on concrete methodological designs, including visual, material and physically engaging methods supporting children's agency and mastery in research encounters (Vänskä et al., 2020). Approximately 65 children are interviewed three times over 18 months. Ethical considerations are central to the discussion, including ongoing consent, power relations between children and researchers, representation of children's perspectives (Villumsen et al., 2024; Christensen & Prout, 2002: Bessell, 2004), and research as a relational and situated ethical practice. The paper argues that research processes themselves can function as democratic spaces and concludes by proposing considerations that may inform participatory research practices and democratic engagement with young children in ECEC contexts. In conclusion, ethical and methodological considerations must be closely aligned to ensure that participation not only generates knowledge but also supports children's sense of mastery.

participation, voice, ethics, peer relationships, mastery

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

This project was funded by Partnerskab for Børneforskning (Partnership for Child Research, Denmark. www. borneforsk.dk).

Examining Ethical Concerns in Malta's Early Childhood Education and Care Sector: Findings from a National Survey of Educators

Presenters:
Charmaine Bonello, University of Malta, Malta
Natalie Lombardi Calleja, University of Malta, Malta

All authors:
Charmaine Bonello, University of Malta, Malta
Carmen Dalli, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Jonathan Borg, University of Malta, Malta
Natalie Lombardi Calleja, University of Malta, Malta
Jefflyn Grech, University of Malta, Malta

This study examines ethical concerns in Malta's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, investigating challenges encountered by educators of children aged 0-5 and the perceived need for a national Code of Ethics. International research links ethical ECEC practice to professionalism and children's rights, highlighting dilemmas related to confidentiality, keeping children safe, family relationships and power imbalances in the workplace (Dalli & Urban, 2010; Taggart, 2016). Clear ethical frameworks and professional standards foster coherent, rights-respecting practice, and strengthen educators' agency (Skoglund, Ye, & Jiang, 2022), yet how Maltese educators navigate such challenges remains under researched. The theoretical framework synthesises practical wisdom, and virtue based judgement (Campbell Barr, 2019). It incorporates relational ethics, focused on educator-child-family responsibilities (Noddings, 2013) and equity-oriented perspectives connecting ethical concerns with resource and policy constraints (van Krieken Robson & Martin, 2019). Adopting an interpretive paradigm, this phase of a larger study used a national online questionnaire that solicited responses on ethical concerns, guidance sources, and a Code of Ethics from ECEC educators in state, church, and private settings. Ethical approval and institutional permissions were obtained; participation was voluntary with informed consent, and fully anonymised data were stored separately from consent records on encrypted, password-protected devices. Preliminary findings reveal dilemmas in keeping children safe, professional boundaries, equity, and family communication, emerging a strong call for a national Code of Ethics and ethics focused professional development. These findings provide evidence to inform a Maltese Code of Ethics and policies aimed at strengthening ethical, trustworthy ECEC provision.

professionalism, ethical decision-making, national survey, code of ethics, Malta

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

Towards a Dialogical International Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Practice: Mapping Convergences, Tensions and Emerging Responsibilities

Presenters:
Antje Rothe, Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin, Germany

All authors:
Antje Rothe, Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin, Germany

Mary Moloney, Mary Immaculate College, Ireland

This paper provides a critical overview of existing national and regional codes of ethics in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and explores the feasibility of developing a dialogical international framework of professional responsibilities. While prior scholarship has analysed individual codes within specific national contexts, comparative and cross-national syntheses remain limited. Existing codes (e.g., USA, Australia, Canada, Singapore, Europe) demonstrate convergences around children's rights, relational ethics and professional integrity, yet differ in regulatory status and cultural positioning. This study builds on and extends that comparative groundwork. The analysis draws on rights-based approaches (UN CRC), care and professional ethics, examined through contextual-cultural and decolonial perspectives (Abebe et al., 2022; de Sousa Soares et al., 2024; de Castro, 2020), attending to tensions between universalism and contextuality as well as aspirational and regulatory models. Situated within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, the study employs critical document analysis following Sankofa (2023). Iterative reading and open coding of selected early childhood codes generate themes identifying shared principles, divergences and emerging ethical domains. As a document-based study, no human participants were involved. Reflexivity regarding positionality and potential epistemic bias informed the analytical process. Preliminary findings indicate global convergence around rights, care, equity and partnership, alongside variation in enforcement and cultural grounding. Emerging themes include digital ethics, sustainability, trauma-informed practice and indigenous epistemologies (Sankofa, 2022). The paper proposes the development of a dialogical, internationally adaptable ethical framework through participatory engagement within the P-SIG. Such a framework may support transnational professional dialogue while respecting contextual diversity.

early childhood codes of ethics, rights-based and care ethics, international comparative analysis, document analysis, transnational professionalism

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

Symposium E14 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

PARTICIPATION IN SHARED READING AND STORY TELLING

Chaired by: Eva Heuss, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Enacting Agency in Shared Reading: Children's Use of Illustrations in Adult–Child Book-Related Conversations

Presenters:
Zuzana Jancik Petrova, Institute for Research in Social Communication SAS, Slovakia

All authors:
Zuzana Jancik Petrova, Institute for Research in Social Communication SAS, Slovakia

This study explores how children exercise agency in adult–child interactions about their favourite books. It examines how children enact agency in conversations about familiar texts and how they use illustrations to support, structure, and enrich communication. Grounded in early literacy research, the study builds on perspectives that position children's agency as central to meaningful learning beyond access to literacy objects or curriculum standards (Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Agency is understood as intentional, socially situated action within literacy practices (Vaughn et al., 2020). Although book interactions can support agency (Mathis, 2016), children's agentic use of illustrations in dialogue remains underexplored. The study adopts a sociocultural understanding of agency as intentional, relational action and draws on multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to conceptualise illustrations as semiotic resources. A contextualist epistemology frames meaning as co-constructed within cultural

contexts. Situated within a qualitative research design (Shank, 2006), the study involved 55 children aged 5–6. Semi-structured interviews about favourite books generated data analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Parental consent and children's verbal assent were obtained. Participation was voluntary, withdrawal rights reiterated, and interviews conducted responsively to safeguard comfort, voice, and relational ethics. Children actively used illustrations to organise talk, initiate topics, and redirect dialogue, asserting interpretive authority and shaping shared meaning-making. In the study shared reading emerges as a democratic, dialogic space where responsive adults can foster children's agency, participation, and co-construction of meaning in everyday literacy practice.

early literacy development, children's agency, illustrations, picture books, preschool age

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The work was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic [grant number VEGA 2/0065/25] and theSlovak Research and Development Agency [grant number APVV-23-0184].

More Interactive Elements, More Participation? Usage of Interactive Elements, Children's Participation and Adults Interaction Quality in Digital Book Reading

Presenters:
Eva Heuss, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

All authors:
Eva Heuss, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland
Silvana Kappeler Suter, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

This study examines how interactive element use relates to children's participation and adult interaction quality in dyadic picture book reading. Dialogic reading promotes early language development through active child participation and responsive adult input (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Pillinger & Vardy, 2022). However, findings comparing print and digital picture books remain mixed (Liang et al. 2025). Interactive elements (hotspots, mini-games) are key distinguishing features of digital books (Serafini et al., 2016). The theoretical framework is the opportunity–use model of dialogic reading (Kappeler Suter, 2020), grounded in Helmke (2012). 106 college students video-record a picture book session with 4- or 5-year-olds. Participants are randomly assigned to a picture book app with hotspots only or with hotspots and games. Reading sessions are coded for interactive use (hotspot taps, game time, and child-led control). Child participation and interaction quality are assessed using scales. Consent was obtained from students, parents and children. Participation was voluntary. 0 Implications for digital dialogic reading are discussed, e.g. whether interactive elements can support children's participatory engagement.

picture books, engagement, digital, media, dialogic reading

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Narrative-Based Social-Emotional Learning in Early School Years: Children's Experiences with Oral Folktale Storytelling

Presenters:
Orsolya Német, Eötvös Lóránd University, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Department of School Psychology and Educational Psychology, Hungary

All authors:

Orsolya Német, Eötvös Lóránd University, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Department of School Psychology and Educational Psychology, Hungary

How do children use shared storytelling experiences to explore emotions, relationships, and choices in early school years? This presentation examines children's experiences with the T.A.L.E. (Tale Activates Learning and Emotional-growth) oral folktale program, a narrative-based approach supporting social-emotional learning (SEL) through dialogic practices. While storytelling is widely valued in early childhood education, few studies examine how children actively engage with stories as social and emotional meaning-makers. This study draws on research showing that children's narrative engagement in structured storytelling emphasizes active meaning-making, reflective interaction, and the developmental role of repeated, relational experiences. Drawing on Transformative Learning Theory and proximal process models, oral storytelling is conceptualized as a relational learning space where children explore emotional, cognitive, and social experiences through stories and creative, reflective practices. Semi-structured interviews with 99 children aged 7–9 following a 12-week T.A.L.E. program revealed vivid, experience-near micro-transformations: children noticed and named emotions, practiced self-regulation strategies, engaged in reflective meaning-making with peers, and applied narrative insights beyond the classroom. SEL emerged as a dynamic, recurring process embedded in everyday storytelling and creative-reflective activity. Ethical approval and parental consent were obtained. Children received age-appropriate explanations and voluntarily assented; assent was revisited prior to interviews. Responses were anonymized, and well-being was monitored throughout. Oral folktales provide a low-threshold, context-sensitive approach for fostering holistic social-emotional development. Centering children's lived experiences offers practical insights for curriculum design and classroom practice. The presentation will illustrate these processes through children's narratives, providing concrete examples of meaningful storytelling integration in early school settings.

oral storytelling, folktales, social-emotional learning, early elementary, narrative engagement

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

Symposium E15 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

PLAY BASED SIMULATIONS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Chaired by: Monica Gjelsten, Volda University College, Norway

Bridging Theory and Practice Through Play: Developing Professional Learning Spaces in Early Childhood Teacher Education

Presenters:
Monica Gjelsten, Volda University College, Norway

All authors:
Monica Gjelsten, Volda University College, Norway

This paper examines how playful, practice-based learning experiences on campus can foster professional identity and pedagogical judgement in early childhood teacher education. International research highlights the importance of authentic participation and relational learning in teacher education (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998), while studies of play-based pedagogy emphasise the role of guided interaction and meaning-making in early childhood contexts (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). However, structured campus-based collaborations with early childhood settings remain under-theorised. Grounded in sociocultural theory and communities of practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998), the study conceptualises professional learning as relational and contextually embedded. The study draws on qualitative

data from a development project (2023–2024) in which students designed and facilitated play-based literacy activities with visiting children. Data include reflections, digital questionnaires, and observations. Thematic analysis informed model development. Ethical approval was obtained from SIKT. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent from student teachers and children's guardians. Data were anonymised, and attention was given to the researcher's dual role. Findings indicate that professional growth occurs through layered collaboration—student–child interaction, peer coordination and institutional alignment. A conceptual model visualises these interrelated levels. The study contributes by conceptualising professional learning as emerging through collaborative, practice-based interactions across institutional boundaries.

play-based pedagogy, early childhood teacher education, theory–practice integration, professional identity development, practice-based learning

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

The project is funded by Volda University College through institutional funding supporting collaboration with a Learning Development Kindergarten (partner kindergarten).

The 'Shared space of experience': What might emerge when teachers get involved in play

Presenters:
Theresa Hauck, University of Vienna, Austria

All authors:
Theresa Hauck, University of Vienna, Austria

The PhD study examines teachers' participation in play and players' associated experiences. While the potential of children and teachers playing together for children's learning has already been researched (Pramling Samuelsson, 2025), the extent to which it could also create space for democratic experience remains largely unclear. The focus of the study is not on achieving learning goals set by educators for play, but rather on the meaning that is revealed in play. On the one hand, it follows a phenomenological paradigm, according to which children and teachers are assumed to be corporeal, experiencing beings. On the other hand, it also pursues a praxeological approach, which regards them as actors who orient themselves towards (experiential) knowledge in play. The combination of phenomenological vignettes (Agostini, 2016) and the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2017) enables a broader perspective on humans, who are affected by their environment in play and actively interact with it on the basis of their experiences. In accordance with the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2024), the children not only gave their informed consent, as did their parents, but were also able to decide at any time whether to participate by attaching a co-researcher tag to their clothing or not. The study gave rise to the concept of a 'Shared space of experience' that can arise when teachers playfully move back and forth between knowledge and non-knowledge, structure and openness, closeness and distance. This concept provides teachers with ideas for enabling experiences of self-efficacy, security, and connectedness through shared play.

playing along, shared experiences, meaning, phenomenological vignettes, documentary method

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

Simulation-based learning to identify and promote coping with disruptions in kindergarten management routines

Presenters:
Merav Aizenberg, Achva College, Israel

All authors:

Merav Aizenberg, Achva College, Israel

The aim of this presentation is to present the practice through a face-to-face simulation, based on the integration of a human actor, and through role-playing by the research participants, and to identify aspects of dealing with disruptions in the management routine in the kindergarten. The Simulation-based learning (SBL) was implemented in the pre-training phase of kindergarten teachers, and deals with promoting teaching by developing leadership and classroom management skills (Kaufman & Ireland, 2019). In kindergartens, the daily routine is a cornerstone in the proper management of the organization (Ran & Josephsberg Ben-Yehoshua, 2021). On the other hand, disruptions in the management routine are a common, which challenges the functioning of kindergarten teachers (Dieker et al., 2014). Qualitative longitudinal study in which 48 kindergarten students, who took part in face-to-face simulation combined with a human actor, and role-playing. Data collection was done through observations, later reflective feedback, and open-ended questionnaires. The study participants were given general information about the study, were assured that their anonymity would be maintained, and signed an informed consent form. The findings identify three central themes: the perception of disruptions as an inherent part of the management routine; diverse coping patterns with stressful situations and uncertainty; and the contribution of the simulation experience to the ability of kindergarten teachers to optimally deal with disruptions. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended to continue to incorporate simulations with an actor as a model and only then role-playing, as previously recommended (Joyce & Calhoun, 2024).

simulation-based learning (SBL), kindergarten teacher, management routines, disruptions, coping

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E16 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

(SoS): OBSERVING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICAL THINKING DEVELOPMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD: PLAY-BASED OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES

Chaired by: Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Advancing Play-Based Assessment to Support Children's Agency and Participation: A Validated Observation Grid for Preschool Language Skills in Pretend Play

Presenters:
Karine Desrochers, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Karine Desrochers, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Roxane Drainville, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

This presentation reports on the development and validation of a French-language observation grid assessing preschool children's (ages 3-7) language skills in pretend play. Preschool children's language skills are crucial to their educational success (Pace et al., 2019). Standardized tests are commonly used to detect early language difficulties (Monetta et al., 2016), although their validity may be limited with very young children (Linder, 2008), increasing interest in play-based assessment (Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024). Existing tools document language in play, but none assesses a broad range of language skills in children aged 3-7 based solely on peer interactions in pretend play. Play-based assessment involves systematic and holistic observation of a child's behavior while playing in a free or structured play context (O'Grady & Dusing, 2015). The study also draws on a model conceptualizing a comprehensive approach to language development (Drainville & Dumais, in press). The grid was developed through iterative

planning, operationalization, and validation phases (Corbière & Fraccaroli, 2020). Validation followed testing standards (AERA, 2010), examining content, variable relations, and internal structure. Data collection enabled internal consistency analyses, correlations, regressions, and exploratory factor analyses. Parental consent was obtained, and data anonymized. The final grid includes 14 items with strong psychometric properties. Two dimensions (oral and written language) showed good internal consistency (ω = .84; .81) and excellent inter-rater reliability (ICC = .75-1.00). This study supports universal prevention by providing a validated French-language tool to document children's language skills in pretend play while promoting observation practices that recognize children's voices, interactions, and active participation.

language development, kindergarten, pretend play, validation, observation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research is supported by a grant from the Fonds de recherche du Québec.

Observing Mathematical Thinking Development in Pretend Play: Pedagogical Practices and Children's Agency in Preschool Education

Presenters:
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Raymond Nolin, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This study examines pedagogical practices implemented in pretend play to support the development of mathematical thinking among children aged 4–6, while fostering agency and active participation. Although research highlights the cognitive benefits of pretend play and the importance of early mathematical skills (Duncan et al., 2007), fewer studies have examined how teachers support mathematical thinking during pretend play. This study empirically documents the role of pedagogical practices in the emergence of mathematical thinking. Adopting a qualitative interpretive paradigm, this study was conducted in preschool classrooms in Quebec. Data included classroom observations, video recordings of pretend play, and self-confrontation interviews with six preschool teachers. A content analysis (Bardin, 2013) combined deductive and inductive descriptors to analyse pedagogical practices and mathematical knowledge in pretend play. Adopting a qualitative interpretive paradigm, this study was conducted in preschool classrooms in Québec. Data included classroom observations, video recordings of pretend play, and self-confrontation interviews with six preschool teachers. A content analysis (Bardin, 2013) mobilised descriptors initially defined deductively and later refined inductively to describe pedagogical practices and identify mathematical knowledge mobilised or developed in pretend play. Ethical approval was obtained from the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Parental consent and child assent were obtained. Findings reveal: (1) pedagogical practices supporting mathematical thinking in pretend play; and (2) knowledge and skills children mobilise and develop through their interactions. Recognising pretend play as a context for agency and mathematical thinking reinforces its central role in preschool education and contributes to laying the foundations for active participation in social and educational life.

preschool education, pedagogical practices, pretend play, mathematical thinking, children's agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was funded by a doctoral scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Screen Time, Pretend Play, and Pragmatic Abilities: A MixedMethods Study in Preschool Education

Presenters:
Audrey-Ann Cossette, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

All authors:
Audrey-Ann Cossette, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada
Krasimira Marinova, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada
Christian Dumais, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This study examines the relationships between accompanied/unaccompanied screen time, pretend play skills, and pragmatic abilities among preschool-aged children. The aim is to better understand how screen use, measured at home and at school, is linked with the two abilities under investigation. It is situated within research documenting the decline of pretend play and in a context where teachers receive conflicting messages: while governmental directives encourage the integration of screens in the classroom, public health recommendations advise limiting screen exposure during early childhood. The theoretical and conceptual framework is grounded in the analysis of the three principal variables and draws on two major foundations: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in development, and Bruner's language theory, which highlights interaction formats supporting communication skills. The study adopts a pragmatic paradigm and a mixedmethods sequential explanatory design. In Phase 1, questionnaires completed by parents and teachers document accompanied and unaccompanied screen time, while two assessment grids measure pretend play skills and pragmatic abilities. Phase 2 consists of semistructured interviews with teachers. Ethical considerations include obtaining approval from the CERUQAT ethics board, implementing strict anonymization procedures using alphanumeric codes, and ensuring voluntary and informed consent. As data collection has not yet taken place, the results discussed represent possibilities informed by existing literature and point to the importance of promoting more conscious and intentional screen use, alongside the continued valorization of pretend play as a key component of preschool development.

screen time, pretend play, pragmatic abilities, preschool, decline of play

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

My research was funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) and is now funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Symposium E17 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 13, floor -1

SCOPING REVIEWS OF 21ST CENTURY NORDIC ECEC RESEARCH

Chaired by: May Irene F. Klippen, Knowledge Centre for Education, Norway

Exploring Quality in Nordic Early Childhood Education: Themes and Methods in a Decade of Research

Presenters:
Enrico Pollarolo, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Enrico Pollarolo, University of Stavanger, Norway
Linda Forssman, Uppsala University, Sweden
Sofia Frankenberg, Stockholm University, Sweden
Heidi Harju Luukkainen, University Jyväskylä, Finland
Elin Kirsti Lie Reikerås, University of Stavanger, Norway
Pia Williams, Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

This study presents a scoping review of Nordic empirical research on quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) published between 2015 and 2025. It aims to map how quality is conceptualised, operationalised, and methodologically investigated across Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, identifying thematic priorities and gaps in the literature. Previous research conceptualises ECEC quality as multidimensional, spanning structural, process, and outcome dimensions, while debating accountability frameworks. Nordic studies emphasise welfare traditions and democratic values but remain fragmented. This study offers a systematic comparative synthesis of recent Nordic research. This study conceptualises quality in Nordic ECEC as a multidimensional, value-driven construct operating across systemic and pedagogical levels. Grounded in welfare-state and rights-based traditions, it emphasises the interplay between structural conditions and relational processes. Rather than a fixed standard, quality is framed as a contextual and dialogic process embedded in children's lived experiences and professional practice. Situated within a pragmatic and interpretivist paradigm, this study employs a scoping review design following Joanna Briggs Institute methodology. Peer-reviewed empirical studies (2015–2025) were identified through database searches and analysed using thematic and methodological mapping. Based exclusively on published studies; no primary data collected, ensuring minimal ethical risk. Preliminary findings from this scoping review indicate a strong emphasis on process quality and pedagogical practices across Nordic research, with comparatively less attention to structural conditions and child-focused outcomes. The results also suggest uneven national distributions and identifiable methodological trends, though further analysis is ongoing to refine and validate these patterns. Educational quality requires sensitive relationships, coherent professional learning, and context-based improvement.

ECEC, quality,nordic countries, agency and participation, scoping review

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

Mapping the Nordic ECEC Research Landscape: Current Trends and Areas for Further Study

Presenters:
May Irene F. Klippen, Knowledge Centre for Education, Norway

All authors:
May Irene F. Klippen, Knowledge Centre for Education, Norway

This paper presents a scoping review of empirical research on ECEC published in 2024 across the Nordic countries. It aims to map research trends, methodological approaches, thematic priorities, and potential evidence gaps. The study addresses the question: What characterizes Nordic empirical ECEC research published in 2024? Building on annual Scandinavian ECEC mappings conducted since 2006 (Guldbrandsen et al., 2025; Klippen et al., 2024), this study extends the scope to Nordic ECEC research, thereby broadening the comparative evidence base. Informed by a systematic scoping review approach (Peters et al., 2020), the study applies a pragmatic research mapping framework to examine patterns and trends in the literature. Literature searches were conducted across Nordic and international databases, followed by double-blind screening, systematic coding, and quality appraisal in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). All reviewers declared potential conflicts of interest, and procedures were designed to ensure transparency and replicability. The findings indicate a predominance of qualitative research, particularly case studies and ethnographic approaches, often focused on pedagogical practices and staff perspectives. In contrast, quantitative, longitudinal, experimental, and intervention-based studies remain limited. Research primarily addresses children aged 3–6, with comparatively little attention to infants, parents, or governance actors. An evidence gap map visualizes these patterns and identifies key gaps in the literature. Quality-assessed studies are disseminated through accessible summaries for students and practitioners, while identified gaps provide a foundation for future research and policy development.

