

26 September 2024

UNESCO HQ, ROOM I



# Brain Sciences

## Early Childhood Care & Education 2024 Congress

### Context

[The Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for the Transformation of Early Childhood Care and Education<sup>1</sup>](#), the outcome of the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education ([WCECCE](#)), organized by UNESCO in November 2022, marked a decisive step in advancing the early childhood care and education (ECCE) agenda worldwide. The first high-level intergovernmental event in the field of education to be organized after the Transforming Education Summit ([TES](#)), the conference provided a forum for diverse stakeholders to discuss experiences, practices and innovations, as well as challenges and lessons learned arising from the realization of the ECCE agenda at national and international levels, in particular that of [Target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), by which countries committed to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education by 2030.

Considering that inequalities and disparities in learning and personal development begin early and persist throughout life, it is of utmost importance to redouble our efforts to give all children the opportunity to thrive and flourish to their full potential, to ensure the optimal and holistic development of the foundational skills that are needed for their socialization, well-being, agency and learning.

Achieving these ambitious objectives can benefit, among other things, from recent advances in brain sciences research. Brain sciences can provide a better understanding of the development of these skills in early childhood, the environmental factors that enhance or hinder this development, and the actions that need to be taken to better support this process. The knowledge generated by brain sciences can be harnessed by all those involved in ECCE: policy-makers, parents, international organizations, early childhood professionals and the medical profession. They can contribute to a more profound

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<sup>1</sup> The Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for the Transformation of Early Childhood Care and Education form a set of guiding principles and strategies that focus on four key areas for action: (i) quality, equitable and inclusive ECCE for all; (ii) the ECCE workforce; (iii) innovation to drive transformation forward; and (iv) policy, governance and financing. The document defines action commitments for the transformation of ECCE over the next 10 years. The Tashkent Declaration was unanimously adopted by all participating Member States, who pledged to (i) encourage the provision of at least one year of quality, free and compulsory pre-primary education for all, as well as to progressively increase ECCE provision, (ii) upgrade the mission of ECCE personnel, and (iii) raise ECCE funding to a level sufficient to achieve Target 4.2 of the SDGs, by striving to devote at least 10% of education spending to pre-primary education.

transformation of educational practices, pedagogical approaches and public policies in early childhood, aimed at promoting the well-being and holistic development of young children.

[Doctor James Heckman](#) has demonstrated through his research that 'the highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged families.'<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the early childhood period is crucial, as transforming education fundamentally begins with transforming early childhood education. Adopting an approach encompassing the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of child development and environmental influences is essential to guarantee better learning outcomes and success. Over the past few decades, remarkable progress in neuroscience has significantly advanced approaches to ECCE. Initially, insights were derived from deduction, based on general observations without direct evidence. Today, the field benefits from scientific exploration, utilizing advanced technologies such as brain imaging and powerful computers to conduct experiments and gather precise data. These advances have led to a better understanding of the impact of parental or caregivers' practices on the brain and, ultimately, on the development of a child's skills. From the earliest stages of life, the quality of the environment in which a child grows up has a decisive influence on the trajectory of his or her development.

With this in mind, and in support of the [Global Coalition for Education](#), launched by UNESCO, the Babilou Family Foundation is organizing the **International Congress on Brain Sciences, Early Childhood Care and Education**, a flagship event bringing together leading researchers, decision maker and practitioners. More specifically, neuroscientists, developmental psychologists and education experts will engage in discussions aimed at optimizing educational approaches for early childhood.

## Objective

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This international congress will provide an opportunity to present research findings on early childhood development and learning, and to encourage dialogue between researchers, education policymakers and practitioners on the practical implications of the research. Several research questions will be addressed:

- How can neuroscience findings inform policies for investment in early childhood to maximize return in a lifelong learning perspective, highlighting the crucial importance of the early years of development?
- How does the early organization of the brain enable young children to think and learn and interact, and how is this organization shaped by the child environment?
- How do inequalities in early childhood development and learning come about, and how can they be reduced?
- What factors contribute to disparities in early childhood development and learning, and what strategies can be implemented to mitigate them?

## Structuring and framing the congress

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The interplay between neuroscience and early childhood education is at the heart of the congress. Following the keynote address by Doctor James Heckman, the event will unfold through three round tables. These will explore the interaction and connection between academic research, its practical application and ECCE policies. They will bring together researchers in early childhood development, parents, professionals from the sector, international bodies and policy-makers. Discussions will aim to deepen understanding of the integration of research into policies, practices and actions, assessing their impact and outcomes, as well as the difficulties and challenges that arise from this integration. This

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<sup>2</sup> Heckman, J. J. (2006). 'Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children.' *Science*, 312(5782), 1900-1902.

Congress is designed to link scientific advances with their concrete application, highlighting ways to strengthen ECCE on a global scale.

## 1. Inaugural speech

This keynote address will present the influential work in economics by Doctor James Heckman, which has shown the importance of quality education from the earliest age in improving the chances of personal and professional fulfilment for individuals and their children, and in breaking the cycle of poverty.

## 2. The round tables

Recent advances in brain science offer a major insight into this work, as they provide a better understanding of the importance of early skills development for individual growth and fulfilment. This insight will be illustrated during three round table discussions featuring current research on early childhood development and learning.

### Round table 1: Understanding how young children think and learn

Coordinated by [Professor Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz](#), this round table discussion will present recent advances in brain development, providing a better understanding of how the brain of the young child, although immature, is already organized to learn quickly and efficiently.<sup>3</sup> This research has revealed the multiple skills that children develop very early on in many areas (language, social, emotional, cognitive...)<sup>4</sup> and how the organization of their brain evolves during development to enable the acquisition of new skills based on these early skills.

Another important insight provided by brain sciences is the understanding that brain development and cognition result from an interaction between genetic and environmental factors, and that **the environment has a major influence on different levels of brain organization and development.**<sup>4</sup>

Children's interactions with their environment provide the experiences they need to organize their brains and acquire new skills. Early childhood is considered a sensitive period in a child's development and learning because it is marked by a major reorganization of the brain, known as cerebral plasticity, in response to the child's experiences. A large body of research shows the extent to which providing a secure, enriched environment in early childhood (in terms of socio-emotional reassurance, as well as cognitive and language stimulation) consolidates children's skills in these different areas. The importance of the child's social environment must be stressed here, as the quality of the child's interactions with those around him is decisive for his language, social-emotional and cognitive development.

