

Norland Annual Research Conference

27 June 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to our annual research conference 2023!

Welcome to our Norland Research Conference 2023, designed to support reflection, discussion, purpose and enjoyment. This year, we are examining the concept of the 'competent child,' which is often referred to in practice and policy, and, as such, is worthy of shared re-consideration for us at Norland. Through today's conference presentations, we are contesting the idea of the competent child as an individual construct, believing children to be connected and to have voice and rights. We start with our keynote speaker, Dr Elizabeth Wood, who will share her research and examine 'Competent children: understanding agency, interests and funds of knowledge.' Dr Wood's keynote will then be followed by Norland research presentations and we are particularly delighted that four students from Set 44 are sharing their dissertations with us. Finally, we will celebrate research at Norland, with a focus on the Norland Educare Research Centre and the inaugural issue of the Norland Educare Research Journal, from which we can continue to plan exciting and cutting-edge research into home-based childcare provision.

We are excited and looking forward to the day.

Viki Bennett Kane

Dr Alex Morfaki

Dr Theodora Papatheodorou

Keynote Address

Competent children: understanding agency, interests and funds of knowledge

Dr Elizabeth Wood

Professor of Education, University of Sheffield

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Abstract

Many policy frameworks and approaches support the concept of competent children. Competence is also understood in relation to children's rights, and having a voice in matters that affect their lives. However, competence may also be seen as an individual trait. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, competent children are understood as being able to make choices, but primarily to self-regulate their behavior so that they become 'successful learners'.

In this presentation, I propose a complex understanding of competence in relationship with children's agency, interests and funds of knowledge. I will draw on contemporary theories and practice-focused research to understand children's agency as social, relational, cultural, affective and embodied, and shared across people, places and things. Children's competence is expressed in multimodal ways, drawing on their interests in everyday cultural practices, and the funds of knowledge they build in their home, community and preschool experiences.

I will use examples from research to provide insights into children's cultural competence, their communicative competence and their play competence. I will consider the implications for pedagogy and curriculum, and for creating positive developmental environments.

In order to prepare for this interactive session, please spend some time thinking about the following questions:

- **How do you understand competence, and how this manifests in children's activities, including play, and child- and adult-initiated activities?**
- **How do you understand children's agency? What theories do you draw on in your work with students? And how do you support students to notice and respond to children's agency in their planning, provision and pedagogy?**
- **The EYFS statutory framework draws on the OFSTED definition of curriculum as intent, implementation and impact.**
- **How do you work with students to enable them to co-construct a curriculum with children, based upon respect for children as being competent, agentic and knowledgeable?**

Biographical note

Dr Elizabeth Wood is Professor of Education at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on early childhood and primary education, with specific interests in play and pedagogy; curriculum and assessment in ECE; teachers' professionalism and professional knowledge; policy analysis and critique.

Elizabeth has researched the ways in which children are blending digital and traditional play, and the implications for curriculum and pedagogy. She was the Co-Investigator on a project funded by the Froebel Trust on understanding the relationships between children's interests, play and pedagogy in a multi-diverse early childhood setting.

Currently she is working with colleagues in Australian Catholic University on a project funded by the Australian Research Council into learning-rich leadership for early childhood leaders, and the challenges of workforce reform in early childhood education.

