

The Book of Abstracts

THE INTERNATIONAL XI CONFERENCE ON
CHILDHOOD STUDIES

6.-8.5.2026



FINNISH SOCIETY
FOR CHILDHOOD
STUDIES



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND



SOS
LAPSIKYLÄ



Programme

Schedule for XI Conference on Childhood Studies.

Wednesday, 6 May 2026

9:00 a.m. Registration opens

10:00 – 11:00 a.m. Annual meeting of the The Finnish Society for Childhood Studies

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Lunch

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Opening ceremony at Carelia Auditorium, Joensuu Campus

Greeting speeches by Dean of Philosophical Faculty and the Chair of The Finnish Society for Childhood Studies

Speech by Oleksandra Romantsova, Executive Director, Center for Civil Liberties & Oksana Lebedeva, Founder and CEO of the NGO Gen. Ukrainian

Commentary discussion by Elina Pekkarinen, Ombudsman for Children

1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Plenary 1: Professor Helen Stalford (University of Liverpool)

2:00 – 2:30 p.m. Coffee

2:30 – 4:00 p.m. Workshops I

4:15 – 5:45 p.m. Workshops II

6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Joensuu City reception at Carelia Hall, Joensuu Campus

Thursday, 7 May 2026

9:00 -10:00 a.m. Plenary 2: Associate Professor Pekka Mertala (University of Jyväskylä)

10:00 – 10:30 a.m. Coffee

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Workshops III (includes a possible visit to Linnanlahti ECEC Centre, read more)

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Workshops IV (includes a possible visit to the University Training School, read more)

2:30 – 3:30 p.m. Coffee & poster exhibition

3:30 – 5.00 p.m. Workshops V / Parallel session (results and solutions in development projects)

7:00 p.m. Conference dinner at Kimmel

Friday, 8 May 2026

8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Workshops VI

10:15 – 11:30 a.m. Panel Discussion & Closing Ceremony at Carelia Auditorium, Joensuu Campus

Honorary Membership of the Society for Childhood Studies

Plenary 3: Panel Discussion chaired by Professor Emerita Maarit Alasuutari (University of Jyväskylä)

Pro Childhood Award

Closing remarks

11:30 a.m. Coffee and lunch

Venue: University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu Campus.

Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Wednesday 6.5.2026 14:30–16.00	Wednesday 6.5.2026 16:15–17:45
Symposium 1: Diversifying Childhood in Educational Research (AU 203)	Symposium 3: Children’s Rights Research: Boundaries of Law (AU 203)
Symposium 2: Streets, Nature and the Playground: Experience and Knowledge in the History of Children and Youth (AU 204)	Symposium 4: Non-linear Time in Children’s Lives (AU 204)
Thematic Group 1: Militarization, Family Care & Criminal Liability (AU 208)	Thematic Group 6: Playful, Humorous and Philosophical Approaches (AU 208)
Thematic Group 2: Disability, Interruption & Unaccompanied (AU 209)	Thematic Group 7: Free Play and Boundaries in Research (AU 209)
Thematic Group 3: Empowerment, Play-limits, Equity (AG 104)	Thematic Group 8: Responsibilization, Infantilization, Childism (AG 104)
Thematic Group 4: Holistic Pedagogy, Collaborative Consultation, Class-Evasive ECEC (AG 105)	Thematic Group 9: Digital Childhoods (AG 105)
Thematic Group 5: Poverty and Drug Addiction (AG 106)	Thematic Group 10: Art-Based and Artistic Research; Authorship, Self-Expression & Embodied Listening (AG 106)

Workshop 3	Workshop 4
Thursday 7.5.2026 10:30–12:00	Thursday 7.5.2026 13:00–14.30
Symposium 5: Multispecies Childhoods – Telling and Sharing Stories in a More-Than-Human World (AU 203)	SYMPOSIUM 7: Boundaries and Diversities in Early Childhood Transitions (AU 203)
Symposium 6: NAWI: Dear Future Me and Commoning Children’s Rights (AU 204)	SYMPOSIUM 8: The boundary work in Children’s ECEC between ordinary and special services (AU 204)
Thematic Group 11: Family Reunion, Memory and Cyber Bullying (AU 208)	Thematic Group 16. Pandemic Response & Migrant Educators (AU 205)
Thematic Group 12. Magazine Covers, Comics & Newspaper Articles (AU 209)	Thematic Group 17. State Intervention, Far-Right Politics & Peacebuilding (AU 208)
Thematic Group 13. Adolescence, Childhood Illness, Professional Discourse (AU 210)	Thematic Group 18. Participation, 360 perspectives, Boundary-making (AU 209)
Thematic Group 14. Indigenous perspectives & Childhood in the East-West German Divide (AG 104)	Thematic Group 19. Multispecies & More-than-human Environments, Climate health (AU 210)
Thematic Group 15. Family spaces: IKEA catalogues, Public Libraries & Playgrounds (AG 105)	Thematic Group 20. From Adolescence to Adulthood, Queer Boyhood & Consumer Education (AG 104)
14:30–15:30 Poster exhibition (Carelia Hall, Downstairs)	

WORKSHOP 5	WORKSHOP 6
Thursday 7.5.2026 15:30–17:00	Friday 8.5.2026 8:30–10.00
Symposium 9: Shapeshifting Childhoods: Navigating Boundaries of Space (AU 203)	Symposium 11: Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society (AU 203)
Symposium 10: Child Politics in Education: Socio-Material Approaches (AU 204)	Symposium 12: The Political Mobilization of the Child: Limiting and Regulating Childhood Through Heteronormativity (AU 204)
Thematic Group 21: Linguistic Diversity & Philosophical Enquiry (AU205)	Thematic Group 25: Responsibility, Behaviour, Broken Boundaries (AU 205)
Thematic Group 22: Inclusion, Discursive Boundaries, Hospitality (AU 208)	Thematic Group 26: Counter Power, Inequalities (AU 208)
Thematic Group 23: Geopolitics, Cold War, Youth Mobility (AU 209)	Thematic Group 27: Home-Making, Countryside Childhoods & Literary Geography (AU 209)
Thematic Group 24: Narrative Thinking, Agency and Ethics in Childhood Studies (AG 104)	

The XI Conference on Childhood Studies is grounded in understanding that many boundaries are shaping childhood. The conference is organized for the eleventh time in Finland and for the first time in Joensuu bringing together researchers from different fields, practitioners and students to discuss questions related to childhood in contemporary society.

The conference is organized by the **Finnish Society for Childhood Studies** and the **University of Eastern Finland**, in collaboration with **SOS Children's Villages Finland** and the national project **Coordinating the participation and inclusion of children, young people and families**. Finnish Society for Childhood Studies) is a scientific association founded in 2008 that aims to promote multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral research on children and childhood both nationally and internationally. Childhood as a phenomenon is understood to encompass all individuals under the age of 18. University of Eastern Finland (UEF) is the most multidisciplinary science university in Finland. It seeks to address global challenges and build a sustainable future through high-quality education and interdisciplinary research. UEF offers teaching in nearly one hundred major subjects and educates future experts to meet the needs of a changing world of work.

The keynote presentations examine childhood in contemporary society from a broad perspective. The opening keynote will be delivered by Professor Helen Stalford (University of Liverpool), whose talk is titled *Confronting Legal, Theoretical and Methodological Boundaries in Child Migration Research*. Thursday's keynote will be given by associate professor Pekka Mertala (University of Jyväskylä), with the presentation *Butterflies, Boundaries, and Platforms: Reflections on Postdigital Childhoods*. For the first time in the history of the Conference on Childhood Studies, Friday's programme will feature a panel discussion chaired by Professor Emerita Maarit Alasuutari. In the panel, Professor Karin Murrin, Professor Noora Ellonen and Associate Professor Pekka Mertala will reflect on topical questions such as: What defines childhood studies as a research field, and where are its boundaries? Are there particular theories or methodologies that shape the field? What are the key challenges in childhood studies today, and which questions or issues should the field address in the future?

In addition, the opening session will include a speech address on the situation of Ukrainian children and the actions directed at children as part of Russia's hybrid warfare. The speakers are Oleksandra Romantsova (Executive Director, Centre for Civil Liberties) and Oksana Lebedeva (Founder and CEO of the NGO Gen). A commentary will be delivered by the Finnish Ombudsperson for Children, Elina Pekkarinen.

Because Joensuu is known as the regional centre of North Karelia with a rich cultural offering and an active arts scene, the conference will also provide an opportunity to experience children's perspectives through artistic expression. The city's cultural identity is strongly influenced by Karelian traditions as well as the diversity of art and music, which will be reflected at the conference through children's and young people's dance, music, and visual artworks. The artwork will be available in the Carelia lobby throughout the conference week for everyone to enjoy and has been created in collaboration with the Joensuu Children's Culture Centre.



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Oral Presentations in Thematic groups

Thematic group 1. Militarization, Family Care & Criminal Liability

Restricted Childhoods: Adolescents, Militarisation and the Geography of Everyday Life in Kashmir

Ravinder Barn

Royal Holloway University of London, England

This paper explores how military occupation in Kashmir reconfigures the geography of children's lives, producing spatial boundaries that profoundly shape adolescent experiences. Drawing on focus group interviews with 52 adolescents of Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim background, across two cities in Kashmir, this study examines how militarisation transforms everyday spaces into zones of surveillance, restriction, and fear. These spatial disruptions are not neutral; they are deeply gendered, with adolescent girls facing intensified constraints on mobility, education, and public presence.

The militarised landscape imposes rigid borders within communities, fragmenting access to schools, recreational areas, and peer networks. School closures due to conflict and security operations interrupt academic trajectories, while the repurposing of youth spaces such as stadiums and playgrounds into military zones erodes opportunities for physical and social development. Adolescents describe navigating militarised restrictions and boundaries as part of their daily routines, revealing how state-imposed borders penetrate intimate geographies of childhood.

Girls' lives are particularly bounded by these spatial regimes. The threat of harassment and the cultural imperative to protect female modesty in militarised zones result in heightened domestic confinement. Many girls are discouraged from social interactions with boys, or participating in outdoor activities, reinforcing patriarchal norms and limiting their spatial agency. These gendered geographies of fear and restriction not only curtail freedom but also shape aspirations, identities, and future possibilities.

By situating adolescent narratives within the geography of children's lives, this paper highlights how occupation-induced spatial boundaries function as tools of control and exclusion. It calls for a rethinking of borders, not only as geopolitical constructs but as lived realities that structure youth experience. Centring adolescent voices, especially those of girls, offers critical insights into the intersection of space, power, and growing up under occupation.

Tracing Boundaries: Memory Stories and the Lived Experience of Childhood

Jutta Balldin¹, Carina Berkhuizen¹, Lisa Dalsgaard¹, Anne Harju¹ & Caroline Ljungberg¹

¹Malmö University, Sweden

The aim of this paper is to explore how boundaries in childhood are experienced and negotiated through memory stories from the 1970s and 1980s, with a particular focus on the home and neighbourhood. Using an autoethnographic approach, the study analyses adults' retrospective narratives of childhood to examine how children navigate physical, symbolic, emotional, and intergenerational boundaries. The theoretical framework draws on childhood studies and conceptualizations of boundaries as culturally and historically situated, shaped by broader social structures such as class, gender, language, and age.

Methodologically, the study employs autoethnography, treating personal memories as data. These memory stories are understood as fragmented and affective traces that offer access to aspects of childhood that are not always linguistically expressible, such as emotions, sensory experiences, and embodied memories. This approach presents both methodological and ethical challenges, particularly since the material consists of adult recollections rather than children's direct voices. This calls for reflexivity and ethical sensitivity to avoid romanticizing or pathologizing childhood, issues that will be addressed in the presentation.

The findings reveal that children move within and across various boundaries, often in spaces marked by autonomy, surveillance, and exclusion. These boundaries are dynamic and subject to transformation over time. The study demonstrates that memory stories can provide valuable insights into how children experience and renegotiate boundaries in everyday life, and how these experiences can inform a more critical understanding of children's social conditions today.

Helping Me Live and Deal with Life: U.S. Children & Adolescents' Own Definitions of Experiencing Family Care

Allegra Midgette^{1,2}, Juliene Madureira Ferreira² & Lucretia Fairchild

¹Texas A&M University, USA, ²Tampere University, Finland

Children are often thought of as targets of adult-defined and initiated care. However, the majority of research has focused on caregivers' experiences rather than those who receive care (Midgette et al., 2025). Prior theorisation has highlighted that care, to be considered as such, requires that those receiving care feel cared for (Tronto, 2013). In the present study, we examine care-receiving as a space for boundary-making, where U.S. children (N = 58, 9-17) reflected on their definitions of what they consider as their own experiences of receiving care. Through the use of hybrid thematic analysis (reflexive and coder reliability) of children's semi-structured interviews we identified two main themes: care as 1) helping children live (e.g., meeting basic needs, cooking, cleaning), and 2) helping them deal with life (e.g., social and emotional advice and support). Older adolescents placed greater emphasis on the emotional and social care they received. There were also gendered and developmental patterns in what children named as specific acts of care (e.g., across ages: keeping 9-11-year-old children safe, getting rides for early adolescents, and mental health support for middle adolescents). These findings advance our theorization of care as a practice by highlighting that there are developmental differences in the needs that care-receivers may attend to in their experiences of being cared for. Together this work highlights the complexities involved in children's experiences of care, as well as the importance of investigating children's own interpretations and definitions of what experiences and behaviors they consider as caring.

Thematic Group 2. Disability, Interruption & Unaccompanied

Boundaries of Childhood: Disability, Poverty, and the Ethics of Care in Mumbai's Slum Communities

Prayathna Kowitz

Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany

The aim of this study is to examine how poverty, disability, and illiteracy shape the boundaries of childhood in the slum communities of Mumbai. Using a case study approach based on ethnographic studies and narrative style interview, the paper centres on the experiences of Sita who is raising Om, her six year old nonverbal grandson with cognitive impairments. His grandmother navigates care under the conditions of extreme poverty, bureaucratic hurdles, and social limitations whilst being illiterate. These intersecting boundaries of the paucity of inclusion, education, and formal recognition create a marginalized childhood that is precarious and constrained. By situating Om's lived experience within the broader cultural, psychosocial, structural frameworks the paper unravels how disabled, marginalized childhoods are both relational and bounded revealing the ethical, methodological, and policy challenges in supporting vulnerable children in India's urban slums.

Interrupting the Othering of Childhood on the Move

Camilla Löf

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Children and young people on the move are frequently identified as vulnerable and in need of support. While interventions targeting this group may be well-intentioned, the initial framing of individuals as vulnerable risks reinforcing their marginalised positions within society.

The aim of this presentation is to explore constructions of childhood through Social Circus—a practice that has emerged as a complementary approach to health and welfare interventions for various target groups (see Carp, 1998; Fournier et al., 2014; Löf, 2021, 2023). Social Circus can be understood as an umbrella term for the use of circus arts within caring, supportive, or therapeutic settings (Cadwell, 2018). Few other practices are as closely associated with both exclusion and marginalisation on (Bolton, 2004). The paradoxical narratives of circus—childhood joy and monstrosity (Parker, 2011), its rebellious approach towards conventions, and the ‘making the impossible possible’—position circus as a particularly well-suited actor in efforts to counteract exclusion and segregation.

The empirical material draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted within a Swedish Social Circus programme for children and young people on the move, with particular attention to the work of the circus team. The analysis is informed by childhood sociology (James et al., 1998; Corsaro, 2017) and critical theory (Ahmed, 2000, 2012), asking what discursive positions are offered to the target group through the Social Circus project. The findings indicate that the team’s organisation of pedagogical activities interrupted prevailing notions of childhood on the move as ‘other’ (Löf, 2021).

Reimagining the Rights of Unaccompanied Children Through the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: How Childhood Studies and an Ethics of Care approach can Address Challenges and Foster Opportunities

Dustin Ciufu

King's University College at Western University, Canada

Toward challenging the boundaries of childhood broadly and those faced by asylum seeking children in particular, this article situates itself as part of the call within Childhood Studies to Reimagine Childhood (Spyrou et al., 2018). To do so, it begins by developing an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for children bringing Childhood Studies (Canosa & Graham, 2020; Punch, 2016) and an Ethics of Care approach (Barnes, 2019; Cockburn, 2010) into closer dialogue. It will be shown that the former can benefit from the latter in advancing thinking in relation to the image, rights, and participatory agency of the child.

This interdisciplinary conceptual framework is in turn applied to the life worlds of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Canada. In so doing, the article sheds light on the challenges to and opportunities for enhancing unaccompanied children's rights by contesting the boundaries they face at the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada.

Ten semi-structured, open-ended, qualitative interviews were conducted with both executive and frontline settlement services professionals as well as expert lawyers in refugee law. When assessed through this interdisciplinary conceptual framework for children and applied to the image, rights, and participatory agency of unaccompanied children, it reveals the adult-centric nature of the IRB as significantly challenging the attainment of unaccompanied children's rights. Therefore, by way of reimagining childhood broadly, this article offers child-adaptable policies and procedures that can rearticulate the image, rights, and participatory agency of unaccompanied children to contest the boundaries they face and ensure a just refugee hearing in Canada.

Thematic Group 3. Empowerment, Play-limits, Equity

What Can School Give? Empowering Students to Take Ownership of Their Own Learning

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A global crisis of student engagement continues. Despite curricular mandates encouraging student participation, many Finnish students lack meaningful ways to engage with learning or influence their education. This study explores how schools can empower students to take ownership of their learning by granting them power over meaningful educational objects. Using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, it examines a Change Laboratory intervention in a Finnish comprehensive school with eighth-grade students. The intervention provided students with space to identify, plan, and carry out self-defined projects beyond traditional curriculum constraints. Focusing on a student-initiated Documentary Project on bullying and acceptance, qualitative analysis of 12 intervention sessions identified six types of discursive actions exemplifying students' power: taking ownership of the process, committing to take concrete actions, claiming ownership, expressing knowledge and competence, recognizing one's own progress, and taking transgressive actions.

The findings show that gaining power is a gradual, nonlinear process evolving through sustained engagement with a meaningful object rather than mere declarations of ownership. As students' initiatives and decisions materialized into concrete actions, their commitment and ownership strengthened. Although existing school structures often restrict participation, the study demonstrates that genuine empowerment can emerge through collective, object-oriented activity where power develops as a stepwise process.

The study introduces the concept of object-oriented power as a dynamic, collective process of generating and gaining power through engagement with meaningful objects aligned with learners' needs. By recognizing students as legitimate agents of learning, schools can transform alienating practices into spaces of participation, engagement, and relevance, fostering empowerment and well-being.

“You’re Not Allowed to Play if There’s a Lesson Going on, or Story Time, or Something Else More Important.” – Children’s Views on the Meaning and Limits of Play in Pre-Primary Education

Terhi Tuukkanen

Office of the Ombudsman for Children, Finland

In the national core curriculum for pre-primary education, play is highlighted as both a central value and an essential method of learning. This presentation examines how that is realized in children’s daily experiences, using data from the Children’s Barometer conducted by the Children’s Ombudsman in 2024. The data, collected through telephone interviews with 408 six- and seven-year-olds, explored children’s views on pre-primary education. The Barometer included questions on pre-primary practices, factors that make everyday life more or less meaningful, and learning and support for learning. Here, the focus is on children’s open-ended reflections on play.

From the children’s answers, four main meanings of play emerged. First, play had a clearly positive value: it was the most common response to what children liked best. Second, children expressed a deep and continuous desire to play; many imagined an ideal pre-primary setting where “we would play all the time.” Third, play was linked to feelings of competence – something children felt good at. Fourth, play had a strong social dimension. Children also described situations where play was restricted, such as when they had to move from outdoor to indoor activities, go to snack time, or participate in guided activity. Playing was not allowed in certain places, and rest times were seen as particularly frustrating because playing was not allowed.

Overall, the findings show that while children do have many opportunities to play in pre-primary education, play is framed by certain limits – and children are not always involved in deciding where those limits lie.

Breaking the Classroom Boundaries – A Cry For Equity?

Selja Koponen

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In Jacques Rancière's political theory the resistance of minority groups is essential for equity to be realized. However, democratic education that aims to educate children about and for the transformative membership of society tends to overlook children's political subjectivity due to their underaged status and thus reproduce inequalities. Additionally, child-led playfulness is typically neglected in DE; play is mainly considered as instrumental and controlled—even colonized—by adults (e.g., mock elections).

Hence, we pause to wonder about the relevance of students' humorous and spontaneous play which occurred during participatory action research that took place in a Finnish lower secondary school in 2022. The students' play consisted of monosyllabic cries that the students repeated in turn, louder and louder during classes; whoever shouted the loudest won.

We conceptualize the play as a Deleuzian nomadic assemblage that unfolds in an unpredictable and revolutionary manner and challenges classroom boundaries, preexisting hierarchies and patterns of being and thinking. The empirical material and philosophical concepts are entangled as we ground our inquiry on post-qualitative methodologies and thinking with theory. Students' play is understood as a nomadic assemblage, a porous event in which students, teachers, play, yells, etc. come together as a dynamic, and generative entanglement. In this entanglement, students' play has a transformative potential that becomes understood through Rancière's notions of democracy, i.e., a resistance to the prevailing order.

We conclude that the play initiated by the students has the possibility to dismantle power structures to obtain equity and subjectivity in a hierarchical, adult-led system.

Thematic group 4. Holistic Pedagogy, Collaborative Consultation, Class-Evasive ECEC

Holistic Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care: Mapping the Teacher's Role

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In recent years, the concept of holistic pedagogy has attracted interest in early childhood education (ECE). Holistic pedagogy consists of two dimensions: holistic learning of the child and holistic teaching of curriculum content (Einarsdottir et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of understanding about the key attributes of holistic pedagogy. The use of the concept is unclear, for example, in policy documents. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the teacher's role in holistic pedagogy and holistic pedagogical practices in an ECE toddler group.

The data consists of an analysis of 19 peer-reviewed articles to define holistic pedagogy and teachers' role in it. We also observed ECE teacher's holistic pedagogical practices for two days in a toddler group of eight children (age 2-3 years). The article data were analyzed with Rodgers' (2000) concept analysis and the observation data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The findings suggest five main characteristics describing the ECE teachers' role in implementing holistic pedagogy: 1) instructing, 2) supporting and scaffolding, 3) establishing positive relationships, 4) planning and assessing, and 5) developing the learning environment. In a toddler group, the first three areas were more pronounced, and the ECE teacher used them adaptively based on the children's needs. The findings help to clarify the concept of holistic pedagogy and the ECE teacher's role as its implementer. The study also discusses boundary-crossing in holistic pedagogical practices, examining how the areas of curriculum content and supporting children's holistic learning are combined in relation to policy documents.

Seeking Change: A Study on the Effectiveness of Collaborative Consultation in Early Childhood Education and Care

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This sub-study of the doctoral dissertation examines the effects of collaborative consultation in everyday early childhood education and care. Its aim is to develop a research-based consultation model and to strengthen the consultative skills of early childhood special education teachers (ECSETs) as well as the professional capacity of early childhood education and care teams to provide support in daily group settings. At the core of the intervention is collaborative consultation: ECSETs and teams share knowledge, reflect together, and develop solutions that support all children's participation and behavior within the group. The study contributes to discussions on how the boundaries of childhood and support are constructed and can be transcended in the context of early childhood education and care.

The study explores how collaborative consultation influences children's group-level behavior, the support practices provided by staff, and staff perceptions of professional efficacy and the usefulness of the consultation model. In collaborative consultation, professionals jointly reflect on when a child's behavior requires support and how such support can be provided in ways that do not restrict childhood but instead strengthen the child's agency, participation, and well-being. The research investigates how participatory collaboration and shared expertise can help dismantle institutional and professional boundaries in ECEC.

The aim of consultation is therefore not merely to solve individual challenges, but to promote a broader transformation in thinking and practice – to develop the consultation process itself and to deepen the understanding of staff's professional growth as well as children's agency and developmental possibilities. The ultimate aim of the study is to develop an effective model of consultation that strengthens professional competence and promotes an ECEC environment that recognizes, values, and supports childhood in all its diversity.

Encounters with Social Class in Class-Evasive ECEC: Staff's and Children's Experiences

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In this article, we examine if and how social class influences children's interactions and experiences in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Using Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus, we explore how symbolic boundaries shaped by social class emerge in everyday practices. These boundaries are not physical but experienced through subtle social cues.

The data includes observations from 18 daycare centres and interviews with 74 staff members in Swedish-speaking ECEC in Finland. Observations involved informal discussions with children during organised activities and free play over one month at each centre. Data was analysed through critical discourse analysis.

