

**EC@OU**



# **EARLY CHILDHOOD AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Creating a space for critical  
reflection about values, beliefs  
and realities in early childhood**





# ABOUT US

Early Childhood at The Open University (EC@OU) engages in critical, practical and theoretical research and teaching to extend knowledge and understanding about early childhood education and care. We are concerned to explore and promote high quality ECEC for all children and those supporting children in different capacities.

We aim to challenge and disrupt everyday narratives and assumptions around children's capabilities, children's experiences, practitioners and the provision of services. Our research creates a space for critical reflection about values, beliefs and practical realities in early childhood including social justice, advocacy, the nature of high-quality experiences and children's rights. It aims to challenge practice and policy through listening to different perspectives using a range of methods. We seek to make meaningful connections between communities of practice and knowledge exchange to support high quality experiences and services.

# OUR RESEARCH

What?	Why?	How?
<p>We have expertise in both national and international projects working with a range of organisations to research into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Young children’s perspectives, experiences and relationships.</li> <li>– Young children’s learning processes.</li> <li>– Early childhood workforce and professional development.</li> <li>– Pedagogic interface: Children’s wellbeing and health.</li> </ul>	<p>We research to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Advocate social justice for children, their families and the early childhood sector.</li> <li>– Provide an evidence base to challenge and inform policy and curriculum reform.</li> <li>– Improve the quality of experiences, pedagogy, services and outcomes for young children.</li> </ul>	<p>We are guided in our research by socio-cultural-historical theories of human development and approaches to studying human activity. We have expertise in a range of methods including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A full range of qualitative methods.</li> <li>– Mixed methods including online surveys; analysis of mass open-access data; case studies.</li> <li>– Participatory methods including research with children.</li> <li>– Systematic reviews.</li> </ul>

## Recent and current research projects

### Young children’s perspectives, experiences and relationships

- Young children’s curiosity and imagination: Facilitating and documenting through technology.
- Children’s voice in clinical trials research.
- The experiences of young children with learning disabilities attending preschools.
- Young children’s social interactions in inclusive Early Childhood settings.
- Documentary Photography in Early Childhood: Slowing down.
- Literacy experiences: An exploration of young children’s intentions, identities, and affective relations with text.
- Children’s empowerment in play.
- Re-connect/re-collect: Crossing the boundaries through memories of cold war childhoods.
- Power relationships in play.

### Young children’s learning processes

- The Empowerment Framework - a tool to assess the impact of empowerment in children’s learning and development.
- Using a listening approach to support children’s transition to Early Childhood settings.
- ‘A life ‘in and with nature?’ An exploration of outdoor provision in baby rooms.’ Froebel Trust Research Grant including systematic literature review; survey; and case studies.
- Exploring young migrant children’s ‘funds of knowledge’ through documentary photography.
- Surfacing complexity in shared book reading: the role of affordance, repetition and modal appropriation in children’s participation.
- Q-methodological study examining the features of multi-age practice.
- Chickenshed Theatre Company project, evaluating the impact of drama-based workshops to support young children’s language, literacy and numeracy.
- TESSA – Teaching Early Reading in Africa Evaluation Study.
- International outdoor play.
- Children’s rights project: In what ways are children’s rights explored and expressed in Hungarian kindergartens?

## Early childhood workforce and professional development

- Workforce composition, qualifications and professional development in early childhood education and care in English ECEC Montessori settings.
- Australian early childhood teachers' preparation for and participation in interprofessional practice in early years settings.
- Interprofessional practice as trajectories of participation in early years settings.
- Early Years Professional Status: researching reluctance for professionalisation.
- The impact of practitioners using 'In-the-Picture' (a listening to children approach).
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Interprofessional Learning in the Public Sector.
- A gendered contribution to play? Perceptions of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practitioners in England on how their gender influences their approaches to play.
- Higher Education Pedagogy, with particular interest in academic writing/academic literacy.
- Factors influencing parents choosing Early Childhood provision for their children.
- PAPIP- parent partnership project (UK, HU, Kazakshtan).
- Systematic literature review of international research evidence on the impact of staff qualification levels in ECEC on the experiences of and outcomes for children and families (TACTYC).