Practitioner reflections on their role in supporting young children's play

Viki Bennett Kane

Abstract

This discussion will share the process and findings of a small-scale interpretive case study carried out for a Master's award. The research took place in an early years setting, in which practitioner views of their role in children's play was explored. The promotion of play in England as in which very young children learn, is evident to an extent in national statutory policy. However, this policy and guidance also indicates that learning for young children is a linear process, often adult-led, and involving elements of a delivered curriculum. This context has resulted in unresolved ongoing contested discourses of the nature and value of play ECEC in England. Furthermore, there is a range of understandings of play within the early years workforce which are largely based on child development and socio-construction theories. These elements combined can result in value and practice conflicts for early years practitioners when they attempt to reconcile child-centred play approaches with current policy. Exploring the role of the adult is therefore a key aspect in this context. Focus groups and semi structured interviews with practitioners were carried out in an early years setting and the resulting data was analysed in terms of three themes concerning play: practitioners' understanding of play; practitioners' views of their role; practitioners' engagement with reflection. The findings show that practitioners in this setting were highly interested in children's play and that they viewed their role in this play as being largely that of observer or resource provider and, to a lesser extent, that of participant. Notions of co-construction were evident with findings also suggesting that the setting was engaging as a community of practice. The study promoted reflection as a context for enabling practitioners to deepen their understanding of play and found that the context of a community of practice will support this process and led to the researcher highlighting reflection specifically on play within an HE ECEC undergraduate degree.

Biographical note

Viki Bennett Kane has extensive experience in early years practice and in Higher Education, having started her career as a Reception teacher where she first developed her fascination in supporting children to learn through play. From there, she was an early years consultant for local authorities networking and sharing practice with teachers and early years practitioners. She now has over 15 years of experience in higher education, in the roles of Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader in early years on work-based undergraduate degrees. She has a Master's in Early Childhood Studies and her academic roles prompted her to research the range of impacts of higher academic engagement for teaching assistants and early years practitioners. Viki has recently carried out collaborative research with a charity to examine the value of group-based art as therapy practice for children and young people for improving their mental health and participation in school.

**Early Years Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Drama Lessons on Children's
Self-Regulation**
Vince McCleod

Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis had a significant impact on young children's mental wellbeing. Sustained periods away from school deprived them of the fundamental social experiences that facilitate relationship building, communication, self-control and resilience. Consequently, many children entering Reception in the 2021-22 cohort needed more co-regulation, where adult support is given, to assist them with acquiring these personal and social skills.

This study provided an adult-led drama group as an intervention and then explored whether teachers perceived it to have an effect on the self-regulation ability of their students. One of the children appeared to have a noticeable improvement in their self-regulation ability over the duration of the study.

The results of the study indicated that the participating children each had different self-regulation needs and, therefore, the required support strategy was also different. For that reason, it is proposed that self-regulation can be represented on a spectrum and that teachers should assess their children, establish each child's unique self-regulation profile and then respond appropriately with a relevant method of support. Findings also implied that children's self-regulation deficiencies were unlikely to be remedied quickly and that they required sustained, long-term periods of co-regulation as they transitioned from Reception into Year 1.

The researcher will present a new model for identifying appropriate co-regulation support based on children's individual constellations of characteristics.

Biographical note

Vince McCleod

I am a qualified early years teacher with experience of teaching children in the Reception and Year 1 age groups. I trained at Roehampton University's Froebel College where I learned the value of children engaging in holistic, play-based learning, being connected with nature, acquiring problem-solving skills and building trusting relationships. Within education, I am particularly interested in Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and Communication and Language. For my Master's degree I conducted a research project around supporting children's self-regulation through drama. My current research interests include toddlers' nonverbal communication, teachers' use of AI based toys in the early years and whole-school play-based pedagogies. Before teaching in schools, I had a career in recruitment advertising, worked for a family as a childminder, managed children's activity centres and taught canoeing in England and France.

Neuroscience of Play

Dr Janet Rose

Abstract

This presentation reports on a scoping review of the current literature around neuroscience and play to ascertain what already exists, what might be helpful to inform practice and what next steps may be needed in terms of future research. The emerging field of neuroeducation offers new perspectives on what learning opportunities are facilitated by a play-based environment. The literature on executive functioning/self-regulation identifies how play promotes brain development. This review attempts to synthesise the literature to ascertain key messages building on. Interpersonal neurobiology, the work of Panksepp and Porges' polyvagal theory are used to frame the context for the role of play in supporting neurophysiological executive functioning/self-regulation with links made to Vygotskian concepts of self-regulation. An interpretive systematic scoping literature review was conducted and a thematic conducted, undertaken to analyse the findings. The limitations of neuroimaging studies are acknowledged. A rigorous sampling and search strategy was employed to guard against publication and search bias, including contextual position of studies. Key findings include how the learning environment and different types of play, particularly 'rough and tumble play', promote brain development, as well the critical role of adults in play interactions. A deeper understanding of how play supports brain development can help ensure adults create an optimal learning environment such as creating activities which promote executive functioning. The research offers a rationale for countering current policy pressures for more formal learning environments. Suggestions for further research are made.