Results show that staff often adopt a class-evasive approach, rejecting discussions around social class and avoiding related terminology. Instead, they frame differences as variations in personality or values. However, observations reveal how children from working-class backgrounds carefully navigate interactions around celebrations due to limited economic resources. Navigating these boundaries means children learn to adapt, negotiate, and sometimes feel excluded, which influences their sense of belonging and identity. Ignoring social class, or being class-evasive, risks reinforcing existing inequalities and undermines ECEC's commitment to social equality.

Thematic group 5. Poverty & Drug Addiction

Negotiating Professional Boundaries: Positioning and Collaboration in Frontline Responses to Child Poverty

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Child poverty is a growing concern in Finland, with severe implications for children's wellbeing. It challenges prevailing assumptions about childhood as a protected and equitable life stage, bringing to the fore questions about how multidisciplinary expertise can be mobilised to strengthen institutional responses and support systems for children affected by poverty.

This paper examines how frontline workers from Finnish primary schools and public social work services negotiate professional boundaries in their responses to child poverty-related issues, both in interactions with each other and in encounters with children and families. Using boundary work as a theoretical lens, findings from ongoing work focus on inclusionary and exclusionary practices and collaborative efforts across institutional contexts. While boundary work is traditionally conceptualized as occurring within or between professional groups, the study tentatively considers whether boundaries are also drawn by frontline workers in relation to families in ways that shape access to support and inclusion.

Empirically, the research data comprises written vignettes and focus group interviews with 99 practitioners with different educational backgrounds and work tasks, collected in Finland between 2023-2024.

Early observations suggest that professionals actively construct and downplay boundaries in ways that influence how and when support is offered or withheld. Collaboration in these matters often appears to be contingent on informal relationships and individual initiative, rather than clearly defined institutional procedures. This paper offers insights into how boundary work unfolds in frontline responses to complex social issues, highlighting the situated nature of collaboration and role demarcation.

Coping Boundaries in Growing up With Drug-Addicted Parents from Children`s Point of View

Stephanie Meiland

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In scientific and professional debates, children growing up with drug-addicted parents is usually understood as a form of social disadvantage that makes childhood unsafe and children vulnerable in a specific way. In contrast to the so-called normal childhood, this not only highlights differences in the experience of being a child, but also specific boundaries in the inclusion and participation of these children, which can also be seen in the expansion of prevention and intervention programmes. Although much seems to be known about the life situation of affected children as a group with particular risk potential, so far there has been a lack of sufficient engagement within the experiences and constructions of meanings of the children themselves as well of an in-depth examination of the topic that goes beyond assumed causalities and categories of difference. The paper will therefore explore the everyday life from a child`s perspective, their subjective experiences and coping strategies. Firstly, in the sense of case understanding, an individual case from the own dissertation project will be analyzed by using a multi-material approach (interview protocol, photos, field protocols) and the analytical method of hermeneutic sociology of knowledge to gain three levels of understanding (childhood, being a child and doing child). Subsequently, cross-case considerations will be made as to how children of drug-addicted parents create their own lifeworld, and in this context refer to the boundaries they face in coping their everyday life, in order to then discuss possible consequences for educational professionalization and practice.

A Register-Based Follow-Up Study of Children Who Had Accompanied Their Parents to Inpatient Substance Use Treatment

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Parental substance use disorders affect the parents' children and their living conditions. The aim of this study was to examine the life course of children who had accompanied their parents to an inpatient family unit of a hospital specializing in substance use treatment. Data included parents (n=984) admitted to the family unit and information on their accompanying children (538 daughters and 538 sons). Treatment data were linked to national register data concerning education, hospitalizations, imprisonments, and death between 1989 and 2018/2023, depending on the registry. The children were born between 1975 and 2009, and follow-up continued until young adulthood. A smaller number of these children had completed secondary education in comparison to the general population in Finland. Based on hospital treatment data, one third of the children had some psychiatric diagnoses. From a transgenerational perspective, it was noteworthy that one in six girls had given birth to their first child before the age of 21. We are about to receive updated register data and thus new results will be presented at the conference. Overall, the results of the register study have shown that many family-related issues that the child cannot control affect their well-being and life-course. A major threshold is already crossed when the need for help is recognized and the social- and healthcare system entered. However, comprehensive support for families is really needed.

Thematic group 6. Playful, Humorous and Philosophical Approaches

Pathways to Playful Democracy: Addressing Child Rights Impact Assessment through Play-based Design

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Play can serve as a civic method that supports democracy by implementing the core principles of Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) in accessible, inclusive, and forward-looking ways. A tool developed in Finland as part of an innovative teaching approach in playful and gameful design exemplifies how humanities students created a playful, participatory tool for pre-literate children, advancing child rights in decision-making. The tool presented in this study demonstrates systematic assessment through rule-based play formats, ensures participation by reducing barriers via narrative role-play, and promotes transparency by making collective outcomes visible to all participants. Importantly, it frames the design of the tool within the context of the child's right to play, as recognized in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), as clarified in General Comment No. 17 (UNCRC Committee, 2013). This presentation highlights the initial results of testing the tool with preschool-aged children (n=50) and their teachers in November 2025. The study aims to gather the user experiences of the participating children regarding the functionality and perceived playfulness of the tool—the rules, narrative elements, and transparent voting mechanics—through researchers' observations, field notes, audiovisual recordings of testing, and group interviews with children. The contribution of this study is to explore the validity and value of the developed playful tool. The results illustrate the benefits of exploring innovative, play-based pathways for conducting Child Rights Impact Assessments related to decision-making, thereby advancing playful democracy in Finnish childhood.

Using Humour to Bridge Boundaries Between Adults and Children in Research

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Background and aim

This study examines how humour influences the qualitative research process when exploring children's perspectives. In childhood studies, methodological boundaries often reflect adult-centric norms that shape how children are engaged and understood. Traditional research paradigms can reinforce adult-child hierarchies, limiting children's agency and voice. By analysing humour as a relational and methodological phenomenon, we aim to investigate its role within research encounters: how it emerges, how it is negotiated, and how it may shape the research process. The purpose is to understand whether and in what ways humour contributes to or challenges the methodological boundaries between adult researchers and child participants.

Research design

Six researchers collaboratively re-analysed data from five studies conducted in Finland and Belgium (2016-2023), involving 48 children aged 2-14. The data included transcribed interviews, video recordings, and field notes. Using abductive content analysis, we focused on how humour emerged and influenced interactions between researchers and children.

Findings

Humour was observed to reduce tension, foster trust, and promote reciprocal communication. It enabled children to express themselves more freely and creatively, challenging normative expectations of childhood behaviour in research. Humour also blurred hierarchical boundaries, allowing for co-constructed meaning-making and enhancing children's participation.

Conclusions

We propose humour as a boundary-crossing methodological practice that opens new ethical and relational possibilities in childhood studies. It invites researchers to reflect their positionality and supports more child-perspective approaches. Humour not only enriches data quality but also contributes to reimagining the boundaries of childhood and research itself.

Studies of Child Perspectives Approach Requires Researcher to Cross Boundaries

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When a researcher starts doing research with the design informed by the studies of child perspectives approach, it usually requires crossing or expanding boundaries of own thinking about children, adults, professional practices and about doing research and being a researcher. In this theoretical paper I will discuss ontological, epistemological and ethical questions of studies of child perspectives using my own research process as an example. I will describe the changes in my thinking and the consequences of the change for my study.

Children are often viewed from problem-oriented perspective both in scientific, societal and professional discourses. In my presentation I will discuss boundaries between adult perspective and child perspective and also between problem-oriented perspective and connection-oriented perspective, and consequences of chosen perspective for theoretical and methodological choices and outcomes.

Ontological questions: How does the researcher's image of child influence the research? How did defining the concept of play change my understanding?

Epistemological questions: Whose knowledge is understood as "real" knowledge? Are bodily expressions as valid information as words?

Ethical questions: How did emphasis on children's right to be protected influence the methodological choices? What changes made giving weight also to children's right to participation?

Thematic group 7. Free Play and Boundaries in Research

The Paradox of Free Play

Minna Laitinen

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The significance of free play for children's development and learning is well established in early childhood education. Nevertheless, research indicates that free play situations are often filled with practices that restrict and narrow children's opportunities to engage creatively. Indoor free play, in particular, is shaped by various constraints such as limited time, space, and available materials. These limitations can hinder children's ability to construct imaginative play and increase the risk of exclusion—whether intentional or unintentional.

This presentation explores the pedagogical practices that support inclusive free play without unnecessarily limiting children's agency. The presentation is based on a research article drawing on data collected in Finland from three groups participating in a two-year pre-primary education trial between 2021 and 2024. The data includes thematic group interviews with staff and the early childhood education plans of the participating groups. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to examine the material.

Findings suggest that in large groups, some structuring is necessary to ensure peaceful play environments and to enable adults to guide play in inclusive and creative directions. Planning should focus on the equitable formation of play groups. In addition, careful arrangement of play spaces and materials is essential. This ensures that children have room to construct play creatively and that all children have the opportunity to be part of a playing group.

Boundaries in Research with Play in Danish Kindergartens

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In the playground children collect snails. Suddenly a boy squeezes some of them into a plastic tube and shakes them roughly up and down and a girl uses a hard metal spoon to lift and poke the snails in the right direction in the wooden box. Similar situations with snails happened several times in a design-based-research project using play experiments in two Danish kindergartens (children aged 3-5 and their pedagogues). The aim of the research project is to create knowledge about children's wellbeing and flourishing, but what about snails? Written and visual field notes show how the researchers, positioned as co-players, were challenged as the snails became play tools in the children's play and hands. Should the researchers intervene and how – and maybe destroy the play mood and the children's engagement? And how could it maybe affect the researchers' possibilities to be invited into the children's play again?

The study draws on play theory concerning play as mood practice and posthuman theories addressing affect and ethics. With the aim of exploring flourishing for humans and nonhumans entities and boundaries and dilemmas in childhood research with play, the presentation examines the following question: How can research involving play with children create knowledge and reflections about boundaries and dilemmas connected to ethical and eco-centric perspectives and researcher positions?

The analysis and findings are still in-the-making but emphasize childhood studies as responsible practices recognizing both children's play and caring for nonhuman species as equal and valuable participants.

Building Trust Relationships with Children in Superdiverse Kindergartens: Boundary Work, Agency and Vulnerability in Ethnographic Research

Akim Said Aalou

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Although building trust relationships is widely invoked as a prerequisite for qualitative research, particularly with children, their formation and consequences have rarely been empirically investigated. As a result, researchers often rely on intuition to navigate these relationships. Drawing on an ethnography in three superdiverse kindergartens (27 days of observation in three classrooms with 60 participating 4-5 y/o children), this paper examines what it means to build trust relationships in ethnographic work with young children. While existing literature focuses on strategies for earning trust, we shift attention to how children position themselves in relation to the researcher, how they negotiate the development of this relationship on their own terms, and how this process produces different forms of trust. From the earliest encounters, children take up and revise distinct positions ranging from actively approaching the researcher out of curiosity to avoidance out of shyness or disinterest. From these initial relationships different kinds of trust relationships are formed, which I analyze as a process of boundary work negotiated not only between child and researchers but also among peers, teachers, and parents. This negotiation entails a continuous and unequal redistribution of agency and vulnerability across these actors, challenging the binary of powerful adults and vulnerable children. Through this interactional process, different forms of trust emerge, as children and researchers come to expect different things from one another. By tracing how trust relationships are formed and vary, this study offers an empirically grounded conceptualization of building trust relationships in ethnographic research with children.

Thematic group 8. Boundaries of Childhood between Childism and Unchilding

Boundaries, Dimensions and Divisions of Childhood: Responsibilization and infantilization as parallel Approaches to Lived Childhoods

Margareta Aspan

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In his book *Children, rights and childhood* the philosopher David Archard discusses how views on children, since Locke and Rousseau, has undergone some significant changes. What is unchanged is that the adult understandings of being a child influence how childhood turns out. Archard's notions of childhood's boundaries, dimensions and divisions clarify how different approaches to maturity, competence and childishness, live side by side but can in fact contain quite contradictory assumptions.

In this paper such assumptions are discussed on the basis of ongoing political policy work in Sweden: first, the political intention to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 13, and second, the political proposal to remove from school governing documents formulations ensuring student influence in education.

Differences and contradictions in modern childhoods can be illuminated by identifying assumed boundaries, dimensions and divisions. When does childhood end (its boundary) in response to the will to confirm or dismiss the child's competence and responsibility for its actions, and how do authorities reason according to childhood dimensions, seen in how age or immaturity are given different weight in for example legal and educational contexts? Childhood's several divisions or sub-categories – such as toddlers, tweens, teenagers – are constructed by society's expectations. Here the responsabilization discourse struggles against views asserting children's lack of consequential thinking, or even infantilization.

For scrutinizing the chosen cases in Swedish ongoing policy making, the study is based on Carol Bacchi's (2009) *What's the Problem Represented to be*, through which political arguments can be illuminated and compared.

The 'Social' in Question: Childism and the Negotiations of the Boundaries of Childhood

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This paper is a critical discussion of how relations within the field of child protection is currently being reconfigured in a child-centered direction through new legislative practices closely related to a rights-based discourse. However, we argue that current theoretical conceptualizations of 'the child' play a significant role in this reconfiguration, which (perhaps inadvertently) risks displacing 'the social' through its emphasis on 'the child'. Contemporary critical childhood studies offer important insights into these debates. A dominant strand is Childism. Childism critiques adultism and emphasizes listening to children's perspectives without filtering them through adult(ist) norms. This is done, for instance, through 'emergent' listening in legal proceedings or by uncovering how children's perspectives are silenced through normative assumptions and child–adult dichotomies that fail to reflect children's lived experiences. However, despite drawing on a 'pluralist way of seeing' (highlighting that the universal child is a myth), this approach may inadvertently be less attentive to the child's broader social embeddedness. By zooming in on the child's perspective through deconstructing norms created historically, politically and through participation of persons, the "child" seems to hang as a seemingly pure being, disconnected in a normless vacuum.

This raises essential questions about the boundaries of childhood – conceptually, politically, and ethically. In our efforts to amplify the child's perspective and dismantle adultist structures, are we at risk of reconstructing the child as a decontextualized subject, thereby obscuring the social, relational, and institutional boundaries that shape childhood?

Palestinian Childhood and Boundaries Under Israeli Occupation and Settler Colonialism in the West Bank and East Jerusalem

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This contribution focuses on spatial boundaries marking childhood to an extent that has been called “unchilding” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019) or “lost childhood” (Netland, 2013). This is the boundary regime of Israel as an occupation force in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We demonstrate how far these boundaries influence children’s everyday lives, their ways to school, scopes of action, friendships and leisure time. We examine how children identify and employ strategies to navigate imposed boundaries, develop counter-measures to assert their dignity, and, at times, how these same conditions lead them to internalize limitations or diminish their own sense of worth. We further attend to gendered dimensions of children’s experiences, exploring how intersecting boundaries, that is, those imposed by state power and those rooted in cultural norms shape and constrain their everyday lives. We draw on empirical data from written exercises and in-depth interviews with 12-14 years old children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We selected this age group because children at this stage increasingly assert their desire for spatial and decisional autonomy, challenging adult surveillance. These struggles and the strategies developed to navigate and resist imposed boundaries form a shared repertoire of knowledge among peers, circulating through everyday discourse. Our study helps deepen global understandings of childhood by revealing how children in occupied Palestine actively negotiate, resist, and reconfigure the boundaries imposed on them, offering vital insights into the spatial politics of growing up under systemic violence.

Thematic group 9. Digital Childhoods

Algorithmic Boundaries of Normality: Platformisation, Datafication, and the Reconstitution of Childhood and Family

Nicoletta Eunicke

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The everyday lives of children—and adults alike—are increasingly permeated by algorithms and digital technologies, which reconfigure family structures and the very notion of childhood. Often operating invisibly, algorithmic systems delineate the boundaries of what is perceived as a “normal” childhood and a “good” family (Goulden, 2021). Within the broader context of an algorithmic society, these developments are profoundly consequential for children’s lives and for the social construction of childhood (Quinn, 2021), as “children growing up today are among the first to be datafied from birth” (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018, p. 11). Data about children are collected not only through their interactions with peers (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021) and within domestic environments (*ibid.*), but also in educational institutions (Reimer & Flückiger, 2021) and across the interfaces between family, school, and daycare (Alanko & Alasuutari, 2022).

This presentation examines one dimension of this broader process of algorithmisation: the platformisation of family practices of care, upbringing, and education. The concept of ‘platformisation’ captures the ways in which digital platforms structure, mediate, and recontextualise everyday life (Sefton-Green et al., 2025). Drawing on group discussions (Heinzel & Eunicke, 2025) with children and their families, the study investigates how platform-based infrastructures shape and regulate familial practices of care, upbringing, and education. By analysing these dynamics, the presentation explores how platformisation contributes to the production and normalization of contemporary understandings of childhood, development, and family life.

Screen Children and the Boundaries of Digital Childhood

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In an increasingly digitalized society, children's everyday lives are shaped by complex networks of human and non-human actors. This paper explores how institutional actors such as ministries, NGOs, researchers, and student organizations construct and regulate children's digital practices through policies, recommendations, and educational frameworks. Drawing on Science and Technology Studies (STS), the concepts of generalized symmetry and performance are used to analyze how children and technologies co-create meaning and agency in educational contexts. The article introduces the figure of the screen child as a hybrid actor formed through political discourse and technological mediation.

Three patterns are identified: dichotomies (for example, screen versus non-screen, digital versus analog), double roles (adults as both regulators and uncertain guides), and inclusion ambitions (children's desire for co-creation and ownership). These patterns reveal how boundaries are drawn around children's digital lives, often without their active involvement, resulting in reduced agency and limited pedagogical possibilities. The paper argues for a shift from regulation to relation, where children are not merely subjects of control but co-learners and co-creators in shaping digital futures. By rethinking boundaries through performative and symmetrical lenses, the study highlights the need for inclusive, context-sensitive approaches to digital education that empower children to navigate and negotiate their technological realities. This contribution invites a redefinition of childhood boundaries in digital contexts and calls for ethical, methodological, and conceptual reconsiderations in childhood studies.

Entanglements of Physical and Virtual Spaces and the Porosity of Boundaries in Children's Digital Play

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For many children, digital games – played on consoles, PCs, or mobile devices – are an integral part of daily life. While play is generally considered central to child development, digital forms of it are often viewed sceptically in early childhood education. They are deplored for lacking materiality, physical presence, or ‘real’ spaces. However, our empirical research studying the everyday lives of young children in a digitalized world has shown that, in practice, there are no discrete boundaries separating material and virtual environments: on the contrary, these realms are intrinsically interwoven and entangled. Encounters take place in ‘Inbetween spaces’ that flow into one another during play.

Hybrid practices pose a methodological challenge; not least because digital phenomena such as data streams and algorithms are difficult to observe. But if digitality is approached not only in technical terms, but as dynamic, situated, more-than-human interaction, ethnographic research can open up to address elusive topics such as the porosity of physical and virtual boundaries. Since 2016, our long-term study “(Early) Childhood and Smartphones: Family Interaction Order, Learning Processes, and Cooperation” (SFB 1187 “Media of Cooperation”) has explored how children themselves define or overcome boundaries as they create hybrid spaces through interaction with digital devices. Our research indicates that digital gaming should not be seen as incongruous or detrimental to child development, but rather as an expansion of children’s experiences and relationships with themselves and the world. Our use of camera-ethnographic methodology (Mohn) has facilitated this probing of the boundaries of visibility, observation, virtuality, and materiality.

Thematic group 10. Art-based and Artistic Research; Authorship, Self-expression & Embodied Listening

The Hidden Adult and the Speaking Child: Rethinking Authorship in Children's Literature through Co-Creation

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This paper explores the boundaries of authorship, agency, and voice in a participatory, arts-based study of child–adult co-authorship. The project documents the collaborative process of writing a children's book intended for early readers, co-authored by a published adult writer and her young daughter, who will be named as a co-author on the book's cover. Through this process, the study examines how decisions about narrative direction, language, and imagery emerge in a shared creative space, and how a child—still learning to read and write—can articulate will and aesthetic preference within a medium traditionally constructed for rather than with children.

Drawing on Perry Nodelman's notion of the "hidden adult" (2008), the research challenges the implicit adult presence that shapes children's literature, asking how this presence can be consciously reconfigured through dialogic creation. Clementine Beauvais's concept of "temporal otherness" (2015) further frames the child and adult as inhabiting distinct temporalities; their co-authorship thus becomes an encounter across time, epistemology, and language. Methodologically, the study employs participatory co-creation, reflexive journaling, and dialogic text analysis to trace the negotiation of choice and voice in each stage of writing. By foregrounding the child's active role in shaping both form and meaning, the project reveals how the porous boundaries between researcher and participant, author and audience, can transform our understanding of agency in children's literature. The resulting book—and the process behind it—invites reconsideration of what it means for childhood to speak within its own representation.

Art-Based Research on the Possibilities for Children and Young People to Be Heard in Intensive Substitute Care

Marita Oja

Kulttuuriosuuskunta ILME

The Kuulluksi (“To Be Heard”) project and its sub-study Pathways to Self-Expression draw particularly on the Child welfare past statement (Hytönen et al., 2016), which revealed that children were repeatedly left alone with their experiences of maltreatment. Violence itself silenced and paralyzed them, and often, even when children spoke, they were not listened to. The failure to listen constituted a serious form of structural violence, leaving many with a sense of what has been called “double maltreatment” – first through the experience itself, and then through the lack of response to it.

This presentation examines the Kuulluksi art workshops carried out with children and young people living in intensive substitute care units during 2023–2024. The workshops aimed to strengthen the participants’ own voices and self-expression through sustained artistic engagement. The artistic process was grounded in the idea of art as a bridge between an individual’s inner and outer worlds, and in the understanding that adults’ role is to enable rather than control. The goal was to create an atmosphere free from evaluation and grounded in “not-knowing,” where children and young people could be heard and seen on their own terms. Weekly workshops employed a wide range of visual, verbal, and handicraft-based art methods, adapted to participants’ individual needs (Känkänen, 2013; Todd, 2001; Venkula, 2011).

The presentation describes the course of the workshops, the construction of safe space and freedom of expression, and the balance between freedom and guidance. It also explores elements of anarchism in young people’s self-expression, the tensions between censorship and freedom of expression, and the role of artists as facilitators of dialogue and participation in a long-term process. The presentation also shortly discusses the enabling factors that supported the success of the workshops through multidisciplinary collaboration.

The research highlights the complexity of building safety and trust – both between multi-professional cowork and with the participants –, the everyday predictability produced by continuity, the strengthening of involvement, and the opportunity to question norms through artistic expression. The multi-method art workshop process created alternative ways to represent one’s own reality and offered diverse avenues for processing emotions and life stories. The study demonstrates that long-term, participant-centered art activities can support young people’s agency and self-expression within the context of intensive substitute care.

Boundary Creation as an Artistic-Pedagogical Method in Children's Dance Education – Emerging Practices

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Creativity and play often characterize early childhood art education. Supporting the child's embodied expression in ways that stay open and emergent are at the core of dance education. Keeping with these goals, I explore boundary creation as an artistic-pedagogical method in children's dance pedagogy. The presentation aims to bring research in the performing arts pedagogy into conversation with childhood studies. It is based on my on-going artistic doctoral research in dance pedagogy in the context of early childhood education, in which I develop inclusive and accessible dance education that honors the child's embodied experience as the foundation and goal for the practice. In the presentation I discuss a dance pedagogical workshop process that I facilitated at a public daycare in Helsinki, Finland, as the artistic part of my research. As a dance pedagogue-researcher working with 2-6- year-old children, I experimented with practices that could attune to the children's embodied experience and foster creativity, as well as simultaneously enable a shared, group-based, and inclusive artistic practice. Through an exploration of several dance exercises created during the process, I discuss how the shaping of boundaries within the exercises became enabling constraints as defined by Manning (2013) that created possibilities for moments of emergent artistic agency, embodied listening, and joy within the dancing children. As a result, these dances allowed for a porous attuning to the shared practice of dancing together in diverse and multiple ways with each other and the world.

Thematic group 11. Family Reunion, Memory and Cyber Bullying

The Best Interest of the Child Left Behind? A critical Analysis of Negative Family Reunification Decisions

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Assessing the best interest of the child is a human rights obligation also recognised in the Finnish immigration law. Administrative courts have stated that it is a processual requirement and an important factor in the overall assessment. There are plenty of research discussing the difficulty, ambiguity and unfairness of the assessment of the best interest of the child. Some point out contextual biases, some would like to see new aspects considered and some advocate for recognition of child's own opinion. In this presentation, we explore these and other aspects in light of real cases of family reunification involving children. Based on our exclusive material of about 200 negative decisions (2022–2023) from the Finnish Immigration Service, we reveal situations where the views on the best interest of the child of parents, or the child themselves, are undermined by the decision-makers. We take a situation of a naturalized Finnish parent and their foreign child as an example. We identify a growing body of literature concerning “children left behind”, or more properly, “stayer youth” identifying legal, political and social dilemmas around this phenomenon. We explain how the applicants justify their motivation for a residence permit through the best interest of their child, and how the authorities reject that as a sufficient reason for a residence permit. This may not raise questions on legality of those decisions, but it reveals how some considerations of the best interests of the child are not relevant in the context of immigration.