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<sup>3</sup> Dehaene-Lambertz G, S Dehaene, S and Hertz-Pannier L. 2002. Functional neuroimaging of speech perception in infants. *Science* 298 (5600), 2013-2015

<sup>4</sup> Spelke, E. 2022. *What Babies Know*. Oxford University press

## [Round table 2: Reducing inequalities in development and learning: contributions from the brain sciences](#)

With [Doctor Grégoire Borst](#), the second-round table will focus on a major socio-educational issue today: inequalities in development and learning.

Cerebral plasticity in early childhood explains the brain's great vulnerability when confronted with risk factors. Research has revealed the effects of early experiences of adversity, as well as those linked to pollution or malnutrition, on brain function and structuring, with an increased risk of cognitive and health difficulties that can be observed well into adulthood.

Knowledge of early childhood brain development and learning is used to enhance the effectiveness of ECCE. For example, interventions based on these advances are being developed with young children in vulnerable situations to promote the development of their socio-emotional, cognitive and language skills, as well as their basic mathematical and reading skills.

## [Round table 3: Developing socio-emotional skills: the importance of executive functions.](#)

Finally, the last round table, chaired by [Doctor Adele Diamond](#), will focus on the cognitive abilities that play a major role in children's development and learning. Indeed, another contribution of Doctor James Heckman's work is to have highlighted the fundamental importance of young children's socio-emotional development for their academic success, health and socialization. Research into the brain and cognition has revealed the crucial importance of certain cognitive abilities, known as executive functions, in this development.<sup>5</sup> Executive functions are involved in the regulation of actions, thoughts and emotions. These functions enable children to better manage their emotions, follow instructions and demonstrate patience. They are the subject of a great deal of research in young children, because they are crucial both to the child's socio-emotional development and to his or her maturity and learning at school.

Children with poorer executive functioning are more likely to fall behind when they start school.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore important to help children fully develop their executive functions from early childhood. This is all the more crucial for children confronted with early experiences of adversity, given the accumulating evidence showing the deleterious effects of such experiences on the development of executive functions.

### **3. Discussions**

#### ➤ **What are the implications for parents, ECCE professionals and public policy?**

Research into brain development is helping us to understand why early childhood a crucial period for the development of the skills is needed for individual growth and fulfilment.

A first concrete implication of this research is that ECCE practitioners need to be trained in these scientific advances, so that educational practices, pedagogies and public policies take greater account of the way young children develop and learn, and the need to support the development of children's skills in all areas (language, cognitive, socio-emotional...).

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<sup>5</sup> Diamond, A. 2013. Executive functions. *The Annu Rev Psychol* ;64:135-68.

<sup>6</sup> Blair, C. 2002. School readiness. Integrating cognition and emotion in a neurobiological conceptualization of children's functioning at school entry. *Am Psychol*. 57(2):111-27. doi: 10.1037//0003-066x.57.2.111.

This knowledge can also contribute to the current debate on the use of screens, with a key message being that this use must not be to the detriment of children's interactions with their environment, given the essential role these interactions play in their development.

Another major implication is that the most vulnerable families must be supported in their efforts to provide a sufficiently rich and secure environment for young children's development and learning.

As a general rule, taking into account knowledge of brain and cognitive development to further transform educational practices and pedagogies must be accompanied by interventional research to develop, implement and evaluate interventions derived from this research, in a collaborative approach involving researchers and ECCE professionals. Such research is necessary to assess the effectiveness of these interventions on young children's development and learning, but it is also important to adapt them, if necessary, to the cultural, traditional and local specificities of the child's different learning contexts.

#### ➤ **Interaction between experts, practitioners and researchers**

This conference highlights the crucial importance of establishing dialogue and building bridges between the fields of neuroscience research and early childhood education: although they are sometimes far apart, they both aspire to make their specific and unique languages accessible to all those involved. To meet this challenge, a committee of field experts has been formed to facilitate the practical application of the research presented. This committee will intervene at the end of each round table and will be made up of representatives of development agencies active in the field, parents, experienced practitioners, young post-docs, programme managers and political decision-makers.

During the roundtables, a panel of researchers will share their most recent findings, which will then be explored in greater depth following a series of questions and contributions from policy-makers and experts in the field who manage the operational dimension of the issues tackled on a daily basis. The latter will stimulate discussion on the imperative need to connect science to public policy, investment to practical situations. The aim is to structure an effective dialogue between researchers and policy-makers, to set up a simplified information-sharing system while preserving scientific rigour, and to encourage a solid partnership between the various care structures, family support and the training of early childhood professionals. This approach aims to create a link between scientific advances and their application in the field, underlining the crucial importance of collaboration between researchers and educators for the development and well-being of early childhood.

## Participants

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The congress will bring together a diverse range of 1,000 face-to-face participants, reflecting the multidisciplinary importance of this event. Among them will be:

- **Representatives of UNESCO Member States** will strengthen political commitment, share best practices, and collaborate on implementing policies that support early childhood care and education worldwide.
- **Influential personalities** for messages and advocacy purpose.
- **Researchers and panellists** will advance knowledge and provide a unique opportunity for participants to learn and apply up-to-date scientific data to a variety of educational and developmental contexts by sharing their research.
- **Technical and financial partners'** participation will enable them to better understand the challenges and needs of the ECCE field, to direct their support more effectively, and to forge strategic partnerships with other key players.

- **Early childhood professionals and students** will bring practical perspectives, sharing field experiences and benefiting from interactions with experts to enhance their professional skills and expertise.
- **Parents and future parents'** participation will help them understand the importance of their role in child development and exchange views on best practices and common challenges.
- **Media and journalists** will raise public awareness on the importance of early childhood education and the scientific advances influencing policies and practices worldwide by covering the event. These participants will strengthen political commitment, share best practices, and collaborate on implementing policies that support early childhood care and education worldwide.

## Logistics

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- **Format:** The conference will be held in person and then broadcast on the UNESCO and Babilou YouTube channels.
- **Participation:** Personalized invitations will be sent by UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education to eminent personalities, partners and researchers. Other invitations will be sent by participant category and relayed by UNESCO and Babilou.
- **Pre-registration:** Pre-registration is exclusively online via the congress website. Once validated, participants will be invited to complete the formalities for obtaining a badge with a QR code. Pre-register here: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/international-congress-brain-sciences-early-childhood-care-and-education>
- **Languages:** Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French and Spanish.
- **Venue :** 7, Place de Fontenoy, UNESCO Paris, Auditorium room 1.

