



# **Children and Adults: Playing Together in the Digital World**



Aston University, Birmingham, 2025

# Welcome to TACTYC: A message from our president



Dear friends and colleagues,

In 1978, a group of early years tutors working in universities across the country came together united in feeling their work was not well understood or appreciated, and in the need for mutual support. By 1980, the group had become known as TACTYC, an acronym for 'Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children'. The first Early Years Journal was produced at this time. The main aim of the Journal was to "...keep abreast of relevant research...and take part in public debates on matters of policy and on current issues in the care of young children, by alerting readers to them, commenting on them and publishing articles." (Early Years, 1(1):3)

We became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2018. Trustees, who are members of the voluntary Executive Committee, have worked hard on self-evaluation; they have recently undertaken a stringent review of governance and an analysis of membership characteristics and expectations.

There have been many developments over the past 45 years: the Journal is now an impressive publication with a highly respected international reputation. TACTYC has a website, is involved in commissioning research, and producing a book series, Reflections articles and Occasional Papers. We respond to consultations, and are involved in campaigns. We support a wide range of practitioners with evidence-based reflective practice and research opportunities, and provide a voice for all those involved in early years through advocacy and lobbying.

I am delighted to welcome you all to the TACTYC conference here at Aston University. We can look forward to refreshment in each other's company as well as opportunities for discussion and debate at a significant time for early years.

Developments in Ofsted's approach as well as the proposed review of Early Years to be led by David Bell, coupled with the change in government, give the promise of significant improvements in provision for our youngest children. Although this cannot happen quickly, there are opportunities for us to influence government thinking. Our conference has the potential to set the scene, so let us make the most of our time together.

I look forward to hearing of your experiences and your hopes.

Wendy Scott, OBE: President of TACTYC



# Welcome to our annual conference: A message from our Chair

Dear Friends,

We are delighted that you have joined us here in Birmingham today to take part in our annual conference. Our conference is an opportunity to come together as individuals and organisations committed to young children, to share insights from our research and practice and we are thrilled to be joined by friends and colleagues from a wide range of institutions and organisations.

This year, our theme is ‘children and adults: playing together in the digital world’. We have also tried to make space within our day for conversation and networking, a chance to connect and explore how much more powerful our voices are when we work ‘Together And Committed To Young Children’.

Thank you for joining us, we hope you have a great day!

Dr Viki Veale: Chair of TACTYC

**Children and Adults: Playing Together in the Digital  
World**

**Saturday 15th November 2025**

| Timetable                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10:15 - 10:45 - Registration, coffee and pastries                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| 10:45 - 11:00- Welcome, housekeeping and introduction                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| 11:00 - 12:15 - Keynotes and panel discussion: Fiona Joines. Richard Waite. Dr Lorna Arnott                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| 12:15 - 13:00 - Lunch and round table networking                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| 13:00 - 13:30 – Workshops:                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| Workshop 1: Tinkering with Technology<br>Emma Callow                                                                                   | Workshop 2: Learning with Light<br>Michelle Reid                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                              |
| 13:30 - 14:30 - Breakout session 1: research briefings and discussion items                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Group 1a</b><br><b>Chair: Dr Lewis Fogarty</b>                                                                                      | <b>Group 1b</b><br><b>Chair; Eleanor Milligan</b>                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Group 1c</b><br><b>Chair; Dr Karen Vincent</b>                                                                                            |
| <b>Growing together in an Apple Distinguished School: Integrating Digital Technologies into the Pedagogical Toolkit</b><br>Zoe Kennell | <b>Staying Curious and Being Inspired Through Online Professional Development</b><br>Vikki Wynn<br>Becky Cozens                                                                                           | <b>Exploring Early Years Practitioners’ Perspectives on Digital Play in Daycare Settings</b><br>Joelle Feudjo- Maneze                        |
| <b>Tuning Out the Noise, Tuning Into Connection: Nurturing the Inner World of Gen Alpha</b><br>Nicola Maria Rose McReynolds            | <b>Digital Dialogues: Collaborative Professional Inquiry and Practitioner-Led Research in the Reception Class Teacher Network</b><br>Eleanor Milligan<br>Janet Morris<br>Dr Viki Veale,<br>Lorna Williams | <b>“Secret talking”: Using body-worn video cameras to support babies’ communication in the outdoors</b><br>Dr Karen Vincent<br>Polly Bolshaw |
| <b>The application of Nvivo play awareness to increase children’s agency when decision making online</b><br><br>Dr Pamela Murray       | <b>The Researchful Practice Toolkit: Lessons From Educator-Driven Research</b><br>Dr Frances Giampapa                                                                                                     | <b>Co-caring + Co-working: Can Technology Empower Parents to be Better Partners to Early Years Practitioners?</b><br>Georgia Norton          |
| 14:30 - 14:45 - Comfort break                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| 14:45 - 15:30 - Breakout session 2: research briefings and discussion items                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Group 2a</b><br><b>Chair: Dr Eva Mikuska</b>                                                                                        | <b>Group 2b</b><br><b>Chair: Dr Elizabeth Caruthers</b>                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Group 2c</b><br><b>Chair: Rod Parker-Rees</b>                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                        | <b>Daring to dream: Using technology to explore the vision.</b>                                                                                                                                           | <b>Digital as Another Language: Communication, Creativity, and</b>                                                                           |