Biographical note

Dr Janet Rose BA (Hons), MA, PhD, PGCE, FHEA is Principal of Norland, and has had a distinguished career in higher education and early years education, training and provision both nationally and internationally. Before joining Norland, she was a Reader in Education and an Associate Professor. She has an established track record of senior leadership in higher education, leading large degree programmes in early years education and early childhood, as well as MA and doctoral degrees, alongside early years teacher training. She is the recipient of two 'Outstanding Teaching' student awards and has a national profile as an early years expert.

Janet is frequently invited to be a keynote speaker at national conferences, including the National Day Nurseries Association Conference and the International Nanny Organisation, and has presented research at both the House of Lords and House of Commons. Janet is the author of numerous academic publications, including three key texts that she co-authored – *The Role of the Adult in Early Years Settings*, *Health and Well-being in Early Childhood* and *Emotion Coaching with Children and Young People*.

Janet is also a Board Member of Independent HE, on the Education Committee of the Royal Academy of Dance, a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a Trustee of First Steps Bath and a co-founder of Emotion Coaching UK. In addition, Janet currently has a Fellowship with the Early Relational Health programme at the University of Massachusetts in America.

Student presentations

Reflections on the visit to Pistoia

By

Rose Drury and Georgina Bassil

with

Tippy Pullin, Megan Jones, Paige Swaisland, Rhianna Lindsay (Norland visiting students)

Pedagogy in Practice

Dr Rose Drury

Pedagogy in Pistoia

Abstract

We will present findings from a Study Visit to Pistoia, Tuscany in April 2023. During the visits to the early education services, students were immersed in the Pistoian approach which is underpinned by the belief that children learn as citizens. There is a strong emphasis on space and beauty in the learning environments and the public administration in the city promotes the full participation of families and community in the early education services. In this presentation we will highlight the key themes arising from reflection on the Study Visit and possible outcomes.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Pistoia, community, citizen, social learning

Biographical note

Dr Rose Drury

I am an Early Years consultant and an Honorary Associate at The Open University. I have extensive experience as a teacher, academic and consultant in the field of Early Years Education. My main fields of interest are *Supporting Bilingualism in the Early Years* and *Early Education in Pistoia*. Over the past 12 years I have collaborated with the Early Education services in Pistoia, creating a documentary film of *Pedagogy in Pistoia* for The Open University and undertaking a research project on documentation in Pistoia pre-schools.

<http://www.rose-drury.co.uk/>

Georgina Bassil

I am an Early Years lecturer at Norland College. Prior to this I have worked for many years in the Early Years Sector, most recently running a charity run children centre – working alongside children and families to enhance communities and change lives. This enabled me to support a variety of families and children to help them have the best possible start in life. Earlier this year I very lucky to be invited to join Dr Rose Drury and four of our students, to explore the Pedagogy in Pistoia. This experience gave us an immersive experience into Rose's research which we all walked away from buzzing with reflections and questions.

Tippy Pullin

Having now completed my degree at Norland I eagerly anticipate the year ahead as a newly qualified nanny, through the past three years I have developed a key interest in early childhood research and projects particularly upon the differences many cultures hold towards understanding the early years, and this is something in which I aim to further explore and pursue in the future. Travelling to Pistoia

was a contributing factor towards this interest and provided me with an enriching experience that surpassed my expectations. Witnessing Pistoia's philosophy to the early year's education broadened both my personal and professional outlook. This opportunity reflected to me that children are capable of becoming competent learners and flourish when supported and empowered by teachers, parents, the community, and their surroundings and this is a message that I seek to express and demonstrate within my own practice going forward.