Conflicting Interests in Criminal Liability Age Regulation: An Autoethnographic Study from the Perspective of a Rape Victim

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In Finland, criminal liability requires that the offender has reached the age of 15 at the time of the offence. This age threshold raises moral, social and psychological questions, such as whether a child younger than 15 could be capable of understanding the unlawfulness of their actions and their consequences. The age limit is the outcome of societal decision-making, which explains why different states have adopted different thresholds. Because of the age threshold, even a serious offence committed by a child under 15 remains unpunished. The victim may also be a child. This was my experience: I was subjected to an act meeting the legal definition of rape while in day care at the age of five. The perpetrator had not yet reached the age of 15.

My study adopts an autoethnographic approach, drawing on notes and reflections concerning the processing of a traumatic experience. I situate my personal narrative within a broader legal and societal framework, drawing on scholarship addressing the consequences of sexual victimization, theories justifying punishment, and the competing interests underlying age-based criminal liability regulation. My research questions are: how have I processed this traumatic experience alongside my development as an artist and a scholar of criminal law, and how has the fact that the incident was never addressed in criminal proceedings—because the perpetrator was not held legally accountable—shaped my understanding of a just criminal justice system and age regulation?

Do Parental Support and Boundaries Protect Child Against Cyberbullying? Results from Children's Worlds Study

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Various types of online content and digital media are an integral part of the lives of children. Also, social relationships, learning, and entertainment are increasingly taking place online. As everyday life moves to online digital spaces, violence and crime follow, bringing with them a wide range of psychological and physical harms to children. Cyberbullying as one dimension of digital violence breaks with traditional notions of bullying against children, space, and interaction, as online platforms enable the use of technology as a tool of control and power. Cyberbullying typically restricts one's agency causing negative impact on, for example sense of freedom and safety.

Parents have the major role in supporting and protecting children against various forms of cyberbullying. Parental attachment has shown to correlate to cyberbullying victimisation (Worsley et al. 2019) and especially father attachment has a direct effect on cyberbullying victimisation (Canestrari et al. 2021).

The study asks whether the support of parents and the boundaries they set protect children from cyberbullying and what are the consequences of cyberbullying to children's subjective wellbeing. The survey data consist of Finnish children aged 10-12 years who participated in the fifth wave of the Children's Worlds study (<https://sites.utu.fi/lastenmaailmat/>). Preliminary analysis shows that both parental and family support have effect on cyberbullying. The feeling of being heard by parents, and of being supported and taken care by family is connected to minor cyberbullying.

Thematic group 12. Magazine Covers, Comics & Newspaper Articles

Exploring Gender Boundaries: A Visual Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Representations in Hong Kong's Modern Children Magazine's Front Covers (1941–1951) Through Machine Learning

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Magazine front covers serve as a compelling visual tool for attracting attention, conveying editorial viewpoints, and reflecting social values. However, the front covers of children's magazines have received limited academic attention, particularly regarding their role in facilitating children's socialization through the visual depiction of role models. This research gap is especially evident in studies on gender identity formation, a critical aspect of child development. The absence of related research on Hong Kong's children's magazine culture compounds this limitation. To address these gaps, this study examined 141 front covers from *Modern Children* (1941–1951), an important and influential children's literary magazine in Hong Kong. Anchored in visual critical discourse analysis, the study adopted machine learning techniques, such as ensemble learning and logistic regression, to explore gender representations. The findings revealed that ensemble learning achieved approximately 70% accuracy in classifying gender based on variables such as characters' behaviour, settings, and clothing colours, highlighting significant differences in how male and female characters were portrayed. Logistic regression analysis further identified specific colours as significant predictors of gender, while behaviour type and setting type were not significant predictors. The results indicate a certain degree of progressiveness in gender representations, echoing the educational principles of the magazine under the historical background of that time. This research sheds light on the patterns of gender representations in *Modern Children* and provides valuable insights into the role of images in magazine covers in shaping children's socialization within Hong Kong's cultural history.

Negotiating the Boundaries of Childhood and Adulthood in Schulz's Comic Strip "Peanuts"

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This paper explores *Peanuts* (1950–2000), the long-running comic strip by Charles M. Schulz, to analyze how the figure of the child is mobilized to shape the strip's narrative perspective. *Peanuts* is a global phenomenon—syndicated in 75 countries and translated into 21 languages—yet it was always intended for an adult readership. As a form of “cross-writing” (Hatfield, 2011) that blends adult and child perspectives, *Peanuts* invites its adult readers into a space of “being-adult while also being-child” (Powrie, 2005, p. 350). The strip consistently traverses liminal boundaries between childhood and adulthood, offering readers a “dislocation in time and space”—a vantage point distinct from that of conventional adult or adolescent characters (p. 350). Indeed, much of its humour derives from the incongruity between adult and child states, especially *viz* vulnerability, innocence, and cruelty. Childhood figures elicit in the adult emotional responses—backward identification (‘I was once that child’ or ‘thank goodness I wasn't that child’) and forward projection (‘that child will become what I am now’).

Framed through a cultural studies perspective that draws from cinema (Lury, 2010), literary (Nodelman, 2008), and childhood studies (Abebe et al., 2025), this paper examines how *Peanuts* stages these liminal tensions through visual cues, ironic reversals, and emotional disclosures that blur the boundary between childhood and adulthood. Revisiting *Peanuts* through a cultural lens opens new possibilities for understanding how this enduring comic strip enables adults to symbolically mobilize—and even colonize—childhood within cultural forms, interrogating how meanings are ascribed to childhood.

Supporting Children's Growth and Development in Child Health Clinics – A Discourse-Historical Analysis of Finnish Newspapers

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Background and Aim

Child health clinics have supported preschool-aged children and their families for over a century. These clinics have been a central part of Finnish child healthcare and the promotion of family well-being. Societal changes, evolving family needs, and the structural and cultural diversity of families have influenced the focus, content, and objectives of child health clinic work overtime. This study aimed to describe child health clinic practices and the construction of their significance in Finnish newspapers. Specifically, it examined how themes related to children's growth and development, such as physical, psychological, and social well-being, parental support, and preventive healthcare, have been represented in newspaper discourse across different decades, and what meanings have been attributed to them. The goal was to provide insight into the social and historical significance of child health clinics in supporting children's growth and development.

Methods

The data consisted of newspaper articles published between 1922 and 2022 that addressed child health clinics, collected from the National Library of Finland's digital collections and newspaper archives. The material was analyzed using a discourse-historical approach (DHA).

Results

Over the past century, the role of child health clinics has shifted from monitoring physical growth to supporting children's overall psychological, social, and emotional development. Detailed results will be finalized in spring 2026 and presented at the conference.

Conclusions

Analyzing newspapers provides insight into the historical, cultural, and social significance of child health clinics across different periods, enhancing understanding of their societal and historical role in supporting children's growth and development.

Thematic group 13. Adolescence, Childhood Illness, Professional Discourse

Adolescent Students Building Bridges and Barriers Between their Multiple Worlds

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This paper examines adolescent students' movement across six worlds while producing meaningful projects. Our research questions are: 1) What discursive manifestations of contradictions did adolescents produce in the interviews about their projects? 2) How did adolescents cross boundaries and build barriers between their multiple worlds?

This study uses cultural-historical activity theory and an expanded model of adolescents' multiple worlds as spheres of activity: family, school, peers, digital, civic, and future. Over two school years, we conducted two Change Laboratory interventions in Finnish comprehensive schools with 32 eighth-graders who voluntarily created student-driven projects on topics beyond curriculum and testing constraints. The data include recordings from initial interviews (n=8), CL sessions (n=16), and follow-ups (n=15) across three projects. We analyzed discursive contradictions, then developed a method to explore how adolescents cross boundaries and build barriers between their worlds. Four categories emerged: contact, resource, barrier, and deliberate. Contradictions related to bullying, diversity, academic pressure, and participation were addressed during the projects. Boundary crossing and barrier building occurred in various ways, though movement toward family and future worlds was limited.

The Documentary and Booklet projects aimed for broad impact, while the Recess group focused on changing school practices, which involved reaching into societal boundaries through activities like providing snacks. The Recess and Booklet projects often searched for resources online, whereas the Documentary project sought to shape digital content intentionally. In these projects, students didn't just observe problems; they acted to solve them, crossing boundaries and building barriers between worlds, emphasizing students' role as active agents.

Childhood and Illness – Children's Everyday Life at the Interfaces of Institutions

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Young children can also fall ill, in which case periods of hospitalization can be a transitory or permanent part of childhood. When a child is critically ill, survival and health become a priority, which can pass other aspects of childhood, such as peer relationships or education. In any case, illness can change the course of childhood and everyday life, when children live their childhood in the hospital, at home, and possibly in daycare. A child's life in varying environments can also create tensions for the continuity of a child's everyday life. Then, the significance of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the hospital as a source of hope and as a connection to everyday life can be very significant not only for the child but also for the whole family. Overall, we know only little about these childhoods, which include illness.

We are interested in how the continuity and discontinuity of a child's everyday life are built in the practices of ECEC teachers working in hospitals at the interfaces of institutions. By observing how teachers adapt their actions, we can potentially see the practices, norms, and institutional structures that affect the child's everyday life. On the other hand, we are also interested in what these results can reveal about the childhood worlds in which children live their lives. We use the concept of the world to analyze a child's different living environments, which can be dynamic and diverse.

The Constructing of a Child in Early Childhood Education Professionals' Discussions

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In this paper I am researching constructions of a child in the context of different forms of early childhood education and care (ECEC). Previous research on the construction of ECEC aged children has focused especially on centre-based ECEC. This study extends the examination to other forms of ECEC as well. My data consists of focus group discussions of ECEC professionals: leaders, special education teachers, teachers, childcarers, and family daycare childminders. I have analyzed the data discursively. Based on the analysis, I have categorized three different discourses: In the future-oriented discourse the child is understood as a future schooler, in the second discourse as naturally developing according to their age without any special arrangements. In the last discourse, the child is produced as an object of educational system who is defined through their needs and special support that especially ECEC centres can offer. Based on the analysis, the child seems to be positioned variably in relation to centre-based ECEC, family daycare, and home environment. My research contributes to the discussion on the boundaries of the “normal” and expected child produced in childhood institutions.

Thematic group 14. Indigenous Perspectives & Childhood in the East-West German Divide

Rethinking Justice through Mobility: Sama-Bajo Childhoods in Unequal Geopolitical Landscapes

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The Sama-Bajo (also known as ‘Sama-Bajau’) indigenous community of Southeast Asia has historically been described as mobile ‘sea nomads,’ characterized by fluid identities and multi-state belonging. In recent decades, however, Sama-Bajo childhoods have become more sedentary as they are now living in coastal villages. This paper draws on ongoing multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted among children and young people in three Sama-Bajo villages in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Using the theoretical concept of mobility justice, we examine how spatial, environmental and intersectional dimensions of injustice shape the movement of these young people. Through a combination of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, walking tours, and analyses of children’s maps and drawings, we identify three key forms of mobility injustice. These are produced through adultist, racialized, and gendered bordering regimes, all with geopolitical underpinnings: (1) a ‘land bias’ that restricts children and young people’s access to space, movement, and play; (2) mobility restrictions arising from environmental degradation driven by capitalist, non-local adult activities; and (3) gendered mobility constraints informed by local fetishizations of fair skin, sustained by enduring colonial and racial hierarchies. We end the paper by discussing how the mobilities – and immobilities – of Sama-Bajo children and youth offer critical insights for theorising justice in childhood studies. We highlight in particular the complex interplay between uneven distribution of environmental hazards as a concern for understanding childhoods in different geopolitical settings.

Boundaries and Bridges: Indigenous Perspectives on Childhood and Decolonizing Early Childhood Education and Care

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INDearly (Indigenous knowledges for sustainability in early childhood education) is a network of scholars seeking to explore and share understandings of Indigenous values, knowledge, practices, and ways of being in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) across the circumpolar north. We examine the cultural boundaries of childhood in ECEC through interviews with parents of Indigenous children in Norway, Finland, and the United States, seeking to problematize the tensions between Indigenous ways of being and colonized ECEC systems. Across the research sites, Indigenous parents identified three key elements they wish to see integrated into ECEC: (1) Indigenous language revitalization, (2) connecting children to the Land, and (3) nurturing relationships with Elders culture-bearers, as essential foundations for fostering children's cultural identity development. In this paper, we discuss the tensions and boundaries within early childhood teacher education, drawing on the voices of Indigenous parents. We ask: How can we build bridges to decolonize ECEC and meaningfully include Indigenous perspectives of childhood? The aim of this research is to empower Indigenous parents and others advocating for Indigenization of ECEC for their children. Additionally, this paper has implications for early childhood teacher education programs and ECEC programs and policies.

Crossing Epistemic Boundaries Above the East–West German Divide: Reflections on Constructions of Childhood

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Just as the field of childhood studies examines both idealized images (e.g. Bloch 2022) and the lived realities of childhood (Bronfenbrenner 1970; Silova et al. 2017; ZIN et al. 2024), this paper focuses on epistemic boundary-making processes through the lens of the East–West conflict in divided Germany (Kleßmann 2001; Wentker 2005; Weber 2020), following the onset of the Cold War in 1947 (Jarausch et al. 2017; van Dijk 2012) and the historiographical framework of “German–German entanglement history” (Kleßmann 2001; Wentker 2005; Weber 2020), the latter understood as a period in which a country, sharing a common history, traditions, and language was divided by the systemic struggle between East and West. It will be explored how these systemic boundaries informed educational policymaking and the institutional shaping of early childhood education. Amid the broader struggle for ideological superiority between Western capitalism and the socialist utopia in the East, debates about growing up became entangled in this global political conflict, producing what Uhlig (2003) describes as a “competition for the better childhood” (p. 32). The discussion does not seek to evaluate which side imagined better conditions of upbringing, but rather examines how the overarching ideological context shaped particular understandings of childhood. Using a discourse-analytic approach (Keller 2005; McNaughton 2014) and the empirical findings of an ongoing PhD-project, it will be illustrated, how, on the East side, a rhetoric of progress and optimism was articulated, accompanied by a future-proof vision of a secure childhood spend in a protected environment, while the Western discourse was characterized by narratives of uncertainty and restraint, producing a contrasting vision of safeguarded childhood spaces.

Thematic group 15. Family spaces: IKEA catalogues, Public Libraries & Playgrounds

Unlimited Childhood? IKEA Catalogues as Transnational Infrastructures of Family Life

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This paper analyses IKEA catalogues from 1950 to 2020 as transnational intermediaries that have contributed to shaping notions of family and childhood across borders. Whereas the first catalogues, published exclusively in Sweden, hardly addressed children as a distinct target group, childhood moved into the spotlight from the 1960s onwards. With the company's expansion in the 1970s, notions of childhood and family – with specific processes of translation and adaptation – were exported into other welfare state contexts. The result is a form of „unlimited” childhood: a vision that transcends national boundaries and simultaneously mirrors capitalist expansion. Drawing on a convention-theoretical framework and a modified justification analysis, the study examines how diverse orders of worth were mobilised in catalogues over seven decades.

The analysis highlights how childhood is made durable through a variety of justifications that go beyond consumerism alone. Education, health, learning, play, and pleasure emerge as central domains in which children are addressed, categorised, and commodified. Catalogues thus functioned not only as instruments of consumer guidance but also as quasi-public arenas, in which societal expectations of a “good” childhood were negotiated, stabilised, and made available for translation into everyday family practices. By tracing the long-term transformations from post-war Swedish welfare ideals to globally standardised family imaginaries, the paper shows how IKEA catalogues hybridised conventions of childhood. These hybridisations illustrate how market infrastructures stabilise and circulate notions of border-crossing family childhood, while at the same time converting structural challenges (e.g. housing shortages, safety concerns, demands for education) into individualised consumer decisions.

Exploring Spatial Interactions and Boundaries in Self-Care Children's Public Library Use, Understanding Time in Self-Care Children's Community Placemaking Processes

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Self-care children, or children who are without direct adult caregiver or parent supervision during out-of-school hours, frequently spend significant amounts of time in public libraries across the United States. Public libraries are one of the last free and publicly accessible community spaces and renowned for their family engagement work; however, these institutions are often hostile towards self-care children's presence. As a result there is a need to better understand how this group uses the library space within the institutional and spatial bounds that exist to address marginalization and gaps in service within the library and other public spaces self-care children may spend time in. To answer this call, I analyze the ways that self-care children interact with the spatial bounds of the public library using placemaking and critical childhood theories. This includes understanding how self-care children engage with libraries' permanent features, the temporary changes or adjustments they make in the space, and how the space organizes their activities and movements.

Critical ethnographic observations of self-care children from three varied public libraries in the United States inform the data used for analysis. Findings overall point to self-care children experiencing the library as a space that could be adapted to their needs and desires in spite of, and because of, the spatial and institutional bounds that exist. Resistance in spite of oppression is a powerful reflection of the agency and strength of marginalized groups and provides a counter to deficit focused narratives (Hunter et al., 2016), something commonly tied to self-care children.

Hungry, Tired, but Happy: The Role of Playgrounds in Supporting Family Well-being

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Public playgrounds in Finland play a central role in family life and daily mobility, widely used as part of everyday routines. A literature review by Schipperij et al. (2024) shows that playgrounds support not only physical activity but also broader family well-being—yet this topic remains underexplored in educational and family research. This study aims to explore how parents of preschool-aged children describe the significance of playgrounds in supporting the physical, social, and psychological well-being of both children and themselves. Additionally, we explore the forms of social networks and interactional spaces that emerge both within families and among families in their broader community. The data was collected by interviewing 13 parents in 2025 who initially participated in a survey on playground usage among Finnish families with young children (n = 561) conducted in 2023. The semi-structured interview data were analysed using theory-driven thematic analysis. Preliminary analysis indicates that playgrounds contribute to the social sustainability of families by supporting physical, psychological, and social well-being. For parents, playgrounds enhance everyday functionality through shared physical activity and offer moments of rest, recovery, and emotional relief—though they may also involve social and physical demands. For children, playgrounds promote movement, imaginative and pressure-free play, and the development of motor skills. Socially, playgrounds foster peer interaction among children and enable parents to connect with others, receive peer support, and experience a sense of community. Moreover, playground visits were frequently described as dedicated time for child-parent interaction.

Thematic group 16. Pandemic Response & Migrant Educators

Colonising Childhood: Adultist Governance and Adolescent SRHR in Uganda's Pandemic Response

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This paper examines how adult authorities, such as the state, religious, and policy elites, colonize childhood and instrumentalize ‘the child’ in political contests over sexuality, health, and national morality in Uganda. We analyzed existing policies and child protection instruments on how adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are governed through adultist policy choices that speak about children while sidelining adolescents’ own voices. For example, the abstinence-first sexuality education framework, which was launched in 2018, emerged from moral panic and political calculus rather than adolescent needs, and key SRHR topics were excised to satisfy adult gatekeepers. During the pandemic, over fifty executive directives, including nationwide school closures, recast children as objects of protection and discipline, shrinking access to services while amplifying gendered risks such as sexual violence, thereby weakening youth-friendly redress. Meanwhile, long-promised instruments are being developed to operationalize rights for adolescents. We utilize a constitutional-implementation lens focusing on political, judicial, and popular mechanisms to show how adult elites interpret, enforce, and contest rights for children while retaining decision-making power over them. We contend that adult colonization of childhood operates through policy silences, crisis bureaucracy, and moral governance that utilize childhood symbolically while limiting adolescents’ agency. We recommend crisis-resilient, rights-affirming reforms, including the publication and harmonization of sexuality education and school-health instruments with out-of-school coverage, the fast-tracking of SRHR cases involving minors, and the institutionalization of adolescent-led accountability forums within implementation cycles.

Negotiating the Boundaries of Early Childhood Education and Family Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the boundaries between early childhood education and family life in multiple ways. In this presentation, we examine parents' experiences of early childhood education during the pandemic by asking how they describe the shifting boundaries between ECE and family life, particularly in the spring of 2020. The presentation is based on a large-scale survey (n=595) conducted as part of a Nordic research project on resilience and social sustainability among Finnish parents whose children attended early childhood education during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, early childhood education settings faced significant operational changes: group separations, parents' restricted access to facilities, and increased reliance on digital communication. These changes reshaped the everyday practices of early education and altered the dynamics of home–ECE collaboration.

Preliminary results of parents' experiences reveal heightened uncertainty, a shift of educational responsibility to the home, and the weakening of pedagogical collaboration. As some children remained at home, the pedagogical role of early childhood education became fragmented, and communication was often limited or absent. Many parents reported feeling solely responsible for their child's development without sufficient institutional support. In parallel, the data underscores parents' strong belief in early childhood education as a vital promoter of children's growth and well-being.

This presentation examines how institutional boundaries became blurred, flexible, and negotiable in a time of crisis. The findings highlight how parents navigated this unexpected situation and how the pandemic context offers a unique lens for rethinking the relationship between early childhood institutions and family life.

Resisting Institutional, Professional and Cultural Boundaries: Migrant and Refugee Educators

Susan Grieshaber

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This conceptual paper challenges some institutional, professional, and cultural boundaries associated with Australian educators who work with young children. Official data records the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contact workers, but data is not gathered for educators with migrant and refugee heritages. Yet, as of mid 2024, 31.5% of the Australian population was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025) and over 48% of Australians have at least one parent born overseas (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024). The National Workforce Census Early Childhood Education and Care (NWC) (2024) showed that over 19% (288,012) of children attending services (or their parents) spoke a language other than English at home, and 0.6% of children (8,732) have a refugee or special humanitarian program background. But data is not gathered about the number of migrant and refugee educators working in the sector.

The paper investigates ‘invisible’ institutional, professional, and cultural boundaries concerning educators including the risks of migrant educators being positioned as a ‘problem’ by employers and colleagues (Nuttall et al., 2022); under-utilisation of the rich resources of migrant and refugee educators (Settlement Services International, 2023); lack of recognition of qualifications gained outside Australia, and financial support required for career development. It makes an argument that these boundaries are examples of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007); and that using the cultural knowledges and resources of migrant and refugee educators will better serve children and families to support children to achieve their full potential.

Thematic group 17. State Intervention, Far-Right Politics & Peacebuilding

Redefining Boundaries of State Intervention, Care, and Kinship in Child Protection

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Permanent placement of the child in out-of-home care or non-consensual adoption are the most intervening measures in child protection. In Denmark the Child's Act (2024) now allows such decisions to be made even before a child is born. This calls for knowledge about and critical reflection of how legal, institutional, and ethical boundaries of childhood are negotiated and redefined in contemporary child protection practices.

This paper presents insights from a Danish research project (2025–2028) that investigates how the best interests of the child are understood, practiced and decided upon when permanent placement or non-consensual adoption is considered. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study follows social workers, parents, and children in their everyday lives gaining insight into how the child's views are used to inform decisions, and how such decisions affect disadvantaged children and their families.

Non-consensual adoption can be seen as an extreme form of biopolitical intervention (Rose, 2007), where the state not only regulates but redefines familial bonds. While framed politically as an act of care and a chance for 'a new childhood' free from a stigmatized background and the label of 'system child', the intervention is also criticized for individualizing structural problems of poverty and limited capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011) and labelling them as "bad parenting". This marriage between protection and (legal) regulation raises critical questions about care for children from disadvantaged families, and how boundaries between kinship, welfare, and state authority are drawn and redrawn in contemporary child protection.

Mobilising Childhood in the Affective Politics of the Far Right

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During the ongoing decade, the rise of far-right parties has shaken the political sphere in several countries. They have either been elected as the governing party or entered into governing coalitions setting agendas, the content and tone of decision-making. In this presentation, we trace how childhood is used in far right rhetoric to promote nationalistic agendas in four European countries, namely France, Hungary, Finland and Sweden. With ‘far right’, we refer to parties or movements, which identify people and state and consider ‘others’ as a threat to the national community. By analysing these cases side by side, we aim to highlight the different ways far right political parties use notions of child/hood in their political visions to shore up support for their cultural and political ideologies. In order to explore these discourses, we use far right parties’ political mandates written in their party programs and speeches presented in public and parliamentary debates, paying special attention where notions of child/hood are mobilized. We ask: How does ‘the child’ as a figure is being capitalised on by far right politics?