## Pedagogic interface; Children's wellbeing and health

- Children and young people living through serious family illness.
- Health promotion in ECEC settings.
- How do practitioners create inclusive environments for children with chronic health conditions?
- How do practitioners support children's health and wellbeing?
- Educating for integrated care: Rapid realist evidence synthesis of interprofessional interventions with potential to support integrated care.

## Research supervision (PhD and EdD)

We enjoy the reflective conversations that arise from our work with graduate students.

### A sample of completed doctorates

*Literacy experiences: an exploration of young children's intentions, identities, and affective relations with text*, Dr Lucy Rodriguez Leon, 2020 (Supervised by Professor Jane Payler, Professor Teresa Cremin and Dr Natalie Canning).

*Children as experts in infant school transitions*, Megan Taddeo, University of Winchester (Supervised by Professor Jane Payler).

*Observing and understanding decision-making in two-year-olds*, Penny Lawrence, University of Winchester (Supervised by Professor Jane Payler).



# CONSULTANCY

We will work with you to design bespoke projects to meet your research or advisory needs. Past projects include:

*Brilliant babies, terrific toddlers:*

Professional development conference for Dorset County Council (Professor Jane Payler).

*Enhancing Practice Birth to Three:*

Professional development programme for Dorset County Council (Professor Jane Payler).

*EY Smart:*

Online training platform for PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (John Parry).

*Enriching Mathematics project* at Cambridge University which promotes developing mathematical skills through play (Dr Natalie Canning).

*Play policies and promoting play to parents in Early Childhood settings across the West Midlands.* Play in the EYFS – Cheltenham Children's Centres (Dr Natalie Canning).

Evaluation of the HAF/Welsh Active Early Years programme (Dr Jane Dorrian).



# MEET THE TEAM

Early Childhood at the Open University is led by an interdisciplinary team of academics with a wide range of expertise. We have worked in a range of occupations related to the education, health and care of young children.

The team includes 'central academics', meaning that we are based at The Open University campus at Walton Hall in Milton Keynes. In addition, our team includes staff tutors and over 100 Associate Lecturers (ALs), who are the main contacts for our students.

Our ALs work with students in the four nations of the UK. Another important part of our team includes our curriculum managers and administrators, who work alongside central academics in Milton Keynes.





### **Dr Joanne Josephidou, Programme Lead, Early Childhood**

I joined The Open University in September 2019 but before this, I was a primary school teacher for many years before entering Higher Education, as a teaching fellow, in 2009. I taught on Initial Teacher Education programmes at the University of Cumbria before joining the Early Childhood Studies team at Canterbury Christ Church in September 2014. I have taught on a variety of modules and have a particular interest in supporting students in developing early research skills. My PhD focused on appropriate pedagogies with young children and how practitioner gender may impact on these. Currently, I am working collaboratively on a piece of research which focuses on babies' and toddlers' opportunities to engage with the outdoor environment and nature.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/jj6569>

Contact: [Joanne.josephidou@open.ac.uk](mailto:Joanne.josephidou@open.ac.uk)

#### **Key publications**

Josephidou and Kemp (2022) 'A life 'in and with nature?' Developing nature engaging and nature enhancing pedagogies for babies and toddlers', *Global Education Review*.

Josephidou, J. and Bolshaw, P. (2020) *Understanding Gender and Early Childhood: An introduction to the key debates*. London: Routledge.

Josephidou, J., Rodriguez-Leon, L., Bennett, S., Bolshaw, P., Musgrave, J. and Rix, J. (2021) 'Where measurement stops: A review of systematic reviews exploring ECEC workforce qualifications and training, the quality of provision and outcomes for children and families. TACTYC.



