

# Multilingual Childhoods

## **SIG convenors:**

Martina Norling, Örebro University, Sweden, [martina.norling@oru.se](mailto:martina.norling@oru.se) and Gunhild Tomter Alstad, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway (2023 – 2024). Martina Norling and Katri Hansell, Åbo Akademi University, Finland, [katri.hansell@abo.fi](mailto:katri.hansell@abo.fi) (January 2025 – (...)).

**SIG members:** We do not know the number of members in the Multilingual Childhood SIG because the Multilingual Childhoods / REYLL network is part of the AILA Research Network in Early Language Learning. There are approximately 20 people attending the SIG meeting (preconference event) each year, and around 120 persons are subscribers of the email-list.

E-mail lists:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING>

[EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING@JISMAIL.AC.UK](mailto:EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING@JISMAIL.AC.UK)

---

## **1. Aim of the SIG:**

The Multilingual Childhoods SIG and network has been set up to bring together researchers who are investigating the learning of two or more languages in the home, school or community by children from birth to the age of 6 years old – this includes aspects of L1 and L2 language development in contexts of awareness of languages, additional languages, foreign languages, second languages, bilingual education, and immersion.

### **Objectives for the Multilingual Childhoods SIG**

- To bridge the areas of multilingualism and early years education.
- To promote and disseminate research in early years multilingualism and its implementation in policy and practice.
- To create opportunities for informed and constructive discussion and debate.
- To foster possibilities for cross-national collaboration and interaction.

## **2. Activities 2023-2024:**

### **EECERA 2023**

At the SIG meeting in Portugal, we focused on the overall conference theme “Children’s Curiosity, Agency and Participation: Challenges for Professional Action and Development” from a language learning and teaching perspective in multilingual contexts. We (Gunhild Alstad & Martina Norling) have invited three experts in the field who will shed light on this topic from different theoretical backgrounds, research experiences, and multilingual contexts.

Presenters:

Mila Schwartz, Oranim College of Education, Israel: Child’s language-based agency in early language education

Claudine Kirsch, University of Luxembourg: Researching children's participation and agency in Luxembourg.

Sandie Mourão, CETAPS / FCSH, Nova University Lisbon, Portugal: Curiosity, agency and participation in a foreign language – the relevance of play

Chair: Gunhild Tomter Alstad, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

For more details, see the following link: <https://multilingualchildhoods.wordpress.com/2023/04/29/821/>

We organised the following four symposia throughout the EECERA-conference (12 presentations in total):

- Language ideologies and research ethics in multilingual ECEC settings
  - Books as communicative and interaction tools in multilingual practices in ECEC
  - Engaging multilingual children in conversations about languages, learning and picturebooks
- Transitions and multilingualism

## **Activities 2024**

### **The Symposium *Living Multilingualism in Education*, May 24, 2024**

the Symposium was organized by Professor Claudine Kirsch and Gunhild Tomter Alstad. It was located at the University of Luxembourg. Approximately 50 researchers attended the conference.

#### **Online panel discussion**

- On 24 May, 2024 we had an Online panel discussion, Conditions for promoting multilingualism in ECEC

The online panel discussion was part of the Symposium Living Multilingualism in Education. Five experts in the field were invited who shed light on this topic from different perspectives and contexts: Dr. Simone Mortini (Luxembourg), Dr. Anja Pesch (Norway), Dr. Gunhild Tomter Alstad (Norway), Professor Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck (Belgium) & Professor Dr. Claudine Kirsch (Luxembourg).

Each researcher gave a brief introduction to the topic before the panel discussion started, and we then launched into an online discussion with the participants.

SIG members and other interested researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners were invited to join the panel discussion.

This event was appreciated, and a conference is planned from the 12th to the 14th of May, 2025, at Luxembourg University. See below for the planned activities.

## **EECERA 2024**

Our SIG group is growing every year. However, at last year's EECERA in Brighton (2024), there were twelve attendees at our SIG meeting. We believe the underlying reason is the financial constraints currently affecting universities, which make it challenging for members to obtain funding to attend the conference. Nonetheless, our meeting focused on the overall conference theme, "Developing Sustainable Early Childhood Education Systems: Comparisons, Contexts and the Cognoscenti." For more details, see the following link:

<https://multilingualchildhoods.wordpress.com/2024/05/22/pre-conference-meeting-eecera-2024/>

As we did last year, we have invited two experts in the field who will illuminate this topic, “Developing Sustainable Multilingual Childhood Education Perspective of Inclusive and Translingual Practice in Multilingual Settings.” Through their different theoretical research experiences and multilingual contexts, they each had a 20-minute introduction. Then, we encouraged everyone to have a fruitful discussion on the topic. The concept was well-received, and we established new international contacts.

Presenters:

Alexandra Diamond, University of South Australia, Australia: Young children’s language socialization to translingual practice in their small, rural, Indo-Fijian community

Annika Åkerblom, University of Gothenburg, Sweden: Inclusive Language Pedagogy for Sustainable Early Childhood Education in Sweden

- The multilingual Childhoods SIG has set up one symposium:

Multilingualism – social and physical sustainable practices in ECEC settings: discussing semiotic landscapes, language immersion, sustainable practice, and collegial reflections.

Chair: Martina Norling, Örebro University, Sweden

### **3. Planned activities:**

#### **Meetings, networking, cross-national collaboration, 2025**

Multilingual SIG arranges a **Conference Multilingual Childhoods** Luxembourg 12 – 13 May 2025

The conference will include one keynote speaker and one panel discussion with experts on multilingualism in early childhood education, paper presentations (individual and self-organised symposia) and posters. After the conference closing on Tuesday 13th after lunch, we will offer 90-minute workshops with a hands-on approach on topics such as translanguaging, teacher-parent collaboration and teacher education.

Plenary speaker: Drorit Lengyel, University of Hamburg, Germany

Panel discussants: Andrea Young (France), Silva Bratož (Slovenia), Brecht Peleman (Belgium) and Fríða Bjarney Jónsdóttir (Iceland).

#### **Pre-conference and Multilingual Childhoods SIG 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, EECERA 2025 in Bratislava, Slovakia, 25 – 28 August.**

The Multilingual Childhoods SIG invites conference delegates to an EECERA pre-conference meeting on the topic theme “Early Education for All: Celebrating Diversity and Seeking Inclusion”.

Presenters:

Gunhild Tomter Alstad and Sandié Mourão – ten years anniversary Multilingual Childhood SIG, past and present.

Brecht Peleman (The topic is not settled yet).

Chair: Martina Norling and Katri Hansell (SIG Convenors).

### **4. Links and networks established with other institutions and organizations**

E-mail lists:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING>

[EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING@JISCMAIL.AC.UK](mailto:EARLY-YEARS-LANGUAGE-LEARNING@JISCMAIL.AC.UK)

## **5. How do SIG's activities fit with the aims and ethos of EECERA:**

The Multilingual SIG's activities closely align with EECERA's goals by fostering high-quality research, discussions, and partnerships in early childhood education, particularly focusing on multilingualism. This SIG upholds EECERA's dedication to inclusivity, diversity, and the rights of all children by examining how multilingual practices and viewpoints enhance ECEC practices, early childhood development, and learning environments. By organizing symposia, promoting networking among researchers and practitioners, and participating in scholarly endeavors, the Multilingual Childhoods SIG supports developing and highlighting research, policies, and practices that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of today's childhoods across Europe and internationally.