Australian
Early Childhood
Sustainability
Alliance

International Update March 8, 2025

The Transnational Dialogues in Research in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (TND) was initiated by Professors Julie Davis and Eva Johansson in 2010, when a group of academics from Queensland University of Technology, University of Stavanger and others gathered to discuss the field of early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS). This first meeting of what was to become known as 'the TND' occurred in Stavanger, Norway. The group was established for the purposes of growing collaboration and research in ECEfS, to address the research 'hole" identified by Davis in her seminal 2009 paper, and thus, to drive policy and pedagogical change within the international early childhood education field.

Since 2010, the TND has met regularly and networked to build sustained dialogues and research capacities. An additional five in-person TNDs have occurred – in Brisbane, Australia (2011), Stavanger, Norway (2015), Victoria, Canada (2017), Västerås, Sweden (2023) and London (2024) with various online gatherings in between these. Each in person meeting has involved groups of approximately 20 participants from countries including Norway, Canada, Finland, Australia, the UK, Sweden, South Africa, New Zealand, Norway, the USA, Turkiye, Japan and South Korea. Gatherings are built on the premise that, to grow ECEfS research, one needs to grow the researchers. As such, the TND has promoted capacity building through international networking, author and project collaborations and up-skilling around ideas, theories and research practices, with a strong focus on research outputs. Over the life of the TND, two research texts have been published (Davis & Elliott, 2014; Elliott, Davis & Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2020), four special issues (IJEC, AJTE, IJECEE & Childhood in the Anthropocene), plus many other papers and chapters, and multiple presentations at national and international conferences (AERA, WEEC, EECERA & OMEP).

TND participants are committed to early childhood education as crucial to lifelong learning for sustainability. We strongly argue that early childhood education is an essential place to instigate the reorienting, rebuilding, and reinventing of our environmental ethics and relationships and changing cultures towards sustainable living. While, thanks to initiatives such as TND, research in ECEfS and practitioner enthusiasm for sustainability has certainly grown (Davis et al., 2024), there is still much work to do to progress the field. Ongoing issues to be addressed include children's active participation, pedagogical change, national curriculum policies, ethical leadership, and in-service and pre-service training. Importantly, the TND provides opportunities for participants to share different perspectives through diverse cultural and environmental lenses to both inform and mobilise ECEfS more broadly. Rather than highlighting our cultural and environmental differences, TND participants acknowledge that we must work together across international boundaries to find common ground to encourage shifts within our own diverse contexts.

TND meetings have attracted a core group of researchers along with an ever-changing and expanding community of colleagues. The changing location of the Dialogues has created a geographic and cultural dynamic, which injects new perspectives on research and practice in ECEfS. This is one of the strengths of the TND. Every time we meet, we are challenged by new perspectives, experiences and lenses through which to view our field, mitigating the risk that we might become anchored down by static ways of knowing about sustainability. As researchers, we need regular opportunities for our ideas to be challenged and encouraged. It's rare to experience an ever evolving and expanding, culturally diverse and yet supportive context in which this can happen. For genuine change to take place, people need to be exposed to new ways of looking at the world and new ways of responding to the challenge of sustainability, leading both researchers and practitioners beyond our taken for granted ways of being and thinking. We believe the TND plays a unique and critically important role in this regard. As another avenue for change, since the establishment of TND, in 2019 EECERA member Professor Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér instigated the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Sustainability SIG. There are many inter-connections with TND participants and the SIG published an EECERA Sustainability SIG Position Statement in 2023 to offer international guidance.

The TND participants are a mix of both experienced and early career researchers and research students, and this provides opportunities for intergenerational learning and the potential for the gatherings to continue into the future, as new participant leaders emerge. The TND has been seen as a welcoming space for ideas to be shared and challenged in a supportive, nurturing environment. The TND model offers the keys to new and emerging academics, extending social, intellectual and cultural capital to the next generation of researchers.

Particularly for Australian readers, a mini-TND gathering was held in October 2024 as part of the ECEfS Australian Alliance conference in Melbourne. There were 22 participants and three engaging presentations: Sustainable Preschool: A Swedish ECEfS research study by Professor Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér, culturally oriented environmental identity transitions: Migrant Indian teachers in Aotearoa early childhood education by Dr Devika Rathore and The Eco-Schools Program and Student Environmental and Sustainability Learning: Weaving a Tapestry of Shades of Green by Ms Harriet Deans. This provoked much discussion about issues for future research and/or practice changes. Looking further ahead, an in-person TND gathering is planned for the WEEC to be held in Perth, WA in September 2026 https://weec2026.org/.

The TND group is conducted via an email network of some 179 participants internationally and the current co-convenors are:

- Associate Professor Sule Alici, Kirsehir Ahi Evran University (Turkiye)
- Professor Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Mälardalen University (Sweden)
- Dr Sue Elliott, University of New England (Australia)
- Associate Professor Kari Anne Jørgensen-Vittersø, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway).
- Dr Deniz Pamuk, Gothenberg University (Sweden)
- Professor Barbara M. Sageidet, Stavanger University (Norway)

If you are interested in participating in the Transnational Dialogues in Research in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability community, in Australia please contact co-convenor Dr Sue Elliott, Email sellio24@une.edu.au.

The next in person gathering, TND10 is planned to be held just prior to the EECERA conference **scheduled for 25th – 28th August 2025 in Bratislava, Slovakia**, https://2025.eeceraconference.org/

Selected further ECEfS readings:

Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E., & Elliott, S. (Eds.) (forthcoming). *Educating the young child series, Envisioning sustainable futures with young children: International case studies in ECEfS.* Springer.

Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E. & Elliott, S. (Eds.) (2024). Where to next? Examining the gaps, issues and needs in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability Research, Report from the 8th Transnational Dialogues on Early Childhood Education for Sustainability Research. *Childhood in the Anthropocene, 1*(1). https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1878914/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Davis, J., Elliott, S. & Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E. (2024). *Early childhood education for sustainability: A short history*. Springer. https://link.springer.com/book/9789819784042

Davis, J. & Elliott, S. (Eds.) (2024). *Young children and the environment (3rd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/highereducation/books/young-children-and-the-environment/AA4020331CB6867541CF897B35FE715A#overview

Dovigo, F. & Alici, S. (Eds.) (forthcoming). *Promoting transformative practices for sustainability in early childhood education. Cultivating critical, participatory and emancipatory approaches.* Routledge.

EECERA (2023). *EECERA Sustainability SIG Position Statement.* Sustainability-SIG-Position-statement-FINAL-19-09-2023.pdf

Elliott, S. & Davis, J. (2023). *Early Childhood Australia Essentials: Sustainability in early childhood. Almost mainstream: Re-imagining early childhood education for Sustainable Futures.* Early Childhood Australia. https://shop.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/product/ess002/