## Agenda

**8:00 – 9:30**

### **Welcoming guests and coffee reception**

Venue: 7 place de Fontenoy, hall in front of the auditorium (room 1)

**9:30 - 11:15**

### **Opening session**

Location: Room 1

#### Master of ceremony:

Ms. Asha Sumputh

#### Speakers:

- Ms. Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO
- Mr. Christophe Fond, Chief Executive Officer, Babilou Family and Babilou Family Foundation
- HE. Mr. Sharifxodjayev Usman Ulfatovich, First Deputy Minister of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan
- Mr. Sunny Varkey, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, philanthropist, educator and founder of the Varkey Foundation (Video intervention)
- Mr. Xavier Ouvrard, Vice President Supervisory Board, Babilou Family & Babilou Family Foundation
- Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Director of Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

#### Keynote speech:

- Dr. James Heckman, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, and Nobel Laureate in Economics
- Q & A

**11:15 – 13:00**

### **Round table 1: Understanding how young children think and learn.**

Location: Room 1

#### Moderator:

- Prof. Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz, Director of the Developmental Neuroimaging Lab, CNRS, CEA

#### Speakers:

- Dr. Elizabeth Spelke, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University
- Dr. Marcela Pena, Pediatrician and Professor of Cognitive Sciences, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
- Dr. Stephanie Mazza, Professor of Neuropsychology, INSPE, Lyon 1 University

#### Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group:

- Dr. Yufang Ruan, ZJU100 Professor at College of Education, Zhejiang University - The People's Republic of China
- Dr. Patrick Makokoro, President, Nhaka Foundation- Zimbabwe
- Mr. Vincent Bulan, General Director, Babilou France – France

**13:00 - 14:15**

### **Lunch (Hall Segur)**

**14:15 – 16:00**

### **Round table 2: Reducing inequalities in development and learning: contributions from the brain sciences.**

Location: Room 1

#### Moderator:

- Dr. Grégoire Borst, Professor, Director of the Child Psychology and Development Laboratory at the University of Paris and senior member of the IUF

	<p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Charles Nelson, Professor of Education and Pediatrics, Harvard University</li> <li>• Dr. Kathy Hirsh Pasek, Professor of Psychology, Temple University</li> <li>• Dr. Edward Melhuish, Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Oxford</li> </ul> <p><u>Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Angela Low, Expert on emotional intelligence, resilience and parenting – Canada</li> <li>• Ms. Nathalie Casso-Vicarini, Founder-General delegate, Ensemble pour la petite enfance NGO, Member of the first 1000 days Commission – France</li> <li>• Prof. Neena Modi, Professor of Neonatal Medicine and Vice-Dean (International), Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London</li> </ul>
<p><b>16:00 - 17:30</b></p>	<p><b>Round table 3: Developing socio-emotional skills: the importance of executive functions</b> Location: Room 1</p> <p><u>Moderator:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Adele Diamond, Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, University of British Columbia (UBC) - Vancouver</li> </ul> <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Jelena Obradović, Professor of Developmental Psychologist, Stanford University</li> <li>• Dr. Claire Hughes, Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Cambridge</li> <li>• Dr. Philip Zelazo, Professor of Developmental Psychologist and Neurologist, University of Minnesota</li> </ul> <p><u>Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Maria Camilla Londono Aristizabal, PhD. Candidate in Psychology and UNESCO Chair for Inclusive Early Childhood, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières</li> <li>• Dr. Sirene Lim, Associate Professor - Singapore University of Social Sciences</li> <li>• Ms. Alyssa Blask Campbell, CEO of Seed &amp; Sew – United States of America</li> </ul>
<p><b>17:30 - 18:30</b></p>	<p><b>Plenary: Research implications for policies and strategies</b></p> <p><u>Moderator</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Director of Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO</li> </ul> <p><u>Interventions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Fatima Nasser Al Melhi, Acting Director of Special Projects Department, Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority</li> <li>• Mr. Aziz Kaichouh, Secretary General of the Higher Council for Education, Vice President of the Moroccan Foundation for Pre-School – FMPS, President of the African Foundation for Lifelong Learning (ATLV)</li> <li>• H.E. Dr. Prak Kosal, Deputy Secretary General of ECCD and the Director of Early Childhood Education Department of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS)</li> <li>• Mrs. Alexandra Posada, Chief of Early Childhood of the Office of the First Lady of El Salvador and the President of the Board of the Crecer Juntos Institute</li> <li>• Ms. Sridevi Raghavan, Co-President, Babilou Family Foundation</li> <li>• M. Gwang Chol Chang, Chief of Section of Education Policy, UNESCO</li> </ul>
<p><b>18:30 - 20:00</b></p>	<p><b>Cocktail (Hall Segur)</b></p>



**Plenary session:** **Dr. James Heckman**, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, and Nobel Laureate in Economics

### Round table 1: Understanding how young children think and learn

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#### **Moderator**

Prof. Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz, Director of the Developmental Neuroimaging Lab, CNRS, CEA

#### **Round table objectives**

This round table will present recent advances in brain development and learning in very young children. In recent years, the rapid development of brain imaging in young children has led to major advances in our understanding of how the brain is organized and functions in the first few years of life, and how this organization enables the young child to possess many early skills and acquire new ones. A remarkable example is language acquisition, where we now have a better understanding of how the child develops numerous language skills from the very first years of life. Research also shows the fundamental importance of sleep for the reorganization of the brain during development, and its influence on children's learning. Advances in knowledge about the development and learning of very young children can play a major role in developing innovations to promote the development of children's early skills. Four researchers will present their current research on brain imaging of the very young child, early skills, language development, the role of sleep in early development and learning, and innovations based on this knowledge.

#### **Speakers**

- **Prof. Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz** (Director of the Developmental Neuroimaging Lab, CNRS, CEA): Brain imaging of the very young.
- **Dr. Marcela Pena** (Professor of Cognitive Psychology, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile): Language development in the first years of life and the value of tablets to support vocabulary.
- **Dr. Elisabeth Spelke** (Professor of Cognitive Psychology, Harvard University): The precocious skills of the very young child and how to support them.
- **Dr. Stephanie Mazza** (Professor of Neuropsychology, University of Lyon): The importance of sleep for brain development and learning.

#### **Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group**

A group focused on the synergy between research and practice is set up for each round table. The intervenants will reflect as a group on the discussions, and at the end of each round table, offer their perspectives on actions that could be taken in the early education sector based on the round table discussions.