|                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Playful Connections in a Digital World: Harnessing Technology for Healthy Child Development</b><br>Dr Amanda Gummer | <b>values and realities of novice early childhood teachers</b><br>Dr Viki Veale<br>Natalie Shaw           | <b>Inclusive Practice in the Early Years</b><br>Sarah Richards                                                                                                            |
| <b>Tacit Dimension of the Digital Learning Environment in Early Childhood</b><br>Dr Eva Mikuska                        | <b>Young Minds Big Maths</b><br>Dr Rachel Oughton<br>Sophy Darwin<br>Kathryn Nichols<br>Sarah Dixon-Jones | <b>Grandparents, Grandchildren and Digital Media: Exploring Intergenerational Play and Communication</b><br>Dr Paulette Luff<br>Dr Danielle Mangoine<br>Dr Mallika Kanyal |
| 15:30 - 15:45 - Comfort break                                                                                          |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 15:45 - 16:00 - Keynote Panel summary discussion                                                                       |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 16:00 - 16:30 - Closing thoughts, Reflections Award and announcements                                                  |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                           |

## Keynote Panel



**Fiona Joines**

Fi started her career working in a variety of early years settings, before teaching roles in FE/HE. With an MA in Education and Technology she now works as a trainer, designing and delivering workshops and is the author of *Embracing Technology in the Early Years: A Practitioners Guide*.

Fi will explore the importance and value of us entering the child's digital world, learning and playing together to develop the crucial characteristics of effective learning for the child (and the practitioner). She will reflect on how the building of technology skills can lead us to engage in the world safely.



**Richard Waite**

Richard brings 38 years of Early Years Care & Education expertise, specialising in Early Years Technology and STEM education. As founder of Waite EYTS consultancy, he delivers training and creates resources focusing on Early Childhood Technology, Online Safety, and advocating for Men in Childcare, while supporting nurseries across the UK.

Richard presents *Children and Adults: Playing Together in the Digital World*—real case studies showing how nurseries use interactive tables for STEAM learning experiences and how Forest Schools integrate digital tech outdoors: Practical strategies for relationship-focused digital play.



**Dr Lorna Arnott**

Lorna is a Reader in Social and Cultural Early Childhood Studies at Strathclyde Institute of Education at the University of Strathclyde. For over a decade, her work has specialised in researching early childhood lived experiences, particularly around digital play, creativity, social interactions and participatory child-centred methodologies.

Lorna will present data from an ESRC funded project about under 3s digital experiences in family homes across the UK. Drawing on data from a multi-phase methodology including in-depth case studies, she will present key examples of the ways in which technologies can facilitate learning experiences in the first years of life.

## Parallel Presentations

### Workshop 1: Tinkering With Technology



#### **Emma Callow: Consultant**

Emma is a learning experience designer, tinkerer and STEAM educator passionate about playful, hands-on learning. She blends arts and technology to spark curiosity and collaboration in children, using innovative tools, materials, and methods. Her work explores and experiments with creative ways to inspire exploration through the latest trends in education and design.

Tinkering with Technology is a playful, hands-on workshop where participants explore movement, art, and innovation using everyday materials and simple technology. It will be rooted in constructionist and tinkering learning approaches, it fosters imagination, curiosity, and experimentation. Through motors and animation, participants will turn ordinary objects into creative, moving artworks, blending craft, motion, and technology. It's a chance to discover what is possible with the tools you already have and to learn through play, exploration, and making.

### Exploring Early Years Practitioners' Perspectives on Digital Play in Daycare Settings



#### **Joelle Feudjo-Maneze: Independent Early Years Consultant**

Joelle is an Independent Early Year Consultant with over 20 years of experience in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Holding an MSc in Social Research Methods and a BA in Childhood and Youth Studies, she is passionate about driving transformative change and supporting professional development in daycare settings.

This qualitative study explores early years practitioners' perceptions and facilitation of digital play in daycare settings. Digital play, involving the use of tablets, computers, and interactive screens, is increasingly integrated into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three practitioners, and thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was used to identify key themes. Practitioners generally viewed digital play as a valuable and engaging tool when used thoughtfully and in moderation. Benefits included enhanced focus and real-world relevance, while concerns centered on screen time management and lack of formal

training. Participants emphasised the need for clearer guidelines and targeted professional development to support meaningful and developmentally appropriate digital experiences. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital technologies in ECEC, highlighting the importance of evidence-based strategies to ensure digital play supports holistic child development.

