



# BECERA 2023



**Evidencing Practice:  
Re-focusing on  
Children's Flourishing,  
Fulfilment and  
Wellbeing**

**21st February**

**BECERA**   
BRITISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



BRITISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

# Evidencing Practice: Re-focusing on Children's Flourishing, Fulfilment and Wellbeing



**MAC Birmingham, Cannon Hill Park**

**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2023**

HOSTED BY  
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD  
WWW.CREC.CO.UK  @\_CREC  @CRECBIRM

## **BRITISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (BECERA)**

BECERA is an independent organisation for those early childhood practitioner and researchers working in the British Isles who want a space to meet, enquire and discuss issues relevant to their work with young children and families.

BECERA aims to stimulate, support, create and disseminate rigorous, grounded and conceptual knowledge and its applications to our early childhood services. It does this through an annual conference where research is presented and subjected to peer-review. The knowledge generated from each conference will be made available in an online, searchable database.

### **WHAT ARE BECERA'S AIMS?**

BECERA is particularly interested in practitioner research and exploring paradigms and methodologies which impact directly on services.

BECERA is interested in how knowledge is constructed, who listens and who speaks, and in capturing the voices of all, including parents and children.

BECERA will provide a unique British forum to bring together research, practice and policy and strengthen the early childhood research community in the vital contribution it makes to British practice and policy.

### **WHO RUNS BECERA?**

BECERA is an independent, self-funding organisation run by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) which has dedicated itself to improving services for young children and families in the UK for more than 25 years. CREC's Directors are Professor Tony Bertram and Professor Christine Pascal OBE.

## CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD (CREC)

The Centre for Research in Early Childhood, more commonly referred to as CREC, is the home of CREC in Birmingham (Charitable Trust) and Amber Publications and Training (APT).

Established by Professor Chris Pascal and Professor Tony Bertram, CREC has been working to improve Early Years provision for over 20 years.

Located in the St Thomas Children's Centre near Birmingham city centre, CREC specialises in early childhood research which has relevant and meaningful outcomes for practice and policy.

Some of its research is transformed into training and development programmes designed for the specific needs of the early years sector.

CREC also delivers postgraduate and research degrees through its close affiliations with Midlands universities, particularly Birmingham City University and University of Wolverhampton.

In 2015, in partnership with the St. Thomas Centre Nursery and various Nursery and Primary schools across the West Midlands we launched the CREC Early Years Partnership SCITT (School Centred Initial Teacher Training), delivering Early Years focused Teacher Training with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Since then over 40 teachers have successfully gained QTS through the programme.

CREC has a strong reputation for undertaking reviews, reports, evaluations and consultancy work with many UK local authorities, NGOs and countries.

Examples include the British Council, QDCA, OECD, Portugal, Qatar, South Australia, Birmingham and Gloucestershire.

CREC has also been EECERA's strategic partner supporting the delivery of the annual conference since 2009.

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## WELCOME FROM THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Dear friends and colleagues,

These last months have given all of us personal and professional challenges that have demanded extraordinary reserves of energy, creativeness, resilience and compassion as we have navigated life during these continuing difficult times. We hope you have managed to stay well and safe during these tough times and, as we come together at this year's BECERA conference, we can all try and look ahead to a brighter future.

Our choice of focus for this year's conference on **Flourishing Fulfilment and Wellbeing** certainly reflects our belief that it is time to rethink what is the prime purpose of our early education and care programmes and shift our attention to creating the conditions for our children, and ourselves, to flourish and have the chance to lead fulfilled lives with a sense of wellbeing. Flourishing is a process of feeling good and functioning to the maximum of our capabilities. It is a vital condition for fulfilment and wellbeing at all stages in life.

For children this means creating a life in which **joy, love and trust** are nurtured, and where every child is encouraged to develop the skills to connect to, and interact with others, experiencing both autonomy and empathy. In a post-Covid world where we have greater numbers of emotionally troubled children and stressed families, we need to ensure our early year's settings provide for flourishing, fulfilment and wellbeing in children's learning and development. Yet, currently, there seems little emphasis on these core aspects of life, and little evidence on how children thrive and are empowered.

We also believe that **practitioner knowledge** may provide a key to shift this balance of attention within the EYFS to acknowledge these vital aspects of a child's development and develop our practice to nurture them. This means we need to better promote the importance of systematic and rigorous **practitioner/practice-based research** evidence refocusing on context and processes and to raise the visibility and status of the **Eudaimonic**. Conference this year gives us the chance to explore how we can be better at identifying, describing, and evaluating the Eudaimonic allowing our children, and ourselves, to flourish and live with greater fulfilment and wellbeing.

We are looking forward to the opportunity to meet together and share our knowledge, research and passions about these issues at our 2023 Annual BECERA conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bertram C. Pascal', written in a cursive style.

**Professor Tony Bertram and Professor Chris Pascal**

## CONFERENCE INFORMATION

### LOCAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)

### SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Professor Tony Bertram, CREC, Birmingham, UK

Professor Christine Pascal, CREC, Birmingham, UK

### MAJOR CONFERENCE SPONSORS

Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)  
& Amber Publications & Training Ltd (APT)  
[www.crec.co.uk](http://www.crec.co.uk)



## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **HOST**

The host of the 13th BECERA Conference is the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC).

### **REGISTRATION DETAILS**

The conference delegate fee includes: admission to the conference, delegate pass and bag, refreshments and lunch.

### **COFFEE BREAKS AND LUNCH**

Arrival refreshments are served at the Arena Bar. Lunch and refreshments during all scheduled breaks will be served at the Performance Studio. During the last 5 minutes of each break, please make your way to the room in which the plenary or your chosen symposium is located.

### **INFORMATION DESK**

The registration and information desk will be located in the foyer of the MAC. After 10am queries should be directed to the CREC stand which will be located in the Performance Studio.

### **STAFF ASSISTANCE**

The CREC team will be happy to provide assistance with practical matters during the conference. The team will be stationed around the venue during the conference and there will always be one member of the team at the CREC stand.

### **NOTE FOR PRESENTERS**

Each symposium room is equipped with a PC and a data projector. We recommend you save your presentations as a Microsoft PowerPoint file to avoid any compatibility issues. We also recommend that you locate your symposium room in advance and arrive at your symposium room at least 10 minutes prior to your symposium start time in order to load your presentation and ensure a prompt start. All PCs are fitted with USB ports and we recommend you load your presentation on a USB memory stick.

### **NOTE FOR CHAIRS**

Please be present in your symposium room at least 10 minutes prior to your session. It is important that the sessions stay on schedule so that individuals who want to listen to a specific talk may do so, and each presenter gets an equal opportunity to present their work. If a presentation is cancelled you may either convene a general discussion, or instead call a recess.

### **SYMPOSIUM ROOMS**

Symposia will take place across 4 rooms. Depending on which room your intended symposium is in, it may take up to 5 minutes to walk between rooms. We recommend you make your way to the symposium rooms in advance to make sure you get there in good time to find a seat.

### **CONFERENCE BADGES**

Your personal badge is your entry ticket to all keynotes, symposia, exhibition and lunch. We ask that you wear your badge at all times whilst at the venue.



#### LIABILITY INSURANCE

The conference cannot accept any liability for personal injuries or for loss or damage to property belonging to the delegates, either during, or as a result of the meeting. Please check the validity of your own personal insurance before travelling.

#### WIFI

Please use 'MAC Visitors', connect, and accept the Terms and Conditions which should come up once you're connected.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

You can follow the BECERA conference on both Facebook ("BECERA") and Twitter ("@BECERAssoc"). We encourage everyone to post and tweet using hashtag #BECERA2023.

# CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2023

Time	Item	Location
08:30 – 09:15 (75 mins)	Registration & Refreshments	<i>Foyer (registration) Arena Bar (tea/coffee)</i>
09:15 – 09:30 (15 mins)	Opening session	<i>Cinema</i>
09:30 – 10:15 (45 mins)	KEYNOTE I – Flourishing Children Matter: Evidencing the Eudaemonic Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram	<i>Cinema</i>
10:15 – 10:40 (25 mins)	Coffee break	<i>Performance Studio</i>
10:40 – 12:00 (80 mins)	Symposium Set I	<i>A: Pinsent Masons 1 B: Cinema C: Deloitte</i>
12:00 – 12:45 (45 mins)	Lunch	<i>Performance Studio</i>
12:45 – 13:30 (45 mins)	KEYNOTE II – Don't you forget about me: Here is the love, the love the [Professional] Love Dr Jools Page	<i>Cinema</i>
13:30 – 13:40 (10 mins)	Short comfort break	
13:40 – 14:40 (60 mins)	Symposium Set II	<i>A: Pinsent Masons 1 B: Pinsent Masons 2 C: Cinema D: Deloitte</i>
14:40 – 15:00 (20 mins)	Coffee break	<i>Performance Studio</i>
15:00 – 16:20 (80 mins)	Symposium Set III	<i>A: Pinsent Masons 1 B: Pinsent Masons 2 C: Cinema D: Deloitte</i>
16:20	Conference close	
16:30 – 17:30 (60 mins)	CREC Learning Circle	<i>Arena Bar</i>

## Conference room locations

Arena Bar – Ground Floor

Cinema – Access from Ground Floor or Basement Floor (wheelchair access)

Deloitte – Ground Floor

Performance Studio – First Floor

Pinsent Masons 1 & 2 – First Floor

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 2023

09:15 – 10:15 Opening Session & Keynote I

Cinema

### Flourishing Children Matter: Evidencing the Eudaemonic

**Professor Chris Pascal and Professor Tony Bertram**

The ongoing crises of pandemic, poverty and inequality means the wellbeing and fulfilment of many young children are severely compromised. This keynote will promote the value of practitioner and practice-based inquiry in providing robust and ethical evidence about daily pedagogic processes and practices that secure children's wellbeing and fulfilment. We recognise that informed practitioners sit at the heart of securing these goals by providing children with the conditions for their flourishing. These enabling 'process' variables also lead to the Aristotelian concept of 'Eudaemonia'. We believe practitioners should be recognised for their complex and concrete real-world knowledge and their shared, acquired reflections, wisdom, and expertise should be feeding into our sector's evidence base more visibly. We hope that this keynote will inspire and empower practitioner colleagues to become more than consumers of evidence but become more active in knowledge generation. Drawing on examples of current practitioner projects, we will demonstrate that practitioners can use systematic and rigorous real world, qualitative methodologies to evidence excellence in practice and identify those pedagogic processes that encourage our children to flourish, thrive and live with greater fulfilment and wellbeing.

#### SYMPOSIUM SET I: 10:40 – 12:00

	<b>Symposium Title</b>	<b>Room</b>
I/A	MINDFULNESS AND WELLBEING	PINSENT MASONS 1
I/B	CONTESTING EARLY YEARS POLICY AND DOMINANT DISCOURSES	CINEMA
I/C	THE ROLE OF PLAY AND TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WELLNBEING	DELOITTE

12.45 – 13:00 Keynote II

Cinema

**Don't you forget about me: Here is the love, the love the [Professional] Love**

*Dr Jools Page, School of Education, University of Brighton*

In this keynote talk, Jools will argue that education starts with care. She will claim that policy makers must shift their educational priorities to refocus their attention on the wellbeing of young children if

they are to avert a mental health crisis for the next generation. Jools will assert that early years practitioners need to be enabled to develop their own set of principles, policies, and practices to draw upon and respond to the minutiae of the many and varied lived experiences of babies and young children; to celebrate their flourishing and fulfilment whatever their sociocultural context. Jools will present a model of Professional Love to support practitioners in this endeavour and will explain how she has recently stepped into the creative world of movement and dance artists who have inspired her to go ‘big’ and to go ‘bold’ with her Professional Love model rather than accepting it as a utopian ideal.

**SYMPOSIUM SET II: 13.40 – 14:40**

	<b>Symposium Title</b>	<b>Room</b>
II/A	FLOURISHING, FULFILLMENT AND WELLBEING THROUGH A FROEBELIAN LENS	PINSENT MASONS 1
II/B	EXPLORING HIGHER ORDER THINKING	PINSENT MASONS 2
II/C	DEVELOPING CHILD APPROPRIATE APPROACHES	CINEMA
II/D	THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN’S VOICE	DELOITTE

**SYMPOSIUM SET III: 15:00 – 16:20**

	<b>Symposium Title</b>	<b>Room</b>
III/A	RESEARCH INTO ASPECTS OF EARLY YEARS SEND	PINSENT MASONS 1
III/B	ENHANCING CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES AND WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE	PINSENT MASONS 2
III/C	SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO SUPPORT WELLBEING	CINEMA

**16:30-17:30 CREC Learning Circle**

**MAC Bar**

# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

## SYMPOSIUM SET I: 10:40 – 12:00

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### SYMPOSIUM I/A

#### MINDFULNESS AND WELLBEING

ROOM: PINSENT MASONS 1

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**Chair: Jackie Musgrave, The Open University**

**An exploration of mindfulness meditation practice and its role in parenting.**

Jude Brown, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and University of Wolverhampton

**Exploring mindfulness practice (MP) to enhance young children’s wellbeing in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ireland**

Leesa Flanagan, Dundalk Institute of Technology Ireland

**Centring child and educator wellbeing in evaluations of early years leadership development**

Kayla Halls, Middlesex University

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### SYMPOSIUM I/B

#### CONTESTING EARLY YEARS POLICY AND DOMINANT DISCOURSES

ROOM: CINEMA

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**Chair: Zoe Lewis, Birmingham City University**

**Once, twice, three times a failure: time to permanently scrap statutory Reception Baseline Assessment in England?**

David Meehan (1) Dr Zeta Williams-Brown (2), Dr Tracy Whatmore (3), Simon Halfhead (2) University of Northampton (1), University of Wolverhampton (2), University of Birmingham (3)

**Researching with refugee children: findings and learning for future research projects.**

Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucestershire; Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)

**“What IF we could have our own curriculum”: possibilities of having a reflexive curriculum developed through practitioner enquiry in a UK nursery school federation**

Vikki Wynn and Sarah Dixon-Jones, University of Sunderland

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### SYMPOSIUM I/C

#### THE ROLE OF PLAY AND TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S WELLBEING

ROOM: DELOITTE

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**Chair: Dr Kathryn Peckham, Nurturing Childhoods**

**Early Years teachers' perceptions of the role of play in crises**

Laura Mathers and Ioanna Palaiologou, University of Bristol

**Parents' Perspectives on their Children's Play and Friendships during the Covid-19 Pandemic in England**

Caron Carter, Sheffield Hallam University

**Transitional Objects in Early Childhood**

Amanda Norman, University of Winchester

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**SYMPOSIUM SET II: 13:40-14:40**

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**SYMPOSIUM II/A**

**FLOURISHING, FULFILMENT AND WELLBEING THROUGH A FROEBELIAN LENS**

ROOM: PINSENT MASONS 1

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**Chair: Dr Helen Lyndon, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)**

**Using a Froebelian Framework to further children's flourishing, fulfilment and wellbeing**

Sally Cave, The Froebel Partnership

**Slow Cookery: Developing a slow pedagogy approach to cookery to support fulfilment and wellbeing for all.**

Lucy Parker and Anna Denton, Ludwick Nursery School

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**SYMPOSIUM II/B**

**EXPLORING HIGHER ORDER THINKING**

ROOM: PINSENT MASONS 2

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**Chair: Louise Hannan, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and University of Wolverhampton**

**Adult Perspectives on Activities that Elicit Higher Order Thinking and the Smile and Laughter Response in Two-Year-Old Children**

Francesca Brown-Cornwall, Staffordshire University

**Exploring child led curiosity-based provision and concept development in the context of sustained shared thinking (SST) and young children and adult interactions.**

Natalie MacDonald, Dr Glenda Tinney, Dr Jane Waters-Davies, Natasha Young and Dr Jessica Pitman, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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**SYMPOSIUM II/C**

**DEVELOPING CHILD APPROPRIATE APPROACHES**

ROOM: CINEMA

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**Chair: Dr Faye Stanley, University of Wolverhampton**

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**Nurturing Early Childhoods For all our Tomorrows**

Dr Kathryn Peckham, Nurturing Childhoods

**An International Study Supporting Inclusive Education for Refugee and Migrant Children in Early Years Settings**

Alison Tobin, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Birmingham City University, Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucestershire; Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)

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**SYMPOSIUM II/D**  
**THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S VOICE**  
ROOM: DELOITTE

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**Chair: Debi Keyte-Hartland**, Early Childhood Pedagogical Consultant and Artist

**Using the child's voice to plan and deliver speech, language and communication (SLC) interventions**

Kathryn Morris, Blackpool Better Start

**Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? The synergism of a practice-based research project.**

Deirdre Molloy, Dundalk Institute of Technology Part time Early Childhood Studies Programmes

**SYMPOSIUM SET III: 15:00 – 16:20**

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**SYMPOSIUM III/A**  
**RESEARCHING INTO ASPECTS OF EARLY YEARS SEND**  
ROOM: PINSENT MASONS 1

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**Chair: Zeta Williams-Brown**, University of Wolverhampton

**“Appraising the Expectations of the Access and Inclusion (AIM) Model for Scrutinising Transitions from Early Years to Primary Education in Irish Early Childhood Education”**

Laura Firth, Technological University Of The Shannon (TUS)

**How can we engage participants inclusively within survey-based research? Taken from the developing thesis: An exploration of the life stories of children, young people and adults diagnosed with dyslexia to investigate early indicative behaviours and development**

Deborah Nye, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Coventry University

**Starting school during Covid (A Pandemic!): Exploring the transition experiences of young children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).**