Megan Jones

I'm Megan, in my 3rd year of training at Norland college. I have a real interest in learning about different pedagogy and curriculums and bringing them into my practice as a nanny. This is why I chose to go on the Pistoia study trip, to further enhance my knowledge and bring some of the elements of their practice into my own ethos. I have recently completed my dissertation on forest schools and creating an outdoor play environment in the family garden. This allowed me to explore the Scandinavian philosophy which I have embedded into my practice through outdoor play and fostering a love for nature in the children I am lucky enough to nanny for. I am soon beginning my new venture of NQN year where I will be working with a family for a year before fully qualifying and graduating from Norland.

How does Bronfenbrenner's ecological system effect twins' abilities to be an individual?

Joe Baker

Supervised by: Mandy Edmond

Abstract

Background: This study aims to explore the processes that underpin the development of individuality in twins in their early years. The University of Oxford's Centre for Demographic Science states that twinning worldwide has increased by a third over recent decades with even more substantial increases in Europe and North America. This research then seeks to enhance our understanding of twins' individuality to support the increasing numbers of parents and early years professionals engaging with twins and their families. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided a framework to better understand this process and particularly his more mature version of this model based on the impact of People, Contexts and Time on the development of individuality (2006).

Methods: This study uses a deductive analysis based on mixed methodological research to examine to what extent Bronfenbrenner Bio-ecological PPCT model enhances our understanding of the development of individuality in twins.

Conclusion: The Bio-ecological model could provide a foundation on which to develop best practice in supporting the increasing number of parents of twins to promote their children's development as individuals. This might include training, recommendations, and strategies to support Early Years Practitioners in a range of contexts who work with twins and their families to better understand the processes that underpin individuality in micro and mesosystems.

Biographical note

Joe Baker

I would like to briefly introduce myself. I am Joe Baker, and I am currently training at the prestigious Norland College to become a Norland Nanny. I originate from a loving, large extended family and grew up in a leafy suburb of London. My parents are both teachers and I believe their enthusiasm for their students ignited in me a passion to become an early years' practitioner as I quickly appreciated that this is such a vital age of development. I am also a keen sportsman and have represented my school in a whole host of sports including table tennis, football, basketball, athletics and netball. I have also been privileged to captain a number of these teams and in my sixth form was awarded Sports' Personality of the year. I have also greatly enjoyed the responsibility of becoming a Guide Dog trainee boarder and with my parents we have successfully helped to train three Guide dogs in the last year alone.

Do children see their siblings in different ways to friends? An investigation between sibling and friend relationships in childhood.

Verity Langdale

Supervised by: Mandy Edmond

Abstract

This paper investigates the similarities and differences between sibling and friend relationships in early childhood from the perspectives of parents and children. Investigating children's key relationships holds importance as it affects aspects of development and learning in the early years. Due to the majority of children being siblings, this project provides further insight into a relevant topic of research, comparing and contrasting the findings using a mixed methods approach. The methodology for this investigation consisted of a semi-structured interview and an online questionnaire, to which both were thematically grouped and analysed throughout the paper. The themes reflected the findings from the literature review, dividing the data amongst four main areas: comparability, play activities, age, and conflict. The data summarised that there are several aspects to which friend and sibling relationships are very similar, such as a fondness for one another and their impact social development. However, it is also clear that there are differences between these two relationships, which are foreseen through certain actions and behaviour including physical conflict and protective characteristics. This investigation acknowledged through the literature review, that there was lacking information when it came to the direct comparison of siblings and friends, as well as an absence of the child's perspective. This paper therefore explores sibling and friend relationships with a child's contribution, to listen to their voice and address the research gap.