Nordic, ECEC, research, scoping review, evidence

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Samskaping in Norwegian Early Childhood Education: A Scoping Review of Conceptual Understandings

Presenters:
Anne-Lise Flaa, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Anne-Lise Flaa, NLA University College, Norway
Gila Hammer Furnes, NLA University College, Norway

Samskaping has become a popular concept in early childhood education and care (ECEC) research in Norway. This study addresses the following research question: How is samskaping defined in Norwegian peer-reviewed ECEC research, and what pedagogical practice is associated with samskaping? As a relatively new field in Norway, there is a need to map existing research. We therefore conduct a scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley 2005) to help illuminate the field. Samskaping is a Nordic concept that implies that the child participates in creating meaning and action through intersubjectivity (Bae, 2018; Midtunstad, 2024). A more traditional concept is medvirkning, which implies that children's voices influence practice. Samskaping, however, is a more relational phenomenon, developed through democratic processes. With the introduction of samskaping, a plurality of concepts has emerged, creating a challenge: it is unclear how kindergarten teachers understand the differences among these concepts and what kinds of pedagogical practices they lead to. The comprehension of concepts has significance for pedagogical practice (Wittgenstein in Proudfoot, 2009). The study combines inductive and deductive analysis of existing research, assuming a plurality of interpretations. A search string on Google Scholar ("samskaping" OR "co-creation") AND ("barnehage" OR "ECEC") AND ("Norway") yielded 431 records. Screening follows the title/abstract review and the full-text review based on the inclusion criteria. Transparency in selection, screening and interpretation reduces bias and ensures accurate representation of sources. The literature indicates multiple understandings of samskaping, including intersubjective meaning-making, democratic participation and pedagogical strategy. We argue that mapping differences and similarities may support more reflective use of the concept.

samskaping, co-creation, early childhood education and care, medvirkning, scoping review

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

Symposium E18 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 14, floor -1

STEAM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Chaired by: Paula Walshe, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland

'STEAM from the Start': Proposing a Conceptual Framework for the Development and Implementation of a STEAM Training Intervention for Early Childhood Educators

Presenters:
Paula Walshe, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland

All authors:

Paula Walshe, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland

To reconceptualise the integration of STEAM concepts in ECEC through the development, implementation and evaluation of a STEAM training intervention for ECEC educators. Previous studies cited issues impacting the incorporation of STEAM in ECEC including educators lack of training, knowledge and confidence (Chen at al. 2021; Papadakis et al. 2021). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) was engaged as recent studies which used pre-existing theoretical frameworks reported limited STEAM implementation after training (Jamil et al. 2018; DeJarnette 2018). Those studies suggest educator's beliefs and contextual constraints influence post-training uptake, indicating a need for a theoretical framework grounded in ECEC educators lived experiences to explain and support the incorporation of STEAM into ECEC practice. This study therefore develops a context-sensitive framework derived from participants' accounts to address gaps identified in prior work. Constructivist interpretivist paradigm with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Constructivist grounded theory methodology. RTA of data gathered in first phase formed basis of the new conceptual framework and development of STEAM workshop. Training rolled out nationally and evaluated using surveys and focus groups to establish short, medium and long-term impact. Full ethical approval provided by the researcher's university. Participant information letters provided. Informed consent gained. Positive results achieved including participants increased knowledge, confidence and intentional incorporation of STEAM in short, medium and long-term. A novel approach to development of training interventions for ECEC which focus on new pedagogical strategies such as STEAM. Potential to explore applicability of the new framework to develop training for incorporation of emergent pedagogical approaches such as AI.

steam, constructivist grounded theory, conceptual framework, training, professional development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Research is funded by the HEA Technological Universities Transformation Fund and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

Mumabot: weaving disciplines, languages and ideas in STEAM

Presenters:
Maddalena Cocco, Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy

All authors:
Maddalena Cocco, Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy
Tecla Morettin, Fondazione Bambini Bicocca Impresa Sociale, Italy
Anna Mortara, Fondazione Bambini Bicocca Impresa Sociale, Italy
Luisa Zecca, Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy

This contribution investigates the effect on ECEC professionals of STEAM in-service training, an area that many educators find challenging (Johnston et al., 2022). Our research questions are: is the course effective in giving professionals the ability to plan child-centered, multimodal STEAM activities? Were there changes in their ideas about children's role in learning? Research has shown that STEAM education can provide settings in which children can actively engage in constructing knowledge (Hunter-Doniger, 2021), and that a multimodal (Ludovico et al., 2017) and transdisciplinary (Areljung, 2023) approach can grant children a better access to knowledge. To effectively generate change in professionals, research suggests approaches that interweave theory and practice (Gealy et al., 2022) and use collaborative reflection (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Part of the training course was structured as a Action-Research-Training (Zecca, 2018), which employed reflective journals as a tool for the participants. The analysis is being conducted on the journals and on self-evaluation questionnaires with Likert scales. The participants were provided with a consent form and they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. Their names have been replaced by pseudonyms. The analysis is ongoing, but the preliminary findings indicate that the course was partially effective in supporting the professionals in planning multimodal STEAM activities, and more effective in

highlighting the child-centered approach. Many reported a new outlook on the children's role in the class setting. The findings are mixed. The training is partially effective, but the main difficulty to be addressed is the ability to design in a transdisciplinary and holistic way.

STEAM, transdisciplinarity, multimodality, in-service training, ECEC professionals

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

A STEAM-Oriented Analysis of the 2024 Turkish Early Childhood Teacher Guidebook

Presenters:
Hamide Nur Şimşekoğlu, TED University, Türkiye
Fatma Yalçın, TED University, Türkiye

All authors:
Hamide Nur Şimşekoğlu, TED University, Türkiye
Fatma Yalçın, TED University, Türkiye

This study examines how STEAM is conceptualized and integrated in the 2024 Turkish Early Childhood Science and Mathematics Teacher Guidebook. It addresses the question: How is STEAM represented and integrated within this curriculum-support document? Research indicates that early childhood teachers often feel underprepared to implement interdisciplinary STEAM practices effectively (Park et al., 2021). Studies further suggest that curriculum documents frequently include STEAM components without achieving meaningful disciplinary integration (Spyropoulou, Mathiopoulos, & Kameas, 2025). This study contributes by critically analyzing a national policy-driven guidebook intended to strengthen early science and mathematics pedagogy. Grounded in constructivist and design-based learning theories, STEAM is conceptualized as a child-centered, problem-oriented, and interdisciplinary approach. Meaningful integration involves engagement with real-world problems through interconnected scientific, mathematical, technological, artistic, and engineering practices. Adopting a qualitative document analysis within an interpretive paradigm, the study applies a deductive content analysis framework based on five STEAM dimensions. Activity examples, pedagogical explanations, and learning outcomes were coded. Integration levels were evaluated along a continuum from single-discipline to transdisciplinary practices. As the study analysed publicly available policy documents, no human participants were involved. Ethical care focused on accurate representation and systematic coding to reduce interpretive bias. Preliminary findings indicate that while STEAM components are visible, integration remains predominantly science-centered and multidisciplinary. Engineering and arts elements mainly function as supportive extensions rather than integral parts of coherent design-based learning cycles. Findings inform discussions on curriculum quality, policy enactment, and teacher competence in early childhood STEAM education.

STEAM education, early childhood education, Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE), teacher guidebook, document analysis

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

Symposium E19 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE TRANSITIONS FOR CHILDREN

Chaired by: Maja Schürer, Aalborg University, Denmark

Continuity of Learning Across Early Childhood Education and Care, School and After School Care in the Faroe Islands: Educators' Perspectives

Presenters:
Sonja Olsen, University of the Faroe Islands, Faroe Islands

All authors:
Sonja Olsen, University of the Faroe Islands, Faroe Islands
Kalpana Vijayavarathan-R, University of the Faroe Islands, Faroe Islands
Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland

This paper investigates educators understanding of their roles in supporting continuity of learning for 5–7-year-old children across early childhood education and care (ECEC), school and after-school care (ASC) in the Faroe Islands. It examines how two contrasting municipal transition structures shape educators' practices and the institutional conditions that enable or constrain continuity Transitions across ECEC and school are known to influence children's wellbeing, participation and identity (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Vogler et al., 2008), yet less is known about continuity across the full institutional day, including ASC. Research additionally warns that readiness and schoolification pressures may narrow children's opportunities for play-based continuity (Ackesjö & Persson, 2019). The study draws on Dewey (Dewey, 1938), ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and boundary-crossing perspectives (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) to conceptualise continuity as relational, situated and co-constructed across institutional settings. Using an interpretive qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998), sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators across preschool, school and ASC in two municipalities. Data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical procedures ensured informed consent, anonymity and secure data handling (Bertram et al., 2025). Only educators' professional perspectives were collected; no child data were involved. The findings show that continuity was not secured by structure alone but achieved through relational and collaborative practices. Educators emphasised relational security, participation and manageable expectations while negotiating school-oriented pressures. ASC offered rest and informal learning but was marginal in transition planning. Findings highlight the need to strengthen cross-setting collaboration and recognise ASC's role within coherent early years transitions.

continuity of learning, transitions, ECEC, after-school care, boundary-crossing

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

The project is funded by the Research Council of the Faroe Islands.

Daily Transitions in Inclusive ECEC and Early Years of Schooling: Teachers' Perspectives on Supporting Children in Australia, China, Japan, Spain and Finland

Presenters:
Laura Rantavuori, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Laura Rantavuori, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This qualitative study examines how daily transitions between activities and environments, are supported in inclusive early childhood education and schooling. Transitions are seen as significant events and processes that shape children's sense of belonging, continuity, and participation in everyday life. Positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999) guides the analysis of how teachers position themselves and children during daily transitions. The

framework (see Edwards, 2011) highlights how professional roles, relational dynamics, and responsibilities are constructed in everyday transition practices and how these might shape children's participation and support. The data include semi-structured interviews with 112 teachers across five countries, examining how daily transition practices are understood and implemented in different contexts. The analysis focuses on positions and pedagogy that support smooth transitions for children. Ethical approval was obtained in all countries, and informed consent was secured from participants. Necessary research permits were granted by municipalities and/or schools. Teachers provided written consent. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, right to withdraw, and data protection and anonymization. The research followed ethical principles throughout and was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Jyväskylä. The findings indicate that predictable routines, emotional sensitivity, and collaboration with families and colleagues support children's participation and agency. Teachers emphasized flexibility and shared responsibility. Transitions emerged as relational and emotional events reflecting the quality of inclusion in practice.

The study concludes that effective daily transitions are grounded in reflective positioning, intentional planning, and adaptive routines that promote children's security, agency, and inclusion.

positioning theory, daily transitions, children, practices, teachers

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

-

Caring Transitions: Shared responsibility for children in vulnerable positions

Presenters:
Mikkel Tore Eskildsen, University College Northern Denmark, Denmark
Maja Schürer, Aalborg University, Denmark

All authors:
Mikkel Tore Eskildsen, University College Northern Denmark, Denmark
Maja Schürer, Aalborg University, Denmark

This paper explores care-oriented practices in the final months of preschool in Denmark, focusing on children experiencing emotional, social, or behavioral difficulties in the transition to school. Using digital storytelling to capture children's perspectives, the study draws on this question: How do children experience care-oriented practices through digital storytelling during the transition to school? Within Nordic ECEC (e.g., Jónsdottír et al., 2025; Villumsen et al., 2025), increasing attention has been given to transitions, yet care-based practices remain underexplored, particularly for children in vulnerable positions. The study is informed by a bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) and transition research (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2022; Odgaard, 2023) and conceptualizes care pedagogy as a relational practice shaping children's participation. The study uses a qualitative, practice-oriented design based on collaborative workshops (Ørngren & Levinsen, 2017) centered on children's perspectives in transitions. It examines how digital social stories support children's emotional understanding, agency, and participation across contexts. The study follows ethical guidelines, including informed parental consent, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. The study contributes to transition research by examining the challenges experienced by children who do not look forward to starting school. As an ongoing study, it presents preliminary insights into how these concerns shape children's participation and sense of belonging, highlighting the role of care-oriented practices. It contributes to debates in early childhood education by conceptualizing transitions as integral to care pedagogy and outlining implications for collaboration, practice development, and policy.

Transition, care pedagogy, bioecological perspectives, digital storytelling

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

Symposium E20 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

(SoS): LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES THAT ENABLE CHILDREN'S AGENCY, PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE IN PLAY

Chaired by: Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark

Professional Practices that Enable Children's Agency, participation and influence in Play

Presenters:
Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark

All authors:
Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark

This study investigates how ECEC professionals can work with children's opportunities for agency, participation and influence through play and environments for play. . Assessments have rated the domain of play and play environments lower than other areas of ECEC quality (EVA; VIVE, 2023, 2025). This aligns with a global trend in which children's play and the conditions for play are under pressure (OECD, 2025; UNICEF, 2024) increasingly influenced by learning objectives intended to prepare for school (Schlesinger et al., 2020; Broström, 2017; Sahlberg & Doyle, 2029; Gray, 2011). Drawing on the sociocultural theories of child development (Vygotsky, 1978) and of organizational development (Hansen & Ringsmose, 2023), the study examines how conditions shaped by the professionals affect children's opportunities through play. Empirically, the study is based on both qualitative and quantitative observational data collected with the KIDS quality assessment tool (Ringsmose & Kragh-Müller, 2020) in 34 ECEC settings during 2024–2025. It is a joint project. The professionals are actively involved in observing the how the children's possibilities are affected by the actions taken by professionals. Through the observations the professionals became more aware of their role in providing different opportunities for the children. Over a year they have worked to develop environments that provide the children with better opportunities for influence, agency and participation in play. We have results indicating that when professionals become aware of their central role in creating possibilities for children's play, overall pedagogical quality increases. The study thus contributes to insights into how organizational learning and professional practices can strengthen children's agency and participation.

play, participation, environments, professional practices

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Leadership that Enable Children's Agency, Participation and Influence in Play

Presenters:
Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark
All authors:
Line Skov Hansen, Aalborg University, Denmark

Charlotte Ringsmose, Aalborg University, Denmark

This study explores how leadership in ECEC settings can create and maintain conditions that support children's agency, participation, and influence in play. Children's opportunities for meaningful play are shaped by the pedagogical and organizational choices made by professionals. The study builds on research that identifies play as a

fundamental right and a key driver of children's learning, well-being, and development (White, 2012; Winther-Lindqvist, 2017). Nonetheless, evidence shows that some children struggle to engage in play (Gray, 2011). Also, Danish quality assessments consistently rate the "play and activities" domain lower than other ECEC areas (VIVE & EVA, 2023, 2025). The theoretical framework integrates sociocultural developmental theory, play pedagogy (Nilsson & Ferholt, 2014), and research on professional leadership and organizational development (Douglass, 2019). A mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) combining quantitative challenge profiles with qualitative analyses of leaders' written reflections (N = 270) and own field notes from dialogues with the leaders. The research is embedded in a municipal quality-improvement initiative where leaders practiced active, intentional leadership that strengthened staff's pedagogical understanding and practice (Ringsmose & Hansen, 2023). It is a joint partnership between research and practice (Coburn et al., 2013; Farrel et al., 2021). Pseudonyms are used for individuals and ECEC settings. By leading a culture of learning and improvement, leaders can have a positive impact on children's agency, participation and influence in play. Results are discussed in relation to research on professional leadership in ECEC, highlighting leadership characteristics associated with sustainable quality improvement and system-wide coherence (Douglass, 2019; OECD, 2020; Urban et al., 2012).

leadership, learning environment, improvement work, professional learning communities, play

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Leadership and Professional Practices that Enable Children's Agency, Participation and Influence in Play

Presenters:
Janne Hedegaard Hansen, University College Copenhagen, Denmark

All authors:
Janne Hedegaard Hansen, University College Copenhagen, Denmark

The study investigates the role of pedagogues' knowledge and understanding of play, how they use play pedagogically, and how their involvement in play affects children's opportunities to participate (Ministry of Education, 2015; Hansen et al., 2020). An increasing number of children are being identified with social and behavioral challenges, and pedagogues note that these children struggle to engage in play with their peers. However, participation in play is important for developing children's social skills and prevent social marginalization (Butler et al., 2016). The study combines theoretical concepts of play order and play practices (Schatzki 2001; Schmidt 1999; Skovbjerg, 2021, Skovbjerg et al., 2022) with theory of inclusion and exclusion processes in relation to play (Buch, 2017; Hansen 2012, 16; Hansen et al. 2020; Hansen et al. 2022; Lave & Wenger, 2004; Schatzki, 2001). The methodology is based on design research and design experiments (Amiel & Reeves, 2008) and includes 500 children aged 6–9 years and 40 pedagogues from two Danish primary schools. The study follows The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity Pedagogues' participation in play is important to removing barriers to children's participation in play taking into consideration how different types of play and play design meet different children's diverse situations and needs. The concept of free play is challenged. The idea of free play rests on the notion that every child is born to be a playing child, and it is a generally accepted pedagogical attitude to have trust in that capability, believing that pedagogues should not interfere with what children do naturally.

play, learning environments, participation, professional practices, leadership,

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium E21 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ITS IMPACT

Chaired by: Bart Declercq, KU Leuven University, Belgium

“When did they stop reading to the kids?” Constitutive Effects on ECEC Professional Practice by Quality Measurements.

Presenters:
Jan Thorhauge Frederiksen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

All authors:
Jan Thorhauge Frederiksen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

What constitutive effects do Danish quality measurements have on ECEC practices? Quality measurements of ECEC practices are common, informing policy development of effective professional practices. Yet evaluation research stresses the risk of constitutive effects of such measurements, impacting practices and professional judgements, which may affect children in ECEC (Frederiksen 2019, Dahler-Larsen 2014). Constitutive effects are ECEC practices aimed at affecting quality measurement outcomes (Dahler-Larsen 2008). We examine these using two concepts: the measurement-derived classification practices used by professionals (Hacking 2007). And social taxidermy, which describes how professional practice becomes legible to administrative practices and policy development in forms that decontextualize observable and quantifiable indicators (Jacobs 1961, Scott 1998). We analyze Danish quality measurement tools and interviews with professionals conducting these measurements (EVA 2020, 2023, 2025, Svane 2017). Interviewees were selected for experience with either from conducting quality measurements, or interpreting them. We subscribe to a critical-constructivist understanding of measurement, where measurements construct notions of quality and ECEC practice, rather than neutrally assessing them. The interviewees might experience disloyalty and ambiguity when asked about the effects of conducting quality measurements (Integrity, transparency, explainability and respectful interactions in EECERA Ethical Code). To minimize this, we used interviewers familiar with ECEC practice and quality measurements, and ensured anonymity for all participants. We show how classification practices become avenues of legitimization and professional self-narration, and facilitate social taxidermy of the ECEC professional practices, both being considerable constitutive effects. The finding indicate a need for quality measurements closer to professional practices, and for interpretations of the measurements, that emphasize professional knowledge over policy interest legibility.

quality, ECEC, measurement, constitutive effects

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Group-socialization as distinct domain of pedagogical process quality in ECEC for 0-3 years

Presenters:
Bart Declercq, KU Leuven University, Belgium

All authors:
Bart Declercq, KU Leuven University, Belgium
Jochen Devlieghere, UGent, Belgium
Pauline Slot, Utrecht University, Netherlands
Karla Van Leeuwen, KU Leuven University, Belgium

This study is part of the Measuring and Monitoring Quality (MeMoQ) project that measures pedagogical quality in ECEC-settings (0-3 years) in Flanders. It aims to give a nuanced and multidimensional view on pedagogical process quality. This research builds on the developed pedagogical framework (MeMoQ, 2015), research of van Schaik et al. (2018) and the 2nd MeMoQ- measurement (EECERA, 2024; 2025). Pedagogical quality has been defined

in MeMoQ and operationalized by measuring children's experiences (Laevers et al., 2005), the level of 'emotional' and 'educational support' (CLASS, La Paro, 2012; 2014), 'learning environment' and 'cooperation with parents and respect for diversity in society' (MemoQ, 2016). Additionally, in the 2023 measurement, group-socialization (Slot, 2023) was included. Half-day field-observations in 304 units (103 home based, 201 centre bases settings) were executed by 7 trained observers. Observers had to pass a reliability test. In total 1387 observation cycles of group-socialization were conducted (607 infant and 780 toddler). Participants were informed and participated by mutual consent. Ethical guidelines of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity were followed. Results are processed anonymously. Group-socialization can be considered as a distinct domain of pedagogical process quality and is less influenced by group-size or ratio than other domains of process quality. Results are used to further support ECEC settings in promoting group cohesion and helping children to be aware and to be considerate of one another.

Assessment, ECEC (0-3y), meaningful interactions, sense of belonging, process quality

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

The Longitudinal Effect of Early Special Education on Language Ability Depends on Kindergarten Quality

Presenters:
Louie Lei Wang, University of Oslo, Norway

All authors:
Louie Lei Wang, University of Oslo, Norway
Mari Vaage Wang, University of Oslo, Norway
Monica Melby-Lervåg, University of Oslo, Norway

This study examines whether the quality of early child education care (ECEC) influences the longitudinal effect of special education (SE) on language ability. Children with language difficulties make up almost half of the children in SE in ECEC (Wang et al., 2026). Previous studies found the negative effect of SE on children's language and academic outcomes (e.g., Sullivan & Field, 2013). Although the effectiveness of early SE service may depend on the quality of ECEC, no study has examined it. We used the bioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) , which posits that both distal and proximal factors influence children's developmental outcomes. Using the Norwegian Mother, Father, and Child Cohort Study (MoBa), we followed children aged 5 to 8 (N = 6,468; 295 of them in SE) and examined the effect of SE in ECEC when the children were 5-year-olds on language skills 3 years later. We constructed a propensity-score-weighted sample based on 36 covariates. In addition to SE provision, four ECEC quality variables were included as predictors: curriculum quality, group size, staff quality, and assessment routines. All participants gave informed consent before the study started and were free to withdraw at any time; Participants' names were removed. The main effect of SE on language skills is negative, while the main effects of the four quality factors are positive. The negative effect of SE is reduced when ECECs are larger in scale. The results indicated that SE in ECEC is not effective in improving language skills. More resources should be allocated to ECECs with lower structural quality.

special education, ECEC, early intervention, Norway, MoBa

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

This work was supported by the Research Council of Norway to the Centre for Research on Special Needs Education and Inclusive Practice [grant number 327377] and the Research Council of Norway for Centres of Excellence Scheme CREATE [grant number 331640].

(SoS): CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: CREATIVITY, DOCUMENTATION AND ETHICAL PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Chaired by: Irina Silva, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Children's Ethical, Safe and Agentic Engagement with Artificial Intelligence

Presenters:
Irina Silva, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Susan Danby, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

All authors:
Irina Silva, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Susan Danby, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Kristy Corser, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

A Digital Child parliament project was developed to explore young children's existing understandings of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the risks and opportunities of its use, and to build knowledge around concepts such as generative AI, machine learning, algorithmic recommendations and online safety. Informed by the Children's Parliament Investigator model and their AI project with the Scottish AI Alliance, play-based workshops were designed to provide Australian children with opportunities to expand their AI knowledge. Children's Rights and the Sociology of Childhood frameworks supported the design of this project and data analysis. A 3-stage approach was followed to ensure children had opportunities to agentically reflect on AI concepts, engage with them in practice, and develop resources to share their perspectives on the influence of AI in children's lives. Children's engagement included various play-based and hands-on activities (e.g., drawings, digital and non-digital games), supported by experienced researchers.Data were collected through video and audio recordings, artefacts produced by the children, photographs and fieldnotes. 60 children from two schools with different socio-economic background were included to foster equity. Children's participation was dependent on theirs and their caregiver's written consent. Findings indicate that children have experience-based understandings of AI, including awareness of both opportunities and risks. Children shared concerns about privacy, safety, and fairness while expressing curiosity about co-designing AI systems that respect their rights, privacy, lived experiences, and well-being. This paper highlights the importance of positioning children as legitimate contributors to conversations about AI development and regulation. It offers methodological insights for embedding participatory approaches within early childhood research and practice.

agency, artificial intelligence, children's rights, digital technologies, participatory methods

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Meaning, Creativity and Participation: An Investigation of Preschool Children's Digital Gameplay Experiences within Family Contexts. Author: Lingyue Ding

Presenters:
Ding Lingyue, Edith Cowan University, Australia

All authors:
Ding Lingyue, Edith Cowan University, Australia

This paper explores how preschool children (aged 3–5) express their ideas and enact creative thinking through digital gameplay within family contexts. The family digital gaming environment has become an important space in which

family members play and co-construct meaning together. However, previous research has tended to focus primarily on face-to-face educational digital game use, leaving limited understanding of children's autonomous expression and creative opportunities within everyday digital environments. This research employed the Bronfenbrenner's(1977) ecological systems theory, which conceptualises children's development as shaped by interconnected environmental systems ranging from family to broader social contexts. It examines how children's behaviours and creative thinking are influenced and developed through interactions between their family environment and virtual digital spaces. Through interviews and video recordings, this study employed a year-long ethnographic approach involving three Australian families with children aged 3–4 years. The study gathered parents' perspectives on preschool children's gameplay while also examining how children interacted with the digital game independently as well as with their family members. Ethical approval was approved by Edith Cowan University, and all families provided informed consent prior to participation. The findings demonstrate how children express emotions, articulate ideas, and enact creative thinking through digital gameplay. Through interactions with parents and siblings, children bring real-world experiences into the virtual game space while transferring in-game knowledge into everyday life. These findings highlight the potential for family digital gameplay to support children's creative thinking and learning in everyday play contexts.

digital game, preschool children, family context, creative thinking, agency

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

Tangible Coding and Creative Agency: Building the Foundations for AI Literacy in Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Karen Murcia, Curtin University, Australia

All authors:
Karen Murcia, Curtin University, Australia
Sarsha Mennell, Curtin University, Australia

This study aimed to explore how collaborative play with tangible coding robots supports young children's creativity, computational thinking, and agency. Arguably, AI-literacy represents an evolution of foundational digital-literacy rather than a revolution. Research in early childhood education has highlighted the value of play-based digital experiences in developing computational thinking and creativity (Murcia et.al 2026; Tang et.al, 2024). Foundational digital-literacy practices are fundamental for children's citizenship in AI influenced societies (Murcia et.al 2025). The study is informed by sociocultural perspectives that position learning as relational, dialogic, and co-constructed. Guided-collaborative-play was a pedagogical strategy that enabling children to act as designers and problem-solvers within digital contexts. This action research project involved five children aged four and five, their parents, and two early years specialist educators positioned as practitioner-researchers. Video data was collected across three digital play sessions involving age-appropriate tangible coding robots. Narrative-style vignettes are illustrating key learnings. The study highlights children's active participation, informed parental consent, and respectful documentation practices. Attention was given to positioning children as competent contributors rather than passive technology users, ensuring that digital engagement remained developmentally appropriate, relational, and play-based. Children engaged in sequencing, testing, revising, and imaginative storytelling while negotiating solutions with peers and adults. The vignettes highlight interplay between children and co-playing adults, demonstrating how relational scaffolding supports both technical skill development and agentic participation. Early coding experiences provide an important developmental foundation for AI literacy. We suggest strengthening early digital literacy through play-based coding experiences can lay the foundations for children to become capable citizens in increasingly automated societies.

tangible coding robots, creativity, computational thinking, children's agency, AI foundations

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project was funded by ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child.