Emma Kettle, Birmingham City University

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**SYMPOSIUM III/B****ENHANCING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE****ROOM: PINSENT MASONS 2**

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**Chair: Alison Tobin**, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Birmingham City University

**Layers of exclusion: Developing nature engaging and enhancing pedagogies with infants and toddlers**

Joanne Josephidou, The Open University and Dr Nicola Kemp, Canterbury Christ Church University

**Identifying and overcoming barriers to Outdoor Learning: teaching bravely.**

Peter Haw-Tierney, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) Masters 2022

**The Importance of Accessing the Outdoor Environment to Supporting Children's Well-Being - Reflections from Early Childhood Studies students**

Dr Faye Stanley and Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton

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**SYMPOSIUM III/C****SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO SUPPORT WELLBEING****ROOM: CINEMA**

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**Chair: Ioanna Palaiologou**, University of Bristol

**How do (or can) Early Childhood Education and Care practitioners promote young children's health? Early Childhood Health Promotion Research**

Jackie Musgrave, Early Childhood at the Open University

**Playtime with Books: Transforming Effective Early Educational Interventions for Virtual Delivery**

Aiman Kamarudin, University of Cambridge

**Stories in Playful Spaces**

Dr Jo Traunter and Kerrie Lee, University of Hull



# ABSTRACTS

**SYMPOSIUM SET I, 10:40 – 12:00**

**SYMPOSIUM I/A: Mindfulness and wellbeing**

**Chaired by Jackie Musgrave, The Open University**

**An exploration of mindfulness meditation practice and its role in parenting.**

*Jude Brown, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and University of Wolverhampton*

**Research aims or questions:**

- What are parents' perceptions of practising mindfulness meditation?
- How does a shift in awareness shape parenting practices?
- How might this lead to the dissemination of practice in supporting parenting?

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Mindful parenting has been described as a fundamental parenting skill or practice (Steinberg 2004; Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn 1997). Exploration of internal awareness of self-regulating response mechanisms that enhance our capacity as parents to 'mentalise' our children's immediate experiences through reflective functioning (Fonagy et al., 2001, Steele & Steele, 1991) and explores how mindfulness meditation may enhance and strengthen attachments, relationships and co-regulation.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The theoretical framework draws on theories of mindfulness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2005), its phenomenological perspective (Brown and Corden, 2009), including the role of attention (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and Rogers's humanistic person-centred approach (1979).

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This small-scale interpretative and inductive study focuses on a phenomenological case study methodology inviting participants to record experiences through Culture Probes (Gaver et al.) and through the development of dialogue using layers of heuristic (Sultan 2019) and mindful inquiry. (Shapiro and Bentz 1998).

**Ethical considerations:**

Aligned with ethical approval, information sheets and consent forms were provided for all adult participants. Full details of anonymity and the right to withdraw were also included. Names of any pilot participants have been anonymised.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Initial pilot study findings suggest that parental 'presence' is integral in developing self-regulation (Shanker 2016) and intersubjectivity (Trevarthen 1975); potentially transformative in parent-child relationships.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Early data suggests that regular parental practice of present-moment awareness may shift responses to children's needs and enable sovereignty, empathy and acceptance. (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn 1997).

**Keywords:** mindfulness, parenting, relationships, co-regulation, empath

## **Exploring mindfulness practice (MP) to enhance young children's wellbeing in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ireland**

*Leesa Flanagan, Dundalk Institute of Technology Ireland*

### **Research aims or questions:**

This doctoral research project aims to explore educators' construction and implementation of MP with young children in ECEC in Ireland.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Research to date exploring MP implementation with young children has indicated benefits including improvement in prosocial behaviour (Berti & Cigala, 2020), enhanced self-regulation and executive function (Thierry et al., 2016). Nevertheless, there appears to be a dearth of research conducted in early childhood (Maynard et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The study is based on an ecological framework highlighting the important interconnected system (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) with caregivers collaboratively working together around the child, in addition to drawing on the PERMA (Seligman, 2018) model of wellbeing.

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This study will be conducted through an interpretative lens, a mixed methods design will be employed including a survey and semi-structured interviews with ECEC educators in addition to focus groups with experts including parents, ECEC educators, mindfulness experts and university program leads to assist with generating recommendations. An interpretive phenomenological approach (Smith, 2007) will be embraced to allow insight into the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Ethical approval has been sought from DkIT with further ethical fundamentals including informed consent, right to withdraw, anonymity, privacy, data protection and safeguarding upheld.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

Preliminary analysis of the literature indicates the potential of MP to nurture young children's wellbeing (Sheinman, 2021) while proposing to espouse a whole school approach (Hudson et al., 2020) to MP.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

It is envisaged these findings will impart how MP can be embraced by early year's educators and parents to nurture the wellbeing of young children

**Keywords:** mindfulness, wellbeing, whole school approach

## **Centring child and educator wellbeing in evaluations of early years leadership development**

*Kayla Halls, Middlesex University*

### **Research aims or questions:**

Amidst growing focus on the potential for leadership development to improve children's outcomes in early childhood education and care (ECEC; Doulgass, 2019; Melhuish & Gardner, 2019), there is an urgent need to examine the evaluation of leadership development programmes (Sakr et al., 2022; Halls et al., 2022). We need to scrutinize how we operationalize the phrase 'improving children's outcomes' and the extent to which wellbeing features.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

This research builds on Douglass' OECD review (2019) on ECEC leadership development as well as literature on child and educator wellbeing (Cumming et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2022).

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The research is framed by conceptualisations of leadership in ECEC that place an emphasis on pedagogical leadership (Sakr & O'Sullivan, 2022), intersectional understandings of leadership (Nicholson & Maniates, 2016) and leadership for social justice (Nicholson et al., 2020).

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

We conducted research in the pragmatist tradition to collaboratively problem-solve in response to sector challenges (King, 2022). We conducted a global systematic review as well as gathering insights from 24 diverse UK training providers through interviews and focus groups.

### **Ethical considerations:**

We considered the limits to anonymity in our case studies and developed a robust informed consent procedure that was approved by the institution's ethics committee.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

We examine the current positioning of wellbeing in evaluations of leadership development; we highlight the potential to integrate wellbeing measures within existing evaluation protocols.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

With the launch of the NPQEYL in England, the time is right to demonstrate the importance of conceptualising and evaluating ECEC leadership in relation to child and staff wellbeing.

**Keywords:** leadership, wellbeing, evaluation, leadership development, measurement

**SYMPOSIUM I/B: Contesting EY policy and dominant discourses**  
Chaired by Zoe Lewis, Birmingham City University

**Once, twice, three times a failure: time to permanently scrap statutory Reception Baseline Assessment in England?**

*David Meechan, University of Northampton, Dr Zeta Williams-Brown, University of Wolverhampton, Dr Tracy Whatmore, University of Birmingham, Simon Halfhead, University of Wolverhampton*

**Research aims or questions:**

The study sought to investigate teachers' and key stakeholders' perspectives and experiences of the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA). It provides an analysis of how the RBA had impacted practice in 2021-2022 and explores participant recommendations on how they are successfully navigating the assessment. It concludes by recognising the limited value of the RBA for teachers and children and suggests an alternative approach.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Research (BERA, 2019; Bradbury, 2019) has been undertaken relating to the introduction of a Reception Baseline Assessment since 2015 but there was little research at the time of relating that related to the statutory introduction of the RBA. The authors, therefore, wanted to undertake research that would explore the experiences of educators who had to deliver the RBA in 2021.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The conceptual focus of this study acknowledges a change in practice in the first six weeks of Reception class for children and educators as a result of the statutory introduction of the RBA. Through collecting participants' insights, the research was able to demonstrate consistency in responses to the RBA and collate further information on how educators are changing their practice to accommodate the RBA moving forwards.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This interpretive study investigated a national sample of stakeholders across England. The survey sought to capture both the common and individual perspectives of participants by using scale and rank questions and allowing for open responses as a follow up. Themes were identified and compared to relevant literature, campaigns and research on the current RBA, and its predecessor in 2015. In considering the validity of the research, participants held a variety of professional roles and the survey and its analysis were peer-reviewed by the experienced research team.

**Ethical considerations:**

Ethics was granted from the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Birmingham in line with BECERA and BERA guidelines. A key consideration was confidentiality and anonymity ensuring that participants did not identify themselves or the setting in their responses. This enabled participants to feel comfortable and respond honestly.

**Main finding or discussion:**

The findings highlight that most participants did not consider the assessment as beneficial to themselves, children or parents. Furthermore, the RBA negatively impacted children and practice during the crucial first six weeks of Reception Year. However, discussion is also provided regarding how stakeholders are navigating such a challenge. Many participants in the study called to scrap this form of assessment.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

The need for standards and its objectives of assessment, accountability and performativity should not be prioritised over the experiences of children being measured. Therefore, the RBA, based on the analysis of findings, should be scrapped and an appropriate assessment used instead. For participants in the study, appropriate assessment for four-year-olds is the continued use of internal assessment, which focuses on a broader range of development, using observations and play.

