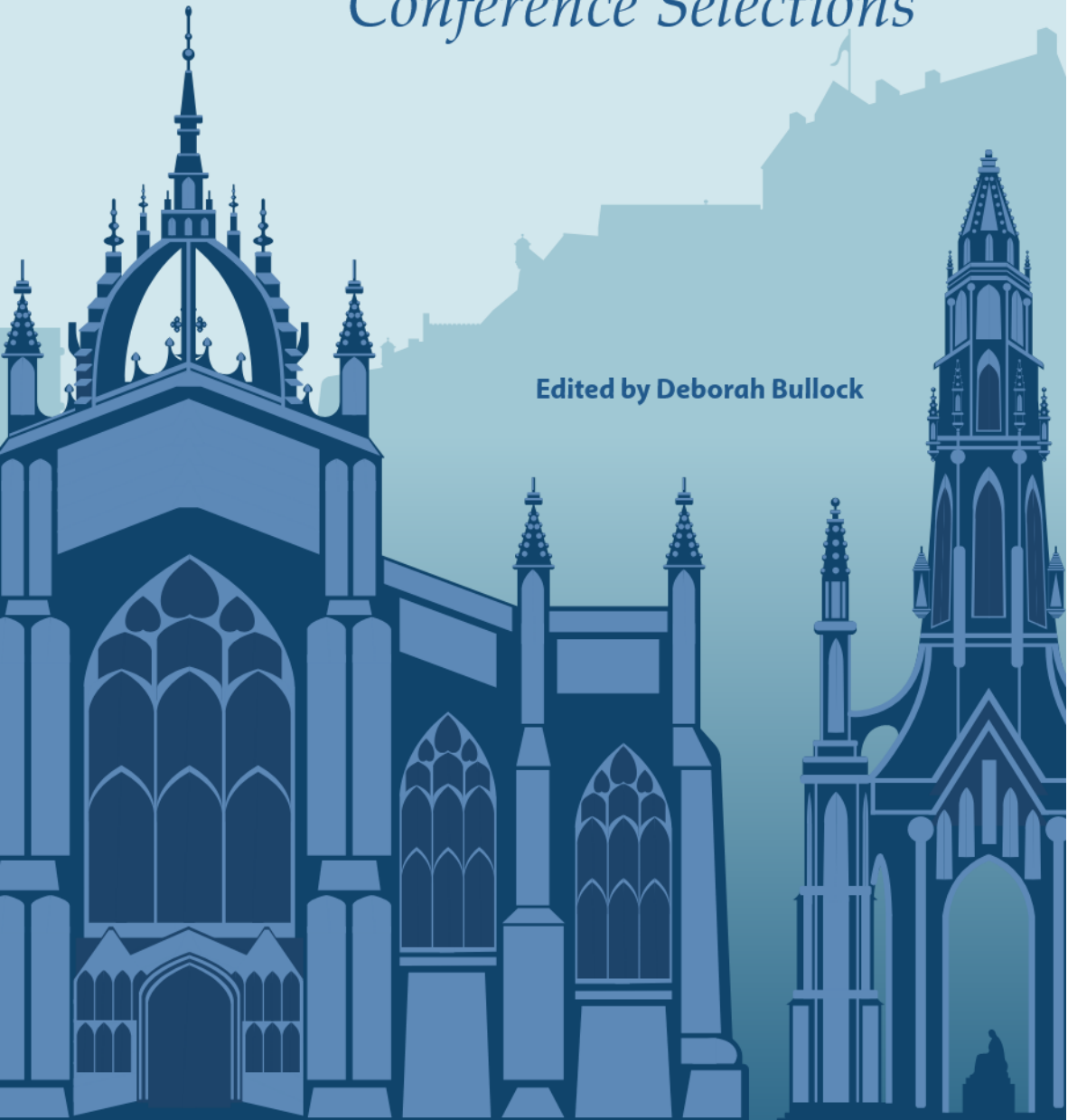


# IATEFL 2025

## Edinburgh Conference *Conference Selections*

Edited by Deborah Bullock





# IATEFL 2025

## Edinburgh Conference Selections

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Edited by Deborah Bullock

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## 8 Teaching young learners and teenagers