- **Mr. Vincent Bulan**, General Director, Babilou France – France
- **Dr. Yufang Ruan**, ZJU100 Professor at College of Education, Zhejiang University - The People's Republic of China
- **Dr. Patrick Makokoro**, President, Nhaka Foundation- Zimbabwe

## Round table 2: Reducing inequalities in development and learning: contributions from the brain sciences

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### **Moderator**

Dr. Grégoire Borst, Professor, Director of the Child Psychology and Development Laboratory at the University of Paris and senior member of the IUF

### **Round table objectives**

This second-round table will focus on inequalities in development and learning linked to differences in the security and enrichment of children's living environments. The challenge is to better understand how the early experiences associated with these contexts affect cerebral and cognitive development, and what innovations can help reduce these developmental inequalities.

### **Speakers**

- **Dr. Grégoire Borst** (Professor, Director of the Child Psychology and Development Laboratory at the University of Paris and senior member of the IUF)
- **Dr. Charles Nelson** (Professor of Education and Pediatrics, Harvard University): The influences of early adversity on brain development.
- **Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek** (Professor of Psychology, Temple University): How can we transform public spaces to promote early childhood development and learning?
- **Dr. Edward Melhuish** (Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Oxford): Research on Brain Development: What are the implications for public policy?

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group**

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- **Dr. Angela Low**, Expert on emotional intelligence, resilience and parenting – Canada
- **Ms. Nathalie Casso- Vicarini**, Founder-General delegate, Ensemble pour la petite enfance NGO, Member of the first 1000 days Commission – France
- **Prof. Neena Modi**, Professor of Neonatal Medicine and Vice-Dean (International), Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London

## Round table 3: Developing socio-emotional skills: the importance of executive functions

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### **Moderator**

Dr. Adele Diamond, Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

### **Round table objectives**

This final round table will cover work on the importance of executive functions for early childhood development and learning, the long-term effects of their development in early childhood on the individual's chances of fulfilment and achievement in adulthood, and the various approaches used to support the development of executive functions across different cultures.

## Speakers

- **Dr. Adele Diamond** (Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, Columbia University - UK): The development and support of executive functions in early childhood.
- **Dr. Jelena Obradović** (Professor of Developmental Psychology, Stanford University): The development of executive functions and their support across different cultures.
- **Dr. Claire Hughes** (Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Cambridge): The Role of Parents in the Development of Executive Functions.
- **Dr. Philip Zelazo** (Professor of Developmental Psychology and Neurologist, University of Minnesota): Supporting the development of executive functions in early childhood.

## Early Childhood Care and Education Expert Group

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- **Dr. Maria Camilla Londono Aristizabal**, PhD. Candidate in Psychology and UNESCO Chair for Inclusive Early Childhood, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
- **Dr. Sirene Lim**, Associate Professor - Singapore University of Social Sciences
- **Ms. Alyssa Blask Campbell**, CEO of Seed & Sew – United States of America

### Under the leadership of



**Ms. Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO**

Ms Stefania Giannini was appointed UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education in May 2018, becoming the top UN official in the field. As Senator of the Republic of Italy (2013 – 2018) and Minister of Education, Universities and Research (2014 – 2016), she developed and implemented a structural reform of the Italian education system, centred on social inclusion and cultural awareness.



**Mr. Christophe Fond, Chief Executive Officer, Babilou Family and Babilou Family Foundation**

After successful international experiences with global groups (including 9 years with Fnac), Christophe created and became Managing Director of the group now known as Grandvision in Latin America in 2008. When he left in 2016, this represented over 1,200 optical centers, 6,000 people and covered a geographical area of 8 different countries in Latin America. In 2017, Christophe joined the Sonova Group for which he became Executive President in charge of the audiology division. Christophe was in charge of a fast-growing scope, now comprising nearly 4,000 centers, 9,000 people and operating in some 20 countries.



**Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Director of Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO**

Mr. Borhene Chakroun is Director of Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems Division at UNESCO Headquarters. He has conducted policy reviews and skills systems diagnosis in different contexts and has written articles and books in the field of skills development and lifelong learning. Recently he has focused on global trends in reforming education and training systems as well as the global agenda for skills development in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. An engineer with a Ph.D. in Education Sciences from Bourgogne University in France, he has worked as a trainer, chief trainer, and project manager. He has also worked as a consultant for the EU, World Bank and other international organizations before joining the European Training Foundation (ETF) in 2001.



**Ms. Sridevi Raghavan, Co-President, Babilou Family Foundation**

Ms Sridevi Raghavan is an MBA graduate of Harvard Business School. During her MBA, she presented the idea of India's first company nurseries at the HBS Annual Business Plan competition and securing seed funding for her entrepreneurial idea from HBS alumni. Sridevi returned to India after graduation to launch Amelio, which became among the largest nursery networks in India with over 30 nurseries across Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad. After selling her chain of Amelio nurseries to the Babilou Family Group in 2018, Sridevi joined the Executive Board in 2020 and became the Senior VP in charge of global Education, Quality, and Sustainable Development. In India, she is well-known as an engaged entrepreneur. She is considered an expert in education and regularly speaks at early childhood conferences and symposia around the world.



**Mr. Xavier Ouvrard, Vice President Supervisory Board, Babilou Family & Babilou Family Foundation**

A graduate of IEP Paris and HEC, Mr. Xavier Ouvrard founded MILONGA in 2001, which he managed until 2011. The company is now France's leading musical instrument distributor and number 1 in teaching. He then joined the SODEXO group (2012 - 2016), where he was in charge of international development for the Personal & Home Services division (2013), then Managing Director of the Child Care division and Crèche Attitude. In December 2016, he joined Babilou Family as Managing Director Middle-East before being appointed Managing Director of Babilou Family. He was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Babilou Family in November 2017, then Chairman and CEO in January 2021.



**M. Gwang Chol Chang, Chief of Section of Education Policy, UNESCO**

Prior to his current position as Chief of Section of Education Policy at UNESCO, Gwang-Chol Chang worked at various locations and positions such as Officer in Charge of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNESCO Dakar), and Senior Programme Specialist/Chief of Education at UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok) and UNESCO Dakar Office. At UNESCO HQ and in the field, he has developed and led various education programmes, including the right to education, education policy analysis, sector planning, system and data management, learning assessment, education financing and early childhood care and education. Before joining UNESCO, he worked at the Ministry of Education of the DPR Korea. He holds Doctorate in Education from Kim Hyong Jik University.