We use Erica Burman’s analytical lens: ‘child as method’, to highlight how affects and emotions are linked to the parties’ wider cultural–political projects. ‘Child as method’ is helpful as it identifies connections between figurations of the child and affective and political economies of childhood pointing to broader cultural changes in societies. Our preliminary findings suggest that childhood serves as a potent rhetorical tool, cultivating atmospheres of concern, anxiety, or even fear—thus reinforcing far-right ideologies through emotionally charged narratives.

“Boundaries of the Past and the Present.” The Mosaic Approach as a Method to Understand the Boundaries of Contemporary Youth Sector Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

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The Northern Ireland (NI) conflict is widely understood as a religious conflict; but is fundamentally a clash of political and national identities; with Catholics aligned to an Irish identity, called Nationalists and Republicans and Protestants, with a strong British identity, named Unionists or Loyalists. Despite efforts such as the Good Friday Agreement, indicators of division and conflict remain, which are clearly noticeable in young people’s lives.

UN Resolution 2250 proposes that young people are necessary as co-creators in peace processes if peacebuilding is to be successful. However, young people from NI self-report as being disinterested in peacebuilding. This study proposes a new approach to youth sector peacebuilding: the Hamardle model (Hamilton, Hammond and McArdle, 2024) that challenges peacebuilding workers to reframe their work using a youth-centric lens and methodology for peacebuilding that starts where young people start (Davies, 2021).

To investigate this challenge the Mosaic Approach (MA) is used to explore contemporary youth sector peacebuilding programmes in Northern Ireland. This multi-method approach “combines the traditional techniques of observation and interviewing with the introduction of participatory tools” (Clark, 2005 p. 13). The MA “places an emphasis on exploring young people's perceptions of their lives (Clark, 2005) and offers a shared space for multiple listening as a complex web of interactions, continually moving from the micro to the macro level, providing opportunities for practitioners and young people to listen to each other and to themselves (Rinaldi, 2005), providing a horizontal social space in which the historical and social boundaries could be reconfigured.

Thematic group 18. Participation, 360 perspectives, Boundary-making

Child Participation as a Space: A Narrative Study of Everyday Life in Early Childhood Education

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This presentation is based on an ongoing doctoral study that explores child participation in early childhood education (ECE) as a relational and everyday phenomenon. Child participation is conceptualized as a dynamic space formed through interactions among children, educators, and the ECE environment, extending beyond human relationships to include material and cultural dimensions. Although child participation is a central theme in both international ECE discourse and the Finnish curriculum, its practical implementation often remains limited. A key challenge lies in the adult-oriented nature of existing research and pedagogical practices, which tend to prioritize the teacher's perspective while the child's own viewpoint remains marginal. Situated within the field of childhood studies, this research adopts a narrative, autoethnographic, and relational approach. The data consists of video-recordings in a Finnish kindergarten, with the researcher present as a teacher. Narrative methods were used in the analysis.

The findings show that the space of child participation is a dynamic, multi-layered, and tension-filled phenomenon. Children actively shape their own space of participation through individual actions and interactions with peers and educators. Peer relationships and engagement with the material environment are particularly emphasized. Even young children demonstrate awareness of the structural possibilities and constraints that guide their actions, while simultaneously testing and stretching these boundaries in their everyday activities.

The study highlights that children are not passive objects of ECE pedagogic but active agents in shaping their environment to support their participation. These insights call for a shift to recognize the complexity and multi-layeredness of participation in ECE.

Reimagining Boundaries of Childhood through 360° Perspectives: Immersive Insights from Early Childhood Education Settings

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The project Weitblick in der Sozialen Arbeit (“Broadening Perspectives in Social Work”) at the University of Applied Sciences Koblenz explores how immersive 360° video technologies can transform perspectives on everyday practices in early childhood education. Building on sociological perspectives of childhood as a generational and social construct (Alanen, 2017; Qvortrup, 2005) and recent debates on agency and methodological reflexivity in childhood studies (Esser & Betz, 2016; Bollig & Kelle, 2016), the project challenges traditional methodological and ethical boundaries of researching childhood.

By capturing and reflecting on interactions within day-care settings from a 360° perspective, Weitblick enables researchers, students, and practitioners to re-experience pedagogical spaces through children’s eyes. Importantly, children themselves act as co-researchers by recording 360° videos of their own environments. This participatory approach blurs the boundary between observation and participation (Honig & Bühler-Niederberger, 2009) and redefines how children’s agency and spatial experiences can be represented without adult colonisation of meaning.

Drawing on current approaches to immersive media in social work education (Averbeck et al., 2024), the paper discusses how 360° recordings created by children act as “boundary objects” that promote interdisciplinary dialogue between social work, childhood studies, and media education. Through these child-led immersive perspectives, Weitblick in der Sozialen Arbeit expands both the methodological and epistemological boundaries of how childhood is seen, studied, and experienced—contributing to rethinking the role of technology in making children’s everyday worlds visible and discussable in research and higher education.

“We’re Playing – Not for Adults”: Children’s Boundary-Making as Part of doing Peer- and Play Culture in an Early Childhood Institution

Fina Lewenhaupt Vilholm

Absalon University College, Denmark

This paper explores how children define and negotiate their own boundaries within a pedagogically organised but play-centred early childhood institution. Based on ten months of micro-ethnographic fieldwork (Vilholm, 2022) the study examines play beyond the adult gaze—not as a lack of supervision, but as a pedagogically supported condition in which children are given the opportunity to create temporary spaces on their own terms. In this institutional setting, adults are present, attentive and mobile, yet they deliberately refrain from entering all play, allowing children to decide when and how adult participation is welcome, as part of producing and distributing play cultures.

The analysis shows that children actively use this opportunity to set boundaries both towards adults and within peer culture. Play beyond the adult gaze thus becomes a space where children practise self-determined participation, experiment with language, bodily movement, rough-and-tumble play, and co-create their own norms of what play and fun can be—forms of boundary-making that differ from adult-led interaction. Rather than demonstrating professional absence, the findings point to a slower pedagogy that recognises children’s right to protect private zones of play and supports the value of being able to opt out of adult presence without losing safety, care or relational connection. The paper argues that such conditions expand children’s opportunities to define their own boundaries—not only as a right, but as a lived cultural practice embedded in everyday play.

Thematic group 19. Multispecies & More-Than-Human Environments, Climate Health

Researching Childhood Multispecies Secret Places With/Out Children: Working With/In Boundaries

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This paper presents ongoing doctoral research on childhood multispecies secret places, physical, digital, and imagined, shared with other-than-human companions and shaped through secrecy. These places challenge conventional childhood geographies by disrupting adult-defined boundaries and foregrounding children's spatial practices that elude supervision. They also raise critical questions: What knowledge of children's secret lives is produced, and how? What are the ethical implications of this knowledge-making?

Advancing childhood studies, this work proposes a relational, multispecies, and decolonial approach to researching childhood places, one that embraces ambiguity, wonder, and the limits of knowing. It centers children's more-than-human entanglements and resists claiming full access to their experiences, valuing the unknowability of secret places shaped by resistance and creativity. Refusing to fully know becomes an ethical stance, prompting reflection on researcher power and the risks of adult colonization of children's worlds. Engaging with the theme Childhood and Boundaries, the paper explores what it means to research childhood with/out children, where "with/out" signals both presence and absence, collaboration and distance. It interrogates boundaries between adult and child, researcher and participant, secrecy and visibility.

This paper shows that empirical methods with limiting boundaries can also be generative. Using a postqualitative, research-creation approach, including enabling constraints, anonymous postcards, and arts-based analysis, it argues that research can be more than extractive; it can be a practice of wonder. It invites childhood studies to embrace radical hospitality toward all forms of childhood including the have-been, ever-are, other-than-human, and the strange or unexpected, recognizing the adult researcher as a guest.

Mapping Childhood in More-Than-Human Environmental Education Research: Geographic and Methodological Boundaries

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How is childhood conceptualized in more-than-human environmental education research, and which children become visible within these conceptualizations? This paper presents findings from a systematic review of 110 peer-reviewed articles (2009-2025) examining representations of childhood in multispecies and posthumanist environmental education literature.

The analysis maps geographic, methodological, and conceptual patterns shaping knowledge production about childhood and nature relationships. Research is concentrated predominantly in the Global North, particularly Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States, while Global South contexts remain underrepresented. Methodologically, studies predominantly feature curated, adult-mediated nature encounters in managed spaces. Children living in ongoing multispecies relationships appear less frequently. Conceptually, particular understandings of childhood are often presented as broadly applicable, with varying attention to cultural and geographic specificity.

These patterns reveal how childhood as a concept gets constructed through environmental education research. Where Indigenous children appear, they are predominantly from Australian and North American contexts, while Indigenous communities elsewhere remain underrepresented. Similarly, urban children in the literature are typically from affluent Northern settings, while underprivileged /working children in Global South contexts are absent. Understanding diverse childhood worlds is foundational for developing inclusive theoretical frameworks. The paper examines how current research boundaries shape whose experiences inform scholarly knowledge, and identifies opportunities for geographically and methodologically diverse scholarship that recognizes multiple ways of being a child in relation to more-than-human worlds.

Children's Perspectives Missing in Climate-Health Research: A Scoping Review on Boundaries of Knowledge

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Climate change is widely recognised as a major threat to children's health and wellbeing. However, research on child health is typically conducted from adult perspectives, with limited inclusion of children as informants. This scoping review aimed to examine whether climate-health and the impacts of climate change have been studied from children's perspectives within nursing and health sciences literature.

Following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, peer-reviewed empirical studies addressing climate change and child health were systematically searched and independently screened by two scholars. Of the 221 records identified, 10 studies met the inclusion criteria. Data were extracted on study aims, participants, and key findings. Preliminary analysis revealed that although research identifies extensive threats posed by climate change, such as climate anxiety and heat stress, children are rarely positioned as knowledge-holders of their own climate realities. Instead, climate-health knowledge is predominantly produced through nurses and parents. Only a few studies positioned children as co-constructors of knowledge.

This absence has epistemological, ethical, and methodological implications. Adult-defined boundaries shape which climate-health impacts are considered valid, which coping strategies are acknowledged, and whose future concerns receive attention. Listening to children could reveal aspects of climate-health that benefit society as a whole.

The review suggests that the boundaries of childhood in climate-health research are shaped by adult authority, institutional norms, and methodological traditions that marginalise children's agency. To challenge these boundaries, children must be engaged not only as vulnerable populations but as essential contributors to climate-health research. Crossing this boundary opens possibilities for future-oriented climate-health action.

Thematic group 20. From Adolescence to Adulthood, Queer Boyhood & Consumer Education

Composing to Learn and Navigate Boundaries Beyond Secondary Schooling

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Multilingual learners (MLs) in secondary schools often grow and live on boundaries between languages, cultures, and stages of life. This study explores how MLs in a linguistically and culturally diverse high school in Western Canada navigate these boundaries while transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Within a six-week Grade 12 Environmental Science inquiry project inspired by *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Kimmerer et al., 2022), students engaged in digital multimodal composing-to-learn (DMCtl, Smith, 2019) to deepen their understanding of reciprocity, human responsibility toward nature, and sustainable ways of living. Drawing on multimodality (Early et al., 2015; Kendrick, 2016) and digital multimodal composition (Smith, 2019), this qualitative research employed multimodal ethnographic methods to analyze students' project proposals, digital storyboards created with Miro, final digital products (art pieces, videos, and audio creations), and interviews with students and their teacher. Through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), two vignettes illustrate how storytelling in DMCtl became a central tool for enabling students to reclaim agentive identities as videographers, visual artists, and project managers. Through storytelling, students meaningfully applied their environmental knowledge, reflected on interconnectedness between human life and nature, and used digital multimodal tools to act in the world. The project culminated in an interactive schoolwide gallery that highlighted how DMCtl can bridge school life and the real world, transforming content learning into an authentic experience. The findings underscore the power of DMCtl to mediate boundary crossings — interdisciplinary learning, schooling practices and being in the world, being a student and a citizen — and position MLs as capable meaning-makers.

Flower Boy: Queer Boyhoods and Unrequited Queer Love

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This paper examines the queer potentialities of contemporary Swedish children's cinema through close readings of *Tsatsiki, Dad and the Olive War* (Lisa James Larsson, 2015) and *Percy, Buffalo Bill and I* (Anders Gustafsson, 2005). Drawing on Alexander Doty's (1993, 2000) theorization of straight readings of certain mass culture only being possible within heterocentrist paradigms. Along with Kathryn Bond Stockton's (2009) notion of the queer child, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1985) concept of erotic triangles, the analysis challenges the heteronormative habitual readings that have the reception and understanding of these films, and children's cinema at large. The paper argues that scenes conventionally coded as romantic produce erotic tensions between male characters that exceed the boundaries of homosocial friendship. *Tsatsiki, Dad and the Olive War* and *Percy, Buffalo Bill and I* then emerge as key examples of how Swedish children's films encode queerness within narratives traditionally understood as heteronormative. By analyzing the cinematic tone of these films intimacy and desire is revealed alongside the idea of the innocent childhood. By foregrounding these queer readings, the paper highlights the importance of reinterpreting canonical works in Swedish children's cinema as sites where queerness is not marginal or exceptional but structurally embedded.

Youthscaping Consumer Pedagogy – Re-Thinking Lower-Secondary School Consumer Education

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Consumer education has been recognized as a key instrument in addressing the challenges faced by young people in increasingly complex markets and ongoing eco-social crises. At the same time, there is a growing consensus on the need to make consumer education more relevant and meaningful for pupils to fully realize its transformative potential. According to prior research, this is most effectively achieved by linking pedagogical content with young people's everyday experiences and cultures. Yet how this kind of pedagogic "youthscaping" (Aponte-Martínez & Pellegrino, 2017) is executed in practice, and how the boundary between adult and young people's worlds can be crossed in a responsive way, remains largely unstudied.

Based on qualitative teacher interviews (n=23), we examine aspects of youth-centered consumer pedagogy in Finnish lower-secondary school home economics. Our preliminary results indicate that youthscaping of consumer education is pursued by addressing pupils' near-future life-course transitions (e.g., moving out to live independently), applying self-reflective learning assignments, and utilizing topical youth cultural phenomena as a pedagogic framework. However, while teachers recognize the need for a youth-centered approach, it is practiced in varying ways and with varying intensity. This highlights the need for more active reflection on, and pedagogic support for, youth-centered teaching practices in promoting young people's consumer competences.

Thematic group 21. Linguistic Diversity & Philosophical Enquiry

Responding to the 'Small': Crossing Porous Boundaries

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In this paper, we explore through words, sounds and video how a child's play with miniature LEGO skeletons opens up philosophical enquiry into the porous boundaries in-between adult/child, life/death, animate/inanimate, big/small and human/more-than-human. Following a research field trip to a cemetery, Aatu's existential play invites us to reconsider how education might help people of all ages to confront the meaning of existence in a fragile world - an urgent task in the Anthropocene. We re-turn (to) data from Small Matters, a Research Council of Finland- funded project on young children's philosophical enquiries into multispecies death and dying. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Karen Barad, we reimagine responsibility and response-ability in times of ecological crisis. Through a vignette, we illustrate how the Community of Philosophical Enquiry (CoPE) pedagogy enables a 'thinking-with-hands' that troubles human exceptionalism and adult-centrism. Levinas's ethics of alterity and Barad's agential realism together inspire a posthumanist reading of the child's existential play. We argue that cultivating response-ability requires slowing down, attending to the small (child, iPhone, paper, white tack, pencil...), troubling anthropocentric temporalities, and tracing phenomena ad infinitum. Re-turning to the data becomes a worlding process—an excavation of layered realities critical for justice-to-come.

Children as Civilising Agents: Understandings of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care

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The Norwegian early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector is characterised by increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, with 20% of children having a minority background (Statistics Norway, 2022). Previous research has primarily examined how staff address diversity (Glaser, 2018), while children's own perspectives have received less attention, even though studies indicate that children with a migration background may face additional challenges compared to majority children (Lazzari et al., 2020; OECD, 2017; Picchio & Mayer, 2019; Sadownik, 2018). This qualitative study explores how children in Norwegian ECEC understand and experience cultural and linguistic diversity, with particular emphasis on which voices are recognised and how this shapes inclusion and belonging. Guided by Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes (1994), children are understood as active civilising agents who are both shaped by and contribute to shaping cultural norms (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017; Kimathi, 2023). The empirical material consists of interviews with children aged 3–5 years, pedagogical leaders, assistants and directors, as well as observations of everyday interactions. Preliminary findings suggest that linguistic diversity is more visible in children's narratives, peer interactions, and the institutional environment. In contrast, cultural diversity is less explicitly articulated and more often aligned with majority practices. The study discusses how recognition of multiple voices and everyday participatory structures can strengthen inclusion, and points to the need for pedagogical approaches that invite all children's linguistic and cultural resources into the shared community, regardless of social, linguistic or cultural background.

“We all Have a Voice...Use It!”: Challenging Deficit Perspectives About Multilingual Learners Through Newcomer Agency and the Multimodal Making of a Young Activist

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Deficit perspectives continue to shape how multilingual learners (MLLs), particularly racialized newcomers, are positioned in classrooms—often as cultural contributors rather than fulsome intellectual participants, capable leaders, and activists. This ethnographic study draws on a living literacies framework to explore the year-long disciplinary engagement of Ana, a Grade 5 newcomer in a western Canadian classroom who crossed multiple boundaries as she developed her activist identity. through reflexive thematic analysis of Ana’s written, oral, and embodied participation in Language Arts and Social Studies, we trace her development of a sophisticated activist model—identifying issues and their impacts, proposing evidence-based alternatives, persuading others to action, and grappling with collective social change. Ana articulated, tested, and refined this model across disciplinary contexts through multimodal practices—ranging from reflective writing to spontaneous protest and collaborative filmmaking—that reveal agentic possibilities often obscured by print-dominant assessments and deficit assumptions that seek to contain MLLs within predetermined roles.

Our analysis reveals how Ana crossed linguistic, disciplinary, and identity boundaries throughout this process, moving fluidly between her roles as newcomer, student, and emerging activist. Her case demonstrates how pedagogical environments that centre student voice, multimodal expression, and justice-oriented inquiry can recognize and reposition MLLs as boundary-crossing leaders and change-makers. Ana’s story offers a powerful counter-narrative to deficit ideologies and illustrates the transformative potential of living literacies in multilingual education. Implications are offered for classroom practice, teacher education, and policy, calling for recognition of MLLs’ inherent agency and support for their full participation in disciplinary learning.

Thematic group 22. Inclusion, Discursive boundaries, Hospitality

Inclusive Early Childhood Education – Boundaries, Barriers, and Hope

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This study examines the boundaries, barriers, and hope related to the implementation and realization of inclusive early childhood education. The analysis is based on three separate studies, and the aim is to synthesize their findings. In exploring boundaries, attention is paid to who is able to fully participate in the various activities of the day in early childhood education and under what conditions. Barriers are considered both as concrete and symbolic factors that slow down or completely prevent a child's or children's participation. Hope functions both as a counterforce and as an enabler of change. Through the lens of hope, the study reflects on how early childhood education communities can collectively identify, diminish, and remove boundaries and barriers to make inclusive early childhood education a reality. Hope is seen as a conscious action that enables the realization of inclusion and equity in early childhood education.

Discursive Boundaries in Children's and Parents' Talk About Play

Rebekah Willett

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This paper investigates children's and parents' ideas about and experiences of play in the United States, including barriers and enablers to participation in community spaces such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, and museums. The paper draws on interviews with 16 children ages 4 to 12 and separate interviews with parents and caregivers of those children. The analysis investigates ways broad societal level discourses about family play practices are reflected in children's and parents' discourse. Three dominant discourses are examined: children's play as physical activity, children's play as important for learning and development, and children's play as innate and part of their naturally curious and imaginative state of being. The paper argues that family play practices are in some ways highly visible as children play in public spaces in diverse ways with varying levels of supervision. Further, family play practices become visible or at least known by others through social encounters. Family play practices, therefore, are part of the ways that family membership is performed in communities. This membership and performance is constructed within and through dominant discourses about children's play. These discourses create boundaries that define the value of particular kinds of play, with an emphasis on play that is highly physical, developmentally appropriate, and/or imaginative. Importantly, these discursive boundaries ignore social and emotional aspects of play that children value. Further, discourses create hierarchies that value forms of play that are less available to some families than others due to geographic, socioeconomic, or other cultural or identity factors.

Hospitality in Early Childhood Discussions

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The field of early childhood education (ECE) is full of encounters. In addition to daily interactions between diverse children and adults, various thoughts and feelings, worldviews, cultures, knowledges, experiences, understandings, attitudes, and values are constantly in motion—clashing and crossing but also coexisting or attempting to coexist in a spirit of friendliness.

Using a narrative and phenomenological approach, we analyze transcriptions of focus group discussions in which participants representing different positions (ECE practitioners, parents, politicians) discuss inclusive ECE. We employ the metaphor of hospitality to explore the tensions—and the ruptures within those tensions—related to inclusive early childhood education.

Thematic group 23. Geopolitics, Cold War, Youth Mobility

Children on Svalbard: Childhood as Embodied Geopolitics in the Context of Blurry Legal and Geographic Boundaries

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Svalbard is an Arctic Archipelago, situated at a two-hour plane ride from mainland Norway. It is under Norwegian sovereignty, yet citizens of signatory states to the Svalbard treaty (1920) are granted equal rights of access to, and residence on, Svalbard. As a result, Russia has a settlement on Svalbard, and the Norwegian state's settlement Longyearbyen is an ethnically diverse population encompassing over 50 nations. Norway has strong national interests in the administration of Svalbard, explicitly stated in its latest policy document (Meld. St. 2023-2024, p. 13). The Svalbard treaty forbids military presence on the archipelago, even for Norway. Consequently, Norway has used family settlement as geopolitical strategy to signal Norwegian sovereignty. Given current rising tensions between NATO and Russia, Norwegian authorities emphasize that Norwegian rules and regulations apply on Svalbard. The state uses its strategy of "permanent Norwegian family settlement" to signal a normality to the international public (ibid., p. 14). However, the policy document also informs that the legal and political framework of Svalbard is different to Norway's mainland, including children's rights to health and welfare services.

In this tension between geopolitics, normality and unconventional societal and legal frameworks, 426 children live isolated in Longyearbyen. With their physical presence, these children embody representation work of adult geopolitics, and signal boundaries where borders between states are blurred. Based on school texts, workshops, interviews with youth and with child welfare professionals, our paper examines how childhood in Longyearbyen is experienced both by youth and the adults with responsibilities for them.

Creating the Rights of the Child: The UN Convention and the Global Cold War

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My paper draws on archival research in the Commission of Human Rights at the UN to examine the drafting process of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, from 1978-1989. The Polish People's Republic instigated the request for a Convention in 1978 aiming to model it on the 1959 Declaration and have it ratified in time for the International Year of the Child in 1979. However, in the end the drafting took a decade, and revealed differing conceptions of what should be the legal, social, political, emotional, intellectual boundaries of childhood held by states representing different religious and political worldviews. These included both Catholic and Islamic views of childhood as well as arguments between the states from the socialist bloc and the West, for example over the state's role with the child and family. Most of all, I show that the debate at the heart of the drafting was between states of the Global North (including the socialist states) and the Global South over whether there really is an 'autonomous' child, existing independently of social, economic, historical, cultural and political context. I argue that the Convention was partly built on the erasure of the post-colonial worldmaking of the Global South, which in the 1970s called for an international order of economic justice and wealth distribution to improve children's lives, rather than rights for autonomous individual children, living outside history.

Youth Mobility in Jordan and Lebanon: Navigating Intersecting Boundaries

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¹*Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)*, ²*Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) Jordan*, ³*Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) Lebanon*

Research on the interaction between legal, political, social and symbolic boundaries in the context of human mobility has elucidated the complex and often contradictory nature of migrant and refugee trajectories. Cross-border mobility is also increasingly a key part of youth transitions, wherein geographic movement is imbricated within and mutually constitutive of the embodied and social shift between childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Analyses that contextualise mobility experiences in young people's broader lifecourses can offer essential insights into the consequences of mobility for their lives and wellbeing. Yet while it is well-established that gender plays a distinct role in shaping the trajectories of young people as they move through adolescence, research on the temporal dimensions of youth mobility has not engaged in-depth with the boundaries and borders that are constructed by and through gender norms and inequalities.

In this paper, we draw on research undertaken as part of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal study, to explore the gendered dimensions of young people's mobility and the physical, symbolic and experienced boundaries that they encounter and navigate. The GAGE study has followed the trajectories of adolescents and young people in multiple lower- and middle-income countries for the past decade. Findings presented here focus on pre- and post-migration in-depth interviews with young people from host and refugee communities in Lebanon amid ongoing economic and political turmoil, and with young Syrian refugees in Jordan before and after returning to Syria in the aftermath of the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

Thematic group 24. Narrative Thinking, Agency and Ethics in Childhood Studies

Childhood Studies and the Study of Children's Perspectives – Challenging Conceptual Boundaries

Liisa Karlsson

University of Helsinki, Finland

This presentation examines the theoretical, ontological, and methodological boundaries that shape—and at times constrain—research with children. Drawing on empirical studies within the field of childhood studies, it focuses on how child perspectives challenge conventional frameworks.