This chapter is dedicated to the teaching of young learners and teenagers, offering both insights and practical techniques. To begin, faced with common challenges related to young learners' creative writing, **Unnati Ved** turns to GenAI for support, and discovers that when carefully integrated, it can not only scaffold creativity, deepen engagement and foster learner autonomy, but also turn writing into a playful and fun activity. Moving on to multiple literacies, **Ellen Setterfield** provides an overview of essential literacies that young learners need to navigate and shape the world, together with practical suggestions on how to integrate these in the primary classroom. Reporting on a project to foster pre- and in-service primary teachers' competences regarding virtual exchange, **Annika Kolb** and **Nurjona Pinguri** describe and exemplify how they developed quality criteria for virtual exchange projects, while empowering young learners to address real-world issues. **Melisha Robinson** recounts how she implemented a plurilingual approach in India, and shares techniques arising from classroom research with young learners that can be used in both multilingual and monolingual contexts. **Josianne Block** also reports on classroom research regarding own language use, this time in the context of adolescent migrant learners. Seeking to better understand how learners use languages during interactive group tasks, she concludes that caution is needed when advocating for a multilingual approach in the classroom. Turning to a focus on speaking, **Nobuo Yuzawa** examines the adequacy of spoken models used in textbook audio materials in Japan's elementary school English education, identifying various issues and offering suggestions to address these. Nobuo concludes that reforming audio materials is both necessary and urgent to support long-term communicative development. Next, to explore secondary students' apparent reluctance to express themselves in English, **Nino Sturua** undertook classroom research. Nino's findings provided valuable insights into underlying reasons for this, from which she was able to create an action plan to build confidence and improve oral communication skills. In another small-scale study in a Scottish secondary school, **María Inés Vallejo** explores how learners construct their language learner identities and discovers that by intentionally fostering investment, we can help learners move beyond extrinsic motivators and connect more deeply with the language and the people who speak it. Focusing on materials, **Rieke Dieckhoff** and **Jan-Erik Leonhardt** report on insights from a pilot study with English language teachers into how series and serials to address gender and LGBTQIA+ are used in secondary classrooms. **Sylvie Doláková** then describes how she introduced a creative, hands-on, child-centred educational technique – lapbooks, or 'project books' – to Czech, Slovak and Polish teachers. Sylvie explores the educational value and challenges of the method, describes how it can be adapted for both individual and group activities, and offers guidelines for implementation. Finally, we end this chapter with a Signature talk paper by **Liam**

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## 8.3 Virtual exchange in the young learners' language classroom

**Annika Kolb** and **Nurjona Pinguri** *University of Education Freiburg, Germany*

Virtual exchange offers valuable opportunities for language learning in the primary and pre-school classroom. Through engagement in authentic communicative situations, even young learners can develop linguistic, intercultural and digital competences (Pennock-Speck & Clavel-Arroitia, 2022). Despite this potential, virtual exchange is still underutilised in early language education, partly due to a lack of teacher training. This paper presents activities of the Erasmus+ project INVITED (Integrating primary and pre-school virtual exchange projects into language teacher education) as well as an outcome of the project – quality criteria for virtual exchange projects with young language learners.

### The INVITED project

The INVITED project seeks to foster both pre- and in-service teachers' competences regarding virtual exchange. Four European universities develop training material on virtual exchange to include in their curriculum, and aim to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience virtual exchange projects with children during practice phases as part of their studies. At the same time, a professional development course is being developed for in-service teachers to be published on the European School Education Platform (ESEP). After a survey with pre- and in-service teachers on their experiences with and their needs regarding virtual exchange (INVITED consortium, 2024), the project is building a community of teachers interested in virtual exchange with young learners. The community is promoted through the project website as well as an eTwinning group on ESEP (European Commission, 2024). It provides opportunities to exchange experiences and materials, displays good practice examples and short how-to-do videos, and hosts a series of webinars by experienced teachers.

### Quality criteria for virtual exchange projects with young learners

Given the specific requirements of virtual exchange projects with young learners, the project consortium set out to develop quality criteria for virtual exchange in the early language classroom, based on a variety of sources: 1) existing research on virtual exchange in primary school; 2) a questionnaire survey with in-service teachers; and 3) criteria for the eTwinning quality labels.