**High Level Personalities**



**Dr. James Heckman, Professor of Economics, Nobel-Prize Winning Economist**

Dr. James J. Heckman is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, a Nobel Memorial Prizewinner in economics and an expert in the economics of human development. Through the university's Center for the Economics of Human Development, he has conducted groundbreaking work with a consortium of economists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, statisticians and neuroscientists showing that quality early childhood development heavily influences health, economic and social outcomes for individuals and society at large. Heckman has shown that there are great economic gains to be had by investing in early childhood development. [Read more.](#)



**HE. Mr. Sharifxodjayev Usman Ulfatovich, First Deputy Minister of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan**

Usman Sharifkhodjaev has served as the First Deputy Minister of Preschool and School Education for five years, previously holding a similar position in the Ministry of Public Education. He was also a Board Member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) from 2021 to 2024.

During his tenure, he has been involved in the development and implementation of over 30 regulatory acts and strategies aimed at enhancing the preschool and school education system through 2030. He has led initiatives to launch various e-government services, such as school admissions and the issuance of educational documents, which have streamlined processes and saved time and resources for stakeholders.

Additionally, he played a role in the resumption of educational activities during the post-COVID period, helping schools adapt to new health guidelines while maintaining



educational quality. His efforts to integrate hospital pedagogy into the country's educational framework aim to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for children facing health challenges, contributing to ongoing reforms in the education sector.



**Mr. Sunny Varkey, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, philanthropist, educator and founder of the Varkey Foundation (Video)**

UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Education Partnerships Sunny Varkey is a philanthropist, educator and entrepreneur. He is the founder of the Varkey Foundation, a not-for-profit organization supporting projects to improve access to education worldwide. He is also founder and Chairman of GEMS Education, an international education provider.

## Round table 1

### Moderator



**Prof. Ghislaine Dehaene, Director of the Developmental Neuroimaging Lab , CNRS, CEA** Pediatrician, director of the Robert Debré Child Brain Institute (Paris, France) and the developmental brain imaging lab, Prof. Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz and her team investigate the development of cognitive functions in infants and children using brain imaging techniques. Their goal is to understand how complex cognitive functions, such as language, music, mathematics, etc... emerge in the human brain, thanks to a thorough description of the brain's initial structural and functional organization. She also studies how school education builds on this pre-existing organization but also transforms it, to enable new skills such as reading for example. She is the recipient of several national and international awards (Prix Justine and Yves Sergent 2013, Grand Prix Scientifique de la Fondation de France, 2015, et NRJ-Institut de France, 2016, Médaille d'argent du CNRS, 2018). She was elected as foreign member of the US National Academy of Sciences (2022). With colleagues, she has published a book on language for a general audience '*La plus belle histoire du langage,*' and a book for general practitioners on how to understand and monitor child's developmental disorders in primary care '*Les troubles dys avant 7 ans: Les clés pour comprendre et assurer le suivi en médecine de ville*'.

### Speakers



**Dr. Elizabeth Spelke, Harvard Psychology Department, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University**

Dr. Elisabeth Spelke is involved in the work of the Center for Brains, Minds, and Machines at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has previously taught at the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University. Her research focuses on the sources of human-specific cognitive abilities, such as mathematical abilities, symbol construction and use, and object taxonomy. She investigates the origins of these abilities through behavioural studies on infants and young children, exploring the development of their understanding of objects, actions, people, places, numbers, and geometric shapes in their environment.



**Dr. Marcela Peña, MD, Pediatrician and Professor of Cognitive Science, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile**

Dr. Marcela Peña is MD, pediatrician and obtained her Ph.D. in Cognitive Science and Psycholinguistics from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. Presently, she holds the position of Full Professor at the School of Psychology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, where she leads the Laboratory of Cognitive Neuroscience. Additionally, Dr Peña serves as the Scientific Director at the National Center of Artificial Intelligence in Chile. Dr Peña has been affiliated to several multidisciplinary initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting learning skills when children develop in adverse contexts. For instance, she is a member of the UNESCO Chair of Science for Education, entitled 'Building a Bridge between Laboratory and Classroom', operating under the leadership of Professor Roberto Lent in Brazil, she contributes as an invited researcher within the J-Pal network, and is an active member of the UBC Language Sciences group in Canada. Dr Peña's research is centred on early cognitive development and early learning, employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates behavioural and neuroimaging techniques. Her investigations delve into how infants and young children, both those typically developing and with atypical development, acquire language, learn from their environment, and develop foundational cognitive skills crucial for their education and well-being. More recently, Dr Peña and her team have been engaged in designing tablet-based interventions aimed at promoting linguistic and communicative abilities among pre-school aged children, as innovative tools to support the activity of early childhood educators.



**Dr. Stephanie Mazza, Professor of Neuropsychology, INSPE of Lyon 1 University**

Dr. Stephanie Mazza is a member of the Lyon Neuroscience Research Center affiliated with Inserm and Lyon 1 University. She is also a member of the scientific council of the National Institute of Sleep and Vigilance. Her work aims to establish a connection between sleep and performance. She is particularly interested in the impact of sleep deprivation on cognitive performance: memory, attention, and stress management. She is leading a research project evaluating the involvement of sleep and its disorders in the learning process of children and adolescents. She has co-developed, with school teachers, a sleep education programme for primary school children.

## Round Table 2

### Moderator



**Dr. Grégoire Borst, Professor, Director of the Child Psychology and Development Laboratory at the University of Paris and senior member of the IUF**

Dr. Grégoire Borst is a full Professor of Developmental Psychology and Educational Cognitive Neuroscience at the University Paris Cité. He is the director of the Child Development and Education Lab (CNRS) at La Sorbonne and a senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France. His work focuses on the role of cognitive control on the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children and adolescents and on learning at school. He has published more than 90 articles and 9 books. He is a visiting scientist at MGIEP (UNESCO) and senior member of the IBE (UNESCO). He is the co-director of the interdisciplinary research network on education and learning of 100 labs and 700 researchers in France. He is also the co-director of the 10-year research programme on the Sciences for Education in France. In 2021, he received the Daignan-Bouveret Prize

from the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences for his research on the science of learning. In 2023, he became a fellow of the International Science Council.

## Speakers



### **Dr. Charles Nelson, Professor of Education and Pediatrics, Harvard University**

Dr. Charles A. Nelson III, Ph.D., is currently Professor of Pediatrics and Neuroscience and Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and Professor of Education in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He also holds the Richard David Scott Chair in Pediatric Developmental Medicine Research at Boston Children's Hospital and serves as Director of Research in the Division of Developmental Medicine. His research interests centre on a variety of problems in developmental cognitive neuroscience, including: the development of social perception; developmental trajectories to autism; and the effects of early adversity on brain and behavioural development. He chaired the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Early Experience and Brain Development and served on the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panels that wrote *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, *New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research*, and currently serves on the panel *The Role of Seafood Consumption in Child Growth and Development*. Among his many honours he has received the Leon Eisenberg award from Harvard Medical School, an honorary Doctorate from Bucharest University (Romania), was a resident fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio (Italy) Center, has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Medicine, the British Academy and along with Professors Fox and Zeanah has received the Ruane Prize for Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Research from the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation. In 2021 he received the Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize and in 2023 he received the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Distinguished Scientific Contributions to Child Development award.