Traditionally, childhood has been understood through institutional and developmental discourses that influence how children's agency, knowledge, and participation are conceptualized. These framings can limit recognition of children's lived experiences and expressive capacities.

Using relational and dialogical approaches, the presentation highlights how children live and learn in interaction with others—human and more-than-human—and within specific temporal, spatial, cultural, and ecological contexts. Education and growth are inherently relational, requiring attentiveness, mutual respect, and meaningful encounters.

Narrative thinking, as theorized by Jerome Bruner, offers a complementary epistemological mode to logico-scientific reasoning. Children's knowledge is often expressed through action—such as play, gestures, silence, and humor—forms that differ significantly from adult-centric modes of communication. Furthermore, a deepened understanding of dialogicity (Bakhtin) provides valuable perspectives and boundary-expanding insights into interactions with children. Children's ways of expressing their knowledge, understandings, beliefs, ideas, and initiatives challenge researchers to ethically engage with their unique modes of meaning-making.

Methodologically, studies of child perspectives require researchers to slow down, listen, and interpret children's expressions beyond verbal language. Children produce knowledge in narrative ways. Recognizing these forms of expression and re-conceptualizing the childhood invites reflection on the boundaries between adult and child, researcher and participant, and opens space for more inclusive and responsive childhood research.

When Agency Draws Boundaries: Rethinking a Core Concept in Childhood Studies

Keiju Vihreäsalo

University of Helsinki, Finland

One of the most influential—and foundational—conceptual shifts in the history of Childhood Studies has been the move from viewing children as passive and dependent to recognising them as active, competent social actors with agency in their own right. The identification and promotion of children’s agency has long been central to the field. In recent years, however, this conceptual core has become the target of sustained critique and reconceptualisation. A growing body of scholarship has problematised the assumption of an inherent and autonomous capacity for agency, as well as the dominance of the “competent child” ideal that continues to marginalise children in the Majority World, and minorities within the Minority World.

This paper approaches this debate through the lens of boundaries: What conceptual, methodological, and ethical boundaries does the prevailing notion of childhood agency draw—and with what consequences? Scholars have urged closer attention to what Childhood Studies concepts do: what forms of knowledge, research questions, methods, and answers they enable or foreclose. The concept of agency carries both generative and limiting force: it makes certain forms of seeing possible, while obscuring others. These conceptual boundaries not only shape academic analysis, but also seep into children’s lived experiences—offering recognition and empowerment for some, while producing embodied discomfort and exclusion for those who do not fit. I contribute to this ongoing discussion by drawing on existing scholarship and advancing a critical interrogation of the conceptual boundaries at the heart of agency in Childhood Studies, emphasising the need to rethink how they structure inclusion and exclusion.

Research Involving Children – The Ethical Aspect of Research Conducted at School

Anna Górka-Strzałkowska

The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland

My presentation discusses the methodological and ethical doubts and challenges that arose during the design of the study involving children, as well as during its course. The aim of my research was to learn about this child perspective and, at the same time, through the possibility of free child narration, to create a space for participation and agency. The participation of children sharing their school experiences through diaries gave the research a participatory character. In my research, I referred to the latest biographical and participatory trends in research conducted with children and the contemporary interpretation of the concept of school hardship introduced by Korczak (2012). The implications of this research were ethical and methodological dilemmas that arose at the stage of project design as well as during its implementation. The aim of the presentation is to present the ethical dilemmas of research carried out in a school, especially by a person who works with children, meets them on a daily basis and supports them in solving problems. Therefore, I asked the following research questions:

1. What ethical issues arise in research involving children and what do they concern in such a specific place as a school?
2. What roles do the research participants (pupils, parents) play and what do they decide?
3. What is the ‘triple role’ of the researcher and the dilemmas associated with it?

I discussed the methodology of my own research, including the approach, dilemmas, research location and research group. I gave examples of new research in participatory approaches. I put forward examples of solutions that I used in the project in the context of research involving primary school children, using the example of ‘My School Day’ diaries from the perspective of both a researcher and a school teacher.

Thematic group 25. Responsibility, Behavior, Broken Boundaries

Responsibility in Child Protection (cancelled)

Ronja Mäkinen

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

My doctoral research is part of the University of Jyväskylä's social work research project Responsibility in Child Protection, which begins in January 2026. Project's name is Vastuu Lastensuojelussa (VaLa). This paper examines how responsibility in child welfare is defined and bounded within the Finnish context at a time of significant planned reforms to the Social Welfare Act and the Child Welfare Act, and amidst recurring national debates triggered by tragic cases of child fatalities.

Understanding the limits of responsibility is crucial for safeguarding those children who are most vulnerable and in greatest need of protection. The research method is content analysis. Theoretically, my research contributes to the scholarly discussion in social work on accountability, discretion and assessment. Responsibility appears across several domains, including legal, administrative, geographical, sociocultural, ethical-moral and resource-based boundaries, as well as the boundaries between statutory and voluntary work and between different levels of governance. For social workers, child protection is demanding expert practice, while for children it forms part of their lived childhood.

Social workers carry personal responsibility for the children they serve, yet simultaneously represent the wider society that seeks to protect children—at times also by setting limits. In this paper for the Childhood Studies Conference, I examine how responsibility in child protection is defined. I approach the topic by seeking to identify and delineate the boundaries of responsibility.

The data for my doctoral research will consist of documents produced by supervisory authorities as well as focus group interviews with social workers. In the paper I am presenting, I focus on the thematised preliminary findings emerging from the document data, which I examine in relation to the boundaries of responsibility in child protection.

Multi-Disciplinary Boundaries – Finnish Service System of Children with Behavioral Problems

Kati Saurula

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Children's behavioural problems are often merely symptoms of some other primary cause, yet it always looks identical externally. Conduct problems can be due to neurodevelopmental issues e.g. ADHD or autism spectrum, or mental health issues. They can also be due to insufficient parenting practices. Furthermore, conduct problems can be due to inadequate learning and participating support during school day.

Therefore, both children with conduct problems and their parents have simultaneous service needs for social welfare services, health care services and educational support. These needs are consecutive, overlapping and intertwined. It is important to recognise if child's service needs are concerning his health, lack of social support, learning disabilities or participating school. These needs define which administrative branches have competence and responsibility to assess needs and provide services. Services must be collected as a service package which meets the best direct or indirect interest of the child (CRC art. 3). The goal is to collect a timely and boundlessly performing package (The Act on Organising Healthcare and Social Welfare Services 612/2021, 10.1 §). Services should support each other to enhance total impact. With conduct problems this service integration is essential.

This legal dogmatic research answers to two questions: 1) How the multi-professional service system of problematically conducting children is structured? and 2) What kind of service thresholds there are on all three administrative sectors? Research studies the inter-administrative competence boundaries within jurisdictions of primary social welfare services, health care and both primary and lower-secondary education through a lens of service needs.

Broken Boundaries

Maisa Kosola¹ & Markku Vellas¹

¹Tukena-foundation, Finland

The Broken Boundaries project supports young people aged 13–29 who show violent or otherwise boundary-breaking behaviour. Many of them have intellectual disabilities or neurodiversity that affect communication, understanding and emotional control. The project develops practical ways to help them build safer coping skills, manage emotions and strengthen their sense of belonging in everyday life.

As part of the project, a study explored young people's experiences of violence. Eighty young people responded; one third reported having used violence at some point. Most said they acted in self-defence, while others mentioned losing self-control, frustration or peer pressure. More than half (50 out of 80) said they need more support in matters related to violence – either as victims or witnesses. The findings show that violent behaviour often arises from fear, confusion or difficulties in emotion regulation, rather than a wish to cause harm.

Violence in its different forms is common in these young people's lives, but it is rarely discussed openly. There is also a form of non-encounter – when a young person's feelings or words are not recognized or answered. Both experiences leave a mark. Recognising and addressing them is essential for breaking the cycle of harm and for building support that truly reaches the young person.

The project is based on the idea that a person must be seen separately from their actions. Every young person deserves understanding and support. Early and inclusive help is vital to prevent escalation and to build safety and continuity around each young person.

Thematic group 26. Counter Power, Inequalities

Pushing Boundaries: Children's Counter Power in Social Contexts—Insights from Diverse Disciplines

Sandra Della Porta

Brock University, Canada

Growing up in an adult-centric world is a constant struggle for children. Why? Because children—like humans at any age—are capable of actively engaging with others collectively, reciprocally, and intergenerationally (Neff & Raby, 2022; Wall, 2022); as the Self-Determination Theory purports, children strive to be autonomous, feel competent, and connect with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, children, particularly in euro-centric societies, are often disempowered in familial, social, and educational spheres, limiting their agency, and in turn, impacting their well-being (Biswas et al., 2024; Gurdal et al., 2016; Liebel, 2020). In adult-centric spaces, boundaries are created for children. To counter imposed limits, children use power resources to harness their agency. In early childhood, Eidsvåg and Rosell (2021) view power as enabling and restricting in children's interactions. Generally, power is defined as a means of influence, garnering attention in childhood studies, education, social work, sociology, and psychology (Brey & Shutts, 2015; Brock et al., 2019; James & Prout, 1997; Ivashkevich, 2012). Further, Prilleltensky and colleagues (2001), from a psychological lens, point out that literature on power and control is not only adult-centric, but also psycho-centric, focusing on cognitive and emotional elements, and far less on social and political elements. This work brings together cross-disciplinary literature on means (e.g., social, cognitive, linguistic, physical/movement) through which children fight against the grain of adult-centric authority across various settings (e.g., home, peer group, classroom). Studying counter-power will bring to light what is possible for children limited by social and structural boundaries (Morrow, 2003).

Children Without Frontiers?

Gary Pollock

Manchester Metropolitan University, England

Understanding why children's lives unfold in different ways as they grow up is central to any attempt to redress inequalities. This requires an observatory approach at a micro level to examine different aspects of life trajectories as they develop. Embedding these experiences within socio-economic context is arguably the only way to be able to identify factors which may be able to predict positive and negative outcomes, a prerequisite for any policy interventions . While we may hope that a child has boundless opportunity, for many a series of buffers can serve to limit prospects. Taking as its starting point the need for a long term approach to measure children's lives all the way to adulthood, the Growing Up in Digital Europe (GUIDE) project has successfully piloted an input harmonised questionnaire in Finland, Ireland, Croatia, France and Slovenia (with other pilots currently in process). By collecting data from the age of 8 over a 24 year time span in multiple European countries GUIDE it will, in the future, be possible to identify which children have been limited by social boundaries, and which have lived without frontiers. The GUIDE project has got the potential to show how we can make a difference to reducing the inequalities for children across Europe.

Classroom Collisions: Good Intentions and the Foreclosure of Gender Self-Determination at School (cancelled)

Harper Keenan¹, Maggie Beneke² & Tran Templeton³

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Drawing from the conference theme on childhood and boundaries, this paper examines the case of transgender-affirming school policy in San Francisco public schools to argue that even well-intentioned efforts to facilitate inclusive schools often reinforce rigid boundaries around who children can be and become. Drawing from legal scholar Dean Spade (2013), who contends that “in the face of significant resistance to conditions of subjection, law reform tends to provide just enough transformation to stabilize and preserve status quo conditions,” (p.1035) I suggest that the design of trans-affirming school policy enables adult-governed school systems to describe themselves as trans-inclusive while simultaneously retaining their power to regulate childhood gender.

I follow Ball et. al. (2011) in conceptualizing of teachers as policy actors whose professional vision is shaped by school policy. Informed by childhood studies scholarship, which views children as capable of “[acting] in a manner that enhances greater individual and community self-determination” (Campano et al., 2020, p. 224), I argue that teachers who seek to support gender diversity often struggle in their efforts, largely because they are learning from adult-designed policy about how best to support transgender children in school. Drawing from two years of multi-site ethnographic study in five kindergarten and first grade classrooms, I present a series of qualitative snapshots illustrating classroom collisions between teachers’ policy-informed ideas about childhood gender and children’s agentic assertions of their genders in ways that challenge adult authority. Ultimately, the findings illustrate the need to consider children’s capacity for self-determination in designing equitable educational environments.

Thematic group 27. Home-making, Countryside Childhoods & Literary Geography

Negotiating the Boundary to Adulthood: Young People's Home-Making Practices After Leaving the Childhood Home

Katariina Kotila

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

In this presentation, I explore the process of leaving one's childhood home as a porous boundary through which childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are being negotiated and lived. Leaving the childhood home and living independently for the first time is a central transition and is often understood to symbolize emerging adulthood. Living without one's parents or other guardians allows young people to learn how to manage their everyday routines and household chores and to represent their personality through the materiality of their new dwelling. However, moving to one's own place is not a straightforward jump to adulthood but instead a continuous process in which young person's childhood family can have an important role.

I discuss home-making as negotiating the boundary to adulthood, drawing from the study material that I have gathered for my PhD research on young adults' homes. The material consists of video diaries, written diaries, and interviews of 18–23-year-old Finnish young adults who have recently moved out of their childhood home to begin their higher education studies. My focus is on how this transition involves both these young adults and their childhood families and how diverse feelings and emotions are a part of this transition. Adulthood, then, is negotiated through home-making that involves both young people and their families who can ideally provide help and support. But this process also involves diverse feelings that young people must face, from joy of learning new skills and becoming more independent to loneliness of missing one's childhood family.

Boundaries of Childhood in the Countryside

Alina Kuusisto¹ & Pirjo Pöllänen¹

¹University of Eastern Finland, Finland

We examine remembered childhood and early youth in the remote Finnish countryside from the 1970s to the 1990s. Our material consists of about 30 interviews with people who lived in rural North Karelia, in which they describe their lives and schooling during their primary school years. Rural childhood can be seen as a desired idyll, but it can also be viewed from the perspectives of fear, exclusion, and marginalization (Matthews et al. 2000). In this presentation, we do not approach childhood lived in a remote village as either a problem or an ideal, but as a field of different possibilities, in which the countryside as a living environment both limited and supported the child's life. We examine rural childhood through possibilities and their boundaries. What meanings do the interviewees give to childhood leisure and everyday life in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s? What elements constituted the sphere of childhood life, and what role did school play in it? Our analysis is anchored in the historical context of the childhoods studied, which, from the perspective of the countryside, represented a period of transition. By the 1980s, the worst years of rural depopulation were behind, rural-mindedness was on the rise, and agricultural policy was in a stable phase. The welfare state's services extended also to the countryside, the school network was still extensive, and infrastructure had improved considerably since the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, the economic recession of the 1990s, the change in the direction of the welfare state, and the accession to the European Union began to transform everyday life in the countryside. The traditional village community stood at the intersection of the old and the new. The study of childhood and its history is a growing research trend (in Finland, e.g., Vehkalahti et al. 2022), in which, however, the perspective of the countryside has been somewhat overlooked. In this presentation, we wish to bring forth lived childhood from both the perspectives of the countryside and recent history.

Growing Up in the Boarder city of Vyborg: Discussion of Two Young Adult Novels by Eeva Virtanen

Satu Grünthal

University of Helsinki, Finland

The presentation focuses on two young adult novels that depict life of two girls in the boarder city Vyborg before and during World War II: Eeva Virtanen's *Tyttö Monrepoon nurkalta* (1965) and *Rauniokaupungin tyttö* (1967). In the first novel, the 13-year-old protagonist Tytti is depicted during the last summer of peace in 1939. In the second novel, the 17-year-old protagonist Leila together with her family have been able to return to familiar yet war-torn surroundings during the continuation war. The novel culminates in the family's narrow escape from the burning Vyborg. Both novels are discussed in the framework of literary criticism and literary geography.

The interdisciplinary field of literary geography studies the regional, local, and spatial meanings constructed in literary fiction. In the presentation, perspectives of literary geography, together with literary close reading techniques, are applied to analyze the relationship between the girls and their urban environment, as well as the city's impact on their own struggles and their developing identity. For both girls, Vyborg is a city with both concrete and symbolic meanings and values.

The concept of "sense of place" will be discussed both on the representational level (girls and their relationship with Vyborg) and the experiential level (where the concept of locality expands to encompass the aspects of the reading process itself). This perspective also raises questions about the relationship of the novels to both the children's and young adult literature of their time and to the broader context of Vyborg literature after World War II.

Symposiums

Symposium 1: Diversifying Childhood in Educational Research

Chair: Eija Sevon

Multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and languages has recently led to greater diversity among children and their families in educational institutions in the Nordic countries. Social inclusion in education is often considered a safeguard of equal opportunities for children who might otherwise be excluded due to factors such as culture, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, language, location, or special needs. However, these same factors can also serve as a basis for exclusion, discrimination, and othering. Therefore, the study of diversifying childhoods in educational research needs to consider power relations, conflicts, and the construction of boundaries. Diverse individuals participating in shared practices represent different social locations with varying interests, perspectives, and understandings. Childhood studies challenge the traditional ways of conducting research with children and demand commitment to valuing children's knowledge and perspective. These underline researchers' ethical commitment to developing ways to build trust and to listen to diverse children's perspectives. Consequently, ethical questions emphasise in-situ negotiations during research encounters.

This symposium presents research that takes diversifying childhoods in education as a starting point. The three presentations address methodological and ethical questions related to researching diversifying childhoods.

Children's Voice in Educational Research – A Critical Perspective

Hilde Hjertager Lund¹ & Helene Kjærgård Eide¹

¹University of Bergen, Norway

This paper explores the ethical and methodological challenges of representing children's voices in educational research. The child's perspective is often treated as an authentic truth that can be accessed directly, yet it is always co-constructed through adult interpretation and institutional framing (Facca, Gladstone & Teachman, 2020; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The study critically explores the shift from researching on to researching with children, questioning whether the child's perspective has become a value in itself.

Empirical examples from group interviews and observations with Norwegian kindergarten children reveal how interview structures, adult expectations, and power relations shape what is expressed, silenced, or mirrored between peers. These findings challenge the notion of the child's perspective as a stable or discoverable entity and emphasise the researcher's role in constructing and mediating meaning (Pettersvold, 2016).

The paper argues that children's perspectives in research are never neutral but the result of researchers' methodological, ethical, and interpretive choices. It calls for reflexive researchers who critically examine their own assumptions and textual representations of children's voices (Facca et al., 2020).

Boundaries to Children's Participation: Situated Inequality in Participation Among Children Under the Age of Three

Emma Koitto¹, Niina Rutanen¹, Mari Vuorisalo¹ & Eija Sevón¹

¹University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This study examines situated inequality in early childhood education by exploring equal construction of participation in diverse ECEC groups from children under the age of three. In this study, the diversity of children is seen as differences between everyone consisting of age, time spent in ECEC and different home languages, genders and cultures for example. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989, §12–13), every child has the right to express themselves, to be heard and to be considered by adults in matters affecting them. It is generally thought that the concept of participation illustrates and revolves around these rights. Despite the law and curriculum, earlier research shows that there are challenges in achieving participation, and it's not equal between the children in ECEC (Correia et al., 2019; Kirby, 2020). This study examines the youngest children's participation through the lens of situated inequality (Højholt & Røn Larsen, 2021), highlighting how daily interactions are inherently conflictual as participants with diverse backgrounds negotiate goals and contradictions in specific situations (Højholt & Røn Larsen, 2021; Røn Larsen & Stanek, 2024). Ethnographic observational data from two groups of children under three is analyzed using reflective thematic analysis. During data collection, special attention is paid to the non-verbal interaction of children to ensure a willingness to participate in the study. Based on our previous research (peer review), our hypothesis is that the data will reveal more restrictions on participation in relation to other children than in relation to others.

Ethical Questions in the SITES - Social Inclusion and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care Project

Niina Rutanen¹, Eija Sevón¹ & Maria Lahtinen¹,

¹University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The SITES - Social Inclusion and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care research project examines children's social inclusion, equality, and sense of belonging in linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood education and care (ECEC) groups. The research project aims to deepen the understanding of how children and their families experience inclusion and to identify enabling and challenging factors for social inclusion and cooperation practices in ECEC. Particular attention is given to how social inclusion and participation are constructed in the everyday practices of children's groups. Likewise, the meanings of social inclusion and diversity in the cooperation between families and ECEC institutions are explored. Additionally, transitions within ECEC are a focus. The project sheds light on how conditions for social inclusion and participation are constructed in ECEC services and policies.

This presentation addresses the ethical and methodological questions encountered and reflected upon at the outset of the project. Previous research has highlighted vulnerabilities and challenges, particularly among children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Building trust and fostering reciprocal relationships are critical components of the research process. Furthermore, attention must be paid to potential cultural differences and to developing practices that work effectively across cultural boundaries.

Symposium 2: Streets, Nature and the Playground: Experience and Knowledge in the History of Children and Youth.

Chair: Tuomas Laine-Frigren

This symposium is organized to expand our understanding of the historical significance of places and spaces beyond family and school in children's daily lives, socialization, and learning. Our work is inspired by research that views children and young people as actively creating their life histories through their interaction with adults, peers, and everyday environments (e.g., Kallio 2010). At the same time, we emphasize the need to improve our understanding of the time-bound, ever-changing social, discursive, and material contexts in which children interact and navigate the demands and expectations placed upon them. In our symposium, these spatial and environmental contexts are (1) modern public playgrounds; (2) spaces for youth created and planned by early 20th century promoters of youth work; and (3) Swedish towns and cities as experienced by Finnish immigrant children in their everyday adventure and play. The symposium consists of three individual papers. Dr. Essi Jouhki's paper examines how adults remember their childhood playgrounds. In her study, Jouhki focuses on affective and material dimensions of play. Dr. Lauri Julkunen studies new spatial practices in 20th-century youth work. Drawing on Johan Östling's (2020) concept of an "arena of knowledge," Julkunen examines how spatial practices in early 20th-century youth work – including young people's behavior in these spaces – created new ways of understanding modern youth. Dr. Tuomas Laine-Frigren examines how second-generation Swedish-Finnish immigrants recall their childhood places and spaces. Inspired by the work of Simone Lässig and others, he focuses on the agency and knowledge of migrant children during playtime outside of school and family settings. The symposium also examines how children navigate boundaries between these different learning and experience environments. Theoretically, we combine the concept of "emotional boundaries" (Olsen 2017) with affective (e.g. Anderson 2009) and postmaterialist approaches (e.g., Malinen 2022), as well as the notion of children as knowledge actors (Lässig & Steinberg 2019). The symposium aims to lay the groundwork for the special issue on the topic. Laine-Frigren, the convener of this symposium, will chair the discussion.

“Always Somehow Exotic and Exciting”: Exploring the Playground Environment and Affective Atmospheres in Childhood Memories

Essi Jouhki

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Modern public playgrounds are regarded as essential recreational spaces where children are encouraged to explore their limits and express emotions and actions freely. Designed to be stimulating and engaging, they invite sensory and emotional encounters with varied materialities and spatial arrangements. The imprint of these affective experiences in childhood is often so strong that they can be vividly recalled and relived in adulthood. (Jouhki & Moll, 2023.) This paper examines how adults remember their childhood playgrounds, focusing on the embodied, sensory, and affective dimensions of play and materiality. Drawing on a large dataset of written memories of childhood playgrounds, the study explores how they are remembered not only as physical environments but as emotionally resonant and meaningful spaces. The analytical framework builds on the emotional and experiential history of childhood (Olsen, 2017; Vallgård et al., 2015) and on the concept of affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009) to analyse how playgrounds are remembered, experienced and made meaningful through the interplay of materiality, senses, bodies, and emotions. In the memory accounts, the materiality of playgrounds produces affective experiences that cluster into three distinct atmospheres: (1) the playground as a magical paradise, (2) as a site of energetic adventure, and (3) as a space of fear, thrill, and transgression. However, playground atmospheres are not fixed; they are overlapping, shifting, and shaped by children’s material perception, bodily sensations, and emotional development (see, ‘emotional frontiers’ by Vallgård et al., 2015). This novel theoretical approach offers a nuanced interpretation of memory sources, highlighting the emotionally charged spatial boundaries of childhood memories.

Youth Work as a Spatial Arena of Knowledge in the early 20th Century Finland

Lauri Julkunen

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

This paper examines the early history of youth work in Finland through the lens of the spatially situated nature of knowledge production. Around the turn of the 20th century, young people became increasingly visible in urban public spaces – a visibility often accompanied by social concerns. Youth work emerged, in part, as a response to this “youth question”. It aimed to offer alternative spaces to both the domestic sphere – perceived as increasingly unappealing to youth – and the morally suspect streets. Youth work developed not only as a new recreational movement but also as a nascent field of expert knowledge concerning young people and adolescence. Drawing on the concept of an arena of knowledge (Östling, 2020), this paper posits that new spatial practices in early 20th-century youth work also created new ways of understanding modern youth.