Biographical note

Verity Langdale

My name is Verity Langdale, and I am a third year Norland student. I have lived with the same three girls since the beginning of my journey, and we have really enjoyed spending time together and sharing our interests such as watching films, craft projects and sewing – which have nicely translated over to our projects at Norland – (we also love a boogie on the weekend). I have really enjoyed living

and working in Bath, being able to get to know so many families and children has enabled me to develop my practice and grow as a childcare practitioner, as well as making so many friends in all of the little people I have looked after. I noticed that I have always cared for children who have siblings, and watching them play and interact has always been of interest to me, especially when I can draw similarities between their bond and my own with my brother. Being able to carry out a research project of my choice was a bit scary at first, but I have learnt so much throughout the process and look forward to expanding upon my childcare experience.

An analysis and discussion of the findings of the investigation into an Exploration of the use of Dual Language Books to Support Young Children’s Bilingualism in the Home Environment.

Georgia Myers

Supervised by: Dr. Theodora Papatheodorou

Abstract

This study explored the use of dual language books (DLBs) to support young children’s bilingualism in the home environment. It was conducted whilst the researcher was on a month-long placement with a family, with participants consisting of a bilingual six-year-old child and her parents. The qualitative methodology followed throughout this study was the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001). The data collection methods consisted of narrative observations, child conferencing, drawing as a participatory technique and semi-structured interviews (Clark and Moss, 2011). The data was analysed using both an inductive and deductive approach. Throughout this study the researcher sought to investigate how a nanny can use DLBs to support a young child’s bilingualism, exploring how to select these books, introduce them to young children and to support their engagement with DLBs. The findings highlighted that the nanny must consider issues with DLBs such as the privileging of one language (as demonstrated by the DLBs used in the project) and the child’s interests when selecting DLBs. They should also investigate the parents’ previous use of DLBs in the home environment. The study showed how using drawing as a participatory approach and story props such as puppets can support the introduction of DLBs to children. Findings also showed how a child can engage with DLBs to support them in developing their language skills, the development of conversation and vocabulary learning in their second language.

Key words: Dual language books, bilingualism, reading, German/English, Mosaic Approach.

Biographical note

Georgia Myers

I decided to relate my dissertation to bilingualism as I have always had a passion for languages, studying both French and German at A level. German is part of my culture, with my Grandfather having been born in Germany and I continue to take weekly German classes to maintain this interest of mine. I have worked with bilingual families before and found it interesting how dual languages were used in the home environment and when researching this, came across how books are useful resources to support this. I delved deeper into this, and there I discovered about dual language books. With little research out there on this topic, I decided I wanted to investigate this further. I have thoroughly enjoyed researching this topic and am so pleased with the overall outcome. Norland have been amazing at supporting me through this and I cannot thank my supervisor Theodora Papatheodorou enough, for her support over the course of this academic year.

A Case study that examines the sense of belonging of third culture children to their parents' maternal language, customs, and traditions.

Francesca Kate Williams

Supervised by: Dr. Alex Morfaki

Abstract

The purpose of this work-based project is to discover the impact of transitioning on third culture children. Ruth Hill Useem, an American sociologist introduced the concept of Third Culture children during the 1950's. The term is used to describe children who spent part of their developmental years living abroad due to their parents' work. Such children develop unique diverse identities as they are exposed to different cultures. Many children are bilingual having grown up listening to two or more languages.

Throughout this qualitative study, the researcher investigates how a participant experiences transitions and how it affects them emotionally, consequently bringing forth recommendations on how early years practitioners can help third culture children, transition from one place to another within their practice.

Biographical note

Francesca Kate Williams

Growing up I lived in three different countries because my parents' jobs took us overseas. At six months I was whisked away from a nursery in Reading, to Sydney Australia where I attended an amazing kindergarten. At three I left Australia and moved to Northern Spain, where I went to local schools studying in Spanish, overnight my world had been literally turned upside down.

For sixth form I returned to the UK, this transition was difficult. I struggled to understand my own culture, although I had English parents and spoke the language fluently, the harsh reality was that I did not feel British. My own personal journey has been the seed for my dissertation subject, I wanted to investigate how EYP's can support children through this specific type of transition. Nowadays I love to travel and hope after graduating to work for families who are on the move around the world.