Symposium E23 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): EXPECT: EXPLORING PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD OF TOMORROW DEVELOP RESILIENCE IN SOCIAL SUSTAINABLE CHILDHOODS AFTER COVID-19

Chaired by: Lilly Augustine, Jönköping University, Sweden

Parents' experiences of their pre-school child's wellbeing, and educational and social life during the COVID-19 pandemic

Presenters:
Anette Emilson, Kristianstad University, Sweden

All authors:
Anette Emilson, Kristianstad University, Sweden
Björn Runar Egilsson, University of Iceland, Iceland
Alu Alanko, Oulo University, Finland
Catharina van Trijp, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ole Henrik Hansen, Jönköping University, Sweden

The the aim is to generate knowledge on parental experiences of having a child in pre-school during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Nordic countries. The research questions are: How did parents experience pre-school practice and restrictions during COVID-19 in relation to their child's wellbeing? What tensions could be identified in parental experiences of pre-school practice and societal regulations during COVID-19? Although pre-school educators have reported on the challenges that social distancing and disease control posed for their cooperation with families (Juutinen et al., 2025), little is known about parental experiences during the pandemic in the Nordic countries. To highlight tensions between lived experiences and Covid 19 regulations we apply Habermas's (1995) dual viewpoints on the world, the lifeworld- and the system perspective. Hermeneutic methodology was applied to interpret parents' lived experiences. Data consists of semi-structured interviews, and a content analysis (Schreier, 2012) was employed to analyze the data. This study has ethical approvement from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2024-02032-01). Participants were informed of their right to avoid answering particular questions and to adjourn the interview if needed. Informed consent was obtained, and pseudonyms were used during transcription and analysis to ensure anonymity. Parental experiences are presented in three main themes: regulations, social relations and pedagogy/curriculum. Tensions between the lifeworld and the system appeared as public good vs. private good and

adapting to regulations vs. maintaining normality. This research highlights critical issues for future crisis planning regarding support for families, balancing health and development, and clear and consistent communication.

covid 19, preschool, parents' experiences, system and lifeworld, recilience

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Funded by NordForsk (155478).

Nordic early childhood educators' reflections on their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic: Key lessons for fostering resilience and social sustainability

Presenters:
Anders Skriver Jensen, University College Copenhagen, Denmark
Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland

All authors:
Anders Skriver Jensen, University College Copenhagen, Denmark
Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland
Jaana Juutinen, University of Oulu, Finland
Ellen Os, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Lars Yngve Rosell, University of Stavanger, Norway
Charlotte Tullgren, University of Kristianstad, Sweden

This study aims to deepen the understanding of Nordic preschool educators' professional agency during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify key lessons which can enhance preschools' capacity to foster resilience and social sustainability in the future crises. This study builds on previous research (Juutinen et al. (2025) and extends current knowledge of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected preschool pedagogy and practice by offering a retrospective analysis of the lessons learned. This study draws on critical-constructive Didaktik (Klafki,1996, 1998; Broström 2022) located within the critical theory paradigm. Drawing on Didaktik theory, educators' accounts were explored to consider what they reveal about educators' professional judgment regarding resilience and social sustainability. Fifteen focus groups interviews—three in each country—were conducted with a total of 57 educators in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden using convenience sampling All participants provided informed consent and were assured confidentiality. Due to the unpredictable nature of group discussions, it is difficult to fully specify what will occur. Participants were informed about the interview process and reminded of their responsibility to the other group members. The findings highlight 3 key areas of educators' professional judgement which contribute to foster resilience and social sustainability during challenging times: a) navigating policy constraints, b) adapting pedagogical practices within changing context, and c) sustaining social relations. The findings reveal the significance of maintaining policy that supports and acknowledges educators' professional judgments as a vital resource in navigating crises. Future crisis strategies should integrate pedagogical expertise. The study shows that educators' insights are essential for ensuring socially sustainable and resilient early childhood education.

covid-19, Nordic, professional judgement, social sustainability, resilience.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

NordForsk funded project.

Parents' and Educators' Perceptions of Children's Well being and Friendships During COVID 19: Similarities and Differences Across Nordic Countries

Presenters:
Lilly Augustine, Jönköping University, Sweden
Frida Åström, School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University, Sweden
Elisabeth Bjørnestad, Oslomet, Norway

All authors:
Lilly Augustine, Jönköping University, Sweden
Frida Åström, School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University, Sweden
Elisabeth Bjørnestad, Oslomet, Norway
Ole Henrik Hansen, Jönköping University, Sweden
Catharina van Trijp, University of Stavanger, Norway

Anu Alanko, Oulu University, Finland
Björn Runar Egilsson, University of Iceland, Iceland

This study explores how parents and preschool educators describe children's friendships and well-being during COVID-19 across Nordic countries. This study extends a Nordic scoping review of COVID-19 ECEC research (Juutinen et al., 2025) evidencing a focus on practice, work environment and communication, and interviews with parents and educators (Einarsdottir et al., submitted; Emilsson et al., submitted), portraying minimal impact on children's social situation, improved teacher-child relations and reduced friendships. It adds comparable Nordic evidence on children's friendships and wellbeing during COVID-19, using parent and educator perspectives. Friendships, wellbeing and transitions are treated as participation-related outcomes (attendance/involvement; Imms et al., 2017). These outcomes are interpreted through social sustainability (Johansson & Rosell, 2021) and resilience (Masten, 2001), perspectives highlighting how supportive environments enable equitable participation during crisis. Utilizing a pragmatic approach, we analyze cross-sectional online surveys for ECEC educators and parents in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden; country n=977/634/455/388 parents and n=171/345/154/263 educators, using descriptive methods. Norway: Data collection ongoing. Preschools/schools were randomly selected, and principals distributed surveys. Ethical approvals were obtained. Participation was voluntary with informed consent, anonymous responses, and GDPR-compliant data management. Country-level contrasts will include parents' and educators' perspectives on attendance, transitions, children's friendships and peer play, and parents perceived importance of ECEC for child wellbeing. Educators additionally report age-related impacts of restrictions, perceived stress/social difficulties, and absenteeism among children with special needs and second-language learners. The study will inform future preschool policies in the Nordic countries to protect children's rights and well-being during crises.

Nordic countries, covid-19, preschool children, well-being, friendships

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

Nordforsk funded this study.

Symposium E24 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 5, floor 3

(SoS): MAKING PARTICIPATION MEANINGFUL IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

Chaired by: Deirdre Mc Grath, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

Participation Through Young Children's Eyes

Presenters:
Deirdre Mc Grath, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

All authors:
Deirdre Mc Grath, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

This paper explores young children's lived experiences of participation in early childhood settings. Although international and national policy frameworks (NCCA, 2024; Government of Ireland, 2018; DCYA, 2015) emphasize the importance of listening to young children's voices, there remains limited empirical evidence capturing children's everyday experiences of participation. This study addresses this gap by exploring children's perspectives on participation. The research is informed by a conceptual framework that positions children's agency in the context of the generational order (Leonard, 2016) and draws on Shier's pathways to participation model (2001) to define participation as the sharing of power and decision-making. Influenced by the Mosaic approach, (Clark, 2005), this

research utilised tours, photo voice and draw/mark and tell as methods to engage with thirty-four children aged three to four across three early years settings. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the QUB ethics committee and ECCERA's ethical guidelines for research with younger age children (Bertram et al., 2016) were closely adhered to. The findings indicated that children demonstrated a strong preference for contexts affording substantive rather than tokenistic choice, while also revealing that their participation was shaped by interrelated structural and relational conditions. These findings give voice to children's lived experiences of participation and identify significant pedagogical strategies through which educators can meaningfully enhance and embed participatory practices within early childhood settings.

participation, article 12, children's rights, Mosaic approach, children's voice

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Children's friendship quality in early childhood education: Links with participation practices, classroom quality, and length of exposure to the ECE teacher

Presenters:
Nadine Correia, Instituto de Educação, UIDEF, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal

All authors:
Nadine Correia, Instituto de Educação, UIDEF, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal
Helena Carvalho, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIES-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal
Cecília Aguiar, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal, Portugal

This study examined associations between classroom quality, participation practices, and children's friendship quality, considering the moderating role of the length of exposure to the lead early childhood education (ECE) teacher. Participation is key to ECE quality and to children's development (Correia et al., 2023). A fundamental right of all children, participation is shaped by teachers' practices from the earliest ages (Gal, 2017; United Nations, 1989), embedded in high-quality teacher–child interactions, and closely linked to positive developmental outcomes, including children's friendships (Hamre, 2014; OECD, 2019). Relying on multiple informants and mixed methods, associations were investigated between observed classroom quality, observed participation practices, children's friendship quality (reported by teachers, based on children's reports), and the moderating role of the length of exposure to the lead ECE teacher (reported by teachers). The project was approved by the Institutional Review Board. Participants were randomly selected, providing written consent/assent. Information was anonymized. Findings suggest a positive relationship between instructional support and closeness in children's friendships, when children spent more months with the lead teacher; a negative relationship between emotional support and conflict in children's friendships, when children spent more months with the lead teacher; a positive relationship between classroom organization and conflict in children's friendships, when children spent fewer months with the lead teacher; and a negative relationship between conditions for participation and conflict in children's friendships, when children spent more time with the lead teacher. Implications for practice and policymaking are discussed, emphasizing the relevance of sustained high-quality teacher-child interactions and participation practices to enhance children's friendship quality in ECE.

children's participation, early childhood education, ECE teachers, friendship quality

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Work was funded by Portuguese National Funds, via FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, through a research contract awarded to the first author.

Making Participation Meaningful in Early Childhood Settings

Presenters:
Jacky Tyrie, Swansea University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Jacky Tyrie, Swansea University, United Kingdom
Lauren Henderson, Swansea University, United Kingdom
Sarah Chicken, University of the West of England, United Kingdom
Jane Waters-Davies, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, United Kingdom
Patrizio De Rossi, University of the West of England, United Kingdom
Jacqui Lewis, University of the West of England, United Kingdom
Samyia Ambreen, University of the West of England, United Kingdom

This paper presents an empirically grounded model of children's right to be heard and involved in decision making in ECEC. The Everyday Model of Children's Participation (EMCP) conceptualises participation as a relational, dynamic and context-dependent process for adults to utilise to support young children's rights in school. Participation is a guiding principle of the UNCRC (1989), yet research consistently identifies tokenistic enactment in ECEC (Hart, 1992; Charteris and Smardon, 2019). While influential models (e.g. Hart 1992; Shier 2001; Lundy 2007) have strengthened conceptual understanding, they often pay limited attention to younger children, everyday practice, and ecological constraints. The EMCP builds these previous models and addresses these gaps. The research adopts a rights-based framework, grounded in the UNCRC, positioning children as agentic rights-holders. The development of the model stems from both a review of literature and of empirical data. Using a critical realist paradigm, the study employs qualitative methodology and reflective thematic analysis. Data is generated through semi-structured interviews with 14 early years teachers across Welsh schools. Ethical issues included reflexivity, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and situational ethics, the research was aligned with the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). Findings show that meaningful participation is enacted through everyday practices such as relationship-building, listening to verbal and nonverbal expression, responsive action, feedback and reflection, and shaped by individual, organisational and policy contexts. The EMCP provides a practical, rights-based framework for embedding participation in daily practice, with implications for professional learning, leadership and policy alignment.

children's rights, participation, early childhood educatioN, UNCRC, everyday model of children's participation

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), grant no. ES/X002608/1.

Symposium E25 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 6, floor 3

BELONGING AND DIVERSITY

Chaired by: Kristina Westlund, Kristianstad University, Sweden

When diversity comes to matter: children's experiences and negotiations of school-based diversity practices

Presenters:
Mariem Es Salhi, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Akim Said Aalou, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

All authors:
Mariem Es Salhi, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Akim Said Aalou, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

This ethnography examines how diversity comes to matter in young children's school lives through school-based diversity practices in superdiverse contexts. It addresses the following research questions: (1) 'How do children experience and interpret school-based diversity practices?', (2) 'How are these practices negotiated, appropriated, or resisted within peer relations?', and (3) 'How do these processes shape experiences of belonging, recognition, and exclusion?'. School-based diversity practices are mostly shaped by assimilationist, colorblind, and multicultural logics that neglect structural inequalities (Byrd, 2015), often reproducing dominant white, middle-class norms that diverge from pupils' everyday experiences of ethnoracial diversity. This tension is particularly pronounced in superdiverse cities, where children live diversity as 'commonplace' (Wessendorf, 2014), while schools render ethnoracial differences hyper-visible and consequential (Sedano, 2012). Situated within critical childhood studies (Spyrou, 2018), we foreground how children actively interpret, negotiate, appropriate, and resist diversity practices, and how these are reworked within peer relations. We conducted ethnographic research – 75 days of observation, 23 drawing interviews and 7 focus groups – in five kindergartens (n=109, aged 4–6) in two superdiverse Belgian cities. Interview and observational material were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, enabling comparison of children's perspectives and practices. All stakeholders were thoroughly informed of their rights; we gained parental consent and approached children's assent as an ongoing, relational process. The findings show that school-based diversity practices are not simply imposed but actively reshaped through children's engagements, affecting experiences of belonging, recognition, and exclusion in school life. This underscores the need for participatory, child-centered approaches to diversity in the pursuit of more inclusive school environments.

agency, school climate, peer relations, ethnography, superdiversity

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

The authors received financial support from Research Foundation Flanders (FWO; Grant Numbers S003724N-59297 & 11J7225N).

Transnational belongings in ECEC. Parents' and staff's perspectives on language dilemmas

Presenters:
Gunnar Magnus Eidsvåg, University of Stavanger, Norway
Mariella Asikanius, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Gunnar Magnus Eidsvåg, University of Stavanger, Norway
Mariella Asikanius, University of Stavanger, Norway

In this presentation we discuss how parents and staff experience children's belonging in three ECEC-settings. The parents are all representing minorities regarding language and culture, while the ECEC is part of the majority culture. Research emphasize that children's belonging is an existential and complex concern (Emilsson & Johanson, 2025), and that parents' and educators' find opportunities and dilemmas regarding belonging in everyday life (Viljama et al, 2025). Therefore, we discuss how staff members value the children's language belongings, and what dilemmas related to belonging parents face concerning language preferences as a key to children's transnational belongings. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that the individual citizen's life is shaped by belonging to the various communities (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 562), and there is an increasing awareness of transnational belonging within migrant societies (Odden, 2018). Our presentation sheds light on how parents with minority background experience that their transnational belonging projects are challenged, supported and facilitated in the ECEC-settings. The empirical data for the study

consists of 6 semi-structured interviews (N=6) with parents and 9 group interviews (N=22) with ECEC-staff members. All the participants received a written consent form explaining their rights concerning withdrawal and the usage of pseudonyms. We will present findings that shows what kind of dilemmas parents and educators face working to ensure children's belonging in local and transnational settings. The results of the study have implications for the culture sensitive pedagogy of ECEC settings and may inform policy makers of the dilemmas transnational families deal with.

transnational belonging, ECEC, parents, educators, migration

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

Educators' perspectives on key aspects of supporting children's belonging in ECEC

Presenters:
Kristina Westlund, Kristianstad University, Sweden

All authors:
Kristina Westlund, Kristianstad University, Sweden

This study aims to explore key aspects of supporting children's belonging in ECEC, as expressed by early childhood educators. Educators' support is crucial for children's experiences of belonging in ECEC (Löthman & Puskás, 2025; Sadownik, 2018). However, such support tends to be provided intuitively rather than guided by explicit goals (Johansson et al., 2024). In this study, belonging is understood as relational, dynamic and multi-layered (Yuval-Davis, 2011). The analysis is informed by educational (Noddings, 2005) and political (Tronto, 1994, Yuval-Davis, 2011) perspectives on care ethics. An interpretative approach was employed to gain a deep understanding of educators' perspectives. Group interviews combined with stimulated recall were used to capture the participants' situated perspectives and experiences. Eleven educators participated, representing work with children across the age range of one to five years in three preschools. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. An ongoing dialogue has been maintained throughout the study to safeguard their right to withdraw at any time. Stimulated recall sessions were organised within existing work teams, providing a familiar setting in which participants could reflect openly on their work. All participants and preschools have been deidentified in the study. Using thematic analysis, themes were constructed that capture key aspects of supporting children's belonging in ECEC: safety, subjectivity, curiosity and reciprocity. The aspects illuminate how educators strive to recognise the children as unique individuals while simultaneously supporting them in relating to one another as a group. Highlighting these overlapping and interconnected aspects provides valuable insights, that can inform both improved practice and policy aimed at supporting children's belonging in ECEC.

belonging, safety, subjectivity, curiosity, reciprocity

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

Symposium E26 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 7, floor 3

SENSITIVE SOCIAL ISSUES IN ECE SETUP

Chaired by: Deborah Youdell, Macquarie University, Australia

Agonism in the early years: navigating vulnerabilities to early forms of radicalization and building empathy and belonging through agonistic pluralism

Presenters:
Deborah Youdell, Macquarie University, Australia

All authors:
Deborah Youdell, Macquarie University, Australia
Sue Saltmarsh, University of New England, Australia

This paper draws on Australian Home Affairs-funded research into the role of early childhood education in addressing child vulnerabilities to early forms of radicalization and violent extremism (RVE). The research aims to understand young children's potential vulnerabilities to RVE and identify ways to develop understanding, empathy and belonging, drawing on 'agonistic pluralism' (Laclau & Mouffe 2001) to navigate the challenges of incommensurable values in education settings. The work is at the intersection of counter-extremism research showing young children accessing extreme content online (AFP 2024; Nicholson 2022); ECE research into everyday democratic practices (Salamon et al 2024) and the interplay of disadvantage and marginalisation (Jamison & Kriova 2025); and research on empathy, belonging, and agonism (Youdell 2010). The paper uses Judith Butler's concepts of identification-recognition, precarity and vulnerability, and her work with Laclau advocating agonistic pluralism as a politics of difference in complex and diverse contexts (Butler 1997 & 2005, Butler et al 2000). The paper draws on systematic review using Foucauldian discourse analysis of documentary data pertaining to policy and interventions in ECE. The work recognises the risk to communities and individuals who become associated with RVE through professional practice/discourse. This is countered through careful specificity, adherence to evidence and close work with stakeholders. There is limited engagement with RVE in ECE, but existing interventions for inclusion/equity and emphasis on relationality and partnerships prepare ECE for this work. The paper demonstrates that vulnerabilities to RVE are a real concern for ECE, advocating democratic environments promoting understanding, empathy and belonging informed by agonistic pluralism.

Democracy, belonging, radicalisation, agonism, politics

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

Research project: 'The role of educational settings in addressing child vulnerabilities to early forms of radicalization and violent extremism: Preparing the Australian Early Childhood Education and Primary School sectors' funded by Australian Government Department of Home Affairs.

Equipping students to facilitate children's religious and worldview agency in Swedish ECEC

Presenters:
Magdalena Raivio, Karlstad University, Sweden
Ellinor Skaremyr, University of Borås, Sweden
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Magdalena Raivio, Karlstad University, Sweden
Ellinor Skaremyr, University of Borås, Sweden
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study explores how Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teacher educators prepare students to support children’s religious and worldview agency and their sense of belonging in superdiverse ECEC settings. Swedish ECEC teachers often feel unprepared for handling religious diversity, commonly perceived as a “sensitive” area (Knoblauch, 2023; Reimers & Puskás, 2022). Research on ECEC teacher education identifies a dominant secular norm that may marginalise religion (Rosén & Wedin, 2018; Raivio, Skaremyr & Kuusisto, 2023). The study is

grounded in intersectional feminist ethics of care (Noddings, 2013; Raivio, Skaremyr & Kuusisto, 2022; Yuval-Davies, 2011), utilizing epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007) and religion- and worldview literacy (Shaw, 2020) as theoretical key concepts. Drawing on a qualitative interpretive approach, the study is based on semi-structured interviews with 21 teacher educators from 16 of the 18 ECEC teacher programmes. The material is analysed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Besides ethical clearance (Dnr 2024-02904-01), research ethical considerations were applied throughout (e.g. informed consent and pseudonymization), also utilizing a reflexive stance to avoid "othering" as discussed in Raivio et al. (in press, 2026). Preliminary findings show that secular hegemony shapes student teacher preparation, and that limited curriculum space leaves worldview work dependent on individual educators, creating risks of epistemic injustice for student teachers and for the children they will later teach. Findings indicate a need for policy measures that provide structured religion- and worldview literacy in teacher education to support children's agency and belonging in superdiverse ECEC settings.

ECEC teacher education, religion- and worldview agency, epistemic justice, religion- and worldview literacy, social sustainability

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

This study is conducted within the framework of the project Religion and Worldviews in Swedish Preschool Teacher Education (PReWiSE), which is supported by the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 2023-03293).

Under the Public Gaze: Pride Debates and Their Consequences for Pedagogical Practice in Kindergartens

Presenters:
Ragnhild Laird Iversen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Kristin Gregers Eriksen, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

All authors:
Ragnhild Laird Iversen, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Kristin Gregers Eriksen, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

This presentation examines how public debate—particularly Norwegian media coverage from 2024—may shape understandings of and pedagogical practices related to Pride and diversity work in early childhood education. The analysis takes the Norwegian kindergarten curriculum as its normative point of departure and situates it in relation to human rights frameworks (Endsjø, 2022; Hansen, 2021; Øystese, 2016), as well as research on children, gender and sexuality (Arnøy & Jarmann, 2023; Skundberg, 2020; Svendsen, 2022). To reveal underlying assumptions, power dynamics, and implications of problem representations in public debate, we use Bacchi's discourse analytic approach "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (2000, 2009, 2012). The analysis is situated within a social constructivist paradigm, viewing media discourse as shaping how issues like Pride in kindergartens are understood and acted upon. The study uses qualitative document analysis of systematically selected media reports from Norwegian news outlets (2024), interpreting these through Bacchi's analytical questions. To concentrate on discourses and limit personal focus, we cite sources by outlet and date, unless an author holds an official role. The analysis is openly positioned as grounded in a human rights framework. A key finding is that media framings of Pride in kindergartens constructs certain representations that can significantly influence pedagogical practice, even when such critical viewpoints are held by a minority. These problem representations create value tensions between the kindergarten's societal mandate, children's and parents' rights, and professional understandings of diversity.
The analysis shows that ECE- teachers must navigate these tensions carefully and highlights approaches that can help them balance these competing expectations in practice.

pride, gender diversity, kindergarten, value conflict, media

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium Set F (15:45 – 17:00) | Thursday 27th August 2026

Symposium F01 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 1, floor -2

(SoS): SHARED READING: CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Chaired by: Johanna Quiring, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Reading olfactory-enhanced digital books at home

Presenters:
Ingrid Midteide Løkken, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway

All authors:
Ingrid Midteide Løkken, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway
Petra Vackova, Aarhus University, Denmark
Natalia Ingebretsen Kucirkova, University of Stavanger, Norway

This study contributes to this growing field by examining families' experiences with olfactory-enhanced digital books in home-based shared reading. Early reading plays an important role in children's development. There has been a decline in children's reading practices both in early childhood education and home environments. To counter this trend, the need for multisensory and engaging story experiences is highlighted. Although emerging studies show olfaction's potential to enhance young children's affective and embodied engagement with stories, smell remains understudied in reading research. The study is guided by a sociocultural and multimodal learning framework. It draws on an exploratory qualitative design within the larger Sensory Books project. Nine Norwegian families with preschool-aged children engaged with a digital story accompanied by four smell canisters over a three-week period in their homes. The study has been approved by SIKT, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research, and ethical considerations include voluntary participation, informed consent, and sensitivity to children's comfort and autonomy during the interview sessions. Preliminary findings indicate that incorporating smell is a highly engaging element that motivates children to read and re-read stories. Scents stimulated multisensory meaning-making and enriched book-related dialogue and participation. Children show agency when using the smell jars independently and invite family members to participate. They also express their perspectives on the process. The study suggests that smell-enhanced e-books may support children's engagement and active participation and offer implications for designing future multisensory reading interventions.

olfactory reading, multisensory learning, home, shared reading, digital storybooks

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

Between Socialization and Participation: Turn-Taking in Shared Reading Sessions in Kindergarten

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

All authors:
Johanna Quiring, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

This study explores how kindergarten teachers facilitate children's participation in the co-production of talk during shared picture book readings. Shared reading is an established method for effectively fostering language

development (Flack et al., 2018) by engaging children in a conversations. Mehan (1979) identified the I-R-E-pattern (characterized by teacherinitiation, child hand-raising beforereplying, and subsequentevaluation) as a typical structure in classroom discourse. Research regarding the role of this pattern within ECEC – particularly during shared reading activities – remains limited. Talk is conceptualized as a joint endeavour between speakers and listeners (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). However, ECEC interactions are inherently asymmetrical due to the ongoing socialization of children (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). This may affect turn-taking patterns. Adopting an ethnomethodological approach to conversation analysis, four video-recordings of shared reading sessions across kindergartens in three neighbouring countries were analysed. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants or guardians, and all data were fully anonymized to ensure participant privacy. Findings reveal that teachers utilize diverse turn-taking patterns, that might evolve throughout reading sessions: The I-R-E-pattern was found alongside a pattern, where teachers allow children to speak up freely and refrain from evaluating each contribution but still moderate the conversation. In a third pattern children organize the talk themselves. Teachers can intentionally select interactional structures that align with specific learning goals: while the I-R-E pattern is hypothesized to support socialization into classroom discourse, a moderating role might better facilitate children's participation in the co-production of talk.

