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Exploring early years practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

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Abstract

The focus of this research study is an exploration of the early years practitioner perspectives of children and childhood in the setting where the research took place. There is urgency in the literature for those in the early years field to be reflective and challenge their assumptions of children and childhood. A literature review provides a theoretical perspective on the many ways children have been and are constructed and a sociological view of assessment. Ethical considerations for the research were based upon Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 42) suggestion of 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'.

The main conclusions from the research indicate that there are many constructs of children existing in the setting and those children's voices are implicitly evidenced in the learning journeys. One of the main recommendations from this research is that it is intended to stimulate deep reflection for the practitioners in the setting to further challenge their assumptions and practice.

Keywords: adult/early years practitioners, child's voice, participation, assessment, pedagogical documentation.

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**Exploring Early Years Practitioner Perspectives of
the Place of the Child's Voice in Documenting
their Learning**

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Exploring early years practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

ABSTRACT: The focus of this research study is an exploration of the early years practitioner perspectives of children and childhood in the setting where the research took place. Central to this focus is how these perspectives influence the way that children's voices are included in the documentation of their learning. There is urgency in the literature for those in the early years field to be reflective and challenge their assumptions of children and childhood. However, there appears to be little research in practice on what these assumptions are and where they stem from. The research methodology adopted for this study was ethnographic and qualitative in nature. A literature review provides a theoretical perspective on the many ways children have been and are constructed. In addition, the review also explores a sociological view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder practitioners from including the children's voices in the pedagogical documentation known as learning journeys. Eleven early years practitioners were invited to put their views and comments forward through a survey including both predetermined statements and a further comments section to capture emerging data. A focus group was conducted in order to clarify and extend issues arising from these. Each practitioner provided one sample of a child's 'learning journey' for documentary analysis. The main conclusions from the research indicate that

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there are many constructs of children existing in the setting and that children's voices are implicitly evidenced in the learning journeys. This research is intended to stimulate deep reflection for the practitioners in the setting to further challenge their assumptions and practice.

Keywords: adult's perspectives, children's voice, participation, assessment, pedagogical documentation

Introduction

In this Chapter I will introduce the focus for my research and explain the rationale. I will specify the research aim and the objectives as well as indicate why I feel my research is important.

Focus of the Study

The focus for this study is the exploration of early years practitioner perspectives about 'children' and 'childhood' and how this impacts on the extent to which the child's voice is heard and represented in the pedagogical documentation ('Learning Journeys'). The study took place within the early years settings (one full day care nursery and two playgroups) at a Children's Centre.

Rationale

I had been concerned that in my role as a Children's Centre Teacher my request for data about children's learning, in the form of development bands (Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2007), was hindering a more a participatory approach with children in the documentation of their learning. I

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had observed that practitioners in the settings were the main drivers of the learning journeys and I wanted to address the balance to provide a more reciprocal participatory approach where children, parents and practitioners work together.

I acknowledge the crucial importance of children's and parents views for my study however, through reflection on the literature, I realised that in order to involve children and parents in a more participatory way I would need to start from the perspective of the practitioner if I was to make a difference:

'I need to work from the inside out –like a ripple effect- I really need to narrow down my focus if I want to make a real difference'
(Goldberg, 08.12. 2011).

I want to use this study as the basis for deep reflection as advocated by Schön (1991) and to use the findings from the research to recommend change and to develop a staff ethos about children's participation in assessment and in particular their voice in their learning journeys.

Research aims and objectives

The research aim of this study is:

Exploring early years practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

The objectives which will help me to achieve my overall aim are:

- To identify: constructs about children and childhood; the socio cultural view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder a participatory approach with children.
- To Implement a research project and explore the empirical data to ascertain the values and belief systems regarding children and childhood and the extent to which children have a participatory role in the documentation of their learning.
- Formulate recommendations for future early years practice and further study.

Structure of study

My study was exploratory and descriptive by nature and methodologically, it could be described as ethnographic and qualitative. The research was carried out through conducting a literature review which added an academic perspective, the collection of empirical data via a questionnaire, documentary

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analysis of pedagogical documentation known as learning journeys and a focus group. The data was analysed the findings presented and conclusions drawn.

The structure of my research is outlined below.

Introduction

This chapter outlines the focus of the research and justifies and the overall research aim and underlying objectives which I identified.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature in relation to the research aim and objectives. The literature review forms part of my data and is discussed in relation to emerging themes.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This chapter discusses and justifies the research strategy used and methods employed to conduct the empirical research. It outlines the context for the research, the research paradigm and the ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 3 Findings

This chapter documents the findings from the data under predetermined and emerging themes. The findings are discussed and analysed with reference to the literature review.

Chapter 4 Conclusions

This chapter summarises the main findings in relation to the research aim and objectives and highlights the recommendations for further study. Attention is drawn to the strengths and areas for improvement in the research process as well as a self-reflection on the research process.

References and Bibliography

This chapter contains a list of references in accordance with the Harvard Referencing System (BCU, 2011) and a bibliography of supporting texts.

The next chapter is an exploration of the literature significant to my research

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Research Aim:

To explore early years' practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

Objectives:

- To identify constructs about children and childhood, the socio cultural view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder a participatory approach with children.
- To Implement a research project and explore the empirical data to ascertain the values and belief systems regarding children and childhood and the extent to which children have a participatory role in the documentation of their learning.
- Formulate recommendations for future early years practice and further study.