Immigrant Adventures: Play Experiences of Finnish Children in Sweden

Tuomas Laine-Frigren

University of Turku, Finland

In her 2010 dissertation on “children's politics,” Kirsi Pauliina Kallio explores how children actively create their life histories through interaction with adults and peers in different environments. She writes nicely about the variety of places and spaces beyond family and school that Finnish children experience and navigate, such as “public transportation, public events, health centers, playgrounds, libraries, swimming pools, summer cottages, and grandparents’ homes” (Kallio 2010, 11). Through experiences and encounters in environments like these and many others, children shape their own childhoods. In this paper, I explore how second-generation Finnish immigrants to Sweden remember their childhood places and spaces. I am particularly interested in the roles, meanings, and feelings associated with play and playtime in their lives. During playtime, young immigrants could explore the neighborhood and sometimes venture farther into the city. They met a variety of people, including local Swedish children and adults, as well as individuals from other immigrant groups. Playing around the neighborhood familiarized them with the local landscape and the city or town and its surroundings (cf. Cheng 2020). Drawing inspiration from the work of Simone Lässig and others, my paper focuses on the agency and knowledge of migrant children during playtime outside of school and family settings.

Symposium 3: Children’s Rights Research: Moving the Boundaries of Law

Chair: Mona Pare

Boundaries are shifting in children’s rights law research. From traditional areas and sources of law to ways of interpreting and applying the law, researchers must recognize new realities faced by children and new opportunities to advance children’s rights despite our static-seeming laws and institutions.

This symposium explores new directions in children’s rights law research. It addresses children’s rights law sources, and areas in which children tend to be invisible. Person 1 and Person 2 question the UNCRC as a necessary starting point for research on children’s rights, interrogating the convention’s assumptions about childhood, and discussing the range of methodological approaches and disciplines that must be involved. Person 3 presents the role of regional frameworks in understanding and regulating childhoods, with the example of the African Charter on Children’s Rights as a complementary source of children’s rights, and challenges with its implementation. Person 4 and Person 5 explore the role of Indigenous customary law, the power of language in defining children’s rights, and the impact of colonial laws on systemic inequities lived by Indigenous children. Person 6 and Person 7 consider children’s invisibility when they experience parental incarceration, and the lack of a children’s rights framework to respond to this situation. Person 8 presentation looks at children’s position in the courts, questioning the possibility for children to have access to justice within a rigid adult-centric institution, using the example of child and youth-led climate change litigation.

The structure of the symposium will be short presentations, followed by an extended discussion period moderated by the chair. The discussion will allow for dialogue between the presenters around the notion of boundaries of childhood and boundaries of the law in protecting children’s rights.

A Necessary Starting Point? The Positioning of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Research on Children's Rights Law

Fiona Morrison¹ & Kay Tisdall¹

¹University of Edinburgh, Scotland

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most ratified international human rights convention in the world, making it a lodestone for research on children's rights law. However, the CRC has both strengths and limitations that warrant critical examination. This paper explores these substantively, conceptually, and methodologically, drawing on our experience as children's rights academics and policy advocates.

We argue that children's rights research must adopt a more critical approach to the CRC itself and the scholarship it generates. This includes interrogating the Convention's assumptions about childhood, identifying its gaps, and drawing on broader conceptual resources to address them. Key challenges include engaging with decoloniality and relationality while maintaining respect for children's status as rights-bearing individuals. We call for more diverse methodological approaches and greater disciplinary breadth in children's rights law research, with particular attention to epistemic justice in knowledge production.

We conclude by evaluating the CRC's position and effectiveness as a foundation for children's rights law research and look to future research agendas to better advance children's status, dignity, and wellbeing.

Boundaries of Protection: Assessing the African Committee’s Role under the African Children’s Charter

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When it was adopted in 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was conceived as a complementary mechanism to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, designed to enhance the protection and enjoyment of children’s rights within the African context. African States sought to implement the universal standards articulated in the CRC while considering the continent’s cultural, social, and economic realities. The preamble to the Charter explicitly acknowledges the “unique factors” that affect African children, including poverty, armed conflict, natural disasters, entrenched cultural traditions, exploitation, and hunger.

A key feature of the African Children’s Charter is its establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism - the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. This paper explores the role of the Committee in advancing the protection of African children with a focus on the ‘unique features’ of the Charter. In other words, to what extent has the Charter’s adoption in response to these issues been justified? This comes against the backdrop of the 35th anniversary of the Charter under the theme ‘reflect, renew, recommit’. Despite significant progress in advancing children’s rights under the Charter, several challenges persist – including gaps in implementation - and new threats continue to emerge.

Overall, an evaluation of the ACERWC’s position and effectiveness is presented, along with agenda setting future focus areas for both research and action in order to achieve the goal of ‘an Africa Fit for Children.

Wactenmakanicic Opimatisiwin: Reimagining Children’s Rights through Nehirowisiw Law

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For the Nehirowisiwok of Manawan, an Indigenous community located in Québec, Canada, children are relational, autonomous, and spiritually grounded beings according to wactenmakanicic e opikihakaniwitc (children’s law). From their legal perspective, a child—wactenmakanicic, loosely translated as a “little being of light”—is regarded as a gift from the Creator endowed with innate wisdom and occupies a central place in the legal order. Children participate in all decisions that affect their lives and are supported in developing their gifts through mantokatcikana (ceremonies) and atisokana (stories), and relationships.

These Nehirowisiw laws are often incompatible with emtcikociwic (settler) children’s rights law, where childhood is defined by legal concepts such as parental authority and the “best interests of the child.” Crossing these boundaries is both necessary and challenging: Nehirowisiw children’s rights are often caught between their community’s traditional legal order and the colonial laws and principles imposed on them that often govern child welfare and education. This tension manifests in systemic inequities, as Nehirowisiw children are overrepresented in child protection institutions and are deprived access to services offered to children outside of the community.

This presentation draws on community-based research conducted in Nehiromowin, the language of the Nehirowisiwok, to offer a glimpse of the fundamental differences between these legal systems and invite a greater appreciation of Nehirowisiw’s conception of childhood. It will highlight the difficulty of transposing emtcikociwic legal concepts into the Nehirowisiw context and reimagines the boundaries of childhood and of law itself through the lens of wactenmakanicic e opikihakaniwitc.

A Delicate but Necessary Balance: State Obligations in the Pursuit of Crime and the Rights of the Invisible Victims of Crime – Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Children who experience parental incarceration have been described as the invisible victims of the criminal justice system. Unlike other groups of children with vulnerabilities, children who are separated from a parent due to parental incarceration tend to be ignored in policy, legislative and general service provision design despite having multiple needs. Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 as a starting point, this paper will argue that the absence of a targeted and unified approach at domestic level to recognise and protect the rights and needs of these children has resulted in them falling through gaps in state protection. By focusing on key junctures in the criminal justice system, this paper will highlight how the rights and needs of children are directly or indirectly impacted due to a parent being criminal justice involved. The tensions that exist between the need for the State to be seen to punish crimes even where there is little risk of reoffending is balanced against the less visible victims in these cases – the accused’s children. The authors will critically explore the potential for realising the rights of children with incarcerated parents that moves beyond rhetoric and tokenism, and challenges deeply embedded paternalistic and, in some cases, prejudicial attitudes in the system. In ensuring that parental incarceration is seen through the eyes of a child, the focus shifts from "seeing" children to centring children, hearing their voices, understanding their needs and embedding children's rights into decision-making at all stages.

Children Defending Human Rights: Navigating the Boundaries of Citizenship

Mona Pare

University of Ottawa, Canada

When children defend human rights, they act outside the boundaries that society sets up for them. Adolescents have done this multiple times in the past to protest against injustices, associating themselves to movements, often led by adults, to demonstrate against war or racism, for example. In the last decade, young people have been especially visible in their fight against climate change, as children have not only joined existing movements, but they have also initiated their own, like Fridays for Future.

Many children have also taken their political struggle to the courts, thus pushing boundaries of their citizen action even further. Courts are usually not places where children are present as actors, especially as litigants in cases advancing human rights arguments. Yet, today we speak of child and youth-led climate litigation, suggesting that children hold active roles. Children's mobilization efforts inside and outside the courts have attracted praise and criticism from adults, some considering children's participation as exploitation by adults who want to advance their own political agenda.

This presentation explores the institutional, legal, and social boundaries around children's climate action, focusing on climate cases. It discusses the role that adults have in helping children navigate the boundaries, pushing them together with children, but perhaps also setting boundaries. Is there a child-adult power imbalance resulting in boundaries? Do the age differences between the litigants – from children to young adults – result in setting different boundaries? Innovative intergenerational alliances within a rigid setting are at the core of this exploration.

Symposium 4: Non-Linear Time in Children's Lives

Chair: Rebekah Willet

Recent scholarship in childhood studies have been troubling linear notions of time to reveal ways that alternative temporal lenses can support an understanding of children's lived experiences (see Pomerantz and Knight, 2025). This symposium considers time as a boundary that can be stretched and reconfigured. Children's lives seem largely governed by 'clock time' – those adult imposed schedules that determine rhythms of the day, week, and year. In this symposium, we consider how non-linear understandings of time can reframe time as intertwined with space and placemaking; bring in more-than-human perspectives on time; support a focus on states of wonder, awareness, excitement, and flow; challenge narratives of progress and development; and present methodological challenges and opportunities. The panel approaches our topic by sharing reflective responses and analyses of data each researcher had previously collected. In doing so, we demonstrate how a consideration of non-linear time brings new perspectives on a range of experiences in children's lives. The symposium consists of four 15 minute presentations in which each author highlights new insight a temporal lens brings to a project. Each presentation will end in a prompt for audience reflection and discussion. We will devote 20-30 minutes for audiences to respond to our prompts and to ask questions. Kristiina Kumpulainen and Rebekah Willett will moderate the session.

Living Temporalities: Ecological Chronotopes in Children's Augmented Forest Storying

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This presentation explores children's augmented storying with forests through Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope, which foregrounds the inseparability of time and space in narrative. Using this lens, the study examines how immersive and augmented storytelling practices foster entanglements between human and more-than-human worlds, transforming forests from static settings into dynamic participants in narrative life. Drawing on ethnographic and arts-based research conducted in Canada and Finland, the paper traces how children's engagements with augmented forest storying generate ecological chronotopes, understood as narrative configurations where ecological rhythms, temporal cycles, and spatial relations converge. Through multisensory encounters and digital layering, children come to experience forests as living temporalities shaped by seasonal change, decay, regeneration, and multispecies coexistence. These practices reconfigure how time, space, and narrative are experienced, moving beyond linear or anthropocentric models of temporality toward relational, cyclical, and interdependent understandings of becoming. The paper argues that situating children's forest stories within ecological chronotopes reveals narrative as a site of multispecies co-creation and ethical attunement, inviting participants to inhabit rather than merely observe ecological time. In doing so, augmented storying becomes a pedagogical and ethical practice that enacts care and reciprocity within forest worlds. The chronotopic framing proposed here offers conceptual and methodological insights into how narratives, through their temporal-spatial fabric, mediate ecological imagination and responsiveness in times of environmental precarity, opening possibilities for reimagining children's storytelling as a mode of living with, and within, the temporalities of the more-than-human world.

Understanding Time in Self-Care: Children's Community Placemaking Processes

Jacqueline Kociubuk

University of Rhode Island, USA

Places are continually reshaped over time, never remaining stagnant as experiences, memories and nostalgia, events, values, and other constructions are fed back into placemaking processes by the direct and indirect actors involved, including children. Yet children's memories and future reckonings of community places are often overlooked in favor of adults in the United States, further exacerbating adult-child power dynamics present, especially within increasingly limited public spaces. To push back on these deficit-orientations, some human geographers, like Cairns (2018), have presented promising ideas on how resistance and social change can bubble up when studying the temporal aspects of children's placemaking. Following this, my presentation shares reflections and findings from focus-group interviews with US-based self-care children (ages 12-18) around the intertwining of temporalities in community placemaking. Self-care children are children who spend time out-of-school without a direct adult caregiver, often using public or privatized public spaces within their neighborhoods and communities. Understanding the role of temporality in self-care children's placemaking processes helps to illuminate ways power, resistance, and subversion are present in the spaces and places that children spend time in their neighborhoods; providing a useful counter to adult-centric conversations on community-based placemaking.

Children Wondering Through Real-World Information: Stretching Time, Exploring Possibilities

Markéta Supa

Charles University, Czechia

Children engage with information about the real world through both direct and mediated experiences such as observing, tasting, listening, reading, viewing, and discussing. Some of these experiences evoke wonder, an affective and imaginative state sparked by information “beyond our immediate comprehension, yet worthy of our attention for its own sake” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 34). This paper explores how children aged 9–11 experience and reflect upon wonder arising from mediated information about the world, for example, nature, art, fashion, sports, history, or war. It draws on two complementary Czech-based studies exploring children’s affective experiences of informational texts, home-based individual interviews and school-based focus groups, both of which used tangible, creative prompts to elicit self-reflection and dialogue. Children’s reflections revealed that in the initial states of wonder - awareness and excitement (Glăveanu, 2019) - the linear rhythms of their everyday life were interrupted, thickening time and rendering children momentarily still as they began to boundlessly wonder about what is and what could be. Intrinsically motivated, they explored these possibilities further (Glăveanu, 2019). Wonder turned either inward, toward deep contemplation that suspended time even more profoundly, or outward, toward sensory, material, and social actions. The latter included inquiry seeking answers and explanations, often termed as curiosity, as well as playful and creative practices pursued at children’s own pace. The paper ultimately calls for reclaiming space for wonder as a dialogic and holistic experience engaging the whole child (imaginative, creative, critical, affective, embodied, and social) within the fast-paced and boundary-laden conditions characterising many contemporary childhoods.

Flow, Developmental Time and Digital Making

Rebekah Willett¹ & Layla Coleman¹

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This paper focuses on temporal aspects of children's digital making, for example, creating digital art, stories, photos, videos, music, or games. Two themes are explored: flow and children as both beings and becomings. In our interviews with children aged 9 to 14 in the United States about their digital making, we heard about ways that the feeling of time can change – time can 'fly' and it can 'creep'. When immersed in making, there might be a sense of flow (Csikszentmihályi, 2009); however, when immersion includes frustration and lack of progress, that flow might be interrupted. Although long periods of time for children to delve into their making and to possibly reach a state of flow can be rare in a school child's weekly routine, we also heard about playful digital making occurring in interstitial moments. Our second theme focuses on children's reflections about their digital making and their identities as artists, when we heard about their past, present, and future lives. As children revisited their earlier digital creations, they experienced a sense of developmental time, a memory of what it felt like when they were younger and struggling with what now seems simple, sometimes even nostalgic for times in their past. Drawing on Uprichard's (2008) work, we examine children as being agents of their past and their future lives, exploring the boundaries of developmental time as they narrate their identities as digital makers.

Symposium 5: Multispecies Childhoods – Telling and Sharing Stories in a More-Than-Human World

Chair: Riikka Hohti

The theme of this bilingual symposium is multispecies childhoods (Tammi et al. 2023) and representational practices in the context of environmental changes. Based on three-year-long research, we present one of our research inputs, an evolving and experimental website, which connects “small stories” from field work conducted in different informal educational contexts (zoo, hobbies, museums and more) with other kinds of materials such as research stories, sounds, and images. In the symposium, members of the Children of the Anthropocene research group use the website as a starting point to zoom into selected topics related to the design process of the website, more-than-human empathy, and figurations of the child. The story of humans and the rest of nature has often been based on the special status and separateness of humans. Many believe that the time of environmental crises challenges us to rethink this worldview. However, bringing forth alternative, multispecies stories requires the skills of noticing and attending (van Dooren et al. 2016; Tsing 2015). The art of attentiveness is something we aim to practice and develop through these stories.

An attentive story sharpens our understanding of a situation, place, or feeling, always providing a beginning for new stories. Like a mushroom in mycelium, an individual story surfaces, but at the same time, it connects to the mosaic of countless other stories. We believe, as anthropologist Anna Tsing does, that small multispecies stories can possess contagious and world-changing power.

Who is a Child? Rethinking Species Boundaries and Temporalities Within Conceptualizations of the Child

Riikka Hohti

University of Helsinki, Finland

The Stories from Multispecies Childhoods website emerges from three-year long empirical work among children and young people and other-than-human species. The stories, created in informal educational contexts such as hobbies, visits in the zoo, at home, museums, scout camps, on the streets, and in city shores and parks, have been driven by the Children of the Anthropocene research project's questions:

- How is it to live as a child or a young person within the contemporary environmental atmospheres?
- How are the shifting nature relations visible in children's environments and their atmospheres?
- What are the emerging forms of multispecies collaboration like? How can we learn to notice them and tell about them?

Our research approaches have been guided by openness and experimentation. Inspired by anthropologist Anna Tsing, we have studied gatherings of things, bodies and ideas as assemblages that are only becoming and cannot be fully predicted. In the course of the study, we have found ourselves unsettling taken for granted definitions of childhood, beginning to think of children of the Anthropocene as a much larger group as human children aged 0 to 18 years. In this presentation, I will use the materials on the website to go on with this rethinking. Based on our previous work on more-than human assemblages and other than human childhoods (Tammi et al. 2023), I explore the definitions of childhood, unsettling the human-only ontologies and species boundaries behind them.

Stories from Multispecies Childhoods: Designing a Website Based on the Concept of Multispecies Assemblages

Veneri Valasmo

University of Helsinki, Finland

This presentation is part of the *Multispecies Childhoods – Telling and Sharing Stories in a More-than-Human World* symposium.

In the presentation, I explore how the researchers in our project “*Children of the Anthropocene: Research on the atmospheres of the environmental crisis and multispecies relations.*”, together with a web designer, designed and built an experimental and evolving website that brings together multispecies stories of childhood in the time of the Anthropocene (*Children of the Anthropocene*, 2025).

The stories on the website have emerged through encounters between children and young people, other-than-humans, plants and microbes, various technologies, materialities, and researchers. The stories have been told and written both by the children and young people participating in the research and by the researchers. They have been shared in clubs, at the zoo, within families, in museums, on scouting trips, and in streets and parks, and have been told through practices such as making art, reminiscing, reading research literature, and moving through both urban and forest environments.

In the presentation, I highlight and reflect on how the key concepts that grounded our research and guided the website design process—such as multispecies assemblages (Tammi et al. 2023), atmosphere (Hohti et al. 2025), and the art of noticing (van Dooren et al. 2016)—have participated in shaping both the design process and the resulting form of the website. I examine the kinds of possibilities, limitations, negotiations, and compromises that emerged in the process of creating the website, as concepts, stories, researchers, the web designer, and web technologies and tools came together.

Empathy & Response-Ability as Curriculum Methods

Rachel Sinquefield-Kangas

University of Helsinki, Finland

This portion of the symposium will explore how the Stories from Multispecies « Childhoods website (<https://multispecies-childhoods.fi/en>) can be activated as open pedagogical resources for teaching multispecies ethics, integrated through arts-based practices. Drawing from the website's curated collection of audio, visual, and textual materials, participants are invited to engage in exercises exploring concepts of more-than-human empathy and response-ability. We begin by delving into the annals of the website locating our own affecting materials. Next, we look more deeply into our individually selected materials, attuning to what qualities about it are attracting us toward it. We ask questions, for example:

- How might I think/feel in the place of the Other(s) that my selected media is grappling with here?
- What sort of emotions am I 'catching' from my selected website story?
- What sort of response-ability does forming such relations with the selected material compel into action?

Finally, we map or physically draw-out connections between our answers to these questions and relevant topics young children learn about or could engage with educationally connected with topics of environmental justice and sustainability.

Symposium 6: NAWI: Dear Future Me and Commoning Children's Rights

Chair: Amina Ally

This symposium conceptualizes “commoning rights” as a collective and relational practice that foregrounds care, reciprocity, and ecological interdependence. It does so use the film *NAWI: Dear Future Me* (2024. Dir. Schmutzler & Schmutzler) that tells the story of Nawi, a 12-year-old girl resisting a forced marriage, and providing a powerful site for re-examining dominant paradigms concerning child rights and what it means to be a child. Through a diffractive reading of Nawi through rights-based discourses, dominant liberal and universalist paradigms can be re-examined. We consider how Nawi can contribute to an ongoing dialogue for decolonial critiques of children’s rights and childhood, and moving beyond limiting discourses of the implementation of children’s rights through the UNCRC (Rabello de Castro, 2021; Abebe et al., 2022; Twum-Danso & Okyere, 2020; Nieuwenhuys, 2013, Lind, 2024).

Using commoning as a framework, we rethink how children’s rights are conceptualized and lived. Thinking through Nawi as a subject negotiating obligations of kinship, land, and more-than-human relations, we use this as a basis to create a space to reimagine children’s legal subjectivity and voice beyond state-centered and individualist understandings of rights. How can we reclaim children’s rights as lived, co-constituted practices emerging from intergenerational and ecological entanglements? This symposium aims to contribute to efforts to decolonize children’s rights discourse and to imagine plural, relational ontologies of childhood.

Common Worlding Practices in a Postdigital Landscape: The Digitally-Enabled Cross-Cultural Child Figure

Amina Ally

Norwegian University for Science and Technology, Norway

Worlding is that which is present after an affective moment occurs, before there is content there are only micro perceptions (Massumi, 2002). This paper considers the common worlding strategies the cross-cultural child subject engages in a postdigital landscape to make visible or materialize micro perceptions. This paper engages ‘commoning’ to explore the interaction of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child’s (UNCRC) article 8 (the preservation of identity) with articles 13 (freedom of expression) and 17 (access and information) as particularly relevant to children’s digital rights. I consider how the digitally enabled cross-cultural child disrupts binaries between citizen and foreigner through archival practices on digital platforms.

Gullestad’s (1997) reflections on national identity and childhood emphasizing boundaries are revisited through ‘commoning’ and research conducted with children living in Norway aged 12-15 interacting with more than two distinct cultures. Childhood is a time where boundaries between the worlds of plants, animals, ancestors, fantastical beings and dreams are blurred and porous (Pretti et al., 2022). Boundaries are crossed with ease, and worlds are protected from adults that may disrupt the balance of multiplicities, of worlds within worlds (24). I bring together discourses of the ‘digital’, ‘childhood’ and ‘national identity’ to consider how the boundaries reinforced by national images of childhood are negotiated by the cross-cultural child’s common worlding practices. I argue boundaries of national identity are crossed in digital spaces, where the multiplicity of the cross-cultural child subject’s world can be expressed, and their affective micro perceptions are materialized as well as acknowledged.

Commoning Children's Participation Rights Through Pedagogical Encounters

Eveline Meylemans

Ghent University, Belgium

This paper explores how children's rights can be understood as commoned; collectively enacted and continually re-made through everyday relational practices rather than applied as fixed, universal norms. Drawing on ethnographic co-research with children in a residential psychiatric setting, I conceptualise participation as a pedagogical encounter in which children, staff, and the researcher co-create meanings of belonging, care, and voice.

Building on Escobar's (2018) notion of commoning as a pluriversal practice of world-making, the paper reimagines children's rights as emerging from within situated, affective, and material relations. Rights are not viewed as entitlements granted by institutions but as living practices—constantly negotiated through shared attention, care, and responsibility. In these encounters, children's ways of knowing and relating transform the space of participation into a commons: a field of mutual learning, uncertainty, and ethical responsiveness.

Approaching co-research as a pedagogical encounter (Daelman, 2023; Biesta, 2010) highlights how acts of listening, hesitation, and co-presence can open spaces where rights are enacted as collective achievements rather than individual claims. Such moments make visible a pluriversal understanding of rights: not as abstract universals, but as relational, contingent, and co-created forms of justice that grow through the shared work of living and knowing together.

Para un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos: Commoning Borders in the Onto-Epistemological Practices of Childhood Studies (cancelled)

Laura Segarra

University of Lleida, Spain

This meditation explores the methodological and ethical borders that shape knowledge production within the UNCRC framework and beyond. It asks how research might be reimagined as a practice of commoning rights. Drawing on Arturo Escobar's (2015) notion of commons in the pluriverse, worlds woven of human and nonhuman, living and non-living, material and spiritual relations, I approach commoning as an ontological and epistemological practice that unsettles the dualisms on which dominant research relies: subject/object, human/nonhuman, adult/child, researcher/researched.