### **Professor Jane Payler, Professor of Education (Early Years)**

My research and publications, recognised internationally, focus on sociocultural perspectives on young children's interactive learning processes, inter-professional practice, professional development of the early childhood workforce, and children's positioning in research. I have researched, taught, examined, published and practised in early years education and care for over twenty-five years in three universities and two colleges. I am a former Chair of TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years and former Co-Director of the Children's Research Centre at the OU. I have advised governments in the development of standards for graduate leaders in the early years, EYPS and EYT, contributed to numerous government consultations and developed a wide range of curricula for early childhood from vocational courses through to university doctoral level study.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/jkp2>

Contact: [Jane.payler@open.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.payler@open.ac.uk)

#### **Key publications**

Moyles, J., Payler, J. and Georgeson, J. (eds) (2017) *Beginning Teaching, Beginning Learning 5e*. Maidenhead: OU Press.

Payler, J., Cooper, V. and Bennett, S. (2019) Children and young people living through a serious family illness: structural, interpersonal and personal perspectives. *Children & Society*. DOI: 10.1111/chso.12348

Payler, J. (2015) 'Children & Young People Now 'Year Ahead' early years report', invited report, Children & Young People Now, 6th Jan 2015.



### **Dr Jackie Musgrave, Associate Head of School**

My doctoral and post-doctoral research brings together my interest in early childhood education and child health. I have taught Early Childhood students in Further and Higher Education institutions since 1996. I am Vice-Chair of the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network with a responsibility for Research and Knowledge Exchange. I am committed to helping ECS students to develop their voice as researchers. I have been part of the Early Childhood at the OU since October 2017 and I feel privileged to be part of the excellent, knowledgeable and supportive team. My current research (with Professor Jane Payler) explores how practitioners in early childhood education and care settings promote the health of babies and children. This has culminated in a Toolkit for practitioners and includes the 5 Steps Approach to Health Promotion in ECEC settings. This is available free of charge, please email me with your request.

Further information and a full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/jm39645#tab2>

Contact: [Jackie.musgrave@open.ac.uk](mailto:Jackie.musgrave@open.ac.uk)

#### **Key publications**

Musgrave, J. and Payler, J. (2023) Early Childhood Health Promotion: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Education and Care Practitioners. A resource to support your practice in improving the health of children in pre-schools settings. Available free of charge on request.

Musgrave J (2022) Health and Wellbeing for babies and children: contemporary issues. London: Routledge

Musgrave, J. and Payler, J. (2021) Proposing a model for promoting Children's Health in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings. Children and Society <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/chso.12449>



### **John Parry, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood**

I am a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood and have worked at The Open University since 2010. I have written material for a range of modules for students studying at the OU for both the Early Childhood and Primary qualifications. Before moving into Higher Education, I was a practitioner and teacher who had worked with young children and their families for over 25 years, for much of this time within Portage. The focus of my publications and research has been the inclusion of young children in their local pre-school settings and the early friendships between disabled children and their peers. My most recent work has been with Professor Jonathon Rix developing 'In the Picture', an approach to observing young children at play and engaging with their experiences.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/jsp266>

Contact: [John.parry@open.ac.uk](mailto:John.parry@open.ac.uk)

#### **Key publications**

Rix, J., Parry, J. and Malibha-Pinchbeck, M. (2020) 'Building a better picture: practitioners' views of using a listening approach with young disabled children' Journal of Early Childhood Research, 18(1), pp. 1-15.

Parry, J. (2015) Exploring the social connections in pre-school settings between children labelled with special educational needs and their peers. International Journal of Early Years Education, 23(4), pp. 352-364.

Parry, J. (2014) Making connections and making friends: social interactions between two children labelled with special educational needs and their peers in a nursery setting, Early Years: International Research Journal, 34(3), pp. 301-314.





**Dr Natalie Canning, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood, Co-director Children's Research Centre, Post Graduate Research Convenor for Childhood, Youth and Sport**

My research is centred on children's play, especially how children are empowered in play. I come from a playwork and social work background, supporting children to explore personal, social and emotional development through play. I have published within the field of professional development, children's play, empowerment and creative spaces and have taught across various EC undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. I am co-convenor of the European EC and Education Special Interest Group in Outdoor Play and on the committee for TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in EY.