shared reading, participation, conversation analysis, language learning, turn-taking

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

Digital or Analog Picture Books for Children's Engagement

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

All authors:
Kerstin Pfannes, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland
Eva Heuss, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland
Silvana Kappeler Suter, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

This study examines which factors, i.e. quality of interaction, child characteristics, book format (digital vs. print) predict children's engagement, and whether executive functions moderate these effects. Research on whether digital or print picture books better engage children remains inconsistent (Strouse & Ganea, 2017; Reich et al., 2019). Children's executive functions have been shown to be associated with their attention during picture book reading (Richter & Courage, 2017). The study draws on the opportunity–use model of dialogic reading (Kappeler Suter, 2020), grounded in Helmke's (2012) framework. Video recordings from 142 college student-child dyadic picture book sessions are being coded for children's engagement and adult's interaction. The dyads are randomly assigned to use print picture book, picture book app including hotspots, or hotspots and games. Executive functions were assessed using validated measures. Other child variables (age, gender) are assessed via a parent questionnaire. All participants provided written informed consent, data are anonymised, and withdrawal was possible at any time. Multiple regression predicting child engagement was significant, $F(6, 136) = 10.72$, $R^2 = .32$, $p < .001$. Interaction quality was the only strong positive predictor ($B = .25$, $\beta = .47$, $p < .001$). Children in the app including games condition showed higher engagement than the picture book group and the app including hotspots ($B = 2.74$, $\beta = .27$, $p < .01$). Executive functions did not moderate these effects. These findings stress the importance for caregivers to create a stimulating setting that welcomes children to engage in the conversation.

picture book app, picture book, engagement, executive functions, hotspots and games

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The research project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Symposium F02 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 2, floor -2

CHILDREN AS DIGITAL CITIZENS

Chaired by: Adrijana Visnjic Jevtic, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

Teachers work with children's digital judgment, value enhancement in kindergarten

Presenters:
Margareth Eilifsen, Western Norway University of Applied Science, Norway

All authors:
Margareth Eilifsen, Western Norway University of Applied Science, Norway

There is a challenge in Early Childhood Teacher Education (ECTE) in Norway related to children as digital citizens. Children today are born into a digital world, and for teachers to ensure children's rights and support them in developing digital judgment, teachers must recognize the world children are born into and live in. Earlier research (Madsen et al., 2023) on digital technology, together with white papers and national strategies (NOU, 2024), inspired my research. Earlier research states that there is a gap between national guidelines for ECTE and learning outcome descriptions related to digital competences (Undheim & Ploog, 2023). Children's right to co-responsibility and participation in their daily lives is highlighted in the Education Act and the Kindergarten Act, but not related to a digital world. The investigation of the concept of (digital) citizenship is situated within a constructivist paradigm, in which a critical, rhetorical document analysis (Foss, 2023) has been conducted to uncover what political policy documents require of teacher education. Digital judgment has a cultural and situated dimension, emphasizing both legal and social aspects. What is considered society's ethical standards and norms influences a legal and ethically justifiable action or attitude. I have analysed three key policy documents, and have not examined individual subjects or teachers' practice. All the documents are public, and I have been careful to avoid giving a negative impression of teacher education. ECTE should promote democracy, and children should develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to manage their lives and participate in their community in a digital world.

digital citizenship, ECTE, UN rights of the child, participation

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

The whole project is presented in themonographic scientific book:Bergsjø, L. O., Eilifsen, M., Tønnesen, K. T. & Vestbøstad Vik, L. G. (2025). Barn og unges digitale dømmekraft. Verdiløft i barnehage og skole. 2. utg.

Citizenship Education in the Digital Age: Initial Early Childhood Teacher Education in Croatia, South Korea and Japan

Presenters:
Adrijana Visnjic Jevtic, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

All authors:
Adrijana Visnjic Jevtic, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia
Soonhwan Kim, Ewha Womans University, Republic of Korea
Mie Oba, Fukuyama City University, Japan
Višnja Rajić, University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

This study aims to analyse how citizenship education is conceptualised and integrated into initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Croatia, South Korea, and Japan. Citizenship education in ITE rarely addresses early childhood education (ECE) contexts (Moss, 2019). This study builds on established democratic citizenship frameworks (Banks, 2017; Westheimer, 2022) to examine how ITE equips future teacher as civic agents. The study draws on the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Barrett, 2018; CoE, 2023), which encompasses social, human rights, political, cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions of civic competence. This is extended through digital citizenship (CoE, 2019) and global citizenship education lenses (UNESCO, 2024). The analytical coding matrix operationalises each dimension through observable indicators in learning outcomes, allowing systematic comparison across national contexts. Grounded in an interpretive, qualitative-comparative paradigm, the study employs document analysis of official curricula, programme syllabi, and learning outcome frameworks drawn from ITE programmes in Croatia, South Korea, and Japan. No personal data or human participants are involved. Documents were sourced from a wide range of sources, ensuring fair representation. Preliminary findings suggest considerable variation across the three national contexts in the prominence and framing of citizenship education within ITE. The social and cultural dimensions appear most consistently represented, while political dimension is underrepresented or addressed implicitly. The findings highlight the need for more intentional and explicit integration of citizenship education into ITE. Internationally, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to define a shared framework for ECE teacher competencies that is both universally grounded and culturally responsive.

civic agency, citizenship education, comparative curriculum analysis, initial teacher education, professional competencies

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

'This is the country for all of us' - Developing democratic citizenship in young children in superdiverse India

Presenters:
Kinnari Pandya, University of Helsinki and Azim Premji University, India, Finland

All authors:
Kinnari Pandya, University of Helsinki and Azim Premji University, India, Finland
Jaana Pesonen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Liam Georon, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

This paper examines the role of ECCE curriculum in fostering citizenship and belonging of young children in superdiverse (Vertovec 2007, 2015) India with vast regional socio-political-religious and economic disparities. The study explores superdiversity of worldviews reflected in the curricular goals, content and pedagogic recommendations of ECCE curricula in relation to the constitutional vision and the recent National Education Policy 2020. Neimi (2024) has examined the notion of ‘secular’ in the Indian context while studying the place of religion in Indian ECCE settings. Worldviews as models of meaning construction, ways of understanding and living life (Gearon Et al. 2023) are often personal-private and institutional-organized-public. Curricular analysis offer an insight into organized institutional worldviews, understanding the politically sanctioned forms of knowledge and values, also underlying the national and citizenship building goal of any State sanctioned curricular process (Deng and Luke, 2008; Iyer, 2024). Two national ECCE curriculum documents (2022 and 2024) and two state curricula (2016 and 2024) are analysed using content analysis and Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2004). Four themes reflecting institutional worldviews are derived of which ‘constitutional values, Indian values and ethical disposition’ is presented here. Objective constructive engagement from our position as researchers to the context of study is attempted while analysing these state mandated documents. Strong curricular and pedagogic thrust on citizenship

building located in the constitutional vision of the Indian nation is reflected in all documents. Strategies to ensure first hand immersive pedagogic experiences for worldview development, including digital resources for building inclusivity and belonging among young children are explored as implications for practice.

worldviews, superdiversity, citizenship building, ecce curriculum analysis, India

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

GINTL (Global Innovation Network of Teaching and Learning, Finland) travel grant in October 2025 supported significant work on this paper. Pandya, Gearon and Kuusisto are affiliated with the Academy of Finland project 'Child in time: Existential resilience'.

Symposium F03 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 3, floor -2

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON ECE EXPERIENCES

Chaired by: Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Elon University, United States

Documenting Young Children's Perspectives in Early Childhood Education: A Methodological Review

Presenters:
Aimée Gaudette-Leblanc, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Aimée Gaudette-Leblanc, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Annick Bourbeau, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Myriam Bergeron, Université Laval, Canada
Hélène Boucher, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

This study aimed to identify, describe, and compare methodologies used to capture young children's perspectives in early childhood educational settings. While numerous methodologies document school-age children's perspectives, far less is known about suitable approaches for younger children, particularly infants and toddlers aged 0 to 3 years. The review draws on child-centered, participatory, and rights-based perspectives from childhood studies and sociocultural theory, conceptualizing children as competent social actors with agency. The study is situated within a constructivist paradigm, viewing children's perspectives as socially constructed and co-produced through interactions. A methodological review was conducted using systematic searches in ERIC, Education Source, and Academic Search Complete (2000–2026). Ethical considerations in this methodological review focus on the systematic conduct of the review process and the critical examination of included studies. We paid particular attention to studies involving infants and toddlers aged 0 to 3 years. We also examined recruitment procedures and participant characteristics, considering the possibility that children who were more expressive were more frequently invited to participate and reflecting on how study procedures may have shaped whose perspectives were ultimately documented. This review has, to date, resulted in the inclusion of 38 studies. Preliminary analyses indicate a predominance of qualitative designs, with most studies involving children aged over 3 years. The Mosaic approach appears to be widely used across studies. This study offers an overview of research methods that enable young children to express their views and actively shape their educational experiences. It highlights populations and contexts requiring further research.

methodological review, children's perspectives, educational settings.

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

The Good Childhood: Children's voices from Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United States

Presenters:
Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Elon University, United States
Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark

All authors:
Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Elon University, United States
Jennifer Duncan-Bendix, Aarhus Unversity, Denmark
Ruben Fukkink, University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

This cross-national study investigated the construct of a good childhood from children's perspectives. Previous research investigating the good childhood, a Nordic ideology including tenets such as democracy, egalitarianism, and emancipation (Wagner, 2006), demonstrates disparities in how these principles are enacted. Further research from children's perspectives and in different cultures and ECE contexts is needed (Tobin, 2022; Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2008). Pulkkinen's (2012) "Ten Pillars of a Good Childhood" framework was translated into four child-friendly concepts: fun, safety, fairness, and belonging (each including a positive and negative valence). A mosaic methodology was employed, incorporating drawings and photovoice (Clark & Moss, 2017), in a sample of 116 four-year-olds from Denmark, the Netherlands and U.S.. During multiple site visits, children drew and photographed their ideas of fun, safety, fairness, and belonging. The DRAW.IN.G framework (Berti & Cigali, 2022) was used for coding. Quantitative and thematic qualitative analyses were conducted. Following the EECERA-2024 code, parents provided written informed consent and children gave verbal consent. They were free to draw and photograph what they wanted and to decline any activities. The children showed a deep understanding of the themes fun, safe, fair, and belonging. There were robust differences between the positive vs. negative valence of each concept. Dimensions of the good childhood concept seem culturally appropriate for Danish, American and Dutch children, acknowledging country-related differences. The mosaic method affords in-depth investigation of children's emotions and experiences, particularly related to social inclusion, and is also useful for ECE practitioners.

the good childhood, Mosaic method, child-led digital photography/photovoice, children's drawings, cross-comparative study

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Enhancing Young Children's Agency and Meaningful Participation within Early Childhood Education from the Perspectives of Children

Presenters:
Christina O Keeffe, Dublin City University Institute of Education, Ireland

All authors:
Christina O Keeffe, Dublin City University Institute of Education, Ireland
Sinéad McNally, Dublin City University Institute of Education, Ireland

This presentation examines how to enhance opportunities for children's authentic agency to support their meaningful participation within early childhood education. There is universal consensus surrounding our obligation as researchers, practitioners and policymakers to uphold children's right to be heard on matters affecting them (UNCRC, 1989) with calls for critical debate to enhance the quality of children's participation (Blaisdell et al., 2019). However, children's perspectives are rarely included as part of these discussions. This research is situated within a children's rights-based approach (UNCRC, 1989; 2009) and follows Lundy's (2007) model of participation. Drawing on critical realism, we employed a qualitative research methodology using interviews and participatory methods in consulting with 136 neuromajority and neurominority children across three Irish primary schools. This presentation

reports on findings regarding young children's (n=58) (4-8 years) recommendations for enhancing their participation which were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Following parental consent, children's assent was sought using an interactive booklet however, assent was ongoing and negotiated using a relational process where the researchers remained alert to both verbal and non-verbal indicators of assent/dissent (Arnott et al., 2020). Children emphasised the importance of authentic agency to support their meaningful participation. Findings will be discussed with regards to enriching children's participation across policy and practice in upholding children's right to have their voices heard and in encouraging critical reflection surrounding opportunities for children's authentic agency over their voices and participation. This is essential in driving meaningful change in children's lives and in supporting their development as active citizens on matters of importance to them (UNESCO, 2022).

inclusive research, participatory research, children's voices, authentic agency

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The authors wish to thank the DCU Educational Trust who generously funded the data collection for this study through a doctoral scholarship to the first author.

Symposium F04 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Auditorium 4, floor -2

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: CREATING SPACES FOR RELATIONSHIP, CONNECTION AND RETENTION AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS

Chaired by: Laura Doan, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

Communities of practice: Creating an open listening climate in early years settings: Developing relationships within a community of practice, while supporting the wellbeing of children and families

Presenters:
Alison Moore, University College Cork, Ireland

All authors:
Alison Moore, University College Cork, Ireland

The research asked how an open listening climate can facilitate child voice (Moore, 2022). Communities of Practice [CoPs], was applied, creating space for managers and practitioners to reflect on interactions, approaches and relationships. A holistic approach is essential to facilitate listening practices that fuse relationships between the practitioners, children and families (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Practitioners' perspectives were gathered to reflect, '…a collective voice…' (Moore, 2022: p174), supporting Wenger's view that CoPs are 'a privileged locus for the creation of knowledge' (Wenger, 1998, p. 214). A theoretical and conceptual framework was developed, weaving together an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and a rights-based lens (Lundy, 2007). The rights discourse facilitated the engagement and dialogue. Reflecting on practice was facilitated by applying a praxeological approach (Pascal and Bertram, 2012, 2016). Interviews and focus groups brought reflection and action together. The Lundy Model (2007) alongside the child participation checklist (DCYA, 2015) were used as tools to generate and interpret the data. The EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al., 2024) were adhered to. The research is rooted in work within the community and the choice of methods to collect multiple perspectives supports the principle of 'giving credence to diverse voices' Examples of listening cultures were evident. Within a multi-disciplinary context, a disconnection could be seen, misdirecting the focus away from children's wellbeing, placing emphasis on parental support. Findings suggest that applying a rights-based approach to support a more open-listening climate, where child voice and efficacy is the focus of practice, is required.

communities of practice, open-listening climate, children's rights, child wellbeing

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Promoting educator wellbeing and retention through participation in a peer mentoring community of practice

Presenters:
Laura Doan, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

All authors:
Laura Doan, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

This study investigated the impact of participation in a peer mentoring CoP on educator wellbeing and retention This province-wide peer mentoring program began as a pilot program in 2016 in British Columbia, Canada. This research is based on the data from 2024, when the program had 310 educators and 41 facilitators in 31 CoPs. Previous research showed that participation enabled educators to develop professional relationships and increase educator efficacy (Doan & Jang, 2020). The research draws upon current theories of educator development, including adult learning theory (Knowles et. al, 2012), educator efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and learning within CoPs (Wenger, 1998). This framework "uses a non-hierarchical approach where educators are viewed as knowing and expert on their own practice" (Doan, 2023). This research was framed within a pragmatic paradigm (Biesta, 2010) and was conducted within a mixed methods methodology (Johnson et. al, 2007). Participants completed reflections, focus groups, and a survey. Research questions included how does participation in a peer mentoring CoP support: educator wellbeing; and the retention of educators? The analysis was conducted using NVivo, which helped to identify key themes. The Canadian Tri-Council Ethical Conduct (Government of Canada, 2014) was followed. A consent form and information sheet was shared. Confidentiality was assured and data was protected in password protected computers. All participants could withdraw at any time without consequence. The main findings demonstrate that participation in a peer mentoring CoP promotes educator wellbeing and retention. These findings provide a framework for a peer mentoring CoP that can support and enable educator wellbeing and retention.

peer-mentoring, communities of practice, educator wellbeing, retention, educator efficacy

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Cultivating Educators' Agency in Early Childhood Research: Experiences with community of practice as a methodology

Presenters:
Rhona Stallard, Marino Institute of Education, Ireland
Thomas Chaisrihar Bach, UCSYD, Denmark
Lisbeth Nørregaard Hansen, UCSYD, Denmark

All authors:
Rhona Stallard, Marino Institute of Education, Ireland
Thomas Chaisrihar Bach, UCSYD, Denmark
Lisbeth Nørregaard Hansen, UCSYD, Denmark

This paper presents the unique research methodology developed for a two-year Small Scale Erasmus+ project. We used a Community of Practice (CoP) approach as a model of professional learning and as a framework for ethical research principles and praxis. An ongoing ethical commitment to foster educator agency informed the research design; positioning educators as co-investigators and co-constructors of collective knowledge rather than as passive

data sources. A CoP methodology grounded in temporal practices and deep listening transforms research into an act of ethical recognition and builds educator agency (Wenger, 1998). The CoP framework functioned as a methodological approach to disrupt traditional researcher-subject hierarchies (Lockhorst et al., 2008. The relational ethics between researcher and educator is central, framed as an "ethical encounter" and a "radical dialogue", altering the power dynamics of knowledge production (Bath, 2011). Our multilayered, multimethod, temporal qualitative research design involving video-cued ethnography and dialogic cafes allowed us to develop insights into inclusion in ECEC. We show how a video-cued ethnographic approach, drawing on a CoP framework, develops critical reflection, challenges assumptions, and expands our situated knowledge as researchers and as ECEC educators (Tobin, 2019). We adopted a deliberate "culture of ethics", rooted in listening and dialogue (Graham et. al, 2016), seeking to remediate power imbalances. We received informed consent from parents, children and educators. Our CoP methodology supported the strengthening of a collective agency, which in turn was linked to the educators' experiences of professional flourishing. Policy systems must resource participatory structures that cultivate professional agency as a cornerstone of a democratic ECEC landscape.

community of practice, research methodology, video-cued ethnography, agency, relational ethics

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F05 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 1, floor -2

CHILD PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL GAMING, DEMOCRACY AND PLAY

Chaired by: Marita Neitola, University of Turku, Finland

Children in digital wonderland - passive users or active co-developer?

Presenters:
Marita Neitola, University of Turku, Finland

All authors:
Marita Neitola, University of Turku, Finland
Anitta Melasalmi, University of Turku, Finland
Tarja-Riitta Hurme, University of Turku, Finland
Jenny Marttila, University of Turku, Finland
Minna Saarela, University of Helsinki, Finland
Meri Pihanperä, University of Turku, Finland

Purpose of this study is to examine the agency and role of children in the use of digital technology in early childhood education. Based on systematic literature review, the research question is: What is children’s agency within digital technology practices in early childhood education? Digital technologies in early childhood has been seen on the one hand harmful for children, and on the other hand, many young children have access in environments where digital technologies are an everyday part of life. Nolan et al. (2021) argue that technological determinism treats technology as a causal force with positive or negative effects, overlooking children’s agency. Studies using sociocultural perspectives (Magnusson, 2021) or post-digital approaches (Marsh, 2019) too often focus on child–technology relationships rather than children’s agency itself. This systematic literature review followed PRISMA guidelines involving a search for international peer-reviewed articles. Of the 5,285 articles screened, 111 met the criteria: an ECEC context, children aged 0–7 years, and the use of digital technology. The data analysis concerning the child's agency in digital techonology was structured around the coding categories of users, developers, and evaluators. The ethical principles of research were taken into account through the careful data processing. Preliminary results suggest that the most common category of agency was users. The majority of children were passive users of digital

technology. Often they were objects of learning assessments, e.g. mathematical evaluation. Applications of digital technology in ECEC should be more developed together with children, based on children's ideas and needs, rather than used solely for assessing their development and learning.

children,digital technology, early childhood education, literature review, agency

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

Jurist Insights on Preschool-aged Children's Involvement in Social Media Content Creation: A Child Rights Lens

Presenters:
Duygu Kazkayası, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

All authors:
Duygu Kazkayası, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye
Zeliha Demirci Ünal, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye
Feyza Tantekin Erden, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore how jurists evaluate the involvement of preschool-aged children in social media content creation within the framework of children's rights (United Nations, 1989). In literature, child social media influencers, also called kidfluencers, are preschool-aged individuals whose content is often managed by their parents, which is conceptualized as sharenting (Cataldo et al., 2022), and child labor (Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025). Sharing children's daily lives or personal information on social media constitutes a rights violation (Steinberg, 2017). While literature addressed the violation of children's rights through existing laws and conventions, limited research examined the involvement of children in social media content creation by foregrounding expert views in holistic dimensions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 6 jurists including either academics, or lawyers, selected with purposive sampling. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time were considered ethically. The findings, emerged with thematic analysis, indicate that many rights of children, including the right to life, education, participation, and the right to be forgotten, and the principle of the best interests of the child may be violated, also that some crimes such as digital kidnapping and ill-treatment can be committed through children's involvement in social media content creation. Furthermore, several factors, like the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI), may exacerbate several potential risks, including cyberbullying, neglect, privacy violations, and potential sexual abuse. The findings suggest that various measures can be taken, extending from legal and educational considerations to interdisciplinary collaboration.

preschool-aged children, children's rights, social media content creation, kidfluencers, digital child labor

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

Children's Post-Digital Play as Democratic Expression: Listening to Children's Voices on Digital Gaming During the COVID-19 Lockdown

Presenters:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

All authors:
Lisa Tölle, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Carolin Quenzer-Alfred, University of Education Freiburg, Germany
Daniel Mays, University of Education Freiburg, Germany

This research examines how young children exercised agency through (post-)digital play during the COVID-19 lockdown. It asks how children made meaning of digital play and how educators acknowledged or marginalised these perspectives. Digital play is an established feature of early childhood (Marsh & Bishop 2014). Yet debates often rely on reductive “screen-time” framings that obscure children’s media practices (Adelantado-Renau et al. 2019). During the pandemic, rising media use intensified deficit-oriented discourses, while children’s perspectives remained absent. Building on research on children’s digital experiences (Quenzer-Alfred & Tölle 2026), this study addresses this gap. The analysis draws on social-semiotic multimodality (Bezemer & Kress 2016) and childhood studies (Einarsdóttir 2007), examining (post-)digital play as situated meaning-making. Within a constructivist paradigm, the study combines Grounded Theory Methodology with the Mosaic Approach. Data include group conversations with seven children and interviews with seven educators and three parents. Ethical practice included written parental consent and children’s assent. Child-responsive methods and small-group settings supported expression and reduced power asymmetries. Verbal and non-verbal dissent was respected, and children could withdraw at any time. Data were pseudonymised and identifying details removed to ensure anonymity. The study was approved by the university ethics board. Children described Fortnite and GTA as spaces of connection, creativity, and continuity, while educators framed digital play as harmful and inappropriate, marginalising children’s accounts. The findings highlight tensions between children’s digital lifeworlds and adult pedagogical norms. They underscore the need for participatory pedagogies that recognise digital play as a site of agency.

children's agency, post-digital play, children's voice, participatory pedagogies, digital childhoods

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This research was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), grant number 470909907.

Symposium F06 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 2, floor -2

(SoS): AI MEETS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK, AND EMERGING PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Chaired by: Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece

Re-situating Generative AI within Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Presenters:
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

All authors:
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Zacharias Andreadakis, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Karmen Drljić, University of Primorska, Slovenia
Torstein Heimdal, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Sanela Hudovernik, University of Primorska, Slovenia
Bente Karlsen, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Lasse Lipponen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Stamatis Papadakis, University of Crete, Greece
Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

This study examined how Generative AI can be understood as an ecological influence operating across interconnected systems, and explored how preservice teachers make sense of these cross-system dynamics. Its primary aim was to develop a theoretically grounded ecological framework to guide pedagogical, professional, and ethical engagement with AI in early childhood education. Current research on AI has largely focused on constructivist or social constructivist perspectives (UNESCO, 2023). Limited attention has been given to Ecological Systems Theory (EST), despite its enduring influence in early childhood scholarship and policy (Saracho, 2023). The study draws on Ecological Systems Theory (EST), which positions the child within interconnected micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem, emphasising contextual influences on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Using an interpretive paradigm, mixed methodology, 300 preservice teachers across four countries (Greece, Norway, Finland, and Slovenia) completed an online questionnaire, exploring familiarity with ecological theory and their perceptions of its intersections with AI. Statistical and thematic analyses were conducted. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from all participating Universities before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Preliminary findings indicate varying levels of theoretical familiarity; however, participants were able to articulate connections between AI and all ecological systems. These insights informed the development of an AI framework grounded in EST, presented alongside its pedagogical and ethical implications. The framework will enable critical reflection on the broader social, economic, and policy forces influencing AI integration in early childhood settings, provide a conceptual tool that links theory to practice, strengthen professional agency, and support responsible, rights-based educational decisions.