## The Researchful Practice Toolkit: Lessons From Educator-Driven Research



### **Dr Frances Giampapa: School of Education, University of Bristol**

Dr Frances Giampapa is an Associate Professor in Identities, Language and Education with a longstanding interest in researching professional identities and educational practice. She is the founder of the Researchful Practice Toolkit. Dr. Victoria Bowen is a Senior Research Associate with over 30 years of experience in education having held various leadership roles, including being a head teacher at an inner-city primary school in Bristol.

This presentation will share the underpinning research outcomes and development of the Researchful Practice toolkit - an online tool that supports early years educators to lead their own practice-based research projects. Our research is informed by literature on professional learning and identities and research-engaged practice (Brown 2017; Baumfield & McGrane 2001; Giampapa & Bowen 2025; Handscombe 2019). Drawing on participatory models for research, we used knowledge exchanges and data from the toolkit to understand early years' educator experiences of being researchful practitioners and agents for change. Our findings show that early years educators felt more confident and widened their understanding of research by driving their own researchful projects which in turn supported their professional decision-making. This not only had an impact on their professional learning and development but it also impacted on the learning and development of young children.

## Playful Connections in a Digital World: Harnessing Technology for Healthy Child Development



### **Dr Amanda Gummer: FUNdamentally Children and The Good Play Guide**

Dr. Amanda Gummer, founder of Fundamentally Children and the Good Play Guide, is a leading child development expert. She champions a balanced 'play diet' that combines traditional and digital play to boost social, emotional and cognitive skills, helping families and educators guide children toward safe, positive, connected digital experiences.

As children's lives become increasingly entwined with technology, it's vital to understand how digital play can bring us together rather than drive us apart. Dr Amanda Gummer will explore how a balanced 'play diet' can harness the benefits of shared digital experiences while supporting children's

social, emotional, and cognitive development. Drawing on evidence from the Good Play Guide and real-world examples, Amanda will highlight practical ways early years practitioners and parents can encourage positive, collaborative digital play. She'll also address common concerns around screen time, online safety, and the importance of co-play, showing how technology can complement traditional play to build connection and resilience. Attendees will leave with clear, research-informed ideas for guiding children to play together in healthy, meaningful ways—online and offline. In a world where screens are here to stay, this session will empower adults to help children thrive through purposeful, playful connection in the digital age.

## Growing together in an Apple Distinguished School: Integrating Digital Technologies into the Pedagogical Toolkit



### **Zoe Kennell: Independent Consultant**

With over 30 years' experience in early years education, Zoe is an independent consultant and former EYFS leader at an Apple Distinguished School. With further professional training in somatics, psychotherapy and spirituality, Zoe brings an integrative approach to using digital technology in transformational ways to enhance creativity, connection and collaboration.

This paper explores the gap between early years pedagogy and the integration of digital technologies in EYFS classrooms (Vidal-Hall). Drawing on ten years of teaching and leading EYFS in a large, Outstanding Apple Distinguished School, I reflect on how collaborative enquiry and evidence-informed practice supported adults and children to use Apple technology in innovative and impactful ways (Hattie).

Drawing on classroom practice, I will share examples of how technology accelerated learning through task focussed feedback (Wiliam), which over time built learning behaviours and a growth mindset in both adults and children (Dweck). I will also demonstrate how integrating technology empowers children to become independent learners, peer coaches, and co-constructors of a bespoke curriculum (Claxton).

By positioning digital technology as one of many tools in a rich pedagogical toolkit, this paper offers practical insights for educators seeking to integrate digital tools in ways which enhance play, relationships and developmentally appropriate child-centred practice.

## Grandparents, Grandchildren and Digital Media: Exploring Intergenerational Play and Communication



**Dr Paulette Luff: Anglia Ruskin University**



**Dr Daniele Mangoine: Anglia Ruskin University**



**Dr Mallika Kanyal: University of the Creative Arts, London**

Paulette, Daniela and Mallika have worked together for the past twenty years, with shared interests in aspects of teaching, research and writing in the field of early childhood education and care. Their current joint venture is an intergenerational participatory project working with grandparents as co-researchers, in Italy and the UK.

This paper explores the role of grandparents in young grandchildren's digital media usage within home learning environments. Three key themes are highlighted: how grandparents understand and mediate children's screen time; opportunities that digital media affords for playful intergenerational learning; and uses of technology to bridge the gap when grandparents and grandchildren are apart. The research is framed by the sociocultural, contextual theories of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner and draws upon published studies, autoethnographic encounters, and a participatory project with grandparent co-researchers. We discuss how grandparents may appreciate the benefits of digital media, engage in playful mutual learning with grandchildren, and communicate (sometimes across distances) using digital applications. The conclusion evaluates the research and suggests areas for future study, emphasizing implications for families and early childhood education.