**Keywords:** reception, baseline, assessment, standards, and teachers

**Researching with refugee children: Findings and learning for future research projects.**

*Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucestershire and Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)*

**Research aims or questions:**

This presentation shares the recommendations from a small-scale doctoral research project, which investigated the lived experience of four refugee children in ECEC, offering insight to future researchers also hoping to work with refugee children.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Other studies concerned with refugee children's lived experiences informed this research (Kalkman and Clark, 2017; Prior and Niesz, 2013; Wihstutz, 2020; Peleman et al, 2020; Picchio and Mayer, 2019; Stekalova-Hughes and Wang, 2019; El Gemayei, 2019).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

In response to a complex, sensitive field, an intersectional theoretical lens was developed. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel: 1979); Orientalism (Said: 1978); and Social Learning Theory (Vygotsky: 1978) were used.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This qualitative research employed a hybrid praxeological and polyvocal methodology (Formosinho and Formosinho, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Tobin et al:2016). To elicit the children's experiences multi-modal methods were developed (Theron et al 2011; Clark and Moss, 2011; Carr et al 2002).

**Ethical considerations:**

A dynamic power sensitive ethical approach was developed, creating various working models to respond to the challenges of the field, enabling an advocate researcher positionality to maintain the original ethical commitment to the parents of the children (Gaywood et al, 2020).

**Main finding or discussion:**

The research process is infused with unseen power differentials often perpetuating unhelpful narratives about refugees. Through careful examination of self, positionality, research structures and design, a more sensitive approach can be adopted which places dignity of the participants at the centre.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

These findings offer other researchers' opportunity to reflect and examine their research practices and consider ethically sensitive ways to research with refugee or other marginalised children.

**Keywords:** refugee children; power; research practices; methodologies

## **“What IF we could have our own curriculum”: possibilities of having a reflexive curriculum developed through practitioner enquiry in a UK nursery school federation**

*Vikki Wynn and Sarah Dixon-Jones, University of Sunderland*

### **Research aims or questions:**

Following the pandemic, the team needed to adapt provision, ensuring every child could flourish. The ethos of the setting did not support a ‘catch up’ curriculum and the leadership team sought to develop an approach to empower the team (Peleman et al, 2017) and effectively support all children.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

The EYFS (DfE, 2021) provides a foundation however is limited to only seven ‘lens’. The team were intrinsically driven to move beyond this and explore possibilities not evident within the framework, through a range of approaches and theoretical fields (Kirova et al, 2020).

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

An ethos of practitioner enquiry was evident. This pragmatist approach ensures that the postmodernist theories explored are understood and reflected upon. An understanding of what needs to happen was developed through an interpretivist framework exploring the possibilities available to enact change.

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

Action research (Lewin, 1946) was the most applicable design, for the involvement of all and aligned with the shared postmodern epistemological stance. Observations, ongoing surveys and regular anecdote circles with the leadership team supported reflexivity.

### **Ethical considerations:**

The team risked ‘island mentality’ with limited alternative perspectives (Gray, 2022) within the setting. Training in Reggio Emilia allowed for further dialogue (Edwards et al, 2012). Adherence to the statutory requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2021) are continuously maintained.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

The investment of *time* for open dialogue and reflection is significant. The need for ongoing CPD (continuous professional development), along with a change to how this is perceived, also contributed to curriculum development.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

The impact of the research conducted has been the development of a curriculum, specific and unique to the federation that is developed by and with the whole team.

**Keywords:** practitioner-enquiry, curriculum, reflexivity, CPD, complexity

**SYMPOSIUM I/C: The role of play and transitional objects in supporting children's wellbeing**

**Chaired by Dr Kathryn Peckham, Nurturing Childhoods**

**Early Years teachers' perceptions of the role of play in crises**

*Laura Mathers and Dr Ioanna Palaologou, University of Bristol*

**Research aims or questions:**

The research aimed to explore Early Years teacher's (EYTs) perceptions of the role of play for young children (3-7) in crises.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Young children have been identified as particularly at risk of deleterious psychological effects from experiences of crises (Cohen & Gadassi, 2018). Play may offer a means for supporting children's wellbeing and propensity to cope in crises (Thibodeau-Nielson et al., 2021; Chaterjee, 2017).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The study draws on Basic Psychological Need Theory (BPNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) rooted within Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci 2000) as a theoretical lens through which to examine the role of play in crises. BPNT considers that satisfaction of the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness leads to human wellbeing.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

In congruence with an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative methodology was employed in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven EYTs from four schools in south England. A separate interview was held with a play expert to provide further insight into the research. Data was analysed using Reflective Thematic Analysis.

**Ethical considerations:**

The EECERA ethics were followed in addition to ethical approval from the University of Bristol. A detailed information sheet and consent form were given to participants and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the process. No identifying information was reported and anonymity was ensured.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Findings suggest that play supports children's psychological wellbeing in crises and provides a means for coping and adapting in adversity.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Providing time and space for unstructured play may support children's wellbeing, resilience and adaption in crises.

**Keywords:** play, wellbeing, crisis, Reflective Thematic Analysis, Early Childhood

## **Parents' Perspectives on their Children's Play and Friendships during the Covid-19 Pandemic in England**

*Caron Carter, Sheffield Hallam University*

### **Research aims or questions:**

The aim of this study was to investigate parents' perspectives on their children's play and friendships during the Covid-19 pandemic in England. It is important to hear these perspectives in order to support children and families going forward in 'new times'.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

The importance and value of children's play and friendships is now becoming widely recognised as being important to children's wellbeing, learning and development (Daniels and others 2010; Hedges and Cooper 2017; Peters 2003). The value of friendship was magnified when Covid-19 temporarily ceased or limited the opportunities for children to play with their friends. This is contrary to the adoption of the UNCRC, Article 15 that states children should have the right to play with other children, form friendships and join organisations.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The research aimed to hear parents' perspectives as to my knowledge there is no research specifically focusing upon hearing parents' perspectives on children's friendships during Covid-19. This is significant as parents were left to make difficult decisions during Covid-19 (Armitage & Nellums, 2020).

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

A pilot case study approach was adopted involving five parents. Data were collected through semi-structured online zoom interviews, reflection and field notes. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Consent was sought from participants through a consent form and information sheet. The use of pseudonyms addressed anonymity and confidentiality.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

Findings provide new insights into alternative strategies used by children and families to find alternative ways to play and interact with peers. These include the use of video messages, zoom games, doorstep visits and play with siblings.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

The study argues for this knowledge to be reflected upon in relation to children's wellbeing in 'new times' but also to be considered for potential traumatic events in the future.

**Keywords:** young children's friendships, wellbeing, play, parents' views and perceptions, Covid-19



## **Transitional Objects in Early Childhood**

*Amanda Norman, University of Winchester*

### **Research aims or questions:**

To develop an understanding about transitional objects (teddies, cloths and small objects) and children's desire to have them close to them in regulating their own emotions and wellbeing. To consider how a therapeutic approach can be understood and weaved within early years professional practice and how this can enrich experiences for children and educators.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Winnicott's (1971) 'good enough' parent and the relationship between the young child and primary carer is discussed in relation to the value of transitional objects, with an understanding of how psychological theories (Bowlby, 1954; Brenner, 2021) can be useful when caring for young children in educational and research contexts. This paper is part of a larger project based on sleep pedagogies.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon attachment theories and object relations in early years settings (Winnicott, 1991). He believed the connection to the transitional object was in bridging the inner world of the infant to their outer world. He saw the transitional object as gaining a sense of their separateness to the environment they were in and a relationship to the outside world had begun.

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The projects initial phase has been auto-ethnographical, within a qualitative interpretive research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data will also be collated from a nursery setting, informed by a case study approach, and is currently being developed.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Although a significant aspect of the paper will be drawn from a literature review, using secondary data, ethical consideration has been given to ensuring fair representation of literature from a wide range of sources. Ethical approval has also been sought from the University of Winchester for the forthcoming data collected from the nursery setting.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

The initial findings demonstrated how myself, as practitioner and researcher, reflected on 'special toys' and 'transitional objects', as well as the expectations during the pandemic, in terms of the emotional wellbeing of children.

The project contributes to a timely connection between the understanding and application of therapeutic approaches within early educational contexts to support the re-focusing on children's wellbeing within caring environments that 'emotionally hold' the child to flourish and fulfil their potential. This is within and beyond transitional times.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

The project will be of interest to those wanting to further understand children's relationships, and their realities with the external world by connecting theory from past to present, and shaping the future. It reveals the tensions of young children cared for in an arguably low touch, high technological culture, compounded by living within and beyond a pandemic. The initial findings will discuss issues and questions from an auto-ethnographical lens, culminating in the contribution to a book publication with Routledge (2023).