GenAI, Bronfenbrenner, framework, ethics, preservice teachers

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

Erasmus+, European Community Funding

The impact of an AI-based storytelling application on preschool children's vocabulary and narrative skills

Presenters:
Konstantina Tastsi, University of West Attica, Greece

All authors:
Konstantina Tastsi, University of West Attica, Greece
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece
Ioannis Psaromiligkos, University of West Attica, Greece
Alexandra Karousou, University of West Attica, Greece

This study examines an artificial intelligence (AI)–based storytelling application in early childhood education and its impact on preschool children's vocabulary and narrative skills. It also explores whether AI-supported storytelling influences children's engagement in story creation compared with traditional storytelling practices. Storytelling and dialogic interaction are central to young children's language development. Research indicates that pedagogically grounded digital tools can support early language and literacy learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2024). However, empirical evidence focusing on AI-based storytelling applications in preschool classrooms remains limited. The study is informed by sociocultural and narrative perspectives that conceptualise language learning as socially mediated and scaffolded. Drawing on Pesco and Gagné's (2017) work on narrative scaffolding, the AI application is viewed as a mediating tool that structures storytelling while preserving children's agency. A mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design is employed with 53 children aged 4–6 years. The experimental group co-creates stories using the AI application, while the control group engages in non-digital storytelling activities. Children's oral language is assessed before and after the intervention using a standardised measure (Logometro) focusing on narrative structure and expressive vocabulary. Quantitative statistics and qualitative thematic analysis will be conducted. Ethical approval is obtained prior to data collection, informed parental consent is secured, participation is voluntary,

and confidentiality is ensured. Findings are not finalised but improvements in narrative coherence and vocabulary use are expected. Implications for the responsible integration of AI-based storytelling tools in early childhood education will be discussed.

artificial intelligence, storytelling, early childhood education, vocabulary development, narrative skills

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

Early Childhood Teacher Education Students' Knowledge, Ethics, and Pedagogical Intentions Regarding Generative AI

Presenters:
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Zacharias Andreadakis, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece

All authors:
Maria Dardanou, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Zacharias Andreadakis, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Nils Christian Tveiterås, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Maria Hatzigianni, University of West Attica, Greece
Karmen Drljić, University of Primorska, Slovenia
Torstein Heimdal, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Sanela Hudovernik, University of Primorska, Slovenia
Bente Karlsen, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
Lasse Lipponen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Stamatis Papadakis, Univeristy of Crete, Greece

The rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) raises fundamental questions about professional judgement and responsibility in ECEC. While policy debates address children's encounters with AI, less is known about how ECEC teacher students understand and ethically evaluate the pedagogical use of GenAI. This study examines students' knowledge, ethical positioning, and pedagogical intentions regarding GenAI. International guidance highlights both opportunities and risks of AI in education, including concerns about bias, privacy, and inequality (UNESCO, 2023). Critical scholarship calls for reflective engagement with educational technologies within broader socio-technical systems (Selwyn, 2022). However, limited empirical attention has been given to ECEC student teachers' ethical positioning and professional judgement regarding GenAI. Drawing on Biesta's (2015) conceptualisation of professional judgement as a normative and responsible practice, decision-making about GenAI is framed as ethically situated. Students' responses are interpreted as emerging forms of professional positioning within socio-technical environments.

Situated within a post-positivist survey design, this cross-national study includes approximately 300 ECEC students in Norway, Finland, Greece, and Slovenia, enabling comparative insights across diverse contexts. The questionnaire combines closed- and open-ended items, analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Participation is voluntary and anonymized, with informed consent obtained and data managed in accordance with institutional guidelines. Preliminary findings suggest strong ethical awareness alongside uneven confidence, with students emphasizing responsibility, critical evaluation, and children's well-being. Many express uncertainty about integration and need for structured, value-oriented preparation in teacher education. Findings suggest that teacher education must move beyond technical AI skills to develop ethically grounded professional judgement and structured AI literacy in ECEC contexts.

GenA, ECEC students, professional judgement, ethical positioning, AI literacy

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

Erasmus+KA220-HEDProject 2025-1-NO01-KA220-HED-000354066 - Empowering Future Educators: GENerative AI for Inclusive and Ethical Early Childhood Education.

Symposium F07 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 3, floor -2

DEFINING QUALITY, BEST PRACTICE AND BEST INTEREST

Chaired by: Maria Jose Lera, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

Synthesizing how the unexplored 'best interests of the child' principle in early childhood education and care is conceptualised in research

Presenters:
Hanna Petersson, Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

All authors:
Hanna Petersson, Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Ewa Skantz, Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Pia Williams, Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

This study aims to synthesize conceptualisations in international research of the 'best interests of the child' principle (UNICEF, 1989, Art. 3.1) in ECEC. As emphasised in research (Sheridan, 2001; Sylva, 2010), access to high quality ECEC is central to children's best interests and development including, for example, responsive teachers who ensure interpretation of children's views based on their best interests (Etchebehere & De León, 2020). Since the study adopts a social-constructivist framework, understandings of the principle are conditioned by sociohistorical contexts and cultural values (James & James, 2012). Methodologically, the study is situated within a qualitative research paradigm, using a scoping review approach. Following a comprehensive search and a thorough selection process, six peer-reviewed publications were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Though this study is based on secondary data, ethical considerations were taken to ensure inclusion of publications from a wide range of sources. We also intended to include only publications explicitly describing their "ethical thinking" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 28). The study identifies two main categories in prior research about 'the best interests of the child' in ECEC: structure-driven conceptualisations (societal and institutional, organisational and preconditional themes) and process-driven conceptualisations (interaction-related, emotional, learning-related and democratic themes), though data is limited. The findings can inform policy development, professional judgment, and everyday decision-making when implementing Art. 3.1 in ECEC.

"the best interests of the child", UNCRC, children's rights, structure, process

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

The Evolution of Early Childhood Environment Quality in Europe Based on ERS Studies (1989–2025)

Presenters:
Maria Jose Lera, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

All authors:

Maria Jose Lera, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain
Andrea Otero-Mayer, UNED, Spain

This research aims to replicate the European meta-analysis conducted by Vermeer et al. (2016) in order to determine whether environmental quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has changed between 1989–2012 and 2012–2025. Vermeer et al. (2016) analyzed 27 European studies (N = 1,297 classrooms) using ECERS and ITERS, reporting a mean score of 3.82 (1–7 scale) and consistently lower scores in the "Activities" subscale. The present study replicates their methodological approach to update the evidence base and examine longitudinal trends in European ECEC quality. The study is grounded in the structural–process quality model (Ruopp & Travers, 1982), which distinguishes structural conditions (e.g., ratios, qualifications, regulation) from observable process quality measured through ERS instruments. A systematic review following PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) was conducted. 375 records were identified in WoS and Scopus (2012–2025); after removing duplicates, 290 were screened (inter-rater agreement 93.3%). Weighted means and effect sizes are calculated to compare periods. The study followed standards EECERA ethical principles of democratic values (visualizing the valued embodied in papers), plurality and multiple perspectives studies (including studies carried out in the whole world), academic scholarship (authors have participated in all the phases of the process, ensuring transparency, reproducibility, accurate reporting, and proper citation), aiming for a positive social contribution. Results indicate overall stability (≈3.85) and persistent weaknesses in "Activities", when quality is good or excellent then it has a positive impact on children development, and different ways to improve quality emerged. The stagnation suggests insufficient structural reform across European systems and highlights the need for sustained investment, training and systematic evaluation.

early childhood education, ECERS, ITERS, meta-analysis, Europe

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

Defining Best Practices in Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Review

Presenters:
María Cerdeira González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

All authors:
María Cerdeira González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
María Ainoa Zabalza-Cerdeiriña, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
M. Manuela Ordóñez, Universidade de Vigo, Spain
Isabel Mociño-González, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

This study, developed within the CiDiC_EI, examines how Best Practices (BP) are defined and theoretically grounded in Early Childhood Education research (2014–2024). It explores their characterisation, underpinning frameworks and prevailing methodologies. The BP concept has been cited since the 19th century (Van Haecht, 1998) and linked to educational quality and child development (Sylva et al., 2004; UNICEF & UNESCO, 2024). Conceptual ambiguity and weak theoretical definitions in previous studies justify this systematic review. The study draws on ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1987), the theory of action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and the DAP approach (NAEYC, 2009), understanding BP as context-sensitive practices integrating executive and cognitive dimensions. The study adopts an interpretive research paradigm to explore how Best Practices are conceptually constructed and understood within Early Childhood Education literature. Methodologically, it employs a systematic literature review following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Searches conducted in Scopus, Web of Science and SciELO resulted in the identification of 21 relevant studies, which were analysed using bibliometric techniques and qualitative content analysis. This desk-based study uses only publicly available peer-reviewed sources. No personal data were involved. Ethical standards were ensured through transparent reporting, accurate citation and adherence to EECERA (2024) guidelines. Research

mainly uses qualitative approaches focused on teachers. Only 9 of 21 studies define a conceptual framework, showing strong links to “quality” but notable theoretical fragmentation. Advancing conceptual consensus may strengthen teacher education, programme evaluation and evidence-based policy.

literature review, best practices, early childhood education, global citizenship education, conceptualization

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

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

Symposium F08 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 4, floor -2

ECE AS A TOOL TO CLOSE THE ATTAINMENT GAP

Chaired by: Olga Anatoli, Linköping University, Sweden

Mind the gap! A politically initiated preschool improvement initiative (CBS) experienced by professionals over time

Presenters:
Gudrun Holmdahl, Karlstad University, Sweden
Maria Olsson, Dalarna university, Sweden
Maria Fredriksson, Dalarna University, Sweden

All authors:
Gudrun Holmdahl, Karlstad University, Sweden
Maria Olsson, Dalarna university, Sweden
Maria Fredriksson, Dalarna University, Sweden

National school authorities frequently introduce policies intended to shape local pedagogical practices in preschools. One example is the Swedish National Agency for Education’s improvement initiative Collaboration for Better Schools (CBS). Our aim is to generate knowledge about how professionals participating in this initiative have experienced and been affected over time, and to deepen understanding of improvement efforts in educational practice. Earlier research shows that improvement initiatives are shaped by local conditions (Olsson & Fredriksson, 2024). However, there is limited knowledge about how professionals experience large-scale, long-term initiatives such as CBS (Nordholm et al., 2022), especially in preschools. The CBS initiative includes policy elements and is understood in the study through policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012), focusing how actors interpret, reinterpret, and handle such initiatives. The study draws on qualitative data from eleven semi-structured interviews with professionals in four preschools, and leaders in one municipality. The first analytical step is inductive; the second applies the concept of interpretative repertoires—clusters of terms, descriptions, and metaphors (Wetherell & Potter, 1992)—and explores relations between them. Institutional ethical approval was obtained. Informed written consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and anonymity was ensured. Participants report improved pedagogical practice and positive professional development. The initiative was, however, interpreted inconsistently across organisational levels, contributing to a gap between preschool staff and municipal actors. Across Europe, national initiatives exist and understanding how centrally formulated policies are locally enacted can support dialogue about shifting expectations in pedagogical practice.

CBS, politically initiated national improvement initiative, policy enactment, preschool professionals, pedagogical practice

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

This project is founded by the National Network for Research and Development.

Who Attends—and Who Doesn't? Demographic and Geographic Patterns in Swedish Preschool Attendance

Presenters:
Anne Lillvist, Mälardalen University, Sweden

All authors:
Anne Lillvist, Mälardalen University, Sweden
Mia Heikkilä, Stockholm University, Sweden
Anna Günther-Hanssen, Stockholm University, Sweden
Klara Dolk, Stockholm University, Sweden

The study aims to analyse attendance data in order to identify patterns related to attendance duration, gender, age, and geographic area. In recent years, municipalities have observed declining attendance among enrolled children in Swedish preschool (SKR, 2024; SOU 2020:67), while national attendance statistics—and in many cases even local overviews—are lacking. Regular preschool attendance is linked to improved learning and development (Dietrichson et al., 2020), greater likelihood of completing schooling (Del Boca et al., 2023), and reduced risk of social exclusion (OECD, 2020; Swedish Police Authority, 2023). This study employs an intersectional framework, recognizing that social categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, and religiosity continually shape the relational and didactic practices in preschool settings. Guided by a quantitative research paradigm, the study employs a cross-sectional design based on pseudonymized attendance records from approximately 15,000 preschool children across five Swedish districts, including data on gender, age, district, and daily attendance patterns. Ethical considerations centered on safeguarding children's privacy through strict pseudonymization—replacing all personal identifiers with ID codes—and secure data management procedures, with analyses conducted at group level. Preliminary descriptive findings indicate that 85–90% of recorded attendance across districts falls between 5.5 and 9 hours per day, while low attendance (<5.5 hours) constitutes roughly 5%. Overall absence ranges from 42% to 47.8%. Additional analyses will be presented regarding variations linked to gender, age, and district. These results highlight the need for attendance monitoring to enable early detection of low participation and to support the development of targeted, equity-oriented interventions for children at risk of reduced learning opportunities and social exclusion.

preschool attendance, quantitative design, intersectionality, educational equity

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

A Crucial Starting Point: The Potential of Preschool Education in Disadvantaged Areas

Presenters:
Lise-Lotte Bjervås, Linneaus University, Sweden

All authors:
Lise-Lotte Bjervås, Linneaus University, Sweden
Maria Magnusson, Linneaus University, Sweden

The aim is to generate knowledge about principals' discretion, focusing on how they navigate tensions between system-level demands and local preschool practice. The study aligns with research showing that principals extend their work beyond formal mandates (Hanhörster & Tippel, 2024:15). It also relates to studies highlighting the complexity of navigating between policy and local practice (Lund, 2024:174). Lipsky's (1980) concept street-level bureaucracy and Habermas's (1986) system–lifeworld framework are used to explain how discretion is shaped by the interplay between policy governance and local practice. The study belongs to a qualitative research paradigm and

draws on 23 in-depth interviews with preschool principals working in Swedish areas classified as vulnerable to varying degrees. Participants were recruited through strategic sampling based on the purpose of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). The interviews were analysed using thematic qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Principals provided written consent. Oral consent was also obtained before the interview began. All participant names have been replaced to ensure anonymity. Participants were informed of their right to discontinue the interview at any time and that the data is kept inaccessible to unauthorized persons. Two overarching themes emerge: principals as active agents and system critique. Principals describe a demanding daily reality with frustration over limited impact, insufficient recognition, and inefficient resource use. The findings show how they adapt policy to local needs while advocating long-term, adapted structural solutions. The findings underline the need to support principals' discretion and align policy expectations with local conditions to ensure sustainable compensatory efforts.

leadership, discretion, street-level bureaucracy, disadvantaged areas, compensatory mission

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

Symposium F09 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 5, floor -2

ETHICAL RESEARCH WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Chaired by: Eva Dierickx, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Ethical challenges in quantitative research in ECE from a children's rights perspective: who cares?

Presenters:
Eva Dierickx, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Mariem Es Salhi, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Els Dumortier, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

All authors:
Eva Dierickx, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Mariem Es Salhi, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Els Dumortier, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Marijke Van Buggenhout, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

This paper examines ethical and epistemic challenges of conducting quantitative research on sensitive topics in early childhood education (ECE). Specifically, it asks: (1) how might quantitative practices produce epistemic injustice in ECE, and (2) what ethical challenges and tensions arise, and how can insights from ethics of care and children's rights inform more ethically attuned survey practices? While general proactive and procedural ethical frameworks guide research with minors, they often remain abstract and insufficiently address the concrete complexities of large-scale survey-based studies in ECE. Drawing on Ethics of Care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings; 1984), children's rights (UNHCR) and epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), this study examines power, participation, and the limits of quantitative research with young children. The reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019) is based on 1,170 fieldnotes collected during a quantitative survey study on bullying in 3 schools (ages 4–8; N = 350). The survey included Likert-style items, closed and open-ended questions and pictorial response formats. Fieldnotes documented children's responses, interactions, and researchers' reflections during administration. Approved by the VUB Ethics Committee Human Sciences, our ethical reflections focus on meaningfully respecting and listening to children's voices within institutionally constrained, quantitative research by foregrounding children's survey experiences. Researchers engaged in ongoing reflexivity regarding their positionality. The analysis identified four themes: adultcentrism in eliciting and interpreting responses; tensions between children's agency, institutional authority, and the researcher; embodied and temporal participation beyond standardized formats; and the scope of researchers' responsibilities of

care. We conclude by offering prompts for more ethically attuned quantitative research practices with young children.

children's rights, ethics of care, epistemic justice, survey research, reflexivity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study is part of the large-scale project Primary Prejudice(S003724N); a collaboration between Vrije Universiteit Brussel, KU Leuven and AP, Antwerp. It is funded by FWO, the Research Foundation Flanders.

Beyond Protection: Co-Creating Ethical Research with Babies, Children, Young People and Adults

Presenters:
Glenda Walsh, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

All authors:
Glenda Walsh, Stranmillis University College, United Kingdom

This presentation explores how ethical research guidance can be co-created with babies, children and young people, foregrounding agency, participation, and democratic engagement across diverse social and digital contexts. Ethical research with children is moving beyond procedural compliance toward reflexive engagement with power, participation, and children's rights (Schmid & Garrels, 2024; Hagell & Benniche, 2022). Consultation alone rarely ensures meaningful participation (Corney et al., 2021). Scholarship increasingly calls for children's active involvement in shaping research design, governance, and ethics, especially in sensitive or digital contexts (Robson, 2018). Grounded in a rights-based framework aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Lundy Model of participation and Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16, this presentation emphasises children's empowerment through agency and voice, recognising participation as a dynamic, context-sensitive process requiring flexible, inclusive approaches centring children's lived experiences. A co-produced, participatory research design was employed across diverse settings, engaging babies through to young adults. Methods were developmentally appropriate and child-centred, including playful encounters, creative methods, and digital consultations. Ethical rigour was maintained through continuous assent, age-appropriate communication, GDPR-compliant data handling, and researcher reflexivity to respect power imbalances and foster safe, inclusive participation. Findings highlight the importance of moving beyond protection-focused ethics toward relational, participatory ethical frameworks. Policies and governance structures must balance safeguarding with children's agency, support flexible participation, and embed co-creation as a core ethical principle across both traditional and digital contexts. Modernising ethical governance frameworks to embed participatory, rights-based approaches across traditional and research contexts is vital to advancing children's democratic participation and voice.

co-creation, agency, participation, ethics, rights-based

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The Department of Children, Disability and Equality in Ireland

Rethinking Ethics in Visual Research with Young Children: Tensions, Reflexivity, and Relational Accountability

Presenters:
Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

All authors:

Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Olga Fotakopoulou, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

This paper examines the methodological and ethical tensions inherent in visual research with young children, analysing how institutional ethical protocols intersect, and often conflict, with participatory, child-centred approaches. Building on scholarship that challenges procedural ethics (e.g. Truscott, Graham & Powell 2019), this study extends debates on children's participation and relational accountability by analysing two empirical projects and a meta-analysis of recent visual research literature. The paper draws on participatory epistemologies and introduces ethical egoism, reframed as a commitment to acting in the child's best interests, as a lens for understanding ethical decision-making in early childhood visual methodologies. Two studies inform the discussion: (1) an analysis of ethical contradictions in visual research with children aged 0–5; and (2) a DAST-based investigation of children's perceptions of science involving 121 participants aged 5–12. A meta-analysis of 65 peer-reviewed visual research studies (2015–2025) complements these findings. Guided by EECERA values, we uphold ongoing ethical praxis, integrating ethical sensitivity, reasoning, motivation, and implementation to inform responsible decisions throughout the research process. The paper highlights tensions surrounding consent, anonymity, relational ethics, and power dynamics. It argues that ethical decisions often stem from institutional compliance rather than child-centred reasoning. Visual research is frequently positioned as empowering, yet institutional protocols can undermine children's agency. The studies demonstrate the value of multimodal, dialogic methods and the need for ongoing consent and ethical reflexivity. The paper calls for flexible ethical frameworks that prioritise children's rights, autonomy, and relational accountability, urging institutions to move beyond proceduralism toward context-sensitive, reflexive ethical practice.

visual research, ethics, early childhood, informed consent, participatory methods, ethical egoism, children's voices

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F10 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 6, floor -2

EXPLORING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ECE

Chaired by: Alexandra Nordström, University of Helsinki, Finland

Digital childhoods: Lessons from COVID-19

Presenters:
Alison Watson, Federation University Australia, Australia

All authors:
Alison Watson, Federation University Australia, Australia

This study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed digital divides in early childhood education and explores strategies to support democratic participation in digital spaces during future crises. COVID-19 disrupted early childhood programs, wellbeing, and family communication (Bussey et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020). Practitioners fostered family play and social interaction (O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021; Quiñones & Adams, 2020), yet online learning remained inequitable and less effective (Bussey et al., 2022; Front Project, 2020; Kunze & McIntyre, 2022). Services adapted through digital practices and support (Warrilow et al., 2021), but practitioners lacked preparation for remote pedagogies (Atiles, 2021; McFarland et al., 2022). The study drew on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework (1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), Bourdieu's constructs of capital, field, and habitus (1977), and a professional learning framework adapted for early childhood education (Australian Institute for Teaching and School

Leadership, 2012). Using a qualitative interpretive paradigm and case study methodology (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014; Yin, 2018), the second phase involved semi-structured interviews and written reflections from nine practitioners. Data were thematically analysed with rigorous quality checks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Ethical considerations included ethical approval, informed consent, voluntary participation, and pseudonyms. The findings reveal a significant gap, with practitioners lacking adequate professional learning and systemic support to create meaningful digital spaces for children. The research underscores democratic implications, emphasising that all children have the right to meaningful digital participation. Achieving this requires stronger practitioner digital pedagogy, attention to access inequities, and strategic investment in digital infrastructure to ensure equitable learning across diverse contexts.

digital divide, online learning, covid-19, digital pedagogy, equity

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Professional development for digital age pedagogies: Supporting children's participation

Presenters:
Alison Watson, Federation University Australia, Australia

All authors:
Alison Watson, Federation University Australia, Australia

This paper argues that remote learning, particularly when not grounded in local contexts and children's lived realities, often fails to foster meaningful participation and agency in the digital age. Expectations that educators master digital tools and their pedagogical applications have intensified, yet professional development frameworks for digital competencies in early childhood education remain limited, despite their importance for equitable participation (Dardanou et al., 2023). Educators report challenges in sustaining play-based pedagogy, meaningful interactions, and children's digital participation (Atiles, 2021; Papandreou & Vellopoulou, 2022), and debate about whether digital play constitutes "real" play further complicates practice (Dardanou et al., 2023). These issues became more visible during COVID-19, when disruptions to children's learning and wellbeing intensified (Kunze & McIntyre, 2022; Uğraş et al., 2023). The study used Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework (1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), Bourdieu's constructs of capital, field, and habitus (1977), and a professional learning framework adapted for early childhood education (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012). Applying a qualitative interpretive paradigm and case study methodology (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018),questionnaires, interviews and reflections from nine practitioners were thematically analysed using rigorous checks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Ethical considerations included approval, informed consent, voluntary participation, and pseudonyms. Distance learning reduced children's participation, as online environments struggled to support interaction, child-led inquiry and sustained engagement. Children required significant adult support at home, which was inconsistent. With future distance learning still possible, strengthening participatory digital pedagogies remains essential. Contextualised professional development is key to crisis recovery and sustaining children's rights to agency and participation.

digital competencies, digital pedagogies, participation, professional development, play

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Supporting Early Digital Literacy for Children's Language Development

Presenters:
Yasotha Veera, Jamiyah Singapore, Singapore

All authors:
Yasotha Veera, Jamiyah Singapore, Singapore

To identify and analyze effective pedagogical methodologies carried out by educators toembed digital literacy skills in language teaching." With digital reading, there is a deeper impact on younger children and low socio-economic demographic based children would project less benefit from digital reading, Liang, Zhang, and Sun (2025). Hare, Johnson, and Vlahiotis(2024), mentions that in their research on children's reading outcomes, ages, languages and text characteristics, that they found no alignment to print and digital modes of learning. The research has shown that traditional methods have worked with young children, but considering the research works, these methods may not be effective as digital learning is coming into the children's world. The paradigm social constructivism, and the design would be qualitative case study and it would be observational study to interpret the social scaffolding provided by educators. To have the parental consent and focusing on the tools to handle data privacy. Providing an understanding on the integration of learning for children between digital and traditional methods. Engaged learning takes place within socio-cultural setting sharing ideas and concepts coming from the technology aided resources that infuses with the traditional classroom teaching styles. An impending issue on young learners need to be scaffolded and the early childhood frameworks should review on developmental milestones for a paradigm shift to meet the intended and purposeful learning outcomes.

blended learning, pedagogical evolution, socio-cultural theory, digital transformation, review on early childhood frameworks