## Tuning Out the Noise, Tuning Into Connection: Nurturing the Inner World of Gen Alpha



### Nicola Maria Rose McReynolds: The Peace Path

Nicola Maria Rose is the founder of The Peace Path and its flagship brand HushAway, a sanctuary designed for neurodivergent children. As a neurodivergent-inclusive coach, educator and voice artist, Nicola blends sound science, storytelling, and technology to create a safe space for emotional regulation, helping children ‘find peace in the little sounds’.

In a world of overstimulation, HushAway offers a digital sanctuary of sound for neurodivergent children. Blending ASMR, Solfeggio frequencies, and narrative therapy, HushAway uses technology to promote calm, focus, and sensory safety. In this session, Nicola Maria Rose explores how audio storytelling and carefully curated soundscapes can become co-regulatory tools, helping children and adults connect in shared digital moments. With real-world ambassador feedback, research-informed design, and inclusive intent, HushAway demonstrates how the digital world can support play, connection, and emotional wellbeing for children with sensory needs. This talk presents the emerging findings about how technology, sound and storytelling can gently bring peace to neurodivergent young minds.

## Tacit Dimension of the Digital Learning Environment in Early Childhood



### Dr Eva Mikuska: University of Portsmouth

Eva started her career as a geography teacher. At the beginning of the Yugoslav war, she came to live in the UK in 1992. After working in various early years settings, in 2005 she joined the UK FE and HE sector as a lecturer and researcher. Currently, Eva is teaching on various programmes and modules, with the main focus on methodological approaches to research, professional educational practices, and other Early Childhood Education and Care related topics.

The tacit dimension of the digital learning environment in early childhood refers to the indirect, often unspoken aspects of how very young children experience and engage with digital technologies. These dimensions are not always explicitly taught or observable, often tacit, which significantly shape how learning occurs in digital contexts. The presentation draws on qualitative data collected over the last decade involving observations, subsequent discussions with educators, and videos/transcripts of semi-structured interviews/focus groups. Data was analysed identifying how the tacit nature of the digital environment materialised in early learning environments. Tacit knowledge is understood here as embodied skills and experiences that are possessed but not codified and may not necessarily be easily expressed. The findings provide opportunities to explore how far-reaching and fundamental tacit dimensions of digital environments are acknowledging the reward this may bring.

## Digital Dialogues: Collaborative Professional Inquiry and Practitioner-Led Research in the Reception Class Teacher Network



**Eleanor Milligan:**  
**University of East Anglia**



**Janet Morris:**  
**University of Worcester**



**Viki Veale: St Mary's University, Twickenham**



**Lorna Williams:**  
**University of Worcester**

We are former Reception Class teachers who now work in initial teacher education. We came together to create a network focused on meeting the professional development needs of this unique group of teachers so they can continue their learning as they develop their practice.

The Reception Class Teacher Network (RCTN) pioneered and researched an innovative approach to professional development for early years educators utilising digital tools. Grounded in Lawrence Stenhouse's (1975) vision of teachers as researchers and inspired by Project Zero's (Mardell et al 2009) Zoom template, RCTN facilitated a reflective, collaborative process that empowered practitioners to critically analyse and document the impact and place of research in their practice. This initiative not only fosters professional growth among individual educators but also enriches the pedagogical practices within their settings and serves as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, offering attendees valuable insights into diverse early years contexts. Bringing practitioners together digitally for peer review enabled community support and reflection. Findings highlight the transformative potential of practitioner-led research and digital collaboration in shaping meaningful, context-responsive professional learning. The project underscores the importance of teacher agency and wider community perspectives in driving sustained improvement for educators.

## Co-caring + Co-working: Can Technology Empower Parents to be Better Partners to Early Years Practitioners?



### Georgia Norton: Playhood

Georgia Norton researches early years innovation and helps settings strengthen partnership with families. Her work on integrating nursery provision with co-working facilities for parents has won social impact grants. As a consultant she's advised organisations ranging from Nike to Amnesty International, and startups, on youth and family advocacy.

This session makes a case for the relevance of the working lives of parents to practitioners in the early years. Becoming a parent is a sequence of lifestyle transitions marked by time off from, re-evaluation of, or change in career, and the pandemic revealed how interdependent work is with childcare and education. As we navigate an increasingly distributed/networked world of work, Playhood identified opportunities to balance screen-based interactions with the human connections core to collaboration around the child.