**Keywords:** transitional, objects, emotional, co-regulation, auto-ethnographical, qualitative

## **SYMPOSIUM SET II, 13:40 -14:40**

### **SYMPOSIUM II/A: Flourishing, fulfilment and wellbeing through a Froebelian Lens**

**Chaired by Dr Helen Lyndon, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)**

#### **Using a Froebelian Framework to further children's flourishing, fulfilment and wellbeing**

*Sally Cave, The Froebel Partnership*

##### **Research aims or questions:**

Working collaboratively to develop an innovative Froebelian Analytical Framework which we believe has the capacity to support other Froebelian practitioners and researchers to interrogate their practice and use this reflective tool to more deeply understand, develop and transform it.

##### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

This focus arises from our recent collaborative project between Guilford Nursery School and Family Centre, UK; Seven Stars Nursery, New Zealand; Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC), funded by the Froebel Trust, which explored the affordances of different natural outdoor spaces Gibson (1977); Vygotsky (1978); Rubenstein (1989).

##### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

We are particularly focused on wellbeing as a key child and adult outcome, but are also capturing other outcomes both for children and staff. (Tovey, 2020; Pascal et al, 2021). We are aiming to do this in a way that celebrates holistic development and celebrates the capacities and development of all children and recognises their unique and individual capacities. Vygotsky (1978); Brown (2021); Clarke (2022)

##### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The research undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm, has adopted an action research methodology using multi-modal documentation, and each participating setting is reflecting on and analysing their narrative, observational case studies using the newly developed Froebelian Analytical Framework.

##### **Ethical considerations:**

A consent form and information sheet was provided to all parents of children involved. Informed consent is negotiated with the children involved during the time the research is carried out. Pseudonyms have replaced the names of participants. Participants (including child participants) are given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time.

##### **Main finding or discussion:**

The findings suggest that using a Froebelian Framework to reflect on and analyse practice affords adults professional wellbeing and fulfilment which in turn ensures positive outcomes and benefits for children.

##### **Implications, practice or policy:**

These findings suggest implications for how practitioners assess and develop their pedagogy and practice.

**Keywords:** engaging with nature, wellbeing, Froebelian principles

## **Slow Cookery: Developing a slow pedagogy approach to cookery to support fulfilment and wellbeing for all.**

*Lucy Parker and Anna Denton, Ludwick Nursery School*

### **Research aims or questions:**

This action research project focuses on using cookery to develop community connections within a nursery school setting. This presentation shares one particular aspect of the project which has been the development of cookery for inclusion, which has focused on adapting our cookery curriculum so all children can enjoy greater fulfilment and wellbeing when cooking.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

The project makes a contribution to existing work on slow pedagogy and also supports work that promotes a Froebelian approach to early years education.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The project is underpinned by key Froebelian principles, acknowledging the importance of community, relationships and freedom with guidance (Bruce, 2021; Tovey, 2017). The project has drawn upon the concept of 'slow pedagogy' (Clark, 2023) which has allowed us to rethink how the children are accessing and engaging with cookery.

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This is an action research project based in one nursery setting. The main method of data gathering has been through observation.

### **Ethical considerations:**

The emphasis placed upon community and relationships within this project, has helped to support the Ethical considerations of the research. Supporting the children to have independence and autonomy over their cooking, capturing their voice and sharing observations with parents have been some of the ways in which we have worked sensitively with the children.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

Closely observing the children, rethinking our routines, providing longer periods to cook and more opportunities to revisit and repeat favourite recipes has led to high levels of wellbeing and involvement within the children and the development of positive relationships between adult and child.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

The project highlights the benefits of first hand experiences for nursery children particularly in relation to PSED and inclusion.

**Keywords:** Froebel, cookery, inclusion, wellbeing, slow pedagogy

## **SYMPOSIUM II/B: Exploring Higher Order Thinking**

**Chaired by Louise Hannan, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and University of Wolverhampton**

### **Adult Perspectives on Activities that Elicit Higher Order Thinking and the Smile and Laughter Response in Two-Year-Old Children**

*Francesca Brown-Cornwall, Staffordshire University*

#### **Research aims or questions:**

The study aimed to ascertain adult perspectives on what activities elicit Higher Order Thinking (HOT) and smiles and laughter in two-year-old children. Identifying ways that adults can provoke HOT and pleasure simultaneously for positive developmental progress in two-year-old children .

#### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Smiles and laughter are often the earliest established, rehearsed and arguably readily available cue two-year-olds have to convey and influence their thinking, learning and socialising opportunities (Addyman 2018, Boyd & Bee 2019, Knudsen 2004) . Fincher-Keifer (2019) states that embodied cognition can help to explain the relationship between the mind, body and emotion as the embodied view of emotion is that it is a neurophysiological state based upon experiences of movement, senses and perception. Using these experiences to create new meaning, knowledge and expression is part of HOT. Fincher-Keifer (2019) explains that internal or external triggers of happiness are likely to cause cognitive responses the brain associates with the feeling, leading to an increased heart rate and contraction of the greater zygomatic muscle (indicator of a Duchenne smile). This is arguably an under researched and thus under-utilised tool adults can resolutely benefit from in the care and educational practices with two-year-old children.

#### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The theoretical position of the project falls within the transformative paradigm, which according to Pugh (2011) is a modern take on pragmatism, as the project seeks to elicit reflection and change in practice with two-year-old children. This is particularly poignant as the topic is about enjoyment and pleasure, Dewey (1934) highlights a central goal of education is to enrich and expand everyday experiences, using smiles and laughter can be a vehicle to achieve this.

#### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The methods adopted included an online questionnaire comprising of 22 open-ended questions which probed different elements of how Higher Order Thinking can manifest itself in two-year-old children, for example problem solving, role play, and memory. The questions were repetitious in wording to exhaust opinions and provoke plentiful qualitative data on eliciting smiles, laughter and HOT, thus causing any themes, similarities and differences across responses to generate. The project themes have been generated from the findings using reflexive thematic analysis via the decomposition approach (Braun & Clark, 2018).

#### **Ethical considerations:**

Institutional ethical approval was granted and BERA (2018) ethical guidelines followed. All data was collected anonymously, and participants gave informed consent on the online questionnaire ahead of submission.

#### **Main finding or discussion:**

Specific themes identified were Providing Playfulness, Deliberately Developing Humour, Harnessing Individuality, Appreciating the Relationship between Mind, Body and Emotion, Sharing in the Benefits. Findings suggest deliberate attempts to elicit smiles, laughter and

thinking concurrently offer potential benefits to both adults and children. Adults that provide a continuum of experiences for children that start from increasing exposure to smiles and laughter in various guises, adding play and humour to non-play activities and routines, and implementing specific play activities where challenge and social context are carefully considered can arguably increase the likelihood of HOT, smiles and laughter, pleasure and developmental progress occurring.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Through collecting data from adults who have frequent contact with two-year olds this research has found a range of social contexts, playful activities and attempts at developing humour are means by which adults perceive they can elicit HOT and smiles and laughter concurrently. Furthermore, if adults harness their relationship with children to understand their individual behaviours and acknowledge the varying relations between emotion and thinking, they report being able to embed subtleties into the typology of play on offer which can exaggerate the generation of smiles, laughter and HOT via three specific considerations:

1. Consciously trying to elicit smiles, laughter and HOT concurrently, regardless of the activity type on offer.
2. Setting adequate challenge (not too easy or too difficult) with varying free/didactic opportunities to play and experience socialisation.
3. Responding to unique preferences and abilities of children, taking the time to observe their physical/facial reactions and how they embody their learning.

**Keywords:** laughter, smiles, two-year-old children, thinking

**Exploring child led curiosity-based provision and concept development in the context of sustained shared thinking (SST) and young children and adult interactions.**

*Natalie MacDonald, Dr Glenda Tinney, Dr Jane Waters-Davies, Natasha Young and Dr Jessica Pitman, University of Wales Trinity Saint David*

**Research aims or questions:**

This study analyses and evaluates observations of child-adult interactions in child led curiosity-based provision, to identify SST and higher concept development, as part of children's holistic play.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Conceptual and higher order thinking may not always be visible in early years provision when measured with tools such as SSTEW (Waters and Macdonald, 2020). However, child-led curiosity-based learning provides opportunities for the questioning, discovery and experimentation that supports higher order thinking (Gealy et al., 2020). SST can also support children develop deeper understandings of concepts encountered in everyday play (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The project is informed by a socio-constructivist understanding of the professional adult learner in which professional knowledge is seen as situated, contextual and culturally shaped (Rogoff 2003).

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

It is a qualitative observational study within an interpretive research paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Observations were undertaken in six childcare settings. Data analysis includes analysis of video content and focus group discussions with practitioners within the settings.

**Ethical considerations:**

All participants were provided an information sheet and consent form. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Settings and participants have not been identified.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Initial data analysis highlights the opportunities for children to question, experiment and evaluate ideas as part of their everyday experiences. The study also provides opportunities to discuss how video observations can support reflective practice.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

When completed, the study will consider the role of the adult when supporting child-led curiosity-based learning in terms of SST and conceptual and higher order thinking.