### **Dr. Edward Melhuish, Professor of Developmental Psychology, Oxford University**

Dr. Edward Melhuish is Emeritus Professor of Human Development at the University of Oxford, and Birkbeck, University of London, and Baoyung Foundation Professor of Education at Zhejiang University, China. He is an honorary professor at 4 other universities. He has been involved many research projects spanning over 40 years in several countries. Examples of his projects in the UK include leading the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS, 2001-2012), Effective Pre-school Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE, 1998-2014) and the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED, 2013-2021) projects. He is currently involved with longitudinal studies of several thousand children in England, China and Norway. His studies have contributed to social policy in the UK for families, early years services and education, including universal provision of pre-school for all 3 and 4 year-olds, establishing 3500 Children's Centres, Every Child Matters and 10-Year Childcare strategies, and early education for 2-year-olds for the 40% most disadvantaged children. His work has involved leading multi-disciplinary teams that have investigated issues related to developing policy and practice bearing upon optimising development and well-being for children, families and practitioners. This work has influenced the lives of millions of children. He was awarded the OBE for services to social science in 2016. He has given evidence to parliamentary committees and is an advisor to research councils in Australia, Canada, Chile, Finland, Germany, Korea, Norway, Portugal, the Netherlands and the USA, as well as the European Commission, OECD and WHO.





**Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Professor of Psychology, Temple University**

Professor of Psychology at Temple University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Dr Hirsh-Pasek was declared a 'scientific entrepreneur' by the American Association of Psychology. Having written 14 books and 250+ publications, her Einstein Never Used Flashcards won the Book for a Better Life Award in 2003 with her *Becoming Brilliant* (2016) reaching the New York Times Bestsellers List in education. Co-founder of the global Learning Science Exchange Fellowship, she brings together scientists, journalists, policy-makers and entertainers, to put learning science in the hands of educators. Her newest initiative Playful Learning Landscapes re-imagines cities and public squares as places with science-infused designs that enhance academic and social opportunities.

**Round Table 3**

**Moderator**



**Dr. Adele Diamond, Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, University of British Columbia, Vancouver**

Dr. Adele Diamond is the Canada Research Chair Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. A leader in two fields, psychology and neuroscience, Adele cofounded the flourishing interdisciplinary field of 'developmental cognitive neuroscience.' Her speciality is the rigorous study of executive functions especially in children which she has been conducting for over 40 years and which include focused attention, creative problem-solving, self-control, and working memory. Adele studies how executive functions are affected by biological factors (such as genes and neurochemistry) and by environmental ones (e.g. impaired by stress or improved by interventions). Her work has been marked by innovation and crossing disciplinary boundaries. Her discoveries have thrice changed international medical guidelines for the treatment of diseases and have had a significant impact on educational practice worldwide, improving millions of children's lives. Adele is a member of the Royal Society of Canada, was named one of the '2000 Outstanding Women of the 20th Century,' and was listed as one of the 15 most influential neuroscientists alive today. Her other awards include an Award for Lifetime Contributions to Developmental Psychology in the Service of Science and Society plus three honorary doctorates. She has given roughly 600 invited addresses in over 40 countries across 6 continents, including at the White House and to the Dalai Lama. Adele was educated at Swarthmore College (BA, Phi Beta Kappa, in Sociology-Anthropology and Psychology), Harvard University (Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology), and Yale Medical School (Postdoctoral Fellow in Neuroscience).

## Speakers



### **Dr. Claire Hughes, Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Cambridge**

Dr. Claire Hughes is a Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Cambridge. She is a Fellow of Newnham College, and Deputy Head of the Psychology Department. Formerly, Claire worked at the Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Research Centre, Kings College London, and held a research fellowship at the Fyssen Foundation in Paris, France (Université Paris V). In 2011 she was made a UK 'Woman of the Year' and her book 'Social Understanding, Social Lives' won the British Psychological Society award for Book of the Year 2013. Other books include "Why Siblings Matter", "Executive Function in Childhood" and most recently, "The Psychology of Starting School". Her research applies longitudinal and international designs to examine the interplay between children's social experiences and cognitive development.



### **Dr. Jelena Obradović, Professor of Developmental Psychologist, Stanford University**

Dr Jelena Obradović is a Developmental Psychologist, a professor at Stanford University in the Graduate School of Education, and the Associate Director of the Stanford Center on Early Childhood. Her research examines how the interplay of children's physiological stress arousal, executive functions, self-regulatory behaviours, and quality of caregiving and educational environments contributes to their health, learning, and well-being over time. She is leading an international initiative to develop multi-method, multi-informant assessment tools and guidelines to conduct mixed-method studies of how executive function skills and behaviours are expressed and leveraged in different settings to support culturally relevant learning outcomes.



### **Dr. Philip Zelazo, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Neurologist, University of Minnesota**

Professor Zelazo studies the development and neural bases of executive function, or the conscious control of thought, action, and emotion. He does so using a variety of approaches, from experimental to cross-cultural to electrophysiological (EEG/ERP), and his work has focused on a number of influential ideas, including the notion that the executive function depends, in part, on the development of the ability to use increasingly complex, higher-order rules (formulated in self-directed speech)—part of the Cognitive Complexity and Control theory; the notion that consciousness develops through a series of 'levels' in which information is reprocessed via thalamo-cortical circuits involving prefrontal cortex (the Levels of Consciousness model)—with consequences for the quality of subjective experience, and the potential for recall, rule complexity, and cognitive control; and the importance of the distinction between more 'cool', cognitive aspects of executive function typically associated with dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DL-PFC) vs. more 'hot', affective aspects associated with more ventral and medial regions of PFC (e.g. orbitofrontal cortex; OFC)

### Round Table 1



**Mr. Vincent Bulan, General Director, Babilou France – France**

Vincent Bulan, a nursery nurse and graduate of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, has over 20 years' experience in the Early Childhood sector. Now Managing Director of Babilou France, he began his career in the pediatric intensive care unit at Rouen University Hospital and Armand Trousseau Hospital (APHP). In 2006, he was appointed crèche director for the town of Montreuil, then Head of Childcare Quality in 2009, before joining Gazouillis in 2010 as Early Childhood Coordinator. In 2014, he joined Babilou as Management Manager before being promoted to Sector Manager, then Territory Director, Regional Executive Director in Île de France Est to finally become Deputy Managing Director in 2020 and take over as Managing Director of Babilou France in 2021.