Strategies for recruitment, on-boarding and managing ongoing digital communication will be discussed in the case study. A more holistic, intimate and honest relationship is possible through a co-ordinated professional approach to devices, AI, apps and software. (New research on 19 countries where parents have founded co-working facilities with on-site childcare will also contextualise the work).

| Young Minds Big Maths                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                   |
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|  <p><b>Dr Rachel Oughton:</b><br/><b>Durham University</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  <p><b>Sophy Darwin:</b><br/><b>Durham University</b></p> |  <p><b>Kathryn Nichols:</b><br/><b>Houghton Community Nursery School</b></p> |  <p><b>Sarah Dixon-Jones:</b><br/><b>Houghton Community Nursery School</b></p> |
| <p>Rachel, Sophy, Kathryn and Sarah are representing Young Minds Big Maths (YMBM), a collaborative professional development project in which early years educators and mathematicians meet regularly online to discuss the maths in children's play. The aim is to support a child-led, playful exploration of maths in early years settings.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>Young Minds Big Maths is a collaborative project between university mathematicians and early years (EY) educators, centred on regular online meetings where we discuss maths relating to children's play and interests. The aim is to help educators recognise, support and extend mathematical thinking already present in children's play, so that they can capitalise on children's natural curiosity.</p> <p>The project is child-led, aiming to enrich existing play rather than to introduce a fixed curriculum. EY educators use insights from the meetings to shape ongoing planning and interaction, drawing on their expertise, skills and knowledge of each child to embed mathematical concepts in ways that are both engaging and developmentally appropriate.</p> <p>In this article we examine Young Minds Big Maths in more detail, and introduce two new resources we have developed, both available digitally, that have the same child-led ethos.</p> <p>Keywords (5): early childhood maths, child-led, educator collaboration, play, professional development</p> |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                   |

## The application of en-vivo play awareness to increase children's agency when decision making online



### **Dr Pamela Murray: University of Worcester**

Dr Pamela Murray is a Senior Lecturer in leadership at the University of Worcester, where she enhances student and client performance using a combination of experiential, educational and psychological development methodologies. She appreciates working collaboratively with peers and seniors in WBS, across the University and externally.

Antecedents of behaviours associated with play have been linked with the 'seeking system', a primary process evolved from a mammalian need for survival (Wright & Panksepp, 2012). This neurobiological activity houses instinct and intuition, and evolves to curiosity. A case is made for working alongside this inquisitive driver to support children's natural maturation through play which is activated in real world surroundings and arguably replicated by/in aspects of virtual play. To build decision making capability, resourcefulness and resilience for a child's playtime online, a metacognitive model is adopted where metacognition concerns the capacity of awareness of cognitive processes and their regulation (Fleur, Bredeweg & van den Bos, 2021). By implementing the (adapted) en vivo leadership methodology (Murray, 2006; 2020), a dynamic phase characterised by contextual uncertainty for the child subjected to intrapersonal instability due to online susceptibility, will be scrutinised. Salient online experiences will be collated and used to inform the design of a workshop to (further) equip play caretakers in their facilitation of children's assured online play, and to underpin the development of children's agency by fortifying their critical thinking skills in the role of play participant.

## Workshop 2: Learning with Light



### **Michelle Reid: Consultant**

Michelle has worked in education for over 20 years. She started her early career as an Early Years Practitioner working in a private day care setting before training to become a Primary School Teacher. She has had a variety of roles including a senior leader in a primary school, curriculum leader, school governor and has also worked alongside the Local Authority on a range of projects. Michelle now works as a content editor for TTS.

This workshop/presentation explores how light underpins human experience and how it can be used to enhance learning opportunities and environments. Beginning with a reflection on light in everyday life and its evolutionary roots, we will then examine emerging research on how light can impact attention, regulation and engagement. There will an opportunity for hands-on exploration of light-based resources where we can consider how learning behaviours and emotional responses are shaped, before coming together to think about how light can be purposefully woven into the different of areas of early years provision.

## Digital as Another Language: Communication, Creativity, and Inclusive Practice in the Early Years



### **Sarah Richards: Mill Hill Nursery School**

Mill Hill Nursery School, part of the Inspiring Foundations Federation in Sunderland, leads inclusive digital learning in Early Years. Our innovative approach uses digital tools to support communication, creativity and emotional development, particularly for children with SEND. We see technology as another language for children to express themselves and make connections.

This presentation shares how Mill Hill Nursery School uses digital tools as another language for expression, helping children to connect, communicate and create. In response to the challenges following the pandemic, we explored how technology could support all learners, particularly children with SEND, by offering new ways to be seen, heard and understood. Our intergenerational 'Bee Connected' project highlighted the emotional impact of digital storytelling, animation and video calls. Digital tools became everyday materials for exploring ideas, building relationships and sharing experiences. Practitioners played a key role in guiding purposeful digital exploration and making space for children's voices to lead. We'll share examples of how digital tools enhance inclusive practice, problem-solving and collaboration, as well as how we are beginning to explore the role of AI in early years. This session offers the chance to reflect on what meaningful, creative and child-led digital learning looks like in early childhood education today, in preparation for an ever-changing digital world.

## Daring to dream: Using technology to explore the vision, values and realities of novice early childhood teachers



### **Dr Viki Veale, St Mary's University, Twickenham**

Dr Viki Veale (senior lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education) is chair of TACTYC and co-coordinator of RCTN. Her research centres on professional development.



**Dr Natalie Shaw: NHL Stenden**

Dr Natalie Shaw lectures in international ITT in Meppel, the Netherlands. She has a degree in SEND. Her master's and PhD focussed on children's rights.

