

## Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume 12 No. 1 April 2023

pp. 87-89

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

### Conference Report

#### Cultures of Play: Actors, Affordances and Arenas

#### EECERA 2022 Conference

School of Education, University of Strathclyde

Glasgow, Scotland

23–26 August 2022

*Mariëtte Koen*

[Mariette.Koen@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Mariette.Koen@nwu.ac.za)

The European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) is an international, independent, and self-governing association, and its annual conference is the largest research conference in Europe. The association continues the tradition of European early childhood thought, sustaining the legacy of well-known researchers while also encouraging the exploration of new methodologies, concepts, and applications. The principles of EECERA focus on providing a relevant and rigorous academic forum in Europe; facilitating collaboration and cooperation between European researchers and other researchers around the world; encouraging clear articulation and communication links between research, practice, and policy; and offering interaction, development, and support to those interested in early childhood education. EECERA further aims to raise the visibility and status of European research on early childhood education throughout the world.

University of Strathclyde's School of Education hosted the in-person, 30th EECERA 2022 conference. A total of 180 abstracts were accepted for presentation, and more than 900 researchers from all over the world engaged in the proceedings from 23 to 26 August 2022 in Glasgow, Scotland (EECERA, 2022).

#### Conference Theme

The theme, *Cultures of Play: Actors, Affordances and Arenas*, provided practitioners and researchers with opportunities to learn from modern-day pioneers in the field of play while also extending and developing understandings of play in its broadest sense.

The conference aimed to answer the following questions:

- In what ways do cultures shape play in early childhood across time and space?
- How is play sculpted by its actors, affordances, and arenas?
- In light of the recent global pandemic and other disruptions to daily life, how does play feature in research, teaching, and experience?

With the theme focusing on play, the conference successfully foregrounded play as an opportunity for dialogue to continue understanding the why and how of play in early childhood education and to explore research on approaches to play. These ideas are in line with current views that recognise play as a right that children have, and the key role it occupies in young children's holistic development (United Nations, 1989).

## Overview

In her welcoming address, Chris Pascal (president of EECERA) expressed her feelings of happiness that the conference could again be held in person after the Covid-19 pandemic. She also empathised with Ukraine and acknowledged support during this difficult time. She highlighted that, despite the war, delegates were grateful for the Russian EECERA colleagues who were part of the conference. Conference Chair, Lorna Arnott, emphasised that the vision of early childhood education is underpinned by themes emphasising that children are at the heart of decision-making, and that responsive play and inquiry pedagogies drive learning in a child-centred way.

The first keynote speaker, Karin Murriss (University of Oulu) explored the use of visual digital technologies as research instruments in early childhood. In her presentation, "Reconfiguring Child Agency in Digital Play," she cautioned that visual technologies are never innocent. Murriss addressed the question of how we theorise the metaphorical and literal lenses of our eyes and cameras, which informs our observation practices and shapes what we mean by child agency. In the second keynote address, Lynn McNair (University of Edinburgh), Deidre Grogan (University of Strathclyde), Lynn Taylor and Marion Burns (Education Scotland) journeyed through Scotland's current play context. They illustrated the Scottish connected cyclical approach of practice-to-policy-to-practice in their presentation, "Connected Cultures: Identifying and Celebrating Scotland's Actors, Affordances and Arenas of Play Through Stories of Practice." Alison Clark (University of South-Eastern Norway/University College London), in the third keynote presentation titled, "Time for Play? Claiming Back Time in Early Childhood Education and Care," explained how time had been brought into sharp relief during the Covid-19 pandemic. Keynote IV, "Inspire to More Play? Teachers' Participation in Dramatic Play," was by Anne Greve (Oslo Metropolitan University) who presented results from an ongoing study about teachers' participation in dramatic play in kindergartens and schools.

In addition to these thought-provoking keynote addresses, researchers and practitioners engaged in special interest group presentations in the following areas: birth to three, children from refugee or migrant backgrounds, digital childhoods, multimodality and STEM, disability studies and inclusive education in the early years, gender balance, holistic wellbeing, mathematics birth to 8 years, multilingual childhoods, outdoor play and learning, participatory pedagogy and praxeological research, professionalism in early childhood education and care, rethinking play, sustainability in early childhood education, transforming assessment evaluation and documentation in early childhood pedagogy, transitions, working with parents and families, and young children's perspectives.

Researchers also had the opportunity to visit nurseries to experience how practitioners provide mindful play experiences that move toward investigation, conversation, and encouragement of children's autonomy. Tickets were available to visit the following nurseries: Cumbernauld Village Family Centre, Ballmalloch Nursery Class, Lairdsland Early Years Centre, Falkirk Local Authority, Clendevon Early Learning Centre, Maddiston Primary School, and Wallacestone Primary School and Early Learning and Childcare Centre.

Delegates agreed that they had had a wonderful and productive conference, enjoyed all that Glasgow had to offer, and were looking forward to the association's next annual conference at Estoril Congress

Center, Portugal with the theme, *Children's Curiosity, Agency and Participation: Challenges for Professional Action and Development* (EECERA, 2023).

## References

- European Early Childhood Education Research Association. (2022). *Conference proceedings: Book of abstracts*. <https://2022.eeceraconference.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/08/Abstract-book-EECERA-2022-V190822.docx>
- European Early Childhood Education Research Association. (2023). *EECERA 31st conference: Themes and strands*. <https://2023.eeceraconference.org/theme-and-strands/>
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of children*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>