**Dr. Patrick Makokoro, President, Nhaka Foundation- Zimbabwe**

Dr. Patrick Makokoro is an early childhood development practitioner, and educational researcher with extensive experience working in community and international development. The work he has carried out includes early childhood development program implementation, early childhood development network establishment in Africa and providing extensive consulting support to international non-profits working in Africa. Among other social entrepreneurship initiatives, he founded the Nhaka Foundation, a charitable organization that provides early childhood development, education, meals, health care, psycho-social support, and other essential services to children in Southern Africa. He is a co-founder of the Africa Early Childhood Network, founder of the Zimbabwe Network for Early Childhood Development Actors (ZINECDA) and convenor of the Southern Africa Network for Early Childhood Development (SANECD). Through the ECDinAfrica, he works with the Africa-focused UNESCO Tri-Chairs in Early Childhood Development. Dr. Patrick Makokoro has books and publications on early childhood development in Africa and continues to write in this area.



**Dr. Yufang Ruan, ZJU100 Professor at College of Education, Zhejiang University - The People's Republic of China**

Dr. Ruan is an expert in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Her research concerns early childhood development and developmental disorders, in particular how language environment interacts with children's emergent speech and language skills. She has published in prestigious journals and has also made significant contributions to UNESCO's background report for the World Conference on ECCE and the first Global Report on ECCE: The Right to a Strong Foundation.

## Round Table 2



**Dr. Angela Low, Expert on emotional intelligence, resilience and parenting – Canada**

Dr. Angela Low is an expert in emotional intelligence and child development who is committed to promoting resilience and social and emotional competence in children, youth and their families. She is an adjunct professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, and a researcher at Simon Fraser University. She also works with the British Columbia government to develop and implement public mental health programs for children and their families across the province of British Columbia. Her research and practice focus on fostering the mental and emotional competence, resilience and well-being of the adults around children, so they can provide the nurturing environments where children can thrive. Angela's recent research focuses on parents' experiences of shame and guilt in the context of parenting education.



**Ms. Nathalie Casso-Vicarini, Founder-General delegate, Ensemble pour la petite enfance NGO, Member of the first 1000 days Commission - France**

Mrs. Nathalie founded and lead the association Ensemble pour l'Education de la Petite Enfance. She aims to answer new challenges of our society making early childhood a priority to reduce inequalities. With the team, they daily aim at raising awareness about positive communication in education and pedagogy with a strong link with the OECD. Since 20 years, She have been studying and comparing various pedagogic methods in different countries (France, Australia, India...). she also created nurseries for companies in France and abroad and coached parents and professionals of early childhood. She is an advisor both for public and private entities in the sector of early childhood education in order to encourage fair initiatives.



**Prof. Neena Modi, Professor of Neonatal Medicine and Vice-Dean (International), Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London**

Neena is a fellow of the UK Academy of Medical Sciences, president of the European Association of Perinatal Medicine, and trustee of Theirworld, a global charity dedicated to ensuring every child has access to quality education. She is a past-president of the British Medical Association, UK Medical Women's Federation, UK Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Neonatal Society and Academic Paediatrics Association of Great Britain and Ireland, and a longstanding advocate for the rights of infants, children and women to benefit from biomedical research.

Neena leads a multidisciplinary research group focussed on improving the health and life-long wellbeing of infants born preterm or sick, the award-winning UK National Neonatal Research Database, and eNewborn, an International Neonatal Research Database. She is head of the Imperial Biomedical Research Centre "Pregnancy and Prematurity" theme.

In 2022 and 2023 she received the US Critical-Path Institute, Pioneer Award for "contributions to health data research", Medical Women International Association award "to a woman physician who has made outstanding contributions to the cause of women in medicine", and the Joint European Neonatal Societies "outstanding neonatologist" award.



### Round Table 3



**Ms. Alyssa Blask Campbell, CEO of Seed & Sew – United States of America**

Ms. Alyssa Blask Campbell, CEO of Seed & Sew, has a master's degree in early childhood education, is a leading expert in emotional development, and travels the globe speaking on the topic. Her podcast, "Voices of Your Village," is a gathering place for parents, caregivers, teachers, and experts, creating a modern parenting village and reaches listeners in more than 100 countries. She co-created the Collaborative Emotion Processing (CEP) method with Lauren Stauble, an Assistant Professor of Early Education and mindfulness consultant, an approach that changes the way adults experience children's emotions so we can respond with intention and raise emotionally intelligent humans. Their research of the CEP method and experiences as educators and parents is shared in *Tiny Humans, Big Emotions*, published October 10, 2023 from HarperCollins.

Alyssa's company, Seed & Sew, serves people around the globe through speaking, consulting, online courses, and early childhood professional development programs, sharing tools and expertise to build emotional intelligence. She has been featured as an emotional development expert in publications such as *The Washington Post*, *CNBC*, *Kids VT*, *Medium*, *Burlington Free Press*, and *Family Education*. Alyssa's show-up-as-you-are approach welcomes people into her village to get support at all ages and stages, shame free. "It's never too early or too late to start," she explains.



**Dr. Maria Camila Londono Aristizabal, PhD. Candidate in Psychology and UNESCO Chair for Inclusive Early Childhood, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières**

Dr. Maria holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia. She is currently Ph.D. candidate in psychology with a focus on family studies at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières in Canada. In January 2020, Maria joined the UNESCO Chair in Early Childhood and Inclusive Early Intervention at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières as a research assistant. Maria has a strong interest in the development of children's executive functions, including their assessment and intervention strategies. Her research also focuses on early childhood assessment and intervention, as well as preschool education. Throughout her career, Maria has gained extensive professional experience working with children, adolescents, and adults in psychological assessment and intervention. She has also provided support and guidance to educators and supervisory staff in childcare centers, helping them implement inclusive practices in the province of Quebec.



**Dr. Sirene Lim (林美莹), Associate Professor - Singapore University of Social Sciences**

Dr. Sirene Lim is currently Vice Dean of the S R Nathan School of Human Development and has been key in the creation of the university's full-time undergraduate early childhood education degree programme which is the only such programme in the country's public university system. She has had various educational positions -- as a teacher, a curriculum officer at the Ministry of Education (Singapore), an Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. She contributes towards national committees on curricular and quality aspects of education,

and serves on the board of the National Institute of Early Childhood Development. Sirene has enjoyed working with a range of pre-service, in-service, masters and doctoral students; and she balances her academic insights with a realistic view of what teachers face daily in the early childhood sector. Her research interests include early childhood policies, teacher learning and leadership, and play in children's lives. She has published in journals such as *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, and *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. Her hope is for Singapore to strengthen its early childhood educational research and practice, to develop a cohesive learning community of professionals and academics, for society to embrace inclusivity and rethink narrow definitions of how and what children should learn.