The realities of professional practice can be harsh. Daring to dream that an alternative is possible is an act of political resistance (Friere, 2020). As ITE lecturers, our aim is for our students to see themselves as 'world makers (Gibson-Graham, 2008:614), willing to engage in the critical hope that things can change. To make this possible, we asked them to engage in an act of collective imaging.

Using technology, we brought together students across Europe to explore their shared identity, shared reality and shared vision for the future of early childhood education. Using generative AI we encouraged them to articulate their vision. In this presentation, we share their visions with you, discuss the implications and invite you to share your vision too.

**"Secret talking": Using body-worn video cameras to support babies' communication in the outdoors**



**Dr Karen Vincent: Canterbury Christ Church University**

Karen Vincent is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her experience as a teacher in a variety of school settings with a particular interest in the earliest years of learning, has led to her practice based pedagogical research interests. Karen supports the professional learning and development of new educators in early childhood, leading on the placement modules in early childhood studies. She is secretary of the International Professional Development Association as well as a TACTYC Trustee.



**Ms Polly Bolshaw: Canterbury Christ Church University**

Polly is a Senior Lecturer in Early Years where I have been teaching on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme since 2012. Prior to that she completed her MA Early Years (New Leaders in Early Years) and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) at CCCU and worked as an Early Years Professional at a Sure Start Children's Centre. In 2014 she gained a PGCLT HE (Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education).

Our presentation discusses selected findings from a participatory action research project in which baby room educators chose to examine the ways in which babies communicate in the outdoor environment. Educators did this through reflecting on body-worn video camera footage captured from the children's own perspectives. The study is part of a wider project (2023-2025) that adopted a

participatory we-search (Vincent, 2021; Papadopoulou and Vincent, 2025) methodology. The opportunity to reflect on the footage over a series of group interviews gave the practitioners new insights into the breadth of ways in which babies communicate outdoors, who they communicate with and what outdoor pedagogies in particular support their communication. These reflections allowed the educators to reevaluate their outdoor provision to support babies' communication and supported the way in which they plan for them. This has wider implications for those seeking to adopt digital technologies and participatory methods to develop their outdoor pedagogies.

### Staying Curious and Being Inspired Through Online Professional Development



**Vikki Wynn:  
University of  
Sunderland**

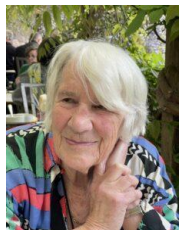


**Becky Cozens:  
University of  
Sunderland**

Vikki and Becky both work at the University of Sunderland in the School of Education on initial teacher training programmes. We are both passionate about early childhood education but also in how we can best support teachers coming into the profession in discovering their own approach.

The University of Sunderland has well established international teacher training programmes that are delivered entirely online with distance learning. Over the years the approaches and strategies have evolved, but we are now seeing so many more opportunities for collaborative learning online, to encourage ongoing curiosity in the digital world and to be able to build confidence to develop innovative practice within the trainees practice too. In our presentation we will share some of the strategies that we are using to engage trainees with authentic, purposeful and contextual approaches that reflect our own early years ethos. This not only supports an understanding of theory in a holistic way for trainees but also encourages exploration of strategies that could be used in practice.

## Meet Our Trustees



### **Wendy Scott, OBE: President of TACTYC**

Extensive experience as an early years teacher, head teacher of a demonstration nursery school and a university lecturer equipped Wendy to serve as an inspector with the ILEA, and then Kensington and Chelsea. She headed BAECE, and worked with the DfE to set up Sure Start. As an Ofsted Inspector and trainer, she gained insight into nursery provision across the country, and invaluable international experience. Having judged Nursery of the Year since its inception, Wendy was the first person to be honoured with a lifetime achievement award by Nursery World. She has also been awarded an OBE for services to education.



### **Viki Veale: Chair**

Viki is a former Reception class teacher and senior leader who has worked across a range of settings including schools and homebased childcare. She is now a senior lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education at St Marys University in Twickenham. Viki is an active member of several Cross Party Parliamentary groups and represents TACTYC at MTAS, the Early Years Coalition and the Primary Umbrella Group.



### **Lewis Fogarty: Vice Chair**

Lewis is the Director of a small group of nurseries in Berkshire and Director of Teaching and Learning for the Department of Education at Brunel University. These professional roles, as well as being a Dad of two young boys, motivates a deep engagement with all things Early Years and the positive development of the sector. In particular, Lewis explores leadership in Early Years in his research activity and represents TACTYC at Family.



### **Karen Vincent: Secretary**

Karen is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her doctoral study explored the values and beliefs of early childhood initial teacher educators, concluding that pedagogical activism is a key component of their pedagogical practices. She is Secretary and Vice Chair of the England branch of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA), and a long-serving member of TACTYC.