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

Symposium F11 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 7, floor -2

GROWTH MINDSETS AND PATHWAYS TO AGENCY

Chaired by: Lotta Uusitalo, University of Helsinki, Finland

What is important in life? The role of social relationships in building existential resilience in young children

Presenters:
Lotta Uusitalo, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Katri Pardon, University of Helsinki, Finland
Lotta Uusitalo, University of Helsinki, Finland
Lassi Lavanti, University of Helsinki, Finland
Lari Launonen, University of Helsinki, Finland
Arniika Kuusisto, University of Helsinki, Finland

This study investigates what young Finnish children consider important in life and how their perspectives illuminate the foundations of existential resilience. Specifically, it examines how children’s worldviews and social relationships shape their meaning-making and sense of existence. Prior research highlights the centrality of social relationships for resilience and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Seligman, 2011), yet studies on young children’s perspectives remain limited. The study is grounded in existential resilience theory and sociocultural perspectives on meaning-making. It draws on the notion of “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962) to understand how children articulate existence through relationships and everyday experiences. The study employed constructivist grounded

theory. Child-led digital storytelling (photos, videos, drawings, voice recordings) and individual life-history interviews (n= 20) generated 611 child-produced items, analysed iteratively to identify emerging categories. Informed consent was obtained from guardians, educators, and the children. Participation was voluntary, and children's willingness was continuously monitored. Consideration was given to the use of digital storytelling, ensuring that children understood how their photos would be used and that no sensitive material was disclosed. Social relationships emerged as children's primary mode of experiencing meaning and existence. Children's narratives intertwined their own sense of existence with belonging, reciprocity, and being valued. The findings point to secular and concrete understandings of the world, yet children demonstrated symbolic and abstract thinking when discussing themes such as space or death. The findings underscore the importance of positioning social relationships at the centre of pedagogy in ECEC. Because children's existential meaning-making is rooted in belonging, ECEC practices should cultivate emotionally safe, inclusive, and relational learning environments.

resilience, children's perspectives, relationships, worldview education, ECEC

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Mapping Pathways to Developing Agency: Temperament, Theory of Mind, and Differentiated External Regulation in Early Childhood

Presenters:
Lihi Sarfaty, The David Yellin Academic College of Education, Israel

All authors:
Lihi Sarfaty, The David Yellin Academic College of Education, Israel
Nufar Gavrieli, Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee, Israel

This study examined developmental mediation pathways linking children's temperament, Theory of Mind (ToM), and external regulation to expressions of emerging agency: self-regulated learning (SRL) and social competence. Agency refers to intentional, goal-directed action grounded in self-reflection and social awareness (Martin, 2004). Yet the dispositional and cognitive pathways through which agency-related capacities develop in early childhood remain underexplored. Drawing on social-cognitive theory and the regulation internalization model, this framework distinguishes between two forms of external regulation: co-regulation (prompting SRL), and other-regulation (instructing SRL). Although SRL is typically linked to school, its foundations lie in early home interactions. Consequently, this study focuses on mother–child dyads as the primary context in which regulatory capacities are internalized prior to formal schooling (Whitebread et al., 2009). Participants were 120 mother–child dyads (children aged 3–6). Mothers, as children's primary caregivers, reported on children's behavior based on extensive daily interactions (Hamadani et al., 2010), capturing SRL processes in naturalistic contexts. They used validated measures of temperament, SRL, and social skills. Children completed a standardized ToM battery. Path analysis (Mplus 8.6) examined direct and indirect associations among variables. Ethical procedures included institutional approval, informed consent, and full participant anonymity. Results showed negative emotionality predicted social difficulties, whereas effortful control and ToM predicted prosocial behavior and attention regulation. Furthermore, negative emotionality showed a significant indirect association with attention regulation via other-regulation (β=−.077, 95% CI[−.152, −.003]). Co-regulation was positively associated with prosocial behavior, though no indirect effects were observed. Findings clarify developmental pathways to agency, helping educators scaffold autonomous functioning based on children's individual temperamental profiles.

agency, self-regulated learning, external regulation, temperament, theory of mind

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

This study received no external funding

Norwegian ECEC teachers/staff´s perspectives on growth mindset and the conditions for implementation

Presenters:
Beate Gjesdal, NLA University College, Norway
Runar Eikhaug, NLA University College, Norway
Lene Nottveit, NLA University College, Norway

All authors:
Beate Gjesdal, NLA University College, Norway
Runar Eikhaug, NLA University College, Norway
Lene Nottveit, NLA University College, Norway
Fiona Boylan, Edith Cowan University, Australia

This study examined how ECEC staff understand growth-mindset in Norwegian early childhood settings. It explored staff knowledge and attitudes toward mindset theory and the factors influencing its implementation in kindergarten. Research on growth- and fixed-mindsets highlights how adults' expectations influence children's motivation and persistence. Although limited within ECEC, emerging findings from Australia show that early childhood teachers possess some knowledge of mindset theory and believe it can affect young children's learning (Boylan et al., 2024). Little is known about how staff in Norwegian contexts, interpret and apply growth-mindset principles. The study draws on mindset theory (Dweck, 2017), focusing on how adults' beliefs and responses shape children's learning processes. The conceptual framing links mindset theory to Norwegian ECEC Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) that emphasise relational, play based and holistic approaches. Two surveys distributed to more than 100 early childhood education staff members were conducted in September 25 and April 2026. The first examined staff's conceptual understanding of growth-mindset, the second investigated what they viewed as essential for implementing a growth-mindset to promote children's learning and persistence. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout all phases of data collection. Comparing results with Boylan's (Boylan et al., 2018) Australian findings provides insight into how mindset theory is interpreted and operationalised in Norwegian ECEC settings and what professional support staff consider necessary. The study highlights which organisational and pedagogical conditions staff see as important for fostering inclusive, learning oriented environments that support children's persistence and learning.

growth-mindsets, taff beliefs/attitudes, learning-oriented, persistence, play-based context

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

Symposium F12 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Senate Room, floor -2

PROJECT BASED AND CRAFT LEARNING

Chaired by: Merve Tezel, Osmangazi Primary School, Türkiye

Shaping Proficiency: A Study of Craft Knowledge among Early Childhood Education and Care Staff

Presenters:
Lilly Swanljung, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

All authors:
Lilly Swanljung, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

This study investigates early childhood education and care (ECEC) staff's craft knowledge and didactic readiness in multimaterial craft education in Finland. It examines how practitioners assess their skills with different materials and techniques, based on the assumption that material familiarity underpins didactic competence and supports children's craft learning. Prior research indicates that ECEC staff often lack the resources and subject-specific competence needed for high-quality craft education, limiting children's opportunities for meaningful material exploration (Karila & Leikkola, 2022). National evaluations also show that craft activities are infrequent and unevenly distributed, across age groups, occurring more often for 5–6-year-olds than for younger children (Juutinen et al., 2021). The theoretical framework draws on research highlighting staff's roles as didactic leaders (Leggett, 2017) and their importance in inspiring and enabling children's experimentation and exploration in craft education (Yliverronen, 2019; Carlgren, 2023). Data were collected through qualitative interviews with six ECEC staff, and the analysis examines how prior craft education and hobbies shape their confidence and practices with various craft materials. The study followed the ethical guidelines of TENK (2023); participants were fully informed, provided voluntary consent, and could withdraw at any time, with all data handled confidentially. Findings show staff feel more confident with textile than technical techniques, a pattern tied to school craft experiences and traditional gender norms. Limited subject confidence may shift teaching toward predetermined outcomes rather than supporting children's creative processes. Enhanced subject-technological proficiency supports process-oriented craft education and curricular autonomy, carrying important implications for professional development.

multimaterial craft education, didactic competence, subject-technological proficiency

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

Project-Based Learning in Estonian Kindergartens: Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives

Presenters:
Kristina Lahe, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia

All authors:
Kristina Lahe, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia
Maire Tuul, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia
Eve Kikas, Tallinn University,, Estonia

The aim of this study is to examine how Estonian kindergarten teachers assess the importance, perceived complexity, and success implementing key elements of project-based learning (PjBL), how they explain their implementation experiences, and how parents perceive and experience their involvement in PjBL. Prior studies indicate that teachers may experience difficulties in implementing key elements of PjBL (Stojanović et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2017). Research also calls for examining conditions for effective PjBL implementation (Ferrero et al., 2021). The study is grounded in socio-constructivist and experiential learning perspectives, Vygotsky's socio-constructivist approach (1978) and Dewey's experiential learning theory (1938). The study follows a pragmatic paradigm. Data were collected via questionnaires (n = 73 teachers; n = 63 parents) using purposeful and convenience sampling through institutional mediation. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and open-ended responses were analysed thematically. The study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Tallinn University. Quantitative results showed that teachers rated the examined key elements of PjBL as important, reported low perceived difficulty, and evaluated their implementation success positively. However pedagogical documentation received the lowest ratings. Qualitative responses indicated challenges related to time constraints, lack of clear frameworks, and uncertainty about documentation. Across elements, effective implementation requires professionalism and creativity, including linking child-initiated activities with curriculum goals, balancing subject areas, and managing time. Parents were largely positive (over 90% felt PjBL supports deeper understanding,

connections, and active engagement), although some preferred additional targeted practice. Results may inform kindergarten leaders and institutions in supporting teachers' PjBL competencies.

project-based learning, early childhood education, child-centered learning, learner agency, teacher professionalism

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project-based learning as an opportunity to development of agency in kindergarten in Israel

Presenters:
Merav Aizenberg, Achva College, Israel

All authors:
Merav Aizenberg, Achva College, Israel

This presentation examines project-based learning (PBL) practices in Israeli kindergartens from the perspective of kindergarten teachers, and identifies teacher typologies that lead PBL and their implications for the development of agency in young children. Aisenberg & Zadok (2022) discovered that PBL has the power to positively impact a significant change in the learning process, the optimal climate, and the involvement of learners in the learning process in kindergarten. Davis's (2000) agency theory views the individual as an active subject. Agency develops when individuals perceive themselves as having both the right and the ability to make decisions, act on them, and take responsibility for the outcomes. The study is a qualitative study based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 experienced kindergarten teachers (10+ years of experience). Grounded in the interpretive approach (Cohen et al., 2011), it explores how teachers understand and implement project-based learning, who leads it, and how it promotes learner agency. The interviews were anonymous, and participants provided consent to participate in the study. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee - Research Authority of Achva Academic College (Approval No. 0085). The findings identify three types of kindergarten teachers who lead projects at varying levels of agency: (1) entrepreneurial teachers who involve children in decision-making (50%), (2) entrepreneurial teachers who encourage children's decision-making (15%), and (3) teachers who base project-based learning primarily on children's decisions (35%). It is recommended that the Ministry of Education train kindergarten teachers to implement PBL from the start of their careers. Teacher education programs should strengthen PBL at all levels, with an emphasis on fostering high-level implementation that promotes agency and proactivity.

project-based learning (PBL), agency, kindergarten teacher, leadership, kindergarten

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F13 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 9, floor -1

MATHEMATICS AND TEACHER CONFIDENCE

Chaired by: Margrét Björnsdóttir, Adjunkt, Iceland

Interpreting and reflecting on early childhood educators' participation in mathematics-focused professional development.

Presenters:
Jess Green, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

All authors:

Jess Green, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

This study examines early childhood educators' experiences of mathematics professional development (PD) to generate educator-informed recommendations for future provision. Educators play a central role in shaping children's early learning through observation, planning, and reflective practice (Broadhead & Burt, 2012). PD is a key driver of quality improvement in early childhood education (Egert et al., 2018; Jensen & Iannone, 2018), and early mathematics competence predicts later achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). Yet little is known about how educators' experience and sustain mathematics PD across everyday practice, peer collaboration, and digital spaces. This study addresses that gap. Guided by Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), PD is conceptualised as socially situated learning developed through participation, collaboration, and shared expertise. A sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978) frames mathematical learning as co-constructed in interactions with colleagues, children, and digital tools. Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) underpins the focus on educators' reflexive meaning-making. A qualitative, interpretative–reflexive paradigm was adopted. Eleven semi-structured interviews with early childhood educators were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Participants gave informed consent, data were anonymised, and withdrawal was possible at any stage. Findings show that early childhood educators' mathematics practice develops through interconnected processes of reflective engagement, collaborative interpretation of practice, and use of digital learning spaces. These processes deepen educators' awareness of children's mathematical thinking and strengthen their confidence in responding to learning opportunities. Findings highlight the need for sustained, team based professional learning structures and policies that support diverse, ongoing forms of mathematics-focused PD.

professional development, reflective practice, mathematics, communities of practice, digital learning spaces

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

This work was supported by UKRI Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/W002914/1].

Professional development project on exploring with mathematics in pre-schools

Presenters:
Margrét Björnsdóttir, Adjunkt, Iceland

All authors:
Margrét Björnsdóttir, Adjunkt, Iceland
Málmfríður Einarsdóttir, Kvistaborg Preschool, Iceland

The purpose of this study is to research how participation in professional development courses, on young children's mathematics, influences preschool teachers' professional practice and the development of a collaborative learning community. Research has shown that creating a learning community can give support to promote professionalism and cooperation of pre-school teachers (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Furthermore, participating in mathematics courses can significantly improve individual teachers' teaching (Österholm et al., 2016). The course draws on pre-school teachers' work with children on mathematical topics that, according to Alan J. Bishop (1988b), are universal across cultures. This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), using participatory action research and structured reflection (McNiff and Whitehead, 2012) to examine pre-school teachers' professional development. Four pre-schools participated, with two pre-school teachers from each school selected to lead the project and attend the course, giving a total of eight participants, chosen through convenience sampling. Ethical consideration guided the research process, participation was voluntary and confidentiality was ensured (Codes of Ethics for Research in Icelandic Universities, 2020). Children were not direct participants. The pre-school teachers actively participated and succeeded in creating a learning community in the pre-schools. The project

gave many teachers a chance to see mathematics all around them, to see the mathematics that is already in their work and gave them the tools to promote mathematics and make it visible and tangible in their daily work. Collaboration in the field of mathematics education and teachers' community building is important for teachers to strengthening mathematics learning in pre-school.

pre-school, learning communities, action research, mathematics learning, school development

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Four preschools and two teachers at the University of Iceland's School of Education received a grant from the Reykjavík School and Leisure Department in the Let's Make Dreams Come True category.

ECEC educators' view of toddlers' mathematics education: Frequencies of teaching mathematical skills and using mathematical concepts

Presenters:
Piia Parviainen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

All authors:
Piia Parviainen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Tuire Koponen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Tiina Ronkainen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Minna Torppa, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Jenni Salminen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This study aims to explore ECEC educators' view of mathematical teaching to toddlers (children aged 0 to 3). Educators' mathematical awareness and their practices are critical in supporting age-appropriate mathematical learning (Björklund & Barendgret, 2016; Parviainen et al., 2024). These are particularly important concerning toddlers (Bittner & Degotardi, 2022; Palmér et al., 2016). It's not, however, evident how frequent educators' intentional mathematical skills teaching or use of mathematical concepts is concerning toddlers' teaching, and if educators' professional title or age is associated with frequencies. In this study, educators' self-evaluated frequencies of teaching mathematical skills and using mathematical concepts are explored in relation to Parviainen's (2019) theoretical framework of early mathematical skills development. Moreover, it's analysed whether frequencies are dependent on educator's professional title or age. The study applies "Mathematics Teaching and Concept Use Questionnaire" (Parviainen, 2021) in exploration. Survey data were collected from ECEC educators (N = 151) who participated in EarlyMath research project. Data were analysed using quantitative statistical analysis. Ethical review was conducted for the research project. The ethical principles (e.g. voluntary nature of research participation and careful data analysis) were meticulously followed. Results showed that according to educators' self-evaluation intentional mathematical teaching took place on average 3-4 times per week; numerical skills and numerical concepts were present more frequently than skills and concepts related to spatial thinking or mathematical thinking and reasoning. Interestingly, frequencies were not depended on educators' professional title or age. The study provides much needed research knowledge of teaching frequencies concerning toddlers´ mathematics educatio (MacDonald & Murphy, 2021).

educator, teaching, mathematical skills, mathematical concepts, toddlers

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

This research was funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 101002966) and the Research Council of Finland (grant agreement no. 363648).

Symposium F14 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 10, floor -1

EXPLORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSION

Chaired by: Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Do center-based and home-based childcares implement the same inclusive practices?

Presenters:
Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

All authors:
Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Shanelle Perron, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Noémie Paquette, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Sabrina Bolduc, 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 study aims to describe the inclusion of children with high support needs and to compare inclusive practices across center- and home-based childcares. Children who require ongoing individualized support are more likely to be excluded from educational daycares (Meyer et al. 2021). Even though almost a quarter of children in Québec, Canada, attend home-based childcare, little is known about the inclusive practices implemented in this context. This project is informed by the concept of quality inclusion, which focuses on the active participation of all children and interactions among peers and educators (Soukakou et al. 2024). A descriptive cross-sectional survey design, mainly quantitative, was used. An electronic survey was sent to directors of both types of educational childcare settings. Completed surveys (n=133) were analyzed using descriptive analyses, Fisher's exact test, and thematic analysis. Preliminary data from a multiple-case study will also enrich the results with observations and interviews conducted in both settings. The survey's content was reviewed by the ethics committee, and the study received an ethical exemption because it collected information about organizational practices. The multiple case study required informed consent of all participants in childcares. While childcares expressed similar needs, several inclusive practices differed significantly. For example, home-based childcares reorganized educators' schedules less frequently than center-based, and almost all center-based childcares modified classrooms or shared spaces layouts. These differences highlight how structural contexts shape inclusive practices across childcares. Tailoring assistance and resources to the characteristics of each setting could promote quality inclusion for all.

quality inclusion, inclusive practices, high support needs, home-based childcare, center-based childcare

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Transforming Early Childhood Education towards Inclusion: Insights from Children's Voices

Presenters:
Ona Monkevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Birute Vityte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

All authors:
Ona Monkevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Birute Vityte, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

The study aims to explore how children experience educational changes implemented in early childhood settings to enhance the quality of inclusive education. Drawing on Lundy (2005), children's meaningful participation requires four elements: space to express views, facilitation of expression, attentive listening, and consideration of children's perspectives in decision-making. Research shows that even young children, including those with special educational needs (SEN), can articulate their educational experiences when educators adopt appropriate strategies to hear their voices (Mortimer, 2004; Shaw, 2021; Kellock, 2021). Moreover, children's voices can have a significant influence on decision-making processes (Barblett, 2023). Building on this premise, our study was grounded in the theoretical framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which views every child as an active expert learner (Meyer et al., 2014:20). A qualitative paradigm and the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017) were employed to ensure that children's voices were visible and heard. Data were collected through draw-and-talk, photovoice, conversations, and observation. Participants included 30 five-year-old children, 18 with SEN. Informed consent was obtained from both parents and children, who were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Data confidentiality was ensured. The findings indicate that listening to children's voices enables the identification of which inclusion-oriented quality improvement measures are experienced by children as supportive of their well-being and learning, and which are perceived as less favourable. The study highlights the value of children's perspectives in transforming early childhood education towards inclusion.

early childhood education, inclusive education, education-transforming decisions, well-being and learning, children's voices.

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

An exploration of how early experiences shape the life stories of those identified with dyslexia

Presenters:
Deb Nye, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Deb Nye, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

This PhD study aims to explore the early experiences of children with dyslexia in order to offer better support at this critical stage in their development. Burnette (2021) emphasises the role of belonging and inclusive environments, showing how supportive contexts can reduce barriers for learners with dyslexia before formal literacy begins. Catts and Petscher (2022) extend this by framing dyslexia within a risk-resilience model, highlighting how environmental factors and early interventions build resilience. Together, they support the exploration of dyslexia through enriched environments rather than focusing solely on reading and writing skills. The study draws on the work of Rutter (2013) on resilience and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). The study adopted a qualitative and interpretivist paradigm and used an Interpretive Phenomenology approach. Data collection methods included a survey, interviews and focus groups. All participants had been formally identified with dyslexia and included adults (7), young people (4 aged 15-17) and children (2, aged 7-11). The adults self-volunteered from the survey, the young people and children engaged through geographical convenience. Special care was taken in both method and analysis to ensure the study was inclusive and respectful of children's and adults' neurodiversity. Consent for adults and children with literacy issues was carefully negotiated. The thesis identifies barriers to participation experienced by both adults and children with dyslexia. Ultimately, the work argues for a more inclusive, responsive, and child-centred approach to dyslexia research and practice, aimed at fostering equitable educational experiences and long-term wellbeing. Facilitating more training, raising understanding of dyslexia, advocating for children with dyslexia, and recognising pre-diagnosis.

dyslexia, advocate, environment, inclusive research, participant voice

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F15 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 11, floor -1

SCREEN TIME AND EYE-TRACKING GLASSES

Chaired by: Niina Rutanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Young Children's Digital Knowledge in Preschool Education

Presenters:
Nathalie Chapon, Université Marie et louis Pasteur, France
Annie Lasne, Université Marie et louis Pasteur, France

All authors:
Nathalie Chapon, Université Marie et louis Pasteur, France
Annie Lasne, Université Marie et louis Pasteur, France

While the risks associated with early exposure to screens among young children are well documented, there is still little research to date addressing their digital knowledge, skills, and uses. What are the digital skills and usage patterns of children aged 3 to 6? Today, children are immersed in a digital culture from a very early age (Dauphin, 2012). The development of digital skills through exposure to screens sometimes occurs alongside, or even precedes, the development of other fundamental skills, such as language acquisition or learning to walk. While international scientific literature, particularly in psychology, abounds on the effects of children's screen exposure, we have observed that no research to date addresses young children's knowledge about screens, especially smartphones, and their uses. Faced with this scientific gap, we decided to conduct research with toddlers in preschool. We present the results of a study conducted with children from three preschool class levels: nursery, middle and upper section. This study, based on an innovative methodology, makes it possible to capture children's voices and to analyze digital "knowledge" and skills using a film-based observational approach and interviews with children. We obtained permission from the educational authorities and consent from teachers, parents, and students to participate in or withdraw from the study. The voices were stored on an encrypted hard drive. All data was anonymized. We propose 4 configurations of children's knowledge and uses of digital technology based on all the observations and interviews made : experts, confirmed users, initiates, novices. Recommendations regarding the use and transmission of digital knowledge for parents will be proposed in the form of feedback study days, workshops.

young, children, digital, knowledge, preschool education

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

Agency Under Pressure: Parenting Young Children in the Digital Age

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

All authors:
Judy-Ann Connelly, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada
Ariane Julien, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Canada

Manu Lambert, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

This qualitative study examines parents' lived experiences of screen use in interactions with preschool-aged children. Digital technologies are embedded in everyday family life (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). While public discourse and much of the literature frame young children's screen use in terms of risks or benefits, fewer studies have examined parents' lived experiences of screen use within everyday interactions (Orfanidou et al., 2025; Wolfers et al., 2025). The interview guide was informed by Hertlein's multitheoretical model of technology and family systems (2012). While this framework structured the exploration of key domains of family life, the analysis remained open to themes extending beyond it. The research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents of preschool-aged children. Analysis followed a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) combining deductive coding informed by Hertlein's model with inductive theme development. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were coded to ensure confidentiality, and participants could withdraw at any time. Findings identify tension as a central feature of parents' accounts. Screen use becomes a necessary tool for regulating everyday family life rather than a deliberate educational choice. Parents nonetheless strive to maintain relational quality and developmental ideals amid intensified expectations and time pressures. The findings suggest that parental educational agency is shaped by socio-digital conditions that intensify expectations and place parents under sustained pressure. Rather than reflecting parental deficits, parents' accounts illuminate how contemporary childhood is organized through heightened regulation and moral expectations within families.

parental agency, digital childhood, screen use regulation, parent–child interactions, family practices

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Children's gaze behavior – Methodological and ethical reflections on a pilot with children's eye-tracking glasses

Presenters:
Niina Rutanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Susanna Isotalo, University of Helsinki, Finland

All authors:
Niina Rutanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Susanna Isotalo, University of Helsinki, Finland
Saswati Chaudhuri, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Mari Vuorisalo, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Tuulikki Ukkonen Mikkola, University of Helsinki, Finland

This pilot study aims to investigate the methodological and ethical aspects related to use of eye-tracking glasses with young children (3-5-year-olds). Screen-based eye-tracking studies are available with toddlers (e.g., Steffan et al., 2023; West & McCrink., 2021), but there is a lack of studies on young children wearing eye-tracking glasses in real-life contexts. Singular case analyses exist with head-mounted 'baby cams' (Elwick, 2015; White, 2011). The theoretical framework centers on children's gaze behavior, beginning with gaze following and early attention-sharing skills that are shown to facilitate children's communication and learning (Deák et al., 2018; Gredebäck et al., 2025).The framework emphasizes that studies with children require flexible, ethically responsive methods that respect autonomy and voice of children (Schweiger, 2024). This exploration is inspired by 'Three R's - reflexivity, rights and relationship' framework (Powell et al., 2016) for critical exploration to navigate methodological and ethical aspects. Data includes eye-tracking data with four children in play sessions, video recordings, and children's interviews. Multimodal interaction analysis is combined with critical content analysis. This pilot is evaluated by ethics committee (University of Jyväskylä) and follows the EECERA Ethical Code (2024). In addition to parents' informed

consents, children's assent is carefully negotiated in-situ. The results will demonstrate the methodological challenges, limitations, and possibilities linked to novel technologies as well as ethical aspects in eye-tracking technology with children. The contribution relates to theoretical, empirical, and ethical aspects: a method is provided to study how children focus their gaze on surroundings to participate in social environments, while ensuring that research process remains ethically valid, responsible, and child-centered.

eye-tracking glasses, gaze, methodology, ethics, technology,

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

Symposium F16 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 12, floor -1

STEAM STUDIES IN CHINA, GERMANY AND IRELAND

Chaired by: Rita Melia, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

Raising awareness of ocean literacy and plastic pollution in early years through Science–Art engagement.