**Keywords:** concept development; sustained shared thinking, adult interaction; higher order thinking, professional development

**SYMPOSIUM II/C: Developing child appropriate approaches  
Chaired by Dr Faye Stanley, University of Wolverhampton**

**Nurturing Early Childhoods For all our Tomorrows**

*Dr Kathryn Peckham, Nurturing Childhoods*

**Research aims or questions:**

This phenomenological study looks at common pedagogical practices and how they are experienced by children. Reflecting on resulting engagement and proposing new ways of thinking about early years practice in the classroom.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

This study echoes the concern of downward pressures for didactic instruction troubled by Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) and the optimal measuring, computerisation and standardisation of young children's abilities (Blair, Zelazo, & Greenberg, 2005; Howard & Okely, 2015 in Howard et al., 2016).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Within a phenomenological study exploring how early childhood pedagogies enable the development of learning dispositions, the many variables, contexts and viewpoints involved were considered. Incorporating detailed representations of the phenomena of early learning as experienced by children, a developmental theory and toolkit was developed.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This qualitative and naturalistic approach to viewing early childhood utilised observational techniques as it followed ten children's experiences through their last year in a UK pre-school and the first in a school classroom. Supporting a cognitive exploration of deeper learning motivations (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015), this phenomenological study captured the autonomy, choices and interactions afforded by adults and the subsequent reactions of the children to explore the complex realities of early learning experiences. Recognising children, not as passive recipients of information but as individuals within an ecological whole.

**Ethical considerations:**

Following full disclosure of procedure and intentions, consent was obtained from all parties (adults and children) with ongoing assent secured weekly. Fluidity built into the methods allowed for dissent and feedback loops in place at every stage retained the integrity.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Sitting within a larger study, the impact on children's declining engagement on school entry are identified along with inconsistencies between the understanding of children's abilities and those being demonstrated. Indicating the disservice being done to our young learners and troubling the notion of learner identity.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Through a greater understanding of the phenomena of early learning, the impact of pedagogy on child engagement can be better understood as we look to support children and their engagement during these formative years.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, methodological approaches, children's perspectives, learning environment, child engagement

## **An International Study Supporting Inclusive Education for Refugee and Migrant Children in Early Years Settings**

*Alison Tobin, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Birmingham City University, Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucestershire and Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)*

### **Research aims or questions:**

This study evaluates how a toolkit can be utilised to enact inclusive early education practices to improve the visibility and recognition of very young migrant or refugee children.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

It draws upon the work of 'The Walk' (Good Chance, 2021) the empowerment of migrant families (Tobin, 2016), the challenges affecting identity and relationships (Bove and Sharmahd, 2020) and making meaning of migratory experiences (Kirova, 2010). It aims to support early years educators by introducing ideas and concepts about refugee and migration experiences in a trauma informed way.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Using Refugee- crit theory (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019) and a praxeological methodology (Formosinho & Formosinho, 2012; Pascal and Bertram, 2012) a play based educational toolkit was developed.

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The study is positioned within a socio- constructivist paradigm and the methodology are qualitative and interpretivist. Through a participatory design, early educators in five countries trialled and evaluated the toolkit.

### **Ethical considerations:**

The study was informed by the best ethical practices of researching with refugee children, including problematising prevalent trauma narratives by interrogating educators' and researchers' positionality to circumvent the white saviour complex (Gaywood et al, 2020).

### **Main finding or discussion:**

The authors have been able to gather diverse evaluations of the toolkits effectiveness and the findings demonstrate that it not only supports refugee and migrant children, but also has a role in supporting community cohesion.

### **Implications, practice or policy:**

As a freely accessible resource, the toolkit can be used in any early years setting globally to ensure that refugee or migrant children have access to an inclusive and equitable education.

**Keywords:** childhood, migrant, educational toolkit, refugee, inclusion



## **SYMPOSIUM II/D: The importance of children's voice**

**Chaired by Debi Keyte-Hartland, Early Childhood Pedagogical Consultant & Artist**

### **Using the child's voice to plan and deliver speech, language and communication (SLC) interventions**

*Kathryn Morris, Blackpool Better Start*

#### **Research aims or questions:**

This research aims to uncover how by listening to children and them taking the lead (Weitzman 2017), SLC services are effective and progress is continued beyond the intervention.

#### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Pedagogical research shows that planning provision based on children's interests, through methodologies such as the mosaic approach (Clarke & Moss 2001) and supporting parents to 'follow their lead' (Weitzman 2017) enables the planning of effective opportunities and therefore increases educational attainment.

This study explores these concepts and aims to develop the use of child's voice in planning interventions.

#### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Using the current frameworks of listening to children (Clarke 2017) and considering their use to 'SPARK' communication (Weitzman 2017), we evaluate how listening to the child's voice can support and prolong the benefits of targeted interventions.

#### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This practitioner research uses qualitative methods including observation and focused discussion to capture children's interests and monitor levels of parents' confidence. The study uses the WellComm assessment tool to monitor SLC development at various stages.

#### **Ethical considerations:**

A consent form was provided and parents understand they have a right to withdraw which will not impede them accessing the intervention. Real names are replaced by pseudonyms.

#### **Main finding or discussion:**

Current findings demonstrate that through letting the child take the lead, parents' confidence in supporting and understanding their child's SLC needs has increased and children's improving outcomes is sustained beyond intervention.

#### **Implications, practice or policy:**

Targeted interventions use the voice of children in planning as this can have a lasting positive impact on their development.

**Keywords:** children's voice, speech, language and communication, Follow their Lead, SPARK, Mosaic

## **Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? The synergism of a practice-based research project.**

*Deirdre Molloy, Dundalk Institute of Technology Part time Early Childhood Studies Programmes*

### **Research aims or questions:**

The purpose of this research (completed as part of my MA in Early Childhood Studies from University of Galway) was to establish if young children at an Irish early years setting held views on their preschool experience and to record these.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

The research was inspired by Einarsdóttir (2015) who laments the lack of literature on the subjective experiences of children in early years settings, and Hanafin (2014) who suggests that consideration should be given to children's views. This research links to a Pedagogy of Listening which is central to the Reggio Emilia approach and advises us to listen carefully to the hundred languages of children.

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

While carrying out this research project the author was aware of the words of Lansdown (2005) who questioned why young children (0-6 years) remain on the fringes of studies seeking children's perspectives and also have been considered "voiceless and invisible within society" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, p.7)

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The primary research principle was that young children were viewed as the source of their own knowledge, and the research design reflected Social Constructivism. A Qualitative Research participatory arts-based mosaic approach (Clark and Moss 2001) was taken using a purposeful sample of 33 preschool children age 3-4 years.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Ethical considerations included up to date child protection welfare training, gaining informed consent, and child assent with freedom to withdraw or not to partake, and one's ethical radar. (Skånfors 2009).

### **Main finding or discussion:**

Preschool children hold views and are prepared to share these views given the right opportunity. Furthermore, this review of the practice based research project concluded that unlike the central tenet of Gestalt psychology, in this context the whole (the study findings) were not different from the sum of its parts (children's opinions) as the perception of each child in the study were individual but similar and when collected and analysed led to the overall findings of the research.

### **Implications, practice, or policy:**

The research project demonstrated that in practice we should take children seriously and value their contributions. As regulators we are urged to consider children's involvement in the monitoring and evaluation in their services. For policy makers it extended current thinking on documenting children's views within the regulatory inspection process of early years services.

**Keywords:** voice; perceptions; synergy; review

## **SYMPOSIUM SET III, 15:00 – 16:20**

**SYMPOSIUM III/A: Researching into aspects of Early Years SEND**  
**Chaired by Dr Zeta Williams-Brown, University of Wolverhampton**

**“Appraising the Expectations of the Access and Inclusion (AIM) Model for Scrutinising Transitions from Early Years to Primary Education in Irish Early Childhood Education”**

*Laura Firth, Technological University Of The Shannon (TUS)*

### **Research aims or questions:**

This research will explore the transition between preschool and primary school specifically in relation to the effectiveness of AIM in Ireland. AIM is a model of support to ensure that children with disabilities and additional needs can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This post graduate research will underpin an exploration of the development of a possible framework to guide a consistent standard of inclusive practice as a means to building a community of practice for the early years profession in Ireland.

### **Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Children with special education needs require particular support at the time of transition to primary school. This transition should be treated as a process rather than a one off event with parents, early years educators and primary school teachers working together (O’Kane, M. 2016).

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon existing inclusive practice (Ring, E. et al 2021) as well as early years educators partnering with parents and primary schools to support a child’s transition to primary school (Hayes, N. et al 2017) and learning within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

### **Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This interpretive study aims to utilise a mixed methods approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) comprising of online questionnaires and semi-structured qualitative interviews with 20 early years educator from the Munster region in Ireland.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Information sheets and consent forms will be provided to all participants. The survey and interviews will be anonymous. Participants can withdraw from the research at any time during the process.