In dialogue with Tatek Abebe (2025), who describes commons as “sites of social struggle and methods of articulating new political imaginaries” (p. 137), and inspired by the cinematic imagery of *Nawi: Dear Future Me* (2024), where the figure of Nawi negotiates kinship, land, and intergenerational obligations, I argue that to research with children is not to include them within a pre-existing framework but to reimagine the very conditions of knowledge: the borders of method, ethics, and voice. Such plural relationalities invite us to move beyond universalist logics of development and participation toward situated, collective, and more-than-human ways of knowing and living together.

Finally, together with the Catalan philosopher Marina Garcés (2013), I recall that the common is not a stable ground but a fragile, contagious practice “opening the system's walls to ideas that do not fit” (p. 111). From this perspective, the task is not to erase boundaries but to inhabit them—to think *des dels marges* (from with-in the borders), where research becomes a shared act of interference, imagination, and care. The following meditation proposes research as a border practice, a living commons where knowledge, relation, and possibility are continually made and remade.

Symposium 7: Boundaries and Diversities in Early Childhood Transitions

Chair: Kaisa Harju

Early years and particularly, early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, are constituted by diverse transitions, ranging from long-term vertical transitions from one context to another, to small scale horizontal, daily transitions. These change processes are both embedded in changes of the context and expectations, but also linked to children's diverse positions and their own agencies in constituting these processes. Children and childhoods are constituted in these liminal spaces and negotiations of boundaries constituted by diverse expectations, values, and evaluations. This symposium will explore the theme of boundaries and diversities in transitions in ECEC settings through three research papers with empirical examples and narrations from USA, Norway, Finland, Iceland. Diverse categories and categorizations (e.g. age, gender, skills) will be critically reflected, being often linked to evaluations of 'rightness', 'normality' or 'readiness' built in the ethos of institutional settings. Children's own contributions are brought to fore challenging visible and invisible boundaries linked to transitions illuminating the often fuzzy hierarchies and tensions everyday life include. Symposium includes four presentations: 1) The institutionalised age of three in transitions, 2) She will be the robot: Preschoolers breaking the rules of play and gender to create alternative roles, disruptive games, and trans-inclusive play spaces, 3) Belonging in Transition: Young Children's Experiences of Starting School in Finland and Iceland and 4) The Negotiated Boundaries of Pupilness.

The Institutionalised Age of Three in Transitions

Kaisa Harju

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Our presentation being part of symposia Boundaries and diversities in early childhood highlights transitions emerging within ECEC institutions has an emphasis on transitions at the age of three. The aim of study is to address how transitions may be constituted by age in national legislations and guidelines, and staff's perceptions of transitions. The theoretical conceptualisation depicts age as a form of organisational structuring of society (Calasanti and Slevin, 2006). In this study, the constructions of age of three in transitions are approached through a document analysis of Norwegian and Finnish ECEC legislations and guidelines and reflections with interview-data from ECEC staff in both countries. In both countries policies related to child-staff-ratio and the group size change when children turn three years of age. However, national differences occur related to when children are considered as three-years old. Tracing the relations between age and transitions through interview-data, suggests that two typologies of transition processes occur: an individual and a collective approach. The institutionalised age and consequential transitions at three, become intertwined in a political and practiced age. At the same time age of three becomes constituted as a borderline to transitions emerging in ECEC and as an organisational structuring where children are placed in transitions based on age.

She Will Be the Robot: Preschoolers Breaking the Rules of Play and Gender to Create Alternative Roles, Disruptive Games and Trans-Inclusive Play Spaces

Sally Pirie

University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore how children in a rural North American preschool created and enacted gendered roles in free play settings, especially imaginative play that incorporates popular culture texts and materials. However, in the second year of fieldwork, a child who had previously identified as a boy rejoined the class as a transgender girl. That child was invited into and included in play as the classroom culture transitioned to a place where gender self-determination became a norm of play and practice. Teachers' own attempts to regulate and structure this shift both complicated the process as well as revealed their own, often uncomfortable beliefs about normative childhood and gender.

The analyses presented in this paper are from the second of three years of an ongoing ethnographic project at a diverse, rural preschool in the Northeastern United States, and in particular a central event in which a group of girls were trying to construct a scene from Star Wars that "required" one child to take on the role of a male character in order for the "game" to remain canonically sound. The appearance of alternative roles and disruptive games went on to be used to widen the range of gender inclusivity in many subsequent games, but teachers resisted them because of their rule-breaking. Findings support children's agentive, active interpretation and re-interpretation of even the most "problematic" popular culture themes and promote the value of unstructured dramatic play. Further, children do not mindlessly reproduce pop/kinderculture themes, but rather agentively and purposefully and flexibly curate these narratives for productive play and, in this case, inclusivity.

Belonging in Transition: Young Children's Experiences of Starting School in Finland and Iceland

Mari Vuorisalo¹, Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir² & Niina Rutanen¹

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Educational transitions, and particularly transition from preschool to compulsory school, have raised a lot of research interest. This study will explore children's experiences during the transitions with a lens on construction of belonging. Particularly, how do children construct their belonging during transition from preschool (Iceland) and pre-primary education (Finland) to primary school. Belonging is multifaceted phenomena, considering both children's subjective feeling of being part of something and of feeling at 'home' (sense of belonging), and social inclusion in terms of role and responsibility of the educational settings fostering participation (politics of belonging) (Yuval-Davis 2011). We will focus on narratives based on ethnographic interviews with children. The interviews were specifically selected based on events the children talked about as important to them (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Our analytical focus was on children's descriptions of their actions and emotions reflecting their belonging in the transition process. Preliminary findings suggest that children's construction of belonging is dynamic and fragile process. The strategies of the school supported the children's belonging and created opportunities for learning and making new relationships. However, sometimes these strategies also threatened children's belonging, provoking them to use tactics to maintain and strengthen their relationships, often through play and group activities.

Boundaries and Possibilities of Pupilness in Starting School

Jasemin Çan

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

During the spring semester, in most pre-primary education settings, children are positioned to face the new social circumstances of primary school. In this presentation, I explore how the boundaries of the pupil and the ideal of “pupilness” are socially negotiated between children and educators in Finnish pre-primary education in the 2020s. These negotiations take place during the spring semester, when the forthcoming transition to school is activated through everyday actions and relations. The aim is to examine how the idealistic notion of pupilness emerges in children’s everyday lives by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence and his idea of distinctions. The ethnographic data and interviews were collected during the spring before the children started primary education (grade 1). This research is part of the longitudinal study Trace in ECEC (funded by the Academy of Finland, University of Jyväskylä).

Symposium 8: The Boundary Work in Children's ECEC Between Ordinary and Special Services

Chair: Lene S. K. Schmidt

In the Finnish and Danish contexts, new boundaries and overlaps in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) between “the ordinary education” and “special education” are being drawn. On the political agenda, emphasis has been on maintaining children in the “ordinary education” and bringing down the extent of children who are referred to special services (Danneskiold-Samsøe & Kjær, 2025). After such politicized problematization of the segregation of children to special services, the focus is now (re)moved to the children's communities and on creating intermediate forms for children as support. These political currents reflect shifting norms and boundaries for what children's communities are expected to address or solve as larger issues. This includes when a child is seen as “ordinary enough” and when it is seen as “too special” to be part of the ECEC.

Our symposium combines policy and multi-ethnographic studies across Denmark and Finland. In the analysis, across children's institutional sites, the borderlands between the special and ordinary are investigated not as fixed formations, but as boundary work and (re)formations. We focus on: How do adults continuously negotiate children's positions and placement in ordinary and special services on their behalf, as well as how children negotiate such positions themselves? This includes the micro-political practices related to the boundary work, in which both children and adults are taking part. It zooms in on the intersections of ordinary and special services and when adults and children negotiate boundaries between who belongs where, how, and with whom.

Policy of Children's Wellbeing in the Field of ECEC – Between Possibility and Problematization

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Children's well-being is a significant topic in Denmark and internationally. This paper synthesizes three different socio-cultural policy and ethnographic studies in a Danish context (Schmidt 2024; Plum et al. 2025; Grumløse 2019). Together, it sheds light on how shifting political ideals of children's wellbeing have been a societal and educational concern, and the questions they raise in the ECEC field regarding the boundary work between ordinary and special services. The paper aims to explore the political (re)positioning of children's communities as agentic forces in addressing challenges in wellbeing. We examine the policy domains of ECEC from a socio-cultural departure (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) and its intersections with practice. The first two studies zoom in on how shifting societal understandings of wellbeing possibilities and problems related to childhood and children have evolved historically. On this backdrop, we show how present and dominant political and societal understandings of wellbeing are full of boundary work. In the field of ECEC, pedagogues are expected to play a vital role in ensuring the well-being of children within the framework of the ordinary services. Drawing on a third study, we shed light on how pedagogues navigate in a politicized landscape when distinctions and overlaps between ordinary and special educational services are being challenged, roles and resources are being rearranged, and the complex moral dilemmas it can produce.

The Administrative Process of Early Childhood Education Support: Experiences of Confusion in Parents' Stories

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¹University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Collaboration between parents and early childhood professionals is an important resource on a child's path in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The interaction between parents and professionals deepens when parents' trust in the sensitivity of professionals is strengthened (Rutanen & Laaksonen, 2020). However, the support process in ECEC can be challenging for parents in many aspects. Recognising a child's need for support and bringing it up, whether the concern is raised by a parent or a professional, may evoke a wide range of emotions for parents (Rautamies et al., 2019).

In this presentation, we draw on two sets of interview data with parent. Data 1 was collected as part of doctoral research using qualitative longitudinal approach. It consist of interviews (N=30) with parents of five children and recordings (N=17) of parent-ECEC meetings. The data will be analysed using discourse analysis (Edwards, 2005). Data 2 consists of interviews conducted during the research project studying the reform of the support system in Finnish ECEC. The parents (N=12) of ten children were interviewed, and the data will be analysed applying thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Different interpretations of a child's support needs may lead to confusion among the parties, especially when the support process is unfamiliar (Lanchak et al., 2024). In this presentation, we explore which situations and issues parents perceive as confusing. We understood the concept of confusion as discursively produced and socially constructed in parents' stories, and it may consist both negative and positive emotions of confusion.

Categorizing the Need: Epistemic Vulnerability and the Multiplication of Support Categories in Early Childhood Education and Care

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¹University of Eastern Finland, Finland, ²University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The identification and categorization of children's support needs in early childhood education is a socially constructed practice shaped by institutional, epistemic, and economic frameworks (Vehmas, 2010). This presentation explores epistemic tensions in defining children as “in need of support” within Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC), focusing on the interplay between pedagogical and medical-rehabilitative paradigms. Inspired by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), we examine how early childhood special education teachers (ECSETs) navigate complex decision-making processes shaped by legal reforms, professional discourses, and everyday pedagogical work. The data, collected through fieldwork in multiple municipalities, include observations, interviews, and document analysis from ECSETs’ daily practices.

Although recent legislative changes emphasize individualized and context-sensitive support without requiring formal diagnoses, medical and therapeutic knowledge often dominates in practice. ECSETs frequently encounter uncertainty and ethical dilemmas when making judgments about support, especially in the absence of medical documentation. The reform introduced a tiered support system—general, intensified, and special support—which increased the need to distinguish between varying degrees of need. Decisions regarding the most resource-intensive forms of support increasingly relied on medical-rehabilitative knowledge, reinforcing its epistemic authority.

Professionals faced challenges in determining what differentiates “ordinary,” “special,” and “very special” needs, often under pressure to justify categorizations with escalating levels of exceptionality. Epistemic vulnerability was not only pedagogical but also legal, as ECSETs feared consequences of misinterpreting the law. Our findings show that decisions are made within a framework shaped by both municipal economic constraints and a juridified education system, influencing how professionals know, act, and categorize.

The Ordinary as Negotiated: Boundary Work in Children’s Everyday Participation

Rakel Toubro

UC Absalon, Denmark

This paper takes its departure from an ethnographic and critical-utopian action research study in a Danish village school. The village school is an arrangement in a rural setting for both ECEC and school (3 to 13 years old). In this setting, I examine how boundaries between “ordinary” and “special” needs are negotiated in children’s everyday school life. In a context characterized by both strong local attachment and experiences of social vulnerability, the ordinary is never neutral: moments of emotional intensity or withdrawal may appear as part of “just everyday life,” while at the same time signaling something that might require special attention. Theoretically, the paper draws on Negt’s notion of *skelneevne* (ability to discern), Rancière’s dissensus, and Massey’s relational concept of place. I introduce the concept of children’s formation work (*børns dannelsesarbejde*) to show how children actively shape belonging and care in their peer communities (Toubro, 2025). The analysis centers on small-scale interactions, such as a classroom discussion where a girl speaks about her mother’s prolonged grief, or children’s fluid movements in and out of group activities during open-ended project work. In these moments, professionals and children engage in boundary work: tacitly adjusting when needs remain within shared community norms and when they call for differentiated support. The findings demonstrate that boundaries between the ordinary and the special are not predefined categories but situated, relational, and negotiated in practice—and that this negotiation is central to how children’s participation and well-being are made possible in rural school settings.

Crippling Understandings of Child Development and Inclusion in Day Care Practices

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Crippling understandings of child development and inclusion in day care practices

Since the introduction of curricula in Danish ECEC (2007) and Denmark's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009), political attention to the inclusion of children with disabilities has intensified. Municipal strategies typically follow two organizational models: (1) mainstreaming into ordinary settings or (2) creating congregated groups for specific child profiles. These approaches frame inclusion largely as a socio-material question of placement — “Where should the child be located?” This placement logic challenges the assumption of ECEC as a universal pedagogical provision and positions special educational knowledge as a new professional horizon, often helped along through interprofessional expertise and collaboration.

A neglected dimension in this process is knowledge viewed ‘from and with’ children— e.g. their conditions for participation. Professional attention tends to privilege knowledge ‘about’ and ‘for’ children rather than relational perspectives that foreground children’s own agency. Drawing on critical disability studies concepts such as “crip-time” (Kafer, 2013) and “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer, 2004, 2006), this paper analyzes institutional boundary-making, normative expectations, and developmental assumptions encountered by children with bodily and functional variations in everyday ECEC life. Through empirical examples, we explore how these children navigate participation requirements and inclusion efforts.

By crippling institutional logics of participation, we invite discussions on how knowledge seen ‘from and with’ children can inform more enabling and democratic practices. This perspective challenges dominant placement paradigms and opens possibilities for rethinking inclusion beyond physical integration toward relational and epistemic justice.

Symposium 9: Shapeshifting Childhoods: Navigating Boundaries of Space

Chair: Kristiina Kumpulainen

This symposium explores childhoods through the concept of shapeshifting, understood as the dynamic, situated, and relational processes by which children and educators navigate, blur, and reconfigure boundaries. It attends to shapeshifting across multiple sites, including Indigenous, digital, linguistic, and politicized contexts, to present four papers that highlight the complex and sometimes conflicting expectations, environments, and temporalities shaping and enabling childhoods. In each case, shapeshifting emerges as a way for children and educators to reconfigure self, place, and possibility, sometimes subtly, sometimes disruptively.

Each paper in the symposium examines how shapeshifting takes form in everyday practices: through walking and storying with place, navigating multilingual or professional identity positions, or mapping displacement and belonging. These practices reflect evolving attunements to adapt, resist, imagine, and intervene, often within conditions of constraint or uncertainty. As such, the symposium presents shapeshifting practices among children and those facilitating childhood encounters as acts of agency that are deeply relational and responsive to context. By foregrounding shapeshifting as both a theoretical and methodological entry point, the symposium reimagines childhood as a fluid field of movement, memory, imagination, and resistance. It contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations in childhood studies by offering new ways to think with boundaries, not only as constraints but as generative sites of transformation and possibility.

The symposium will begin with four paper presentations and conclude with brief provocations, inviting the audience to engage with shapeshifting as a conceptual, methodological, and ethical lens for reimagining research and practice in childhood studies.

Becoming with Place: Children's Storywalking, Enchantment and Shapeshifting

Kristiina Kumpulainen

University of Helsinki, Finland

This symposium paper introduces StoryWalking as a more-than-human ethnographic mode of inquiry that makes visible children's shapeshifting practices as they walk, story, and become with place. Rooted in relational ontologies, StoryWalking unsettles anthropocentric divides between human and non-human, body and mind, culture and nature, and physical and digital worlds, foregrounding children's embodied, affective, and imaginative encounters with place. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research in Finland and Australia, we examine how children, educators, and researchers co-create storied encounters with local forests, beaches, and urban fringes, where enchantment, that is, moments of heightened ethical and aesthetic attunement, opens possibilities for reconfiguring boundaries of self, place, and kinship. Through cases such as a child's transformative bond with a crow in Karawatha Forest in Australia and the imaginative creation of a "walking mountain" on a Finnish shoreline, we show how children move between ancestral and contemporary narratives, ecological and cultural timescales, and human and more-than-human perspectives. These practices exemplify shapeshifting: children blur boundaries between species, animate matter through story, and inhabit liminal spaces where multiple ontologies flicker and coexist. Rather than representing place as fixed, children's storywalking generates dynamic worlds in which identities, relations, materialities and responsibilities are continually negotiated. By situating StoryWalking within the symposium's focus on shapeshifting, this paper invites educators and researchers to see children's shapeshifting practices as generative acts of agency that create new possibilities for learning and living with place.

Cultural and Linguistic Shapeshifting by Newcomer Children to Create Spaces of Belonging

Harini Rajagopal

University of British Columbia, Canada

One in four Canadians has a mother tongue other than English or French and speaks multiple languages at home (Statistics Canada, 2022). As they move between home and school linguistic borders, multilingual children are aware that each place and each language carries not just different words, but different ideologies and hierarchies, different ways of thinking and being.

Highlighting one newcomer, Pari, as she traverses from her Hindi-speaking home to her English-only second-grade classroom in Western Canada, this year-long study emphasizes Pari's cultural shapeshifting as a strategy for belonging. Categorized as ELL in school, she was often "quiet and shy" during classroom activities but surfaced an exuberant and garrulous personality at home with her mother and sister. As she became used to her classmates, teacher, and English language, I share stories of Pari calibrating accent, grammar, and embodied and emotional expression to fit various contexts, and navigate ideological and cultural cues with intelligence and capacity.

Using one multimodal culturally sustaining activity to illustrate this transformation, I interpret Pari's stories as culturally nuanced shapeshifting, a site of imaginative transformation, and as agentive resistance and freedom. Shapeshifting offered Pari a chance to call attention to normative practices, rethink belonging, appropriateness, and capacities, and to bridge worlds. For Pari, it reflected a journey of crossing powerful boundaries with grace and creativity, adapting not just the words she used, but choosing for herself what shifts shaped her being and becoming.

Shapeshifting as Methodology and Pedagogy for Refusing Borders

Iris Berger¹

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This paper engages pedagogically, politically, and speculatively with the urgent need to reconfigure relations within our situated ecologies in a world marked by violence, displacement, and environmental collapse. Drawing inspiration from decolonial teachings such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2025) theory of water, it envisions systems of care that refuse the colonial state's insistence on land as property enclosed by borders as the measure for identity, citizenship, or belonging. Thinking with water and its shapeshifting capacities—solid, gas, liquid—opens a theory of movement that resists enclosure and welcomes recognition of our embeddedness in the cyclical and fragile nature of life.

Sharing examples from early childhood and teacher education settings where children and educators experimented with ways of sensing place differently, illuminates how new relations with local ecologies shapeshifted by attuning to textures of connections rather than possession or control. Shapeshifting, here, becomes an act of witnessing the potential for subtle shifts imbued in encounters that compose our daily lives.

Shapeshifting is not an easy practice, encountering the unknown and unrecognizable can be startling, yet in its wake, pedagogy may be reoriented toward what seemed impossible as shapeshifting may open a space for radical transformation. Ultimately the paper asks: how might we reenvision childhoods by resisting and refusing the bordered logics of the colonial-capitalist world, and instead, speculate toward more interdependent, relational ways of being?

Transformative Change in Professional Identity and Practice of Early Childhood Educators Through Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Jan Hare

University of British Columbia, Canada

Recommendations from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission seek to address Indigenous-settler relations by improving outcomes for Indigenous people, resulting in national curricular reform. Reconciliation has become a vehicle for attention and action in education spheres. Impacting early childhood educators (ECEs) in their local contexts are nation-wide policy directives that call for strategies that build capacity and training of ECEs grounded in Indigenous knowledges to enable culturally appropriate early childhood programs for Indigenous learners. As a result, there is unprecedented need for professional learning that supports ECEs to enhance care they provide to Indigenous children and ensure all programs include Indigenous perspectives, histories, and pedagogies.

This presentation explores the shifting identities of ECEs taking part in professional development focused on examination of their existing practices and new possibilities for teaching and learning from Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and pedagogies. Participants took part in a Massive Open Online Course focused on nurturing childhoods through Indigenous ways of knowing. This online professional learning experience prioritized Indigenous voice and knowledge traditions and critical reflection. Data was collected through surveys and participant reflections (n=396). Findings indicate significant professional shifts among participants, including increased cultural humility, incorporation of Indigenous practices, and deepened commitments to reconciliation. Participants who experienced discomfort learning about settler colonization, Indigenous lived experiences, and pedagogical approaches reflected more deeply on long-held beliefs and values to challenge their sense of what is 'normal practice', which is constructed through interactions of power and hierarchy and with boundaries between practices in their development as educators.

Symposium 10: Child Politics in Education: Socio-Material Approaches

Chair: Sue Grieshaber and Maiju Paananen

The aim of the symposium is to offer insights into how the scholarly community could advance the field of child politics research by engaging with socio-material approaches. The symposium is based on an ongoing book project. We use the term sociomaterial approaches to refer to a range of perspectives that draw on work of Deleuze and Guattari, science and technology studies (STS) and actor-network theory (ANT), employing sociomaterial as an umbrella concept to highlight their broadly shared orientation: they share a relational, anti-essentialist orientation that emphasizes the role of networks and co-constitution of meaning and materiality in dynamic, situated practices.

Drawing on socio-materialist approaches, we show how political forces are present in everyday objects, spatial arrangements, documentation practices, and embodied routines in educational institutions, and discuss the ways in which these can be studied. We discuss how relational ontologies that treat children as co-constituted with the socio-material worlds they inhabit help to understand the political nature of children's lives. We offer methodological tools for tracing how politics is lived and felt. This methodological stance not only reveals hidden dimensions of child politics but also opens possibilities for more responsive and ethically attuned educational research.

The symposium consists of three presentations and a discussant's commentary. We will begin with introduction, followed by the three presentations. Finally, the discussant will bring the perspectives together and offer directions for future work.

Applying Assemblage? Methodological Reflections from Fieldwork to Writing

Riikka Era

Tampere University, Finland

The concept of assemblage has travelled across disciplines, acquiring diverse meanings and methodological applications. In this presentation, I offer the way I engaged with assemblage thinking, that was rooted in Deleuze and Guattari but enriched through encounters with thinkers such as Anna Tsing, Rosi Braidotti, and Jane Bennett. I explore how assemblage thinking helped me trace the socio-material and affective forces shaping the lives of children seeking asylum in Finland.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a reception centre, I examine how children's everyday lives are entangled in assemblages, where categories such as "asylum seeker" or "paperless" override others like "child" in the distribution of scarce resources, such as childcare. Assemblage thinking enabled me to attend to the spatial, temporal, and embodied dimensions of marginalization, and to follow how these forces materialized in everyday encounters and institutional arrangements.

This presentation is part of the symposium *Child Politics in Education: Socio-Material Approaches*. In the presentation I reflect on how assemblage operated as a methodological tool throughout the research process from fieldwork to analysis and writing. I argue that assemblage offers a way to trace how politics, if understood as the distribution of and access to resources, is lived and felt in children's socio-material worlds, and how research itself becomes part of these assemblages. This helps to see clearly how research matters and why we need relational and ethically attuned methodologies.

When the Researcher Makes Time: Reflections on Sociomaterial Methodologies

Anna Kristiina Kokko¹ & Ida Martinez Lunde²

University of Eastern Finland, Finland¹, University of Oslo, Norway²

Existing research has comprehensively shown how temporality is created in the everyday life of educational institutions. In this study, we turn our attention to the researchers and their research methods. By engaging with sociomaterial theorisation of Karen Barad, we ask what kinds of temporalities researchers create through their data methodological choices and how, in doing so, produce certain kinds of temporalities that are then interpreted as the temporalities of school life. We will discuss how recognising time as a product of research process reveals the methodological polyphony of research practices, where researchers accelerate, slow down in their research practices. Such an approach invites discomfort and incompleteness, which we argue are themselves valuable methodological contributions, exposing the tensions and possibilities within research processes. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about what we can actually know about the times produced in our research sites, and what kinds of time we ourselves create through the research process.