Presenters:
Rita Melia, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

All authors:
Rita Melia, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland
Caroline Fahy, Atlantic Technological University Ireland, Ireland
Mary Skillington, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

This research aims to enhance BA Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) students' understanding of the seven Ocean Literacy Principles and to explore how Science–Art (STEAM) methods support integrating ocean literacy and plastic pollution learning into early years practice. This study aligns with emerging research demonstrating the need for holistic ocean learning in formal education (Bastos et al., 2025) and builds on initiatives in Ireland that highlight the value of early childhood engagement with marine environments (Melia et al., 2025). The framework draws upon experiential learning, socio-constructivism, STEAM pedagogy, and place-based sustainability education. Studies show that STEAM approaches strengthen children's collaborative, critical thinking, and environmental awareness skills (Erol & Erol, 2023; Veziroglu-Celik et al., 2026). Community engagement, including a beach clean-up and play day, reflects research emphasising the importance of contextual and participatory marine learning (Samad et al., 2026). A mixed-methods, practice-based approach is used. Year 2 and 3 ECEC students collaborate from Sept 2025–June 2026 with a marine scientist and the Artist in Residence. Data collection includes pre- and post-surveys and reflective artefacts. This study, was part of a credit-bearing module focusing on pedagogical evaluation of learning experiences. Institutional ethical approval was not sought as this was part of a taught degree module. All participants were adult students (18+). Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality were ensured. Preliminary findings indicate increased awareness of ocean literacy, consistent with recent evidence highlighting gaps in teacher preparedness and resources. The study highlights the urgent need for accessible, developmentally appropriate ocean literacy resources for early years settings, particularly in coastal regions.

ocean literacy, plastic pollution, STEAM, early childhood students, educators

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

Project funding: The Arts Council, Irish American Partnership.

How Baby-LCSTEAM home-based curriculum support children core foundational competences' development in ECEC in the AI Era?

Presenters:
Lynne Zhang, Happy Future Connections Children & Family Academy, China, China

All authors:
Lynne Zhang, Happy Future Connections Children & Family Academy, China, China

Our objective is to study what are the core foundational competences for Children' future in AI Era and how baby-LCSTEAM (Life, culture, science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematic) curriculum based on Chinese wisdom and neuroscience support such development. The study builds on the findings of previous researches: 1) National 0-3 Home-based Learning Research in China (2022). 2) Traditional folk crafts activities and materials are "media" for children 'exploring the relationship among mind, hands and objects and developing focus, experiencing' flow' state in STEM education in Chinese culture context (Lynne zhang, Henry Jia, 2023). This research is grounded in multi-disciplinary theoretical perspectives: social-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Froebel's theories, three types of knowledge and stages of cognitive development (Piaget,1933), Confucius theory, and neuroscience related. The study was conducted within a qualitative mixed-method research paradigm: An observational approach in naturalistic settings and video-documentation in 30 families both in Beijing and Langfang, and interviews with parents and teachers. The parents, children and teachers have given permission for videotaping and the research process, both written and orally. Consent forms were sent to all participants. Data was encrypted and anonymized to protect personal information. Baby-LCSTEAM curriculum and planned educational materials provide opportunities to strengthen the developing brain of infants and toddlers and support their core fundamental competences 'development especially in inquire-based deep-level learning, creativity, interdisciplinary learning, etc. Our study deserves more attention for parents, teachers and policy-makers in China.

neuroscience, baby-STEAM, core foundational competences, home-based, AI era

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Science-Oriented Project Work and Children's Meaning-Making: A Study in German Early Childhood Education

Presenters:
Mina Goto, Yamagata University, Japan

All authors:
Mina Goto, Yamagata University, Japan

The purpose of this study is to examine children's engagement in meaning-making processes within science-oriented project work in Germany and to explore how these processes are manifested in their ways of understanding phenomena, interacting with others, and relating to the world. Project work is recognized as a key pedagogical approach (KMK, 2004). While numerous practice reports in the journal kindergarten heute document children's learning within science-oriented projects (Goto, 2026), analysis of how these themes reorganize children's cognition, interaction, and world understanding remains limited. This study draws on Textor's (2013) structural theory of project work and Brandt's (2025) theory of pedagogical support. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, analyzing textual data from practice reports of science-oriented project work published in kindergarten heute, supplemented by interviews with educators. This study analyzes publicly available practice reports from kindergarten heute and interview data collected from educators. All interview participants provided informed consent, and all data were anonymized to ensure the protection of individual privacy. As a result, children deepened

their understanding of scientific phenomena and began to perceive them in terms of cause-and-effect relationships. In terms of interaction, children sought evidence from one another, with educator support playing a key role. Regarding their relation to the world, they came to view substances as changeable rather than fixed and nature as interconnected rather than isolated. The findings suggest that science-oriented project work can foster children's deeper cognitive and relational understanding of the world. Educators should provide scaffolding that supports inquiry, hypothesis testing, and peer-to-peer dialogue to facilitate children's meaning-making processes.

project work, project approach, science, learning, Germany

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

Project funding: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP25K06686.

Symposium F17 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 13, floor -1

TEACHER'S RESPONSIVENESS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Chaired by: Sigal Achituv, Oranim College, Israel

Early Childhood Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Play During Times of Crisis in Israel

Presenters:
Yaara Shilo, Efrata College of Education, Israel OMEP Israel, Israel

All authors:
Yaara Shilo, Efrata College of Education, Israel OMEP Israel, Israel
Ayelet Koffman, Efrata College of Education, Israel OMEP Israel, Israel
Ruti Neeman, Efrata College of Education, Israel

This study examines early childhood teachers' perceptions of children's play during a period of armed conflict and prolonged crisis in Israel, focusing on changes in play patterns and emotional expressions. It also explores teachers' views on play's role in supporting children's emotional coping and resilience under ongoing stress and disruption. Building on research identifying play as a key mechanism for emotional coping in contexts of trauma and crisis (e.g., Terr, 1991; Russ, 2004), this study focuses on early childhood teachers' perceptions.It contributes context-specific insights by examining how educators interpret and mediate children's play during prolonged crisis in Israel. Situated within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm, the study adopts a phenomenological approach, aiming to understand the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of early childhood teachers regarding children's play during crisis.. .ituated within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm, the study employs a phenomenological methodology. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires with early childhood teachers and analyzed using thematic content analysis. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and questions focused on professional experiences to minimize distress. Findings indicate increased crisis-related play themes and heightened emotional expression. A reduction in free and social play was observed. Children used symbolic and socio-dramatic play to process experiences of danger, protection, and loss. Teachers viewed play as vital but reported limited tools for supporting children's emotional needs. The study underscores the need for trauma-informed training, protected play spaces, and formal recognition of play as a core resource for children's resilience in emergency education policy

early childhood education, children's play, war and crisis, trauma-informed practice, teacher perceptions

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Agency as a Source of Resilience in Young Children from Gaza Envelope Kibbutzim Following the October 7th Events and Displacement: Educators' Perspectives

Presenters:
Sigal Achituv, Oranim College, Israel
Shulamit Hoshen-Manzura, Michlalah Jerusalem College, Israel

All authors:
Sigal Achituv, Oranim College, Israel
Shulamit Hoshen-Manzura, Michlalah Jerusalem College, Israel

This study examines agency's role in building resilience and coping strategies among young children from Gaza envelope kibbutzim following the October 7th events and prolonged evacuation, through educators' perspectives. Children actively engage during crises (Waboso et al., 2022), yet promoting autonomy was rated lowest by kindergarten teachers within the "Parenting Pentagon Model" (Lucia-Trincher & Aram, 2025). EC resilience is a socio-ecological process shaped by parental support, emotional expression, and cultural identity (Masten, 2018; Wolmer et al., 2017; Levi, 2024). Framed by Masten and Narayan's (2012) culturally-based protective factors, the study examines resilience in kibbutz communities where compromised parental functioning following terror exposure heightens children's vulnerability (Wolmer et al., 2017), underscoring educational settings' stabilizing role within a community context (Shai et al., 2024). This qualitative study utilized narrative semi-structured interviews (Clandinin, 2022) with ten ECEs of evacuated children from Gaza envelope kibbutzim. Data were analyzed using grounded theory (Corbin, 2017). Anonymity was achieved, and contextual identity was suppressed. Oranim College Ethics Committee approved. Educators perceived establishing educational settings at evacuation sites and creating familiar-yet-new routines as central to resilience. Sources included fostering security and belonging, enabling emotional expression through art, play, and stories, and strengthening children's agency in supportive settings. Findings reinforce educators' role in strengthening resilience and highlight community systems' contribution, exemplifying culturally-based protective factors in international contexts. The recommendation is enhancing governmental support for birth-to-six education, recognizing educators alongside parents and family as children's first emotional line of defense (Klebanov et al., 2026).

October 7th events, Israel-Hamas war, ECES in Gaza envelope kibbutzim, agency as a source of resilience in EC, culturally-based protective factors

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

Project funding: The research was supported by the Israeli Institute of Early Childhood Education, Oranin College of Education, Israel

ECE Teachers' Experiences with Secondary Trauma and Related Compassion Fatigue in Urban Context

Presenters:
Jale Aldemir, Coppin State University, United States
Nicole Anthony, Coppin State University, United States

All authors:
Jale Aldemir, Coppin State University, United States
Nicole Anthony, Coppin State University, United States
Anita Weisburger, Coppin State University, United States

This study investigates the experiences and challenges of urban early childhood education (ECE) providers as they confront student trauma and compassion fatigue. Inner-city families encounter significant adversity, with more than 31% of children in Baltimore exposed to two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (BC Health Dep, 2018). Research indicates that high-stress work environments and limited mental health resources negatively affect ECE professionals, contributing to compassion fatigue, decreased job performance, and higher rates of burnout and attrition (Spran & Garcia, 2022; Merlo et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential for educators and supportive adults to recognize and respond to signs of trauma in young children. Guided by Charles Figley's (2002) compassion fatigue framework, which defines the condition as an emotional response to secondary traumatic exposure, this research examines key components, including empathetic ability, concern, exposure, response, and compassion stress. Employing a phenomenological approach, the study gathers in-depth insights through interviews and a focus group with ECE students from the institution's Human Development Program and Baltimore City child care providers. The study follows EECERA's ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent and respecting participants' choices regarding sensitive disclosures. Participants defined trauma, identified traumatic events affecting children, and discussed their experiences supporting students and families. Teachers reported emotional stress, psychosomatic symptoms, and feelings of helplessness due to exposure to trauma. Detailed qualitative results will be presented. The findings highlight the urgency of adopting trauma-informed approaches in ECE teacher education to better prepare educators for working with high-risk student populations.

early childhood teacher, compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, trauma-informed, urban childcare

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

Project funding: The study was funded through the National Association for EarlyChildhoodTeacher EducationFoundation (U.S.), 2024 Summer Research Grant.

Symposium F18 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 14, floor -1

PICTURE BOOKS AND DOCUMENTATION AS DEMOCRATIC RESOURCES

Chaired by: Lynette Cheng, Macquarie University, Australia

Picturebooks as Democratic Resources: Structural Conditions for Agency and Participation in Early Childhood Settings

Presenters:
Lynette Cheng, Macquarie University, Australia

All authors:
Lynette Cheng, Macquarie University, Australia
Sarah Powell, Macquarie University, Australia
Associate Professor Alice Chik, Macquarie University, Australia
Sandie Wong, Macquarie University, Australia

This qualitative case study aims to explore what picturebook collections (PCs) are available in early childhood (EC) settings and how they support children's (aged 3-5) democratic participation (DP). Research shows, access to diverse picturebooks addressing complex social realities (CSR) supports children's DP through critical responses (Garces-Bascal, 2022). However, little is known about PC composition, curation, and how they structurally support DP in EC settings. Agency, participation, and democracy in EC education are shaped by learning resources available to children. Within literacy environments, PCs are such resources. Drawing on Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012) and Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 2014), these frameworks provide a lens to examine how PC composition and quality - including diversity, representation, themes, visual attributes,

and recency - shape affordances for children's engagement with diverse perspectives and CSR. Informed by a critical interpretative lens, this study involved (i) systematic PC review and (ii) semi-structured interviews with five EC leaders across Sydney settings serving diverse communities, exploring curation practices. Informed written consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were ensured, with participants' voices represented. Preliminary findings indicate that, despite community diversity, PCs are primarily organised around functional themes (e.g. social-emotional learning, resilience) and familiar narratives (e.g. classic stories, rhyming). Whilst supporting learning, PCs offer limited engagement with broader social experiences. Leaders exercise professional judgement in picturebook selection, balancing cultural familiarity, relevance, accessibility, and family expectations, but often without systematic curation processes. Findings have implications for systematic resourcing and curation, positioning PCs as democratic resources enabling children's agency and participation.

picturebooks, democratic resources, democratic participation, agency, complex social realities

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

Project funding: This study forms part of the first author's doctoral research at Macquarie University. The research is supported by the International Macquarie Research Excellence Scholarship (iMQRES). No external project-specific grant funding has been received for this study.

How to read picture books with kindergarten children? The impact of strategies used by the teachers

Presenters:
Kari-Anne Næss, University of Oslo, Norway

All authors:
Kari-Anne Næss, University of Oslo, Norway

This study aims to investigate the impact of mediation strategies used by teachers in picture book dialogue. Picture-book dialogue is part of daily activities for in kindergarten and is also a common component of language interventions for children with language disorders across diverse populations and age groups (Hjetland et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2020). However, little is known about how teachers implement dialogues in practice or how their interactional choices influence children's responses. This study builds on socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The data comprise approximately 800 audio recordings from teacher–child picture-book dialogues collected in two digital intervention studies (RCTs): one involving 312 second-language learners (4–6-year-olds) and one involving 103 children with Down syndrome (6-year-olds) and both groups' teachers. Teacher talk was coded for adherence to existing scripts, and teacher utterances beyond the scripts were subsequently analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Child talk was coded for adequacy. Written consent was collected from teachers and parents. Preliminary findings indicate substantial teacher script adherence in both samples. Deviations from scripts typically involve additional scaffolding at varying levels of support, drawing on mediation strategies that reflect pedagogical adaptation. Four main themes emerged in both samples. The effectiveness of teacher's adaptions varied across children. Analysis of association between type of teacher adaptions and child responses are ongoing and will be presented at the conference. Overall, teachers followed existing scripts but extended the dialogue beyond prescriptions. The preliminary findings underscoring the importance of high-quality scripted materials and teachers' expertise in selecting and adapting mediation strategies for individual children.

digital intervention, picture book dialogue, mediation, language development, implementation

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

Project funding: The two RCT-studies are funded by the Norwegian Research Council.

The Piazza as a Democratic Space: Amplifying Children's Voices Through Intentional Pedagogy and Documentation

Presenters:
Vanessa Silva, Little Jungle School of Early Childhood, United Kingdom

All authors:
Vanessa Silva, Little Jungle School of Early Childhood, United Kingdom
Caroline El-Semman, Little Jungle School of Early Childhood, United Kingdom

This practitioner inquiry investigates how democratic participation is constructed within a communal school Piazza in a baby classroom (24 children, aged 1-2.5) at Little Jungle, an independent, progressive early childhood school in London, guided by a creative, research-led curriculum within the EYFS framework. The study draws on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Reggio Emilia scholarship on documentation as democratic praxis (Edwards et al., 2012; Rinaldi, 2006), extending participation literature by examining how pedagogical conditions shape agency. Grounded in sociocultural and democratic pedagogy, participation is theorised as relational and dialogic (Vygotsky, 1978; Rinaldi, 2006). The environment is conceptualised as a mediating structure shaping collective meaning-making, aligned with the Reggio Emilia principle of the "third teacher" (Malaguzzi, 1993; Edwards et al., 2012). Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed practitioner action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Methods included cyclical observation, pedagogical documentation used as dialogic and analytical tools, educator reflections, and spatial redesign. Informed parental consent was secured to produce documentation. Ethical practice prioritised children's voice and representation in documentation. Democratic participation emerged as co-constructed by children and adults. Children influenced inquiry through their voices, interactions and diverse developmental trajectories. Educators enacted democracy through reflexive mediation, collaborative curriculum decision-making and dialogic engagement with documentation. The Piazza operated as a shared pedagogical commons where curriculum emerged through negotiation, positioning adults and children as co-participants in meaning-making rather than hierarchical actors. Findings suggest meaningful participation within EYFS settings requires protected educator research time, collaborative and creative planning, and investment in pedagogical documentation and space design.

democratic participation, pedagogical documentation, sociocultural mediation, environment as third teacher, practitioner action research

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F19 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 21, floor 1

VOICES ON TRANSITION - CHILDREN, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Chaired by: Andy Schieler, University of Applied Sciences Koblenz (IBEB), Germany

Parent-teacher collaboration: challenges in children's transitions between groups

Presenters:
Tina Binfield-Skøie, University of Agder, Norway

All authors:
Tina Binfield-Skøie, University of Agder, Norway

Examining parent–teacher collaboration in Early Childhood Education and Care institutions, this study explores the research question: How do teachers collaborate with parents during children's transitions between groups in ECEC institutions? Previous studies show that the transition between groups often comes unexpectedly and is experienced as challenging for the children's parents (O'Farrelly & Hennessy, 2013, 2014). The study draws on the concept of institutional logics (Gulløv, 2004, 2017), which highlights how institutional practices, values and routines shape participation. This framework helps illuminate how boundaries between home and institution are constructed and maintained. Anchored in a social constructivist paradigm, the study explores these boundaries through interviews with twelve ECEC teachers who described their experiences, perspectives, and institutional routines surrounding transitions between groups. Ethical principles, including informed consent, anonymisation, and attention to potential power asymmetries in the research process, guided the study (Bertram et al., 2024). Preliminary findings suggest that parents often experience transitions as major events in which children lose familiar caregivers and peers. Although staff appear considerate of parents' emotions, collaboration remains limited. Parents are frequently informed shortly before or after transitions occur, rather than being engaged as active contributors to the process. Though ECEC institutions in Norway are required to collaborate with parents (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017), this study indicates that internal institutional practices, such as group transitions, may be overlooked as areas for meaningful collaboration. The findings point to a need for practices that more fully include parents in decisions affecting their child's everyday institutional life.

parent-teacher collaboration, transitions in ECEC, transitions between groups, institutional logics, separation of home-institution

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

"Transition compass in practice" – Respecting children's and parents' voices during transition from daycare to school

Presenters:
Andy Schieler, University of Applied Sciences Koblenz (IBEB), Germany

All authors:
Andy Schieler, University of Applied Sciences Koblenz (IBEB), Germany

Children's transition from daycare to school is an important step on their educational path (Moss 2025). Both, the importance of children's rights and their family, justify the inclusion of children's and parents' voices. The project "transition compass in practice" evaluates various methods und accompaniment, that educators use to involve children and parents during transition process. Many transitions from daycare to school take place with little involvement of children and parents (Müller & Schoening 2025). However, a Koblenzer research project resulted in seven instruments (transition compass) to support educators in involving children and parents during transition (Schoening et al. 2025). Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecosystemic model shows that child development is interconnected with the environmental systems (e.g. family, daycare, school). Successful transitions therefore depend on the quality of cooperation between these systems (see also the competent system approach of Urban et al., 2011). The evaluation includes 100 kindergartens and 140 schools, in which empirical data from educators (questionnaire and interview), children (interview) and parents (interview) were collected within a mixed-methods research paradigm (Gläser-Zikuda et al. 2012). Based on the university's ethical guidelines we used detailed consent forms for educators and parents. The ongoing project consists of several data collections during 2026. Most of the data will be analysed until the conference. Preliminary results show the importance of a transition coordinator, an educator, that initiates and controls participatory transition processes. The evaluation shed light on the needs of participatory transition processes by systematically involving children's and parents' voices – in the sense of all children's rights, educational success and well-being.

early childhood education, transition, children's voices, daycare, school

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

Project funding: This project ist co-funded by the Ministry of Education in Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany.

Educational Agency and Participatory Settling-In: Exploring Non-Formal ECEC Transitions

Presenters:
Lisa Sacerdote, University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy

All authors:
Lisa Sacerdote, University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy
Luisa Zecca, Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy

This study explores how a participatory settling-in process within L'ABC del Quartiere, a non-formal low-threshold educational space in a multicultural district of Milan, can strengthen educational agency for families with a migratory background and mediate transitions into formal ECEC services through shared practices. Research shows that families with a migratory background access ECEC services less consistently and face participation barriers (Eurydice, 2025; OECD, 2025). Inclusion requires strategies to transform ECEC settings into "spaces of encounter" (Tobin et al., 2013; Bove & Mantovani, 2015), fostering multicultural pedagogical alliances (Epstein, 2011). Grounded in a socio-cultural perspective, development emerges through situated, mediated and participatory interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Within a systemic and ecological framework (Bateson, 1972; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), educational practices are socio-culturally embedded, requiring attention to the contexts influencing families' engagement in ECEC (Rogoff, 2004; Bove, 2022). Conducted within a qualitative exploratory paradigm, the study draws on participatory observations and in-depth interviews with four mothers and their children (0–3), one cultural-linguistic mediator and four educators at L'ABC. A follow-up explores mothers whose children transitioned to nursery services, focusing on changes in participation and agency. Participants were informed about the research and consented. Care was given to linguistic mediation, cultural sensitivity and equitable participation. Preliminary findings suggest that participatory settling-in experiences fostered trust and shared practices, thereby strengthening mothers' educational agency and institutional confidence, while supporting children's smoother transitions into formal ECEC settings. This research highlights how inclusive participatory educational practices can enhance equitable access to ECEC, particularly for families not attending formal services.

educational agency, democratic participation, participatory settling-in, non-formal ECEC, families with a migratory background

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

Symposium F20 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 22, floor 1

(SoS): BEFORE OR BEYOND BEHAVIOUR? PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE GROWTH IN LANGUAGE STIMULATION SKILLS THROUGH TACOS, A BLENDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

Chaired by: Maxime Van Raemdonck, Ghent University, Belgium

Unequal attention, unequal language support? Distinct insights from tracking visual attention and observing language-stimulating practices of preschool teachers

Presenters:

Saskia Bruyninckx, KU Leuven, Belgium
Thibaut Duthois, UGent, Belgium

All authors:
Saskia Bruyninckx, KU Leuven, Belgium
Thibaut Duthois, UGent, Belgium
Ruben Vanderlinde, UGent, Belgium
Piet Van Avermaet, UGent, Belgium
Maribel Montero Perez, UGent, Belgium
Helena Taelman, Odisee Unversity College, Belgium
Victoria Van Oss, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Wendelien Vantieghem, UGent, Belgium
Jantine Spilt, KU Leuven, Belgium

Professional development increasingly recognizes that equitable interaction requires awareness of implicit processes. This presentation integrates two complementary studies examining how preschool teachers allocate visual attention and language-stimulating (LS) practices, and how individual child differences shape these processes. High-quality teacher-child interactions support language development (Levickis et al.,2023), yet most studies assess interaction quality at group level, obscuring which children actually receive these interactions (Kluczniok & Schmidt,2020). Although within-classroom variation is documented (Peleman et al.,2020), implicit attention allocation and explicit LS practices are rarely discussed together. These two studies link both processes to children's home language, language proficiency, and shyness. Both studies draw on the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,2006), conceptualizing interaction as co-constructed and responsive to child characteristics. We integrate research on evocative effects (Nurmi & Kiuru,2015) and expectancy/bias (Inan-Kaya & Rubie-Davies,2022) to understand how individual child differences shape interaction patterns. Using video-observational designs and generalized linear mixed models, Study 1 analyzed teachers' eye gaze through mobile eye-tracking (50 teachers,250 children) and Study 2 examined LS interactions (167 teachers,658 children). Informed consent was obtained from teachers and parents. Video-observation data were limited to essential segments, securely stored, and anonymized during processing. We conclude that linguistically vulnerable children initially receive less attention, however, teachers subsequently provide more explicit LS support to these children. Shy children are at risk in both studies. Together, these results reveal complementary mechanisms of differential interaction. Findings underscore the need for professional development that helps teachers recognize implicit allocation patterns and ensure equitable attention and LS opportunities.

teacher-child interaction, interaction distribution, language-stimulating practices, attention allocation, children's individual differences

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This work is part of the TACOS-project that was supported by Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (FWO) [S007223N].