### **Main finding or discussion:**

Within Irish society, early years educators deliver an inclusive culture by providing an inclusive pedagogy, scaffolded by the child- centred Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) and Better Start provides supports to the Early Years Services. This support enables practitioners to liaise with other professionals to assess what the needs of the child are and provides an overall inclusive structure ensuring the needs of children are at the forefront of our service. The data collection phases will seek out early years educators’ views on the main obstacles and opportunities faced by educators when accessing AIM and identify the accessibility and usability issues in current inclusive practices and processes.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

The content based on the data will detail a possible framework to assist with future early years professional practice. This research will explore an approach to preparing early years educators for inclusive practice by way of the development of a community of practice in which educators can engage in a collaborative process of critical reflection to interrogate practice and to make connections to relevant theoretical frameworks that draws on a multidisciplinary approach.

**Keywords:** early years education, inclusion, transitions, community of practice, Access and Inclusion Model

**How can we engage participants inclusively within survey-based research? Taken from the developing thesis: An exploration of the life stories of children, young people and adults diagnosed with dyslexia to investigate early indicative behaviours and development**

*Deborah Nye, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Coventry University*

**Research aims or questions:**

What early behaviours and experiences do children, young people and adults perceive have influenced their learning journey through life? Are there commonalities in early behaviour and development that could be indicative of the development of dyslexia? Are there commonalities in the pedagogy and support that parents and practitioners have provided that have helped these children and young people in their early development?

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Built on research from Margaret Snowling (2002) and Carol Hayes (2019) into the impacts of dyslexia which is currently centred around reading and writing. More research is needed pre-reading when behaviours noted in early years are to be analysed.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Multiple risk factors can increase the challenges with dyslexia, positive factors can decrease this likelihood. Risk–resilience is a framework (Fraser & Galinsky, 2004) exploring why some individuals seem to show resilience against even the strongest risk factors, while others do not.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The methods of this study are interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) supporting people to make sense of major life experiences, in this instance the assessment of dyslexia (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009).

**Ethical considerations:**

Individuals who are considered vulnerable under Equality Act (2010) and the Code of Practice (2001) participating in research from a distance require a heightened ethical responsibility to gain informed consent.

**Main finding or discussion:**

The supportive videos and audio recordings were accessed by half of the participants. More women responded than men and this will be further explored as the research progresses.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Providing surveys for people who already struggle with reading can be counter productive creating bias within the data. To ensure inclusivity options ensures everyone has a say. Equally this can be a consideration in all research with one in ten people (NHS ND) facing challenges of dyslexia.

**Keywords:** inclusion, dyslexia, research, surveys, equality

**Starting school during Covid (A Pandemic!): Exploring the transition experiences of young children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).**

*Emma Kettle, Birmingham City University*

**Research aims or questions:**

The research aims to explore the experiences of young children starting school during a global pandemic.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Research highlights the impact of Covid-19 on children starting school, including difficulties in building relationships with parents and children, and shortcomings around governmental guidance on supporting children with SEND with transition to school (Wythe, 2022; Backopoulou, 2022). However, the voices of children and parents/ carers are missing from previous research.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The study draws upon Bioecological Systems Theory (BST, Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), claiming the social context and environment in which a child lives will impact their development. Additionally, the study aims to use a social justice framework, considering a child's agency and capabilities regarding their own transition experience (Sen, 1985).

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The study will be conducted through a mixed-method interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As part of data generation, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and creative research methods will be used. The data will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020).

**Ethical considerations:**

Ethical considerations include participants' rights to informed consent, the right to withdraw, and anonymity. The power relations between the researcher and participants will be addressed by adopting a reflexive approach.

**Main finding or discussion:**

This presentation will reflect on the pilot of the data collection tools and share the research aims, methodology and theoretical framework that underpins the study.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Study findings could potentially support experiences of transition for children with SEND by influencing school and LA policy changes around transition planning, and influencing future national policy regarding statutory guidance around transition to school.

**Keywords:** transition, special educational needs, and disability (SEND), starting school, functionings, environment

**SYMPOSIUM III/B: Enhancing Children's experience and wellbeing through nature**  
**Chaired by Alison Tobin, Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and Birmingham City University**

**Layers of exclusion: Developing nature engaging and enhancing pedagogies with infants and toddlers**

*Joanne Josephidou, The Open University and Dr Nicola Kemp, Canterbury Christ Church University*

**Research aims or questions:**

Some voices are not considered when developing outdoor pedagogies with infants/toddlers. Practice is often based on monocultural understandings. We aim to examine how diverse perspectives about children's relationship with nature can be included.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Our research is informed by findings from a Froebel Trust funded project. Opportunities to develop practices that are nature engaging and enhancing (Josephidou & Kemp, 2022) have been highlighted. Studies have identified that children living in less affluent areas may be marginalised through lack of access to green spaces (Natural England, 2019), whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the significance, and inequality, of access to outdoor space (Watts, 2021). Furthermore, infants and toddlers are marginalised within outdoor research and practice (Kemp & Josephidou, 2021).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

We set out how differing cultural contexts can inform thinking (Cooper et al., 2022), including those with a bi-cultural perspective (Rameka et al., 2017), about developing nature engaging and enhancing pedagogies.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The evidence for our argument is drawn from a systematic literature review focusing on international practices of infants'/toddlers' outdoor engagement. To understand how ECEC settings can develop democratic nature pedagogies, we followed procedures laid down by the EPPI-Centre to conduct this systematic review. We wanted to find out which narratives are used to describe nature contact for birth to twos, which geographical contexts are used for data collection and which voices are used to make recommendations for nature enhancing and nature engaging pedagogies.

**Ethical considerations:**

Ethical approval for the project has been provided by the host university in line with BERA (2018) ethical guidelines. We have not interacted with human participants but were alert to the need for people with protected characteristics to be represented in appropriate ways. In analysing papers, we were attuned to issues emerging regarding representation and equality, diversity and inclusion. We continue to acknowledge international differences and perspectives, recognising our positioning as British researchers working within the English context. We are also concerned not to convey the impression that we were taking a deficit view and looking to criticise current practice; rather our intention is to develop this important conversation about the outdoor experiences of under twos.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Many infants and toddlers attend daycare; therefore, it is vital to gain an understanding of the perspectives of their communities, particularly where families may feel marginalised.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

We make recommendations for spaces so that all families can contribute to thinking about pedagogic practices that are mutually beneficial to child and planetary health.

**Keywords:** babies, toddlers, outdoors, nature engagement

**Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Outdoor Learning: Teaching bravely.**

*Peter Haw-Tierney, CREC Masters 2022*

**Research aims or questions:**

This study explored the attitudes of school staff towards the benefits and challenges of taking learning outside the classroom. It explored Ortlipp's (2008) journaling as a research tool, by analysing an all-encompassing multimedia journal.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Research builds on existing evidence that learning outside the classroom supports retaining new knowledge, skills and understanding by making it engaging, practical and memorable (Marchant et al. 2019; Rickinson et al. 2014; Louv, 2010; CLOtC, 2022).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model of Development as a basis, and exploring the relationship to Vygotsky's 'zones of proximal development' (1978).

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This research fell within an interpretivist paradigm (Rossman and Rallis, 2003) as it looked to gain, 'Insights, deeper knowledge and understanding of human behaviour and relationship' (Burton et al. 2008: 61) The study used a qualitative approach, incorporating questionnaires to develop a case study.

**Ethical considerations:**

All participants were aware of the research and consented to their participation. All practical steps were taken to ensure no harm came to any participant in this research, including making all data anonymous.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Opportunities to learn outside the classroom continued to be a valuable and essential element of education. This study created a new definition of 'brave teaching' as, 'Taking sensible risks in creating new experiences to support committing new knowledge, skills and understanding to long-term memory'.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Continue to advocate outdoor learning and develop leaders' planning to make better use of learning environments. Future students to be taught to consider using a 'Journ-All' to support qualitative research.

**Keywords:** outdoor learning, brave, journaling, Journ-All

**The Importance of Accessing the Outdoor Environment to Supporting Children's Wellbeing - Reflections from Early Childhood Studies students**

*Dr Faye Stanley and Dawn Jones, University of Wolverhampton*

**Research aims or questions:**

This research will enable undergraduate early childhood studies students to engage in meaningful reflective narratives on how outdoor spaces can support children's wellbeing

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Practitioners' values must be scrutinised through critical reflective dialogue and discussion. "In order to provide nurturing and enabling environments for young children to learn and flourish... it is imperative that teachers and practitioners make well informed and thoughtful decisions about the experiences they provide for young children in their care" (Wild et al., 2018, p.2). Children who forge a connection with the natural world are more likely to exhibit ecological behaviour (Chwala, 2020). There is a growing momentum for the sustainability agenda within the early years curricula and how care, play and learning need to be intertwined to support children's wellbeing (Early Years Coalition, 2021, p.12).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

This research is underpinned by a sociocultural approach and the idea that children learn through social engagement with their world and are 'children in society' (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

This research will be underpinned by students' narrative reflections based on their placement experiences. Qualitative research focuses on natural settings and is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, situations as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events (Woods,)

**Ethical considerations:**

University ethical guidance was adhered to and ethical mitigations were conducted alongside BERA (2018) guidance including anonymity, confidentiality and the safe storage of collected field notes.