Further information and a full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/nc4338>

Contact: [Natalie.canning@open.ac.uk](mailto:Natalie.canning@open.ac.uk)

**Key publications**

Canning, N, Teszenyi, E and Palfi, S. (2022) Are you listening to me? Understanding children's rights through Hungarian Pedagogic Practice. *Journal of Childhood, Education and Society*. 3(3) pp218-232  
<https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638X.202233193>

Canning N. (2022) 'Implementing an Empowerment Framework: The Significance for Children's Play Environments and Reflective Practice'. *Education Sciences*. 12(8):556.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12080556>

Canning, N. and Rekers, A. (2022) 'Play, Learning and Development' in Waters-Davies, J. (Ed.) *Introduction to Play*. London: Sage



**Dr Karen Horsley, Lecturer in Early Childhood**

I joined The Open University in 2015 as a Lecturer in Early Childhood. I contributed to the production of the new Early Childhood degree and I am the current Chair of E109. Prior to this I was a Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies (University of East London). I have worked in research and practice in a variety of early years settings. I have written for early childhood publications and presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA). I completed a professional doctorate with young children from migrant backgrounds exploring their 'funds of knowledge' through participatory documentary photography.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/kh9855#tab1>

Contact: [Karen.horsley@open.ac.uk](mailto:Karen.horsley@open.ac.uk)

**Key publications**

Horsley, K. (2021). Slowing Down: Documentary Photography in Early Childhood. *International Journal of Early Years Education* (In press).

Canning, N., Horsley, K., Payler, J. (2019) 'Researching children's curiosity and imagination through our story tablet app', *BERA Research Intelligence* – How inclusive of children are our educational research methods? Summer 2019, pp. 22-23.

*Exploring Young Migrant Children's 'Funds of Knowledge' Through Documentary Photography*. EdD thesis, The Open University.  
<http://oro.open.ac.uk/82573/>



### Dr Lucy Rodriguez-Leon, Lecturer in Early Childhood

I joined the Open University in 2019 after many years of experience in early childhood practice. I am currently co-chair of module E109 - Exploring perspectives on young children's lives and learning, and I have written for various open access and undergraduate courses.

My research focuses on early childhood literacies, exploring young children's encounters with written and multimodal text in their play and everyday lives, and how their experiences shape how they perceive themselves as readers and writers. I am also interested in the sensory and embodied nature of reading, and how children are affected by texts and other factors in the social and material environment. I am a member of the Executive Council at the United Kingdom Literacy Association, promoting broad and balanced approaches to early literacy education. I also convened the Literacy working group on the production of the Birth to 5 Matters, non-statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

I have presented my research at various academic and professional conferences, and at policy development events.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/people/ljrl4>

Contact: [Lucy.rodriquez-leon@open.ac.uk](mailto:Lucy.rodriquez-leon@open.ac.uk)

#### Key publications

Rodriguez Leon, L. and Biddle, J. (2022) 'Informal book talk and reader recommendations', in Cremin, T., Henry, H., Rodriguez Leon, L. and Kucirkova, N. (Eds) *Reading Teachers: Reading Teachers: Nurturing reading for pleasure*. London; Routledge.

Chamberlain, L., Rodriguez-Leon, L. & Woodward, C. [2022] 'Disrupting language of instruction policy at a classroom level: oracy examples from South Africa and Zambia', *Literacy (Special Edition, Oracy and education: Shifting perspectives and policy tensions)*, 56:3, pp.264-274  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12302>

Rodriguez Leon, L. (2021) Sensing and configuring the world with text: bringing neo-Vygotskian thinking into dialogue with more-than-human literacies in early childhood, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2021.2008321>



### Dr Eleonora Teszenyi, Lecturer in Early Childhood

I joined The Open University in September 2019. Previously I taught on both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees including leading the Master's programme in Early Years at the University of Northampton. Before entering Higher Education, I had worked in the early years sector for 19 years as an Early Years practitioner, Early Years teacher, Local Authority advisor and children centre teacher in one of the most disadvantaged areas of Leicestershire. The focus of my research and publications is children's rights, parent and practitioner partnerships and early childhood pedagogies; I am particularly interested in children's learning and pedagogic practice in multi-age environments.