TACOS: preschool teachers' language stimulation competencies on display

Presenters:
Marlies Algoet, Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, Belgium, Belgium

All authors:
Marlies Algoet, Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, Belgium, Belgium
Liselotte Vandenbussche, Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, Belgium

This presentation showcases the TACOS professional development intervention (PDI) aimed at enhancing preschool teachers' language stimulation (LS) quality. Conceptualizing LS as multi-component competencies, TACOS addresses both its observable and unobservable components. Traditionally, improvements in teachers' knowledge and beliefs were considered sufficient to shift classroom performance (transmission model, Joyce and Showers,1980). Nowadays, professionalisation research posits a mediating layer: professional vision (Blömeke et al., 2015; Van Es and Sherin, 2022). TACOS focusses on high-quality linguistic interactions (Piasta et al., 2025), enacted through three strategies (Brand et al., 2024): providing rich language input (Rowe and Snow, 2020), offering language-producing opportunities (Cabell et al., 2023,) and giving language-inducing feedback (Kidd and Rowland 2021). The blended TACOS approach combines online video-based learning with offline training sessions, video-clubs and goal setting. It is grounded in socio-cultural and social-interactionist learning paradigms (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) and conceptualises professionalization as the iterative development of multi-component competencies (Vanderlinde et al., 2020). The PDI was tested by comparing an experimental (n=95) and control group (n=86). Informed consents were obtained from teachers and parents for all video materials. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any time. Recordings were stored securely. After professionalization, all competencies' components changed. Teachers are more conscious of intentional versus incidental attention distribution, allocate more attention to at-risk children and feel more competent in LS. This PDI is a benchmark for future teacher professionalization, bridging theory and practice. Policy should allow ample professionalisation time, as competency-based professionalisation requires repeated, expert-coached practice and reflection among peers.

teacher professional development, early childhood education, language stimulation competencies, video-based learning, reflective learning

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

Project funding: This work is part of the TACOS-project that was supported by FWO-SBO grant S007223N-42605.

Shifting teachers' lenses: Effects of a video-based professional development intervention on preschool teachers' beliefs regarding language stimulation

Presenters:
Lien Dorme, Teacher Education & Professional Development, Department of Educational Studies, Ghent University, Belgium

All authors:
Lien Dorme, Teacher Education & Professional Development, Department of Educational Studies, Ghent University, Belgium
Sofie Lietaert, Centre for Language and Education, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
Thibaut Duthois, Research Centre for Language, Diversity & Learning, Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, Belgium
Ruben Vanderlinde, UGent, Belgium
Wendelien Vantieghem, UGent, Belgium
Kris Van den Branden, Centre for Language and Education, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
Goedele Vandommele, Centre for Language and Education, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
Maribel Montero Perez, UGent, Belgium

This study investigates whether a blended, video-based professional development intervention (PDI) changes preschool (student) teachers' beliefs regarding language stimulation (LS). Beliefs are key dispositions in teacher competencies (Keppens, 2020) and shape how teachers interpret and enact LS in classrooms (Pajares, 1992).

Although video-based PDI strengthens LS competencies (Egert et al., 2020), its impact on underlying beliefs remains unclear. The study operationalizes teachers' LS competency in early childhood education via the competence model from Blömeke and colleagues (2015), viewing classroom behaviour as emerging from teachers' situation-specific skills and dispositions. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design was used. Participants were preschool teachers (N = 64 experimental; N = 67 control) and student preschool teachers (N = 123 experimental; N = 140 control). The year-long blended PDI combined face-to-face sessions and online video simulations with focus on guided reflection. Measures were collected before and after the intervention and analysed using repeated measures ANOVA. Informed consent was obtained, data were pseudonymised. Participants could withdraw at any time. Significant time and interaction effects emerged: in-service teachers' self-efficacy and growth mindset increased in the experimental group, student teachers' self-efficacy grew similarly across groups, both samples' monolingual beliefs decreased, and teacher-centred beliefs declined in students. A targeted PDI can reshape teacher beliefs regarding LS. Video-based reflection on everyday classroom interactions appears promising for sustainable professionalisation in early childhood language education.

professional development intervention, preschool, language stimulation, first language acquisition, teacher beliefs

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Symposium F21 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 23, floor 1

(SoS): CHILDREN'S AND TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE SELMA INTERVENTION FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Chaired by: Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

ECEC teachers' experiences with pedagogical videos in the SELMA project

Presenters:
Janken C. Sæbø, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Janken C. Sæbø, University of Stavanger, Norway
Silje Vignes Flesjå, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

The objective of this study was to explore experiences of preschool teachers with pedagogical videos from the SELMA intervention. This is a sub-study of the SELMA project, which aimed to develop and evaluate an intervention focused on social and emotional learning. The intervention includes both digital and physical materials. Initially, the videos were developed as best-practice examples for the teachers. However, our pilot teachers provided feedback that the videos should be viewed by teachers and children together during circle time, and the videos were therefore adjusted to be feasible for children. We conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with five preschool teachers from three ECEC's participating in the intervention group. The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research recommended the study. All ethical guidelines were followed. Participants signed a consent form and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Quotes were anonymized. Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized, resulting in one overarching theme: Shared experiences for children and staff. This theme formed the foundation for three sub-themes: Community building, Engaging, and Developing. The teachers reported that the videos provided shared professional knowledge, supported guidance for colleagues, and motivated children to engage in related play and activities. The findings indicate that high-quality pedagogical videos can inspire continued development of practice to effectively promote SEL, well-being, and mastery in early childhood education.

social and emotional learning, life mastery, pedagogical videos, preschool teachers, the SELMA project

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

Project funding: The SELMA research project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council through grant No. 318626 and The Savings Bank Foundation DNB.

'I tried five times, and the sixth time I managed'. Children's experiences with pedagogical videos on social and emotional learning.

Presenters:
Silje Vignes Flesjå, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Silje Vignes Flesjå, University of Stavanger, Norway
Janken C. Sæbø, University of Stavanger, Norway
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

This qualitative study aimed to explore five-year-old children's experiences with pedagogical videos from the SELMA intervention. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is highly emphasized in the Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens, however few resources exist. The SELMA intervention was collaboratively designed by researchers and teachers. It includes interconnected materials to engage staff and children: a staff resource book; weekly videos; a children's book; a digital professional development for teachers; and a certificate course for assistants. The videos are grounded in SEL theory and sociocultural learning theory, drawing on ideas such as scaffolding, model learning, and dialog. They were intended to support children's learning by 1) showing children modeling social behavior 2) featuring a voice-over introducing SEL topics, and 3) facilitating discussions during circle time. In line with an interpretivist paradigm, 25 children were interviewed in pairs or trios. Two experienced ECEC professionals conducted the interviews to create a safe atmosphere. Including children's voices in research is crucial for providing understanding of their perspectives. The study was recommended by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. All ethical guidelines were followed. Participating children had parental consent and were continuously monitored making sure they were given the possibility to withdraw if they wanted to. Quotes were anonymized. Reflexive thematic analysis identified four themes: 'Experiences from the SELMA year', 'Learning concepts and doing the same', 'Future applications', and 'Understanding at an abstract level'. Positive experiences from the children indicate that the pedagogical videos can support SEL in ECEC.

social and emotional learning, positive psychology, pedagogical videos, playful learning, children's voices, the SELMA project

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: The SELMA research project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council through grant No. 318626 and The Savings Bank Foundation DNB.

Beyond Top-Down: How Children and Teachers Mutually Influence SEL Implementation in Early Childhood Education and Care.

Presenters:
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

All authors:
Ingunn Størksen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Cecilie Evertsen, University of Stavanger, Norway
Neil Humphrey, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom
Pål Roland, University of Stavanger, Norway

The aim of this study was to illuminate staff experiences with the SELMA core components and support materials. Research Questions include: How do ECEC professionals perceive the core components and support materials of the SELMA intervention? How have these influenced the implementation process? This study examined the implementation of the SELMA intervention, a new social-emotional learning (SEL) program grounded in the CASEL framework and positive psychology. The comprehensive SELMA materials for practitioners and children were co-developed by researchers and teachers for use in ECEC in Norway. The SELMA intervention was influenced by the CASEL framework, and theories of optimistic thinking, growth mindset, flourishing, and theories of early childhood well-being. The exploratory qualitative design included digital focus groups with 25 ECEC staff from 10 centers, followed by a reflexive thematic analysis. The study was recommended by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research, and all ethical guidelines were followed in accordance with the Norwegian NESH standards. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all quotations were anonymized. Three key themes were identified: (1) Relevance and Flexibility, (2) Usability and Accessibility, and (3) Circular Influence and Participation. Participants reported that the support materials promote reciprocal learning processes in which children's active participation and engagement enhance staff motivation and strengthen implementation quality. These findings contribute to the expanding SEL literature by illustrating how materials designed for both children and teachers can facilitate meaningful collaborative exploration and learning across both groups.

SEL intervention, implementation, core components, support material, child participation

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

Project funding: This research project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council (Grant 318626) and The Savings Bank Foundation DNB.

Symposium F22 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 24, floor 1

(SoS): RETHINKING QUALITY, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SYSTEMIC SUPPORT IN HOME-BASED EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES: SITUATED AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Chaired by: Lise Lemay, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Educational Quality Assessment in Home-Based Childcare: Practices and Tools Across Quebec Coordinating Offices

Presenters:
Lise Lemay, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

All authors:
Lise Lemay, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Aya Ben Youssef, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Chantale Breault, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
Noémie Paquette, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Véronique Pelletier, Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance, Canada

This study documents the practices and tools used by Quebec coordinating offices to assess educational quality in home-based childcare (HBCC). Educational quality is widely recognized as central to children's development; however, research on quality assessment in HBCC remains limited. Most tools were developed for center-based

settings and insufficiently reflect key features of HBCC, such as mixed-age groupings, integrated routines, and providers working alone. In the context of an upcoming mandatory assessment measure in Quebec, documenting existing practices prior to standardization is needed. This study examines how quality is currently interpreted, assessed, and supported within the coordinating office system. The study adopts a situated conception of educational quality informed by the theory of competent systems (Urban, 2012), viewing quality as a contextual, collective, and evolving construct grounded in professional expertise rather than uniform standards. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through a questionnaire administered to personnel supervising HBCC providers across Quebec coordinating offices. The questionnaire documented assessment tools, indicators, and procedures used during monitoring visits. Descriptive analyses identified patterns and variations. The study received institutional ethics approval. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Findings indicate both shared elements and context-specific practices in quality assessment across coordinating offices, reflecting tensions between standardization and contextual sensitivity. By documenting how assessment practices are already negotiated in the field, the study informs how future mandatory measures might build on existing expertise while remaining responsive to HBCC realities.

educational quality, home-based childcare, quality assessment tools, quality assessment practices, competent system,

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

Project funding: This project is funded through a professional services agreement with the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance (AQCPE), the organization responsible for supporting and coordinating approximately 90% of home-based childcare coordinating offices in Quebec.

Between Independence and Insecurity: The Role of HBC Providers in the German Childcare System

Presenters:
Nina Hogrebe, TU Dortmund University, Germany
Solvei Wiederhold, TU Dortmund University, Germany

All authors:
Nina Hogrebe, TU Dortmund University, Germany
Solvei Wiederhold, TU Dortmund University, Germany

This study aims to explore the role of Home-Based Childcare (HBC) providers within the German childcare system, highlighting the structural dependencies, challenges, and insecurities they face while navigating their self-employed status. Research on early childhood education and care (ECEC) primarily focuses on daycare centers, often neglecting the role of HBC providers (Ang & Tabu, 2018; Bromer et al., 2021). First studies show that HBC providers are often self-employed (Beach et al., 2023), unprotected by labor laws and lacking a voice to advocate for change (Valerio & Goity, 2023). HBC offers equitable and inclusive environments to cater for the diverse needs of families (Collins & Gomez, 2023). We use Melvin et al.'s (2022) framework to understand systemic and equitable inclusion of HBC in ECEC landscapes. A qualitative approach was employed, consisting of five group discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2014) with 22 HBC providers in a German city. The method allowed for an in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives on autonomy, insecurity, and competition. Ethical considerations included ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' experiences. All discussions were anonymized; informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The study finds that HBC providers face financial insecurity and regulatory constraints, impacting their independence. Despite investing heavily in quality care, they are underappreciated, with little institutional support compared to daycare centers. Although HBC is legally recognized as an equivalent option in Germany, our study revealed that it remains systemically disadvantaged. Addressing these systemic imbalances is crucial to ensuring inclusive and high-quality childcare alternatives.

home-based childcare, early education, inclusion, financial insecurity, childcare system

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

Supporting the Professional Development and Capacity Building of Home-Based Childcare Professionals

Presenters:
Lynn Ang, UCL Institute of Education, United Kingdom

All authors:
Lynn Ang, UCL Institute of Education, United Kingdom
Laura Woodman, University of Alberta, Canada

This paper aims to examine current issues and debates surrounding the professional development and capacity building of home-based childcare (HBCC) professionals. A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that high-quality early years provision is closely associated with sustained and meaningful professional development (Ang, Brooker, & Stephen 2017). A review of the research on childminding: Understanding children's experiences in home-based child care settings. Early Childhood Education Journal, 45(2), 261-270.) However, the distinctive nature of HBCC, particularly in relation to educators' roles and working conditions requires professional learning opportunities that are engaging, accessible, and contextually responsive. HBCC professionals often work independently within domestic settings, balancing pedagogical, administrative, and childcare responsibilities. These conditions shape both their professional learning needs and capacity for formal training. We argue for a shift away from a narrow theorisation of professional development as an individual responsibility towards a community-of-practice conceptual framework that recognises professional learning as socially situated, collaborative, and systemically supported. We use a systems-level analytical paradigm with interpretive methodology to emphasise the need for more sustainable, systemic pathways that enhances the engagement, accessibility, and contextual relevance in continuing professional learning opportunities for HBCC professionals. Our presentation explores the ethical considerations inherent in the challenges facing the HBCC and wider early years workforce. Findings reveal the facilitators and barriers influencing educators' engagement with professional learning, including time and financial pressures, digital access, and opportunities for peer support. By reframing professional development as a shared and supported endeavour, policy and practice can better address structural inequities and strengthen the overall quality and sustainability of HBCC provision.

home-based childcare, childminding, professional development, early years, educators

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

Symposium F23 - Thursday 27th August 2026 | Room 25, floor 1

(SoS): EXPLORATIONS OF DEMOCRACY, BELONGING AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH LAND. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Chaired by: Linda Mitchell, The University of Waikato, New Zealand and Amanda Bateman, Birmingham City University

Democracy as a value and purpose for a public education system

Presenters:
Linda Mitchell, University, New Zealand

All authors:
Olivera Kamenarac, Southern Cross University, Australia
Linda Mitchell, University, New Zealand

We examined the transformative role of democracy in ECE for constructing possibilities for belonging. Pervasive neoliberal ideologies have reshaped ECE, expanding corporate and weakening public provision (e.g., Mitchell, 2022; Moss & Mitchell, 2024). Values concerning the purpose of education have shifted from education as a child's right and a public good to education as a commodity (Vandenbroeck, Lehrer & Mitchell, 2023). Positioning democracy as a core value of a public ECE creates transformative possibilities (e.g., Moss, 2021; Sousa & Moss, 2023). We utilised UNESCO's right-to-education dimensions—availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability—and accountability (UNESCO, 2023)—as the organising analytical frame for democracy. Using UNESCO's framework, we evaluated how well the Aotearoa ECE operates across policy, governance and practice to support children's rights to high-quality, equitable, and inclusive education and ECE as a public good. Policy and governance data came from statistics, policy evaluations and research. Qualitative case studies of collective practice (Unger, 2005) illustrated local examples of democratic approaches. Fair data representation and ethical approval were ensured. Adults received information sheets and gave written consent. Families provided written consent for child data; children provided verbal/non-verbal assent. Analyses revealed systemic barriers to children's rights and conditions for democratic ECE. We argue for systemic transformation grounded in sustained commitments to social justice, inclusion, and equity—creating 'a world worth living in for all.' This requires continual resistance to narrow neoliberal subjectivities. To achieve a fully democratic education, we must nurture ECE's innovative collective practice and align policies/systems to enable democratic flourishing.

ECEC policies, purpose of ECEC democracy, ECE as a public good, children's rights

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This paper was supported by 1) the Marsden Fund Council from Government funding, managed by Royal Society Te Apārangi; Royal Society of New Zealand [17 UOW047] and 2) The Aotearoa New Zealand Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Fund.

Belonging through participation in cultural food preparation and sharing home treasures for refugee children and families in Aotearoa New Zealand ECE

Presenters:
Amanda Bateman, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

All authors:
Amanda Bateman, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom
Raella Kahuroa, University of Waikato, New Zealand

We examined the transformative role of democracy in ECE for constructing possibilities for belonging. Belonging/ Mana Whenua is a curriculum strand of Aotearoa New Zealand's ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) which promotes the importance of children seeing their own cultures valued in everyday practice. There is increasing interest in research exploring how ECE settings can support children's early social relationships during mealtimes (e.g. Bateman, 2024) and belonging through integrating cultural artefacts into everyday practice (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018). An ethnomethodological framing (Goffman, 1981) was used to explore the everyday co-construction of interactions during food and treasure-sharing actives. Shaped by an ethnomethodological paradigm, video data of teacher-infant feeding interactions were collected and transcribed and analysed using multimodal conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1973). Adults received information sheets and gave written

consent. Families provided written consent for child data including video recordings; children provided verbal/non-verbal assent. Secure password-protected storage and film editing techniques ensured ethical processes. Findings include: 1) in practical terms, real-life examples of teacher strategies for facilitating belonging with refugee and migrant children and families, and 2) the usefulness of multimodal conversation analysis for exploring everyday pedagogical practices that facilitate belonging. The findings have implications for ECE practices globally, where the multimodal conversation analysis approach offers insight into specific strategies for early childhood teacher/practitioners to support belonging through everyday practical activities such as through cooking of home food and sharing home treasures.

belonging, refugee and migrant children and families, cooking, home tressures, conversation analysis

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This paper was supported by 1) the Marsden Fund Council from Government funding, managed by Royal Society Te Apārangi; Royal Society of New Zealand [17 UOW047] and 2) The Aotearoa New Zealand Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Fund.

Stories of the land: Intergenerational belonging and democratic participation through relationships with place

Presenters:
Raella Kahuroa, University of Waikato, New Zealand

All authors:
Raella Kahuroa, University of Waikato, New Zealand
Hoana McMillan, University of Waikato, New Zealand

We examined how stories of the land are developed across generations, including iwi (tribal) generations, to support a sense of democratic belonging with, and to, place. Belonging/ Mana Whenua is a curriculum strand of Aotearoa New Zealand's ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) which promotes the importance of children seeing their own cultures valued in everyday practice. This work is informed by place-based learning embedded in an indigenous sense of place (Penetito, 2009). This positions "place" as storied and relational. Using an interpretive paradigm, the research and draws on ethnographic and narrative methods. Data were generated through sustained engagement with early childhood settings, including observations, documentation of children's narratives, and conversations with teachers and whānau (families). Adults received information sheets and gave written consent. Families provided written consent for child data including video recordings; children provided verbal/non-verbal assent. Secure password-protected storage and film editing techniques ensured ethical processes. Findings show that children's agency was enacted through shared rituals, collective storytelling tied to place, and embodied practices that connected children to whenua and ancestral narratives. Rather than positioning participation as individual voice or choice-making, these practices enacted democracy as relational responsibility, where participation is grounded in whakapapa (ancestry), collective memory, and obligations to place. In this framing, democratic life is sustained through intergenerational continuity rather than individualised decision-making. The paper argues for grounded, relational approaches that position land in relational, rather than resource-based ways, and for education that supports relationship with land as a key component of belonging.

early childhood education, democracy, belonging, place-based learning, relationships

This application discusses a completed piece of research.

Project funding: This paper was supported by The Aotearoa New Zealand Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Fund.

(SoS): STAFFING MATTERS: PROFESSIONAL AGENCY AND WELL BEING IN ECEC IN NORWAY

Chaired by: Karin Hognestad, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

Increased staffing as Practice: Experiences with Recruitment, Stability, and Work Environment in Norwegian ECEC

Presenters:
Karin Hognestad, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Kristin Olsen, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

All authors:
Karin Hognestad, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Kristin Olsen, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

This study investigates how increased staffing initiatives in Norwegian kindergartens (ECEC) influence recruitment processes, employee stability and retention, and the overall work environment. The aim is to understand how such initiatives unfold as everyday practices and how structural conditions enable or constrain these practices from the perspective of managers. Previous research highlights persistent challenges related to staff shortages, turnover, and working conditions in ECE settings (CSSE, 2024; Zeng et al., 2025). This project contributes by examining increased staffing not only as policy but as lived practice, extending existing research on organisational conditions and professional practice in ECEC. The analysis is guided by the Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis et. al., 2014), which conceptualises practices shaped by cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. This framework enables a nuanced exploration of how recruitment, stability, and work environment practices emerge within specific local arrangements. The study uses a mixed methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative survey data from ECE managers provide an initial overview of staffing-related conditions, followed by qualitative interviews offering in-depth insight into experiences, interpretations, and contextual factors. The study follows the EECERA Ethical Code (Bertram et al. 2024) and has Norwegian SIKT approval. Participation was voluntary with informed consent and clear communication of rights and study aims. Preliminary findings indicate that increased staffing can strengthen collaboration, reduce stress, and support pedagogical quality, but its impact depends on local recruitment capacities and organisational stability. The study offers insights relevant to policy on staffing ratios, recruitment strategies, and workplace sustainability in ECE settings.

increased staffing, recruitment, work environment, practice architectures, mixed-method

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

Strengthened staffing in kindergarten: More resonance in staff-parent collaboration?

Presenters:
Janne Solberg, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

All authors:
Janne Solberg, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

The study investigates staff-parent collaboration after the introduction of strengthened staffing, from the perspectives of parents, staff and centre leaders. What can this multiple data set tell us about the resonance (Rosa, 2024) in staff-parent collaboration considering strengthened staffing? Research on the impact of strengthened staffing on staff-parent collaboration is scarce, a quantitative study (Bråten et al. 2024) found that parent

satisfaction was not significantly affected. More research is needed, including research with qualitative research designs. The study builds on the perspectives of the sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2024), especially his concept “resonance”, representing the opposite of “alienation”. Working within an interpretive research paradigm, inspired by hermeneutics and phenomenology, two focus group interviews with pedagogical leaders, one digital focus group interview with centre leaders and 15 qualitative parent interviews have been conducted. In the analysis, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) was adopted. The study was approved by the Norwegian Ethical Committee (SIKT). Participants got written information and written consent was obtained before interviewing. The analysis suggests that staff and centre leaders experience more resonance in staff-parent collaboration due to strengthened staffing; being able to talk with parents immediately, without causing problems for the rest of the staff. While the parents shared this positive belief, many were dissatisfied with the communication when picking up their child. In the afternoon, when staffing is low (Hognestad, et al., 2025), parents wanted more information. The findings suggest a need for strengthened staffing in the afternoon. Centre leaders can work with organizational culture and establish a shared understanding between parents and staff.

collaboration home-ECE, partnership home-ECE, resonance, communication, strengthened staffing

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

The impact of strengthened staffing — and the consequences of losing it

Presenters:
Kathrine Brekke, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Liv Torunn Eik, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

All authors:
Kathrine Brekke, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
June Berger Storli, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway
Liv Torunn Eik, University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

The study aims to explore how kindergarten teachers experience the impact of having and losing strengthened staffing on their pedagogical work. Research shows that strengthened staffing can lead to new opportunities in pedagogical work, enhanced professionalism and quality (Hognestad et al., 2025). Furthermore, strengthened staffing can contribute to stability and enable smaller groups, and thus be able to give more attention to individual children (Bråten et al., 2024). Smaller groups for activities and play are some aspects of quality in ECEC (Alvestad et al., 2019). The Nordic ECEC tradition emphasize a holistic pedagogy that highlights a value-based approach to care, play, and learning (Bae, 2024, Bøe et al., 2018, 2019). Pedagogical leadership is linked to fundamental values in kindergarten`s social mandate (Tholin, 2022). Changes in the workplace are seen as important sources of professional development (Smeby & Mausethagen, 2017). The study is based on a qualitative design, consisting of three individual in-depth interviews and two focus group interviews with kindergarten teachers from different ECECs. The material consists of a previous and an ongoing study. Ethical considerations adhere to Norwegian institutional procedures (Sikt). Participants received detailed information about the study and provided written consent. Anonymity is secured. Results from the previous study show that strengthened staffing provide opportunities to form smaller groups and support children's interactions and play. Preliminary findings from the ongoing study show that losing strengthened staffing creates tighter constraints for holistic pedagogical work. The findings indicate that increased staffing is perceived to provide better conditions for the kindergarten teacher’s holistic pedagogical work.

strengthened staffing, holistic pedagogy, pedagogical leadership, smaller groups, interactions and play

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