**Main finding or discussion:**

The importance of students' developing an understanding of the links between outdoor sustainable practices and how this supports young children's wellbeing.



**Implications, practice or policy:**

Developing practitioner awareness of how outdoor spaces benefits young children's wellbeing.

**Keywords:** outdoor spaces, natural environment, critical reflection, sustainability, wellbeing

**SYMPOSIUM III/C: Supporting families to support wellbeing**

Chaired by Ioanna Palaologou, University of Bristol

**How do (or can) Early Childhood Education and Care practitioners promote young children's health? Early Childhood Health Promotion Research**

*Jackie Musgrave, The Open University*

**Research aims or questions:**

This pilot study was conducted in one early childhood pre-school children in an area of high deprivation in England to explore the under-researched area of how practitioners promote the health of children. The research used an original tool, Child Health Promotion: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Education and Care Practitioners, containing a 5 Step Programme as a model to guide practitioners in identifying and implementing a health promotion activity.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

The findings helped to set the onward agenda for a larger scale study which will foreground the voices of practitioners and highlight the role that ECEC practitioners can play in promoting the health of children.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The work of Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2011) on networked improvement communities and of Arbour et al. (2015) on continuous quality improvement guided our thinking and action for a participatory approach to promoting child health.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The Toolkit is a model created and adapted from a similar publication, the School Nurses Toolkit (RCN 2017), a resource designed to support School Nurses working with children aged 5 and above in promoting school children's health. The Toolkit has similarities to the School Nurse Toolkit, but has been extended to support practitioners in identifying, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the health promotion activity, influenced by the ideas of Bryk et al. (2010). Data was collected from the co-researcher in the setting who was interviewed on 3 occasions, at the start, middle and end of the period of research. Other data were collected in interviews with the nursery managers and from field notes collected during the lead researcher's presence at a parents' evening meeting.

**Ethical considerations:**

Ethical approval was given for this research through the Human Research Ethics Committee of the authors' affiliated institution. The co-researcher and the managers gave written consent to confirm their participation in the research and consented to the dissemination of findings from the research.

**Main finding or discussion:**

The research foregrounds the valuable role that ECEC can contribute to promoting health of babies and young children. Health can be improved and promoted through implementation of many of the aims of the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021), such as the requirement to

provide healthy eating options, attend to children's oral health and the need to provide access to outdoor play. Key to successful health promotion work is the need for respectful and positive relationships with parents and carers.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

The findings helped to set the onward agenda for a larger scale study which will foreground the voices of practitioners and highlight the role that ECEC practitioners can play in promoting the health of children. The findings have been presented at the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood, as well as being included in reports.

**Keywords:** health, parents, wellbeing, babies, obesity

**Playtime with Books: Transforming Effective Early Educational Interventions for Virtual Delivery**

*Aiman Kamarudin, University of Cambridge*

**Research aims or questions:**

This study explores the acceptability and feasibility of delivering a virtual book sharing intervention to families through early years' services in the UK.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

Children's language development has been shown to be the strongest predictor of school readiness and later school success (Hoff, 2013). Evidence suggests that book sharing activities can foster high quality interactions between caregiver and child and support children's language development (Dowdall et al., 2020).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

Using Rapid-Cycle Design and Testing (see Green et al., 2021), this study adapted an effective face-to-face intervention for virtual delivery and evaluated the programme's acceptability and feasibility among families and early years' services. This methodology allowed for a dynamic adaptation process whereby changes were made to accommodate participants' needs without compromising the programme's theory-of-change.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

A mixed-method approach was used. Qualitative and quantitative interview and questionnaire data collected pre- and post-intervention. Rapid qualitative analysis (Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020) was conducted to draw themes from interview and questionnaire data. Descriptive statistics complemented the findings.

**Ethical considerations:**

Informed consent was obtained from participants (families and early years practitioners). All data were anonymised where possible and stored digitally in encrypted, password-protected folders. Participants could withdraw at any time without reason.

**Main finding or discussion:**

The findings demonstrate the potential of online programmes that can offer flexibility for families while leveraging technology to facilitate personal and individualised support from early years' services.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Findings will inform stakeholders at policy and practice levels on the potential of online interventions that support families and early years' services, and future research on adapting effective interventions for virtual delivery.

**Keywords:** book sharing, play-based intervention, online intervention, video-feedback intervention, early language development

**Stories in Playful Spaces**

*Dr Jo Traunter and Kerrie Lee, University of Hull*

**Research aims or questions:**

Our fundamental values and attitudes to very young children are the critical determining factors in the quality of their cultural lives. In the UK, theatre performances that are exclusively designed to encourage young children's active participation in the arts rarely exist, with the majority of performances still designed for adult audiences. This project sought to explore the collective creation of *The Last Dinosaur* theatre production, as developed through research and practice with the theatre company. In highlighting the emotional and cognitive contribution of immersive, play based theatre experiences for young children, this study seeks to legitimize immersive theatre productions for young children as a valued art form, and invites theatre-makers to apply the research and practice shared to inspire future theatre productions for young children.

**Relationship to previous studies by others and self:**

This presentation focuses on the design and the analysis of a project that sought to investigate immersive theatre performance for young children from marginalised communities in and around Hull.

**Theoretical and conceptual framework of research:**

The research team built a dialogue with the audience using a participatory approach that recognised the child's voice, perception, perspective and agency. The research sought to establish how children access and experience theatre and stories in playful spaces. The study utilised Barthes (1890) conceptual tools, the stadium and punctum, to identify the cultural and personal meanings behind the children's photographic and visual representations.

**Paradigm, methodology and methods:**

The research sought to explore young children's experiences in an immersive theatre production that was designed to engage children in an interactive and sensory theatre performance. This study adopted an interpretative design, aimed at building a dialogue with children using a participatory approach that recognised the child's voice, perspective and agency. The research utilised a combination of methods including photo elicitation, children's drawings, playful group interviews and observation.

**Ethical considerations:**

All participants were recruited via personal letters authored by the research team and distributed by the schools. Operating under the BERA (2018) and ECEERA ethical codes (Bertram et al. 2014), we obtained informed consent from all settings, practitioners, and parents, and children's provisional assent was constantly negotiated.

**Main finding or discussion:**

Multisensory experiences play an essential role in children's theatre performance because young children predominantly make meaning through directly sensing and interacting with their world.

**Implications, practice or policy:**

Young children are competent, capable citizens with equal rights to cultural activities.

**Keywords:** children's theatre, play, participatory research, child's voice, agency

# EECERA 2023- Call for Papers



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This year, the prestigious **EECERA Annual Conference** will be held between 30<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023, and is hosted in Lisbon, Portugal by the Association of Early Childhood Education Professionals (APEI), in partnership with CRIANCA Childhood Association and Estoril Convention Center.

The theme of the 31st Conference is “**Children’s Curiosity, Agency and Participation: Challenges for Professional Action and Development**”. The curiosity of children and indeed, adults, is perhaps more than the simple ‘compulsive motivation to understand the environment’ defined by psychologists as ‘exploratory drive’. Rather, we are suggesting curiosity has a wider meaning. It encourages unpredictability, challenges the boundaries of the status quo, asks odd questions, has hunches, is sometimes doubtful, enjoys serendipity and surprise, and requires an active rather than a passive mind, in which the individual’s agency and participation is centrally placed. Curiosity, then, allows an individual to explore unfamiliar circumstances, and through this exploration to experience discovery and joy – all important for wellbeing. Curiosity questions the safe and secure, the rigid and formulaic, the timid and the bored. It is central to science, exploration and adventure. And, often, we see it underpinning the artistic uniqueness of creativity. Yet, curiosity is an under researched theme that perhaps we should highlight more in EECERA research forums. Thus, EECERA is pleased to make it a key focus for the 2023 Lisbon Conference and relate it with the con-commitments of Children’s Agency and Participation. Indeed, arguably, the quality of children’s participation depends on the acknowledgement, respect and promotion of children’s curiosity. Whilst seeing the potential for irresponsibility in simply advocating curiosity, we hope that a wealth of research respecting the role of children’s and professional’s curiosity in early childhood education will be central to the traditional dialogic ethos of EECERA.

We warmly invite you to join us to participate and contribute to what is acknowledged as the European early childhood research community’s most important forum.

Call for papers is open until **28<sup>th</sup> February 2023**.

For further information regarding the conference please visit <https://2023.eeceraconference.org/> or email [enquiries@eeceraconference.org](mailto:enquiries@eeceraconference.org) .