Further information and full list of publications:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/people/et4754>

Contact: [Eleonora.teszenyi@open.ac.uk](mailto:Eleonora.teszenyi@open.ac.uk)

#### Key publications

Canning, N., Teszenyi, E. and Pálfi, S. (2022) Are you listening to me? Understanding children's rights through Hungarian pedagogic practice. *Journal of Childhood, Education and Society*, 3(3), pp.218-232. <https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638X.202233193>

Teszenyi, E., Varga Nagy, A. and Pálfi, S. (2022) Re-imagining socialist childhoods: Changing narratives of spatial and temporal (dis)orientation. *Journal of Childhood, Education and Society*, 3(3), pp.212-217

Teszenyi, E., Devecchi, C. and Richardson, T. (2019) Enhancing learning for Early Years Foundation Degree students: Empowerment through heutagogy and reflecting on the notion of knowledgeable others *Polish Journal of Educational Studies*, 72(1), pp. 24-44.



### Dr Jane Dorrian, Lecturer in Early Childhood

I joined the Early Childhood team in October 2022 after teaching on undergraduate and postgraduate courses at Cardiff Metropolitan University. I started my career as a nursery teacher in south Wales valleys and also worked as a Local Authority advisory teacher for early years. My doctoral thesis looked at the professional identities of early childhood practitioners and the impact of policy on their experiences of supporting children. I am interested in young children's physical literacy and have worked closely with Early Years Wales to explore how engagement in children's physical activity affects the wellbeing of parents and carers.

Further information and a full list of publications:

<https://www.open.ac.uk/people/jd25239>

Contact: [Jane.dorrian@open.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.dorrian@open.ac.uk)

#### Key publications

Dorrian J. (2022) 'Evaluation of the HAF/Welsh Active Early Years Project' Cardiff: Early Years Wales (Publication due in Summer 2022) <http://oro.open.ac.uk/83347/>

Dorrian, J. (2022) 'Rethinking the Design of School Readiness assessments' in Betts, A. & Thai K.P. (eds) *Handbook of Research on Innovative Approaches to Early Childhood Development and School Readiness*, New York: IGI Global, pp.96-112.

Dorrian, J. (2021) An exploration of factors affecting the baseline assessment scores of children attending morning or afternoon sessions in nursery settings in Wales *Early Years: An International Research Journal* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09575146.2021.1910799>

# TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We teach almost 2,000 Early Childhood students and EC@OU has a long history of producing teaching materials of outstanding quality. We offer two main qualifications for undergraduate students:

- BA (Hons) Early Childhood  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/qualifications/q89>
- Top-up BA (Hons) Early Childhood for people who already hold a foundation degree (FdA)  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/qualifications/q90>

#### Our modules include:

- *Exploring perspectives on young children's lives and learning* (E109)
- *Young children's play and creativity* (E110)
- *Listening to young children: critical reflections* (E229)

We also work collaboratively with partners to offer opportunities for professional development through our contribution to free Openlearn courses, Futurelearn and a variety of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and Badged Open Courses (BOC) such as:

#### Free Open Learn course: In-the-Picture:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=3590>

#### Free Open Learn course: Perspectives on Play:

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/childrens-perspectives-on-play/content-section-0>

#### Free Open Learn course: The family at the centre of early learning:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/the-family-the-centre-early-learning/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

#### Free Futurelearn course: Supporting Physical Development in Early Childhood:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/supporting-physical-development-early-childhood#section-dates>

#### Free OpenLearn course: Supporting Children's (0-8) Mental Health and Wellbeing:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/supporting-childrens-mental-health-and-wellbeing/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

#### For full details visit our website:

<https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/projects/ecou/teaching-and-professional-development>





# ASSOCIATIONS

We are proud of our working relationships with a wealth of organisations including:



Do please get in touch if you would like to find out more about our research, our courses or ways we could work collaboratively with you.



## GET IN TOUCH

Email [joanne.josephidou@open.ac.uk](mailto:joanne.josephidou@open.ac.uk)

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