- 1 Research on virtual exchange projects in early language classrooms almost exclusively focuses on primary education, with no studies in pre-school contexts. Key factors for successful virtual exchange projects that are highlighted in various projects are language scaffolding, classroom management, task sequencing, good communication between partners and a balance between guidance and learner autonomy (Pennock-Speck & Clavel-Arroitia, 2022).
- 2 A questionnaire survey involved 309 in-service primary and pre-school teachers from the project countries. The results showed that teachers emphasised the importance of authentic communication (95.1 per cent), as well as pre-planned and structured tasks (79.7 per cent).
- 3 The criteria that are annually awarded for outstanding virtual exchange projects by the Twinning initiative furthermore informed the criteria development. They emphasise collaboration, appropriate use of technology, student-centred learning, curricular integration and documentation of project results.

Drawing on these sources and with the participation of experienced practitioners in the field, quality criteria for virtual exchange projects in early language education were grouped into five categories: *content*, *teaching methodology*, *communication*, *use of technology* and *outcomes* (see full criteria and definitions here: <https://invited-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Criteria-and-Definitions.pdf>). It goes without saying that no virtual exchange project will fulfil all the criteria. They are designed to help evaluate projects and identify good practice examples.

### **Sample project: reducing plastic pollution**

To illustrate this set of criteria, here is a sample virtual exchange project that took place between two primary school classes from France and Germany. The children had been learning English for three and two years respectively. The reducing plastic pollution project focused on plastic consumption. Through hands-on activities, such as collecting plastic waste and clean-up days, and collaborative tasks between the partner classes, students explored alternatives to plastic and developed a shared understanding of plastic pollution through both synchronous and asynchronous activities.

The project addressed a relevant topic for the children. It followed a cross-curricular approach since it included science teaching as well as maths when the children compared the weight of plastic waste they had collected. Students jointly developed videos with the app ChatterPix, in which animals suffering from plastic pollution asked for help, highlighting the impact of plastic on the environment. The videos were sent to the partner class, which was tasked with finding a solution for the different animals' problems, thus making the videos a collaborative product. Technology was creatively used to communicate and develop a multimodal product since the app allowed the children to animate photos with voice over. The project empowered students to address real-world issues, producing visible outcomes that impacted both their classrooms and the wider community.

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## 8.4 A plurilingual pathway for children learning English

**Melisha Robinson** *British Council, Chennai, India*

A plurilingual approach to learning new languages does not develop language skills in isolation but involves learners drawing upon previously known languages and experience to help mediate meaning (Council of Europe, 2001). This natural process can be seen with young learners, who often do not make distinctions between languages but rather focus on who they are speaking to and how they can be understood. Inclusive practices like this highlight linguistic diversity and challenge English-only perspectives, which have dominated classroom practice for decades. This article shares some ideas based on classroom research with young learners in India. These techniques can be used in both multilingual contexts and monolingual contexts.

### **Why is a plurilingual approach necessary for young learners?**

The linguistic, cognitive and affective benefits of a plurilingual approach to language learning are well-documented. Piccardo and Galante (2018) explain how it provides learners with more choice and ownership over their learning, builds their confidence and improves metacognition, pluricultural awareness and competence. Most importantly, using a plurilingual approach from an early age promotes an inclusive mindset.

### **How can you implement a plurilingual approach?**

*Create a linguistic profile:* Documenting learners' other languages makes teachers aware of the linguistic resource available in class and lets learners know that their languages are valued. Learners could list the languages they know and indicate their proficiency on a scale of 1–5. They could add when they use different languages and with whom. The teacher can use this knowledge to provide targeted linguistic support and group learners with similar languages for tasks.

*Give options to use other languages:* Learners could have the option to use their first language for tasks such as self-reflection or planning for a writing task. If a learner self-reflects in the language they are most comfortable with, they can be more critical and accurate, and recall is often higher. Planning this way for a writing task can also help them access information better and bring it together to share in English. This often gives them more confidence and clarity when sharing.