### **Elizabeth Carruthers: Treasurer**

Elizabeth was an inner-city Nursery School head teacher for 12 years where she developed a teacher/practitioner research active community. She has worked in various roles in education in London, the South-West of England and the United States. Her main research area is early mathematics. As an independent researcher, she is presently working with the Western Australian Education Department collaborating with teacher researchers on Children's Mathematical Graphics.

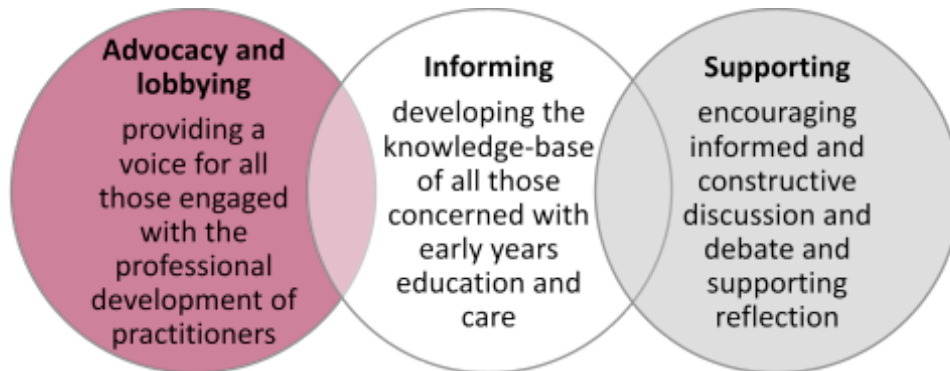
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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <p><b>Rod Parker-Rees: Journal Editor</b></p> <p>Rod was a nursery teacher before developing and running Early Years BEd and PGCE programmes and a BA Early Childhood Studies. Since he became an editor, in 1998, 'Early Years' has grown into a fully international journal, listed in the Social Sciences Citation Index, with five issues and about 200,000 downloads per year and with a team of editors from America, Australia and Chile as well as from the UK.</p>                                                |
|    | <p><b>Eva Mikuska</b></p> <p>Eva is a Senior Lecturer and Departmental Director at the University of Portsmouth. Eva started her career as a geography teacher, but at the beginning of the Yugoslav war, she came to live in the UK and started working in early years settings. In 2005 Eva moved into further, and later, into higher education. Her research focuses on exploring the role of emotion in professional practice, and discourse around gender and ethnicity in ECEC. Eva represents TACTYC at ECSDN.</p> |
|   | <p><b>Eleanor Milligan</b></p> <p>Eleanor is a mother, educator and lifelong learner. She has taught across the year groups in the UK and abroad, but found her passion in Early Years. She lectures at the University of East Anglia on the PGCE Early Years pathway, leads the Joyce Morris Early Years Literacies Forum and coordinates the Reception Class Teacher Network. Within TACTYC, Eleanor supports the work of the social media team.</p>                                                                     |
|  | <p><b>Stella Smith</b></p> <p>Stella holds EYTS and QTS and has managed busy private nurseries in Birmingham. She is now a lecturer and placement co-ordinator for Childhood and Early Childhood degrees at Nottingham Trent University. She also supports Early Years apprenticeships and HND programmes. Stella draws on both her professional and personal experiences in her research, which focuses on children looked after.</p>                                                                                     |
|  | <p><b>Joelle Feudjo Maneze</b></p> <p>Joelle has an educational background that includes an MSc in Social Research Methods and a BA (Hons) in Childhood and Youth Studies. With more than 20 years of experience working in daycare settings, she focuses on leveraging her expertise to address challenges in practice and propose practical solutions, all while staying deeply committed to advocating for inclusive and supportive policies and practices</p>                                                          |
|  | <p><b>Hannah Foster</b></p> <p>Hannah is a full-time teacher in Early Years at a private school in Twickenham where she is also Head of Phonics and Reading Leader for the school. She is passionate about</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>contesting the norms and ensuring our voice as educational leaders is clearly heard. She has a keen interest in Autism/SEN and working with children in various capacities which she achieves via her own tutoring, childcare and entertainment companies.</p> |
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|   | <p><b>Sue Allingham</b><br/>Sue is a former Nursery and Reception teacher, Senior Leader and Local Authority Adviser. Having been an independent consultant now for eight years means that keeping up to date with the current debate in ECEC is vital. Becoming a Trustee of TACTYC has been an important addition to my skills and knowledge as I have become increasingly involved.</p>                                                                               |
|  | <p><b>Charlotte Jones</b><br/>Charlotte is Director of BA (Hons) Early Childhood, BA(Hons) Child and Family: Mental Health and BA(Hons) Counselling and the Psychotherapeutic Relationship at the University of Warwick. Charlotte's scholarly work and professional development notably focuses on areas relating to identity within early childhood contexts, drama and creative and playful practices as well as mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan.</p> |

## Membership

**TACTYC** promotes the highest quality professional development for all Early Years practitioners in order to enhance the educational well-being of the youngest children. We do this through:



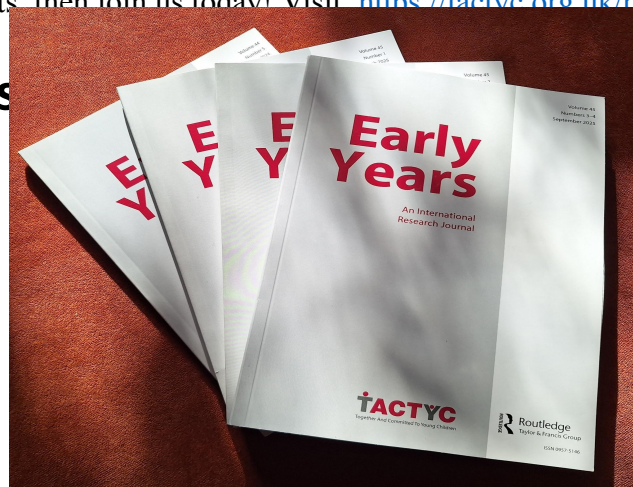
**TACTYC** welcomes people from a wide range of Early Years backgrounds; Early Years lecturers, researchers, education consultants and professionals working with children and families in day-care, education, health, play work and social service contexts.

We offer a range of membership options to suit the diverse sector we represent. Membership benefits include:

- Four editions of the journal *Early Years* every year
- The opportunity for commentary on up-to-date issues through the *Reflections* website papers
- Reduced rates at National **TACTYC** Conferences
- Voting rights at the Annual General Meeting
- The opportunity to link with other professionals working in the area of Early Childhood:
- The opportunity to really influence what happens in early years education and professional learning.

If you want to expand your professional network and keep up to date with the latest research and policy developments, then join us today! Visit: <https://tactyc.org.uk/how-to-join-tactyc/>

## Early Years



## Journal

Members of TACTYC receive 5 issues of the journal 'Early Years' every year, in March, June, September and December, with one double issue published each year. Members also have access to the full back catalogue of issues published since 1980

Early Years: An International Research Journal publishes research papers and scholarly critiques on all issues associated with early childhood (pre-primary) education and care. The journal's overall approach is international and multi-disciplinary, aiming to broaden the cross-national debate by representing a wide range of perspectives from different countries, different disciplines and different research methodologies and paradigms.

As the official journal of TACTYC (Together And Committed To Young Children), a particular focus of Early Years is the initial and continuing professional development of early years practitioners for increasingly complex and demanding work within multi-professional teams and with families from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds.

Editors: Sara de Barros Araújo, Jan Georgeson, Liang Li, Minyi Li, Michelle Neuman, Marcela Pardo, Diana Dos Santos Sousa.

Editor-in-Chief: Rod Parker-Rees

Written by Dr Nathan Archer and informed by contemporary case studies, this is a **practical advocacy guide** for students and professionals in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). It explores how educators can take informed action to influence policies, practices, and attitudes that affect children, families, and the profession. The guide is based on *The Power*

*Project* model from the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (2025), which views advocacy through interconnected levels of influence — from individual to community to system-wide change.

### **Why should you engage?**

Advocacy is a **core professional responsibility** for early childhood educators because their work is both ethical and political. Educators are in a position of trust and influence, shaping children's experiences and wellbeing. Engaging with this guide helps you:

- Recognise yourself as an advocate.
- Build confidence and skills to speak out on unjust or inappropriate policies.
- Take meaningful action to improve conditions for children, families, and the ECEC workforce.
- Work collaboratively to create positive, lasting change at every level of the system.

### **Where can you find it?**

The guide will soon be available on the **TACTYC website**, where you can explore the full resource and hear further discussion on advocacy in Early Childhood Education and Care. Accompanying the Advocacy Toolkit will be the **Advocacy Podcast**, designed and created by Dr Charlotte Jones. The Podcast brings together several of our fantastic Trustees for a very special set of episodes. Within each episode, you can expect to learn more about the practical application of advocacy at varying levels of practice.



Dr Nathan Archer is an independent researcher. He has a professional background as a Montessori early childhood and primary teacher and has worked in early childhood education practice, policy and research for over twenty years. Nathan completed a PhD at University of Sheffield in 2020 exploring the agency, advocacy and activism of early childhood educators in England. Since then he has undertaken research with Sutton Trust, Nuffield Foundation and University of Leeds.



Charlotte is Director of BA(Hons) Early Childhood, BA(Hons) Child and Family: Mental Health and BA(Hons) Counselling and the Psychotherapeutic Relationship at the University of Warwick. Charlotte's scholarly work and professional development notably focuses on areas relating to identity within early childhood contexts, drama and creative and playful practices as well as mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan.

# **Thank you for joining us**



Please take a few moments to share your  
feedback using the link below

<https://forms.gle/zFoBRa7bzMKb6e9S9>