### Plenary: Research implications for policies and strategies



#### **Ms. Fatima Nasser Al Melhi, Acting Director of Special Projects Department, Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority**

Mrs. Fatima Al Melhi is an ambitious professional who thrives on efficient and effective collaboration with others. With a strong track record of leading and motivating teams, Fatima has demonstrated her ability to inspire others to achieve shared goals. Fatima possesses expertise in several key areas, including project management and strategic communications, strategic planning, human capital development, and policy development and implementation. With 15 years of experience in the government of Abu Dhabi, Fatima currently holds the position of Acting Director of Special Projects Department and Head of Early Childhood Policies at the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority. She has also served in various roles within the Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi, and specialised in managing Sector Emiratisation and Capability Development, Tourism Policy and Planning, Industry Sustainability Development, and Industry and Tourist Guide Training. Fatima holds a Master of International Development Law, Diplomacy, and International Relations, specialised in Sustainable Development Law from Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi and a Bachelor of Communication and Media Sciences, specializing in Public Relations and Advertising, from Zayed University Abu Dhabi.



#### **Mr. Aziz Kaichouh, Secretary General of the Higher Council for Education, Vice President of the Moroccan Foundation for Preschool Education (FMPS), President of the African Foundation for Lifelong Learning (ATLV).**

Mr. Aziz Kaichouh was appointed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI as Secretary General of the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research (CSFRS) ([www.csefrs.ma](http://www.csefrs.ma)) on May 18, 2023. He has been Vice President of the FMPS since June 2023 and served as its General Director since its creation in March 2008. He has also been the President of the African Foundation for Lifelong Learning since its establishment in February 2024.

His rich experience stems from working in both the public and private sectors for 25 years. He began his career at the Ministry of Economy and Finance as a State Engineer in IT before joining the investment bank CFG

and then the asset management branch of the CDG group, where he was responsible for information systems, developing systems for the national financial market.

His expertise expanded further during his tenure at CAPINFO, one of the largest IT services companies in Morocco, where he served as ERP Project Director (SAP, Oracle, etc.). He worked on implementing complex integrated management systems for various public administrations and companies in Morocco and Africa.

From 2003, Mr. Kaichouh contributed to the creation of the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Promotion of Social Works of Education and Training in Morocco ([www.fm6education.ma](http://www.fm6education.ma)). There, he was Director in charge of organization, information systems, member affairs, and communication, participating in major projects like the Nafida program, housing aid, supplementary health insurance, study grants, leisure programs, etc., using a partnership approach between the state and national operators, including banks, insurance companies, hotels, transporters, and universities. He was also involved in establishing the Higher Council for Education in Morocco ([www.cse.ma](http://www.cse.ma)) since 2006. From 2014 to 2019, he served as a member of the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research, where he contributed to the drafting of the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision for Education and the Council's Opinion on a roadmap for the nationwide expansion of quality preschool education.

Under his leadership, the FMPS enabled Morocco to develop a high-quality preschool model accessible to all children. FMPS is now the leading national operator in preschool education, having created more than 22,000 preschool units across all regions and provinces, serving over 400,000 children aged 4 to 6, with 65% in rural areas and 25% in underprivileged urban neighborhoods.

FMPS's achievements have significantly contributed to the launch of the national preschool development and generalization program and the rural preschool program of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH).

Mr. Aziz Kaichouh holds an engineering degree from the Rabat School of Mines in Information Systems (1994) and an English MBA from the Business School of the École des Ponts in Paris (2002). He is deeply committed to issues related to education, childhood, social welfare, and development.



**His Excellency Dr. Prak Kosal, Deputy Secretary General of ECCD and the Director of Early Childhood Education Department of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS).**

His Excellency Dr. Prak Kosal, has been working for MoEYS for 31 years including 19 years of experience working in Early Childhood Care and Development. During his services in ECCD, he has been leading and coordinating technical tasks of public preschool, community preschool, day care, home-based education/parental education, and private preschool, ECE curriculum and coordinating in national committee for ECCD, policy formulation and implementation multi-sectoral processes.

He has played vital roles leading and coordinating with relevant technical coordination task teams from different line ministries/institutions, development partners and civil society to cooperatively carry out roles and responsibilities for effective support on ECCD.

As for his educational background, he holds double master's degrees, one in Educational and Financial Planning, and another in Public Laws. During his 31 years of services, he has received extensive professional development programs from well-known institutions around the globe; for example Participated in Early Childhood Development – Asia - in collaboration with Hiroshima University supported by JICA, Advanced International Diploma on Child Rights, Classroom and School Management in Lund University, Sweden supported by Sida; Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Development in Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan supported by UNICEF; Training the Trainer Course in Home Based Care for Young Children in Singapore supported by SCP; the specialized training course on Quantitative Methods for Monitoring and Evaluating the Quality of Education by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO).



**Mrs. Alexandra Posada, Chief of Early Childhood of the Office of the First Lady of El Salvador and the President of the Board of the Crecer Juntos Institute.** Mrs. Alexandra Posada has been the Chief of Early Childhood at the Office of the First Lady of El Salvador since June 2019 and the President of the Board of the Crecer Juntos Institute since its inception in January 2023. In these roles, she leads the design, implementation, and monitoring of the “Crecer Juntos” (Growing Together) National Early Childhood Development Policy, coordinating government institutions and engaging with private sector and NGO stakeholders. Mrs. Posada also heads the specialized commissions for the National Play Strategy launched in 2023 and the forthcoming National Parenting Skills Plan. Additionally, she is a key member of the multidisciplinary commission responsible for the Crecer Juntos Law, aimed at providing comprehensive protection for early childhood and adolescence. Her career has focused on advancing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) initiatives, promoting play, family strengthening, the arts, and children’s rights to create a more inclusive Salvadoran society. She also coordinates projects with development banks such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. psychology from Loyola University (New Orleans). She has also earned several prestigious certifications, including the First Cohort of the Early Childhood Education Policymakers Academy from the World Bank, Applying Behavioral Science for Early Child Development from INSEAD, and Harvard Business School’s program on Power and Influence for Positive Impact.