Researchers in the Boundaries of Research Ethics Assemblages

Anna Siippainen¹, Antti Paakkari¹, Maiju Paananen¹ & Hanna Toivonen¹

¹Tampere University, Finland

Data has become a central part of people's lives and decision-making. There are many challenges associated with data use, and it is also strongly controlled by legislation. This presentation is based on our ongoing research project Data-Activism and Social Justice in Childhood Institutions (DataChild). In the project, we examine the challenges that data-driven decision-making poses to the equality of children and the possibilities for constructing practices that support equality. The project is based on a multiple case study. Data is produced with families with unborn to 13-year-old children who have experienced data-related friction or conflicts with childhood institutions. This presentation utilizes a collective fieldnote diary that the researchers have been writing during the research project with a particular focus on the assemblages associated with data. At the center of the analysis are methodological and ethical challenges. We reflect on three events that have highlighted tensions between the cross-institutional character of data assemblages and the individual-focused goals of the legislation.

The first event refers to a GDPR legislation which complicated gaining ethical approval for the research. The second event concerns challenges with finding participants as families have been unwilling to repeatedly engage with the complex data assemblages and, often under difficult life circumstances, generally doubtful about sharing their data with researchers. Finally, the third event concerns difficulties in gaining research permits for welfare institutions, especially in health care, where research is typically medical research conducted by

Symposium 11: Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society

Chair: Kira Saabye Christensen

Over the past 20 years, society has undergone profound digitalization, with far-reaching consequences for forms of communication, social interaction, and knowledge (Brubaker 2023; Danby et al. 2018; Twenge 2017). However, there are still few studies on what this digital horizon of experience means more broadly for childhood, socialization processes, and the aims of pedagogy in early childhood education and care. This symposium therefore explores how digitalization affects children and childhood both within and outside of daycare institutions. We examine how parents, professionals, and children encounter and use digital tools, what boundaries parents and professionals set for themselves and for children, and what understandings of children, childhood, and pedagogy these boundaries may reflect. Furthermore, we discuss how children respond to these dynamics and what dilemmas and paradoxes these boundaries and approaches create for children, professionals, and parents.

The discussions are based on the research project “Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society”, which investigates the significance of digitalization for children’s everyday lives, upbringing, and pedagogical work in early childhood education. Theoretically, the project draws on cultural-analytical perspectives on institutions (Smith 2004; Hasse 2011), parenting and upbringing (e.g., Lee et al. 2014), as well as ANT-inspired understandings of materiality (Akrich 1989). Methodologically, it is based on ethnographic observations and interviews with children, parents, and professionals in three different daycare institutions.

The symposium will present analyses from four subprojects, from the project 'Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society' followed by a discussion of cross-cutting themes and paradoxes, which will serve as the basis for a joint discussion with the symposium participants. This presentation is part of the symposium 'Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society'. The symposium will present analyses from four subprojects, followed by a discussion of cross-cutting themes and paradoxes, which will serve as the basis for a joint discussion with the symposium participants.

Parenting in a Digital Age – Navigating Boundaries in Early Childhood

Karen Ida Dannesboe

Aarhus University, Denmark

This paper, part of the symposium *Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society*, explores Danish parents' perspectives on raising young children in a digital society. While digital education was once a central focus, recent concerns have shifted toward the impact of digital technologies and social media on children's lives (Danish Health Authority 2024; Børns Vilkår 2023). Previous research has highlighted how parents seek to balance digital media use within the family and protect older children from the influence of social media (Livingstone & Blum-Ross 2020; Kuldás et al. 2023). However, few studies have examined families with younger children (Bakó & Törkés 2018).

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with 20 middle-class parents of kindergarten-aged children, this study explores how families negotiate both symbolic and practical boundaries around digital technology in relation to prevailing ideals of a good childhood. The analysis examines how these boundary-making practices are enacted through rules and regulations concerning children's use of digital devices, parental concerns about the effects of digital technologies on children's well-being and social relationships, and how these practices reflect broader moral values associated with parenting in a digital era. The study is informed by Brubaker's (2020) conceptualization of the digital as a transformative force that permeates everyday routines, social interactions, and the socialization of children. It also draws on parenting culture studies (Lee et al. 2014) and the concept of concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003) to understand how parents' efforts to balance and negotiate digital technology use are embedded within cultural norms of intensive parenting.

Boundaries Around Young Children and Digital Media

Anna Lea Munk Magnussen

Aarhus University, Denmark

With the rising digitalization of society, creating boundaries around children's use of digital media has become a central concern for families navigating the balance between fostering digital literacy and protecting children's well-being as "Technology has become simultaneously a threat to children's security and a promised route to ensuring it." (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 22).

The presentation explores how and why families set boundaries around young children's use of digital media, with a particular focus on socio-economic and cultural differences. Drawing on ethnographic field-work in and around a Danish kindergarten located in a socially diverse area, the study investigates parental motivations, concerns, and practices related to digital media use in both home and institutional settings.

The analysis is grounded in Parenting Culture Studies (Faircloth, 2014; Lee, 2014) which highlights how contemporary parenting is shaped by risk awareness and aspirations for children's futures. It also draws on the concept of Family Media Ecology (Barr et al., 2024), emphasizing the need to move beyond screen-time metrics to understand the broader social and emotional functions of digital media in family life.

By examining how digital media boundaries are negotiated across different family contexts, the presentation contributes to ongoing debates about digital childhoods and sheds light on how media practices may reproduce or challenge social inequalities in early childhood.

Digital Boundaries and Community Formation in Children's Lives in Early Childhood Education Settings

Kira Saabye Christensen

University College Copenhagen, Denmark

The presentation will focus on children's perspectives on digital devices both within and beyond the preschool setting, and on how they interpret and respond to adult-imposed restrictions and boundaries related to screen use and digital technologies. Furthermore, the presentation will unfold analyses demonstrating how children's play and peer communities—despite societal ideals promoting a screen-free childhood—often draw upon and connect with digital universes such as Harry Potter, Star Wars, Zelda, Mario, and others. By engaging with knowledge and familiarity with these digital worlds, children create meaningful play and social communities, while simultaneously negotiating and establishing boundaries for how these play narratives may or may not evolve in relation to the digital universe, and what constitutes valid knowledge within these contexts. The analyses therefore indicate that children's familiarity with games and films influences their access to and position within peer communities.

The project is based on ethnographic observations conducted in two Danish daycare institutions, as well as interviews with 16 children aged 4–5 years. Theoretically, the project draws on cultural analytical perspectives (Smith 2006, Hasse 2011) and ANT-inspired understandings of materiality (Arich 1989).

Professional Negotiations of Digital Boundaries in Early Childhood Education

Karen Prins

University College Copenhagen, Denmark

This presentation is part of the symposium ‘Early Childhood in the Digitalized Society’. The presentation presents findings from a subproject that investigates the significance of digital media for Professionals’ organization and prioritization in pedagogical work.

The project shows that professionals are concerned with organizing childhood for children aged 0–6 with strong boundaries to digital media. This boundary work is justified partly by arguments that children should experience and learn something different in daycare institutions, partly by the fact that professionals themselves are unfamiliar with children’s digital worlds—such as games and films—and partly by the broader societal concern and political interest in screen-free childhoods.

At the same time, the work professionals do to organize, coordinate, and collaborate around the children’s everyday lives is interwoven with and dependent on various digital devices, apps, and programs. This means that professionals still need to use digital devices while being with the children and rely on digital systems in their ongoing work to collect and document data for the municipal administration. This creates a number of dilemmas for the professionals, who are negotiating appropriate strategies to carry out essential digital tasks discreetly, out of sight of the children that at the same time correspond with their pedagogical values.

The project is based on ethnographic observations in two Danish kindergartens, as well as interviews with professionals, management and municipal stakeholders. Theoretically, the project draws on cultural analytical perspectives (Smith 2006, Hasse 2011), and on ANT-inspired understandings of materiality (Akrich 1989).

Symposium 12: The Political Mobilization of the Child: Limiting and Regulating Childhood through Heteronormativity

Chair: Jana Mikats

Heteronormativity –understood as a binary and hierarchical ordering of gender and sexuality – regulates children’s identities and futures, marking deviations as abnormal. As such, it shapes socialization and disciplinary practices, and provides a basis for queer- and anti-feminist opposition. By bringing together researchers from diverse European contexts the symposium examines how “the child” is mobilized in and across varied national, institutional, and social contexts, to enforce and legitimize heteronormative boundaries of childhood(s).

In the first presentation, ‘Rainbow Alert: Some Notes on the Heteronormative Ordering of Polish Childhood(s)’, Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska analyses debates on sexual education and LGBT activism in Poland, showing how policy and curricula reproduce heteronormativity while LGBT youth resist exclusionary practices. In the second, ‘Preschool Girls, Mega-Influencer Moms, and the Doing of Gender on Social Media’, Isabel Köhler and Megan Rådesjö explore preschool girls’ clothing on mega-influencer accounts as a site of gendered contestation across transnational digital spaces. In the third, ‘Innocence, Risk, and Responsibility: Heteronormative Boundary-Making around Early Childhood in Austria’, Jana Mikats examines contestation over drag readings, lost traditions, and gender-neutral pedagogy in kindergartens, showing how the innocent child trope privileges heteronormative families and parental rights while limiting children’s citizenship.

Each presentation will last 20 minutes, followed by a joint discussion comparing cross-national and cross-institutional strategies, resistances, and implications. In doing so, the symposium contributes to understanding how childhood is bounded in contemporary European societies and beyond, offering insights into how heteronormative limits of childhood(s) are maintained, contested, and reshaped.

Rainbow Alert: Some Notes on the Heteronormative Ordering of Polish Childhood(s)

Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska

Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland

Drawing on recent heated debates on the purpose of sexual education and reactions to LGBT+ solidarity campaigns, I wish to dive into the contested terrain of Polish childhoods, looking into how policy, curricular choices, and moral panic around child innocence operate as mechanisms that strengthen heteronormative order, reinforcing the default assumptions of children's heterosexuality and cisgender identity, and intertwining these with notions of religious morality, and national identity (the Polishness).

Focusing on educational spaces, I would like to track disciplinary practices such as censorship of Rainbow Fridays, withdrawal of antidiscrimination curricula, and the role of cultural wars over sexual education in regulating children's sexuality as fundamentally asexual and heteronormative. Following 303 letters from LGBT youth and their allies written in defence of Rainbow Fridays, I reconstruct some of the lived experiences and voices of queer children as vital counterpoints that challenge their assumed nonexistence and expose the costs of their exclusion. My reading of them situates practices of civilising and disciplining sexuality within frameworks of reproductive futurism and explores the persistent cultural process, the Eliasian “conspiracy of silence”, that marginalises non-normative identities. Rather than accepting heteronormative sexual education as inevitable or benign, I thus wish to expose its role as a gatekeeper deciding who gets to count as a real child, whose futures are mourned or defended, and what kinds of bodies, desires, and forms of kinship can be imagined.

Preschool Girls, Mega Influencer Moms and the Doing of Gender on Social Media

Isabel Köhler¹ & Megan Rådesjö¹

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Gender subjectification begins early in life and is constructed relationally within the gender order. While gender equality efforts have made progress across Western Nations, they are increasingly under threat by anti-gender and anti-feminist opposition. Within this context, we explore girls' clothing as a site of symbolic struggle facilitated through social media. By queering the concept of doing gender and using the concept of 'stickiness', we frame stylistic choices as politically charged. Through this lens, we analyze how the presentation of preschool-aged girls' clothing on mega-influencer moms' Instagrams and TikToks participate in the ongoing social (re)construction of gender. In our analysis, we approach these digital spaces as arenas that open up the possibilities for doing, undoing, and redoing gender subjectification. We ask: How do social media representations of preschool-aged girls' clothing on mega-influencer moms' social media accounts participate in the doing, undoing, and redoing of gender? The study contributes to feminist sociological debates on gender, childhood, and digital culture by showing how everyday online practices mediate the affective attachments and disciplinary forces that sustain and, at times, trouble the contemporary gender order.

Innocence, Risk and Responsibility: Heteronormative Boundary-Making Around Early Childhood in Austria

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TH Mannheim

Early childhood has become a contested terrain over who is entitled to educate, regulate and protect 'the child', fuelled by far-right, populist and conservative actors. In Austria, this can be seen in moral panics surrounding drag story hours, discussions about 'lost traditions', and debates about gender-neutral education in kindergartens. Drawing on queer theory, anti-gender studies, and critical childhood studies, this paper examines how contestations over 'the child' shape broader social orders, especially in relation to gender and sexuality.

To this end, I situate these debates within broader European far-right and anti-gender mobilisations, asking: how and in what ways are the boundaries of childhood constructed in contemporary Austrian debates on early childhood? How do understandings of education, family, and nation intersect with these constructions?

Adopting a situational analysis approach (Clarke et al., 2018), I analyse media coverage, social media posts and political statements surrounding key discursive events concerning the contestation of early childhood in Austria. The analysis explores how particular understandings of childhood are constituted at the intersection of education, family and nation, and how (hetero)normativity operates within these constructions.

The findings show that the trope of the innocent, developing child functions as a boundary-making practice that reinforces nationalistic and heteronormative orders of childhood. This regulates which families, identities and forms of care and education are considered legitimate, thereby privileging heteronormative families and parental rights while undermining children's citizenship. The paper highlights how contemporary debates over early childhood serve broader political agendas while simultaneously reinforcing the heteronormative boundaries of childhood.

Posters

Institutional Condition that influences Professional practice in adoption procedures: The Argentinian experience

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This poster presents findings from a PhD study on the ethical dilemmas faced by psychologists working in child protection in Argentina. The research explores the role of psychologists involved in cases where children are separated from their birth families due to protective measures and later adopted. Through qualitative interviews and the analysis of court files, the study examines the institutional and working conditions that shape child protection services, highlighting how these conditions influence professional practices and generate ethical challenges, tensions, and dilemmas in everyday work.

The findings reveal how institutional discourses, bureaucratic demands, and social pressures often constrain professional judgment and limit the capacity to consider each case in its uniqueness. These constraints raise crucial questions: What does it mean to “do things right” in child protection work? Does strict adherence to protocols ensure ethical practice, or does it hinder a thoughtful, case-by-case understanding? How can psychologists intervene while maintaining a position that respects the subjectivity of those involved?

The study also reflects on the psychologist’s role within judicial decisions. It argues that psychologists should interpret legal frameworks in light of each specific situation, identifying when rights are at risk of being violated. However, it emphasizes that professionals do not act in isolation—the defense and exercise of children’s rights depend on an entire system that often operates with significant gaps and inconsistencies. Strengthening ethical practice, therefore, requires collective institutional responsibility as well as individual professional reflection.

Sharenting as a Boundary Phenomenon: Ethical, Legal, and Sociological Dimensions of Childhood in the Digital Age

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In the digital age, sharenting, the practice of parents sharing photos and personal information about their children online, creates an online presence for children shaped not by themselves, but by adult digital practices. This phenomenon inherently challenges the traditional boundaries between the private and public spheres of childhood as digital identities are often created long before children can understand or consent to their online presence. While parental intentions are often affectionate or informative, such actions can inadvertently cross ethical, emotional, and legal borders related to children's right to privacy and autonomy. This study explores sharenting as a boundary phenomenon, examining how parental digital behavior constructs, blurs, or violates the personal boundaries of their children. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from education, sociology, and law, the research discusses how children's identities are co-created or, potentially, colonized through this practice. Moreover, it examines cultural variations in parental norms and how social expectations and technological affordances shape the modern boundaries of childhood.

By analyzing existing literature and public discourses from different cultural contexts, this work highlights the need to redefine children's agency and voice in the digital era. It proposes educational approaches and parental awareness strategies that empower children to participate in decisions about their digital representation. Ultimately, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions on the ethical, symbolic, and experiential boundaries of childhood, aligning with the conference theme "Childhood and Boundaries".

Children's Subjective Well-Being in the Digital Age: A Comparative Study of Poland and Finland

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Childhood today is deeply digitalized, encompassing many aspects of children's everyday lives. Portable devices increasingly provide children with access to digital technology both at home and in public spaces, making digital exposure a normalized part of a typical day. Prior research highlights the critical role of children's daily activities in shaping their life satisfaction and emotional health, emphasizing the importance of balanced daily routines. Time spent with family and engaging in physical activities consistently correlates with higher levels of well-being, while excessive screen time, particularly on smartphones, is linked to increased anxiety and depression (e.g. Harverson et al., 2025, Rees, 2017, Sauerwein & Rees, 2020).

This study will provide a comparative analysis of how different daily activities, especially electronic device use, influence the subjective well-being of children in Finland and Poland. Particular attention will be given to differences related to gender, age, and cultural (national) context. The analysis will be based on the latest data collected from children aged 10-12 who participated in the Children's Worlds survey.

Initial findings suggest that the impact of electronic device use on children's quality of life is not uniform but shaped by cultural, gendered, and socio-economic factors. For example, gender differences are evident: girls are more engaged in digital social interaction, while boys are more involved in gaming. High engagement with social media - especially among girls in Poland - is associated with lower satisfaction with free time and reduced subjective well-being. However, these effects may be moderated by cultural norms and family practices.

Language Trampoline Project (KONE FOUNDATION) Let's help children jump over the Finnish language barriers together!

Hanna Jaloza

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The poster presents the challenges and early results of the Language Trampoline Project (KONE Foundation) launched in April 2025. The project is a comprehensive study that aims to research and evaluate the long-term holistic-language-learning support for non-Finnish-speaking children from immigrant families living in Finland in their natural living environments – at home and in ECEC place (2025-2028). The action-based research employs meetings with parents and workshops for ECEC teachers. The meetings with parents are designed to find ways to support a child who does not speak Finnish and adapt to their family reality while considering and supporting the multilingual context. The aspect that connects the training for parents and ECEC teachers is understanding a child's emotions with difficulties in everyday communication in the ECEC place environment.

Children's Learning in the Transition from Early Childhood Education and Care to School and After-School Care: A Literature Review

Sonja Olsen

University of the Faroe Island, Denmark

Transitions from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to school and after-school care (ASC) represent pivotal boundary spaces in children's learning journeys. These movements involve shifts in pedagogical practices, relationships, and institutional expectations that can both sustain and disrupt continuity. This hermeneutic literature review explores how transitions influence and shape children's learning, focusing on how continuity of learning is conceptualised and enacted across settings. Guided by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2014) iterative and interpretive model, the study engaged repeatedly with Nordic and international research to identify shared conceptual patterns and tensions.

Four interconnected themes emerged: increasing complexity of transitions, shifting roles in scaffolding children's learning, schoolification of early learning, and children's agency as active brokers of continuity. Collectively, these themes reveal that continuity of learning is a relational, ecological, and co-constructed process sustained through collaboration, play, and participation.

The paper contributes to the conference theme Childhood and Boundaries by interpreting transitions as dynamic spaces where educational, relational, and cultural borders are continuously negotiated. It also highlights how small-society contexts, such as the Faroe Islands, illuminate broader questions of coherence and diversity in transition practices. The review offers a conceptual framework for understanding transitions as multidimensional learning processes and a foundation for future empirical inquiry.

Children's Rights and Documentation in Education: Exploring the Best Interests of the Child in Legal Supervision of Education in Finland and Norway

Mirva Poikola

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

This study explores how the boundaries and interpretations of the best interests of the child are produced and negotiated in legal and institutional practices through complaint processes in Finland and Norway. The analysis focuses on complaint cases handled by supervisory authorities, the Regional State Administrative Agency (Aluehallintovirasto, Finland) and the County Governor (Statsforvalteren, Norway), concerning children's rights to support in basic education and early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Building on institutional ethnography, the study examines relations between professional practices, documents, and institutional processes. Complaints provide a unique empirical standpoint for observing how legal, pedagogical, and administrative boundaries intertwine, and where the child's lived situation meets the institutional logic of regulation, evidence, and accountability.

The research design is twofold: first, it analyses how supervisory authorities prepare and resolve complaints concerning children's rights to educational support; and second, how their guidance is interpreted and enacted by local education organisers to support the rights of children. The study also raises methodological and ethical questions about how children's experiences become visible through documentation and legal supervision - and whether they can. The findings are expected to deepen understanding of how the best interests of the child are interpreted and implemented within institutional frameworks of education and legal supervision, offering comparative insights for developing more child-centered documentation and supervisory practices in Finland and Norway. This study is part of the RESISTANCE research project.

Between Institutional Boundaries: Children's Agency in Out-of-Home Care Transitions

Susanna Riekkoniemi

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

In this poster, I examine transitions within child welfare out-of-home care, particularly placement breakdowns and their prevention, from the perspective of institutional boundaries and children's agency. The topic is connected to my social work doctoral dissertation in progress, in which I explore stability and change in out-of-home care through the lived experiences of young adults.

Out-of-home care in child welfare is strongly shaped by institutional boundaries: a child's daily life and transitions are guided by legal, service-system, and professional structures. These boundaries define who decides where the child lives, whom they are allowed to meet, and how they can maintain contact with their own family. Such boundaries can support the child's safety and stability, but they may also restrict the child's possibilities to act as a subject in their own life.

Research literature shows that placement breakdowns are not merely isolated incidents, but reflect tensions between the child, the family, and the institution. These breakdowns reveal how the boundaries of childhood are negotiated, who determines where childhood takes place and on whose terms.

In this poster, I reflect on how these institutional boundaries and children's agency intertwine in moments of transition within out-of-home care, and what possibilities rethinking these boundaries might offer for developing more child-centered and stable forms of out-of-home care. Forms in which the boundaries of childhood are defined not primarily by the system, but by the continuity of the child's own life.

The Boundaries of Safeguarding Childhood – Time, Structures, and Professional Agency in Child Welfare Social Work

Hanna Sainio

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

This study examines how time, urgency and task coordination shape the professional agency of social workers in child welfare. The data consists of 39 frame stories (n=29), collected using the method of empathy-based stories from child welfare professionals. Analysis combined qualitative content analysis with a discourse analytical approach.

Child welfare functions as a last-resort institution of public authority, assessing when a child's environment or behaviour poses risks to their health or development. Safeguarding childhood is its core mandate. Childhood is legally defined as under 18, but in child welfare it's also structured through administrative, societal and temporal boundaries. Legislation defines strict timeframes for social workers' actions and guides the timing, duration and urgency of tasks. Overlapping temporal frameworks create tensions over whose time defines childhood, often intensified by differing perceptions between children and professionals.

Urgency, as an umbrella term for temporal strain, is not merely individual or organizational but a structural phenomenon shaped by legislation, practices, and resource scarcity. This temporal pressure, expressed through urgency and time scarcity constrains social workers' ability to engage in relationship-based practice. Findings show that professional agency is shaped by the dynamic interplay of temporal and structural conditions. In a reflective and negotiated form of agency, time functions as an enabler, whereas in constrained and reactive agency, it limits professional action and the ability to act by professional ideals. The latter form also exposes a fatalistic dimension, where professionals perceive temporal and structural constraints are beyond their capacity to influence.

Material and Spatial Boundary Work & Inclusive Education: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Migrant Children on the Åland Islands

Aino Waller

Åbo Akademi, Finland

This qualitative study explores non-Nordic migrant children's lived experiences of inclusion in comprehensive schools on the monolingually Swedish-speaking Åland Islands. International migration affects millions of children across the globe (Bhabha & Abel, 2020), and receiving societies strive to develop structures and policies that support migrant children's rights and long-term well-being (ibid, 2020). However, reception models for migrant students vary and the concept of inclusion remains ambiguous (Ainscow, 2020). Recently arrived non-nordic migrant children on Åland are directed into mainstream or reception classes on the basis of their Swedish- language skills. Acknowledging children as experts on their own lives and drawing from new materialisms, postcolonial theory, and social systems theory, the present study poses the following questions: How do migrant children experience inclusion and negotiate its material-discursive boundaries? How can these findings inform the operational concept of and policies governing inclusion? Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation, focus groups and participant observation. Participants are 15–20 migrant children of 11–16 years of age from three comprehensive schools on Åland. Data is analysed using thematic analysis with open coding. Preliminary results will be available in the spring of 2026.

Childhood Death and Childhood Studies: A Need for the Merging of Fields

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Literature about children and youth's (i.e., young people's) death and dying experiences tends to reside in pediatric medicine journals, including but not limited to those specific to pediatric palliative care, despite the highly interdisciplinary nature of this topic. However, the medical field in Canada (amongst other Western nations) continues to cling to a status quo that leads to children's deaths being largely silenced (especially for young people themselves) and related grief being disenfranchised—often in pursuit and protection of curative hope. To date, the field of childhood studies has not provided significant discourse about childhood death and dying experiences or end-of-life care, despite the field's important critical dialogues on rethinking childhood and prioritizing young people's rights and voices. As a response to these gaps, this poster outlines initial reflections on the need for childhood studies scholars (and the field) to take up discussions about young people's death and dying experiences, inviting viewers & conference attendees to share their own impressions. We also offer preliminary ideas to think through ways forward for those working at or interested in this conceptual intersection.