This literature review aims to describe the national and international research relating to the early years practitioners perspective of the place of the child's voice in the documentation of their learning. I will give a brief description of how I identified the texts and provide a definition of the key terminology. I will discuss the literature in relation to the themes I identified in my reading of the relevant literature, namely:

- There are many perspectives about children and childhood
- We are still learning about children and childhood
- A sociocultural view of assessment endorses the active participation of children

- Barriers which may prevent adults from including children in a participatory approach to assessment

I gathered relevant literature for the review by: conducting database searches using strategic search terms (see table of definitions below); by locating sources included in earlier reviews; and searching for core texts by title or author credibility or knowledge of them being a main contributor in the field.

Definition of key words

Key word	Definition
'Early Years'	Children aged birth to five.
'Children's voice'	This term is not just confined to the spoken word but includes all the ways children communicate. It is about 'listening to young children' and recognising that it is 'a process which is open to the many ways young children use to express their views and experiences.' (Clark & Moss, 2010, p. 7)
'Participation'	The Oxford English Dictionary (2006): 'To take part in something'. In my opinion, the term also relates to inclusion and belonging in the sense that participation needs to be 'maximised' so that children feel that they 'belong' and they have an 'opportunity to 'speak and be heard' (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009).
'Assessment'	A model where achievements and interests are celebrated and not a checklist of achievement used to identify gaps in children's

	learning. 'A model that includes the 'action, activity or a particular context' (Carr, 2001, p. 181).
'Pedagogical Documentation'	Evidence of children's learning through photographs, children's pictures, short and long observations of children engaged in child and adult led activities (Learning Journey*). *Learning journey is a document which records children's achievements via photographs and observations. Learning and development is also linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage(EYFS) (DfES, 2007)
Perspective:	The Oxford English Dictionary (2006): ' a particular point of view'
Perception	The Oxford English Dictionary (2006): 'a way of understanding or perceiving something'

In my search I found no specific research relating to early years practitioner perspectives of childhood. Some (Ariès, 1962; Cunningham, 1996; Dunne, 2006 & Waller, 2009) spoke about perspectives of children and childhood but from an historical and theoretical viewpoint. Pascal & Bertram (2009) were concerned with how children's voices can be heard and that putting the concept into practice is difficult. Bae (2009) gave examples of how participation with children occurred in everyday early years practice while others (Clark & Moss, 2011 & Formosinho and Araújo, 2006) commented on the growing paradigm of the participatory role of children in the research process. Harcourt (2011), made reference to adult perspectives, but unfortunately, these were not elaborated upon or researched further. There

was also acknowledgement that the extent to which the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) was implemented depended upon individual interpretation of the terminology related to participation (Bae 2009; Lancaster 2010). I found that there were calls for early years practitioner's to be reflective and to be more self-aware about their assumptions and how this could consequently affect the quality of children's participation in early year's settings (Canella, 2005; Glazzard & Percival, 2010; Lancaster, 2010). There was also recognition that a sociological view of assessment and pedagogical documentation were valuable tools in realising children' participation in assessment.

There are many perspectives of children and childhood

There is much evidence in the literature regarding the many perspectives of children and childhood, so much so that I will not be able to give full justice to the literature here. I will however, attempt to draw out pertinent issues arising from this complex area for my study.

In the Oxford English Dictionary (2006) the definition of a child is 'a young human being' and childhood as 'the state or period of being a child'. To me these definitions are brief and unclear and they do not seem to value the importance of this crucial period. In looking beyond these definitions, I was particularly drawn to the definition highlighted by UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) (www.unicef.org) because it

resonated with my beliefs and values, even though it appears to emphasise children of school age. In my opinion the use of 'children to be in school and at play' could be replaced by the phrase 'young child to be at play at home or in a setting' because it would be more inclusive:

'Childhood is the time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and an extended community of caring adults. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. As such, childhood... refers to the state and condition of a child's life, to the quality of those years.' (www.unicef.org)

A further point of interest is that it appears that childhood and child are difficult terms to define because they have different meanings for different cultures and throughout history (James & Prout, 1997; Ariès, 1962). Cunningham, (1996, p.34) goes further and suggests that there is even more than one image in most societies and cultures

Ariès (1962) argues that childhood is a modern phenomenon. A view which many acknowledge as 'flawed' because of the 'evidence' and 'concepts' he used (Cunningham, 1996, p.27;). However, I feel that Ariès (1962) timeline does show that childhood has changed throughout history. Certainly, when I compare three generations of my family the experience of childhood has changed and is still changing today.

There are many 'discourses' (Foucault, 2002, p.131) about children and childhood in the literature (Waller, 2009; Janzen, 2008; Cunningham, 1996). However, for the purpose of my study, I will focus upon two main discourses which appear to encapsulate the main theories which have informed early year's theory and practice. These are highlighted by James and Prout (1997):

- Developmental: This approach comes from the field of psychology where childhood is seen as preparation for adulthood and which Dunne (2006) refers to as a 'deficiency' model. The work of Piaget who observed children passing through 'predetermined stages' (James & Prout, 1997, p. 11) is an example of this.
- Sociological: This approach comes from the field of sociology where children are viewed as 'passive', 'conforming' and 'asocial' and become 'social adults' through adult direction (James & Prout, 1997, p.13).

These views have been called into question more recently and there is consensus amongst the literature reviewed that a post-modern way of thinking which views children as active participants in their lives is now widely accepted (James & Prout, 1997; Rinaldi, 2006; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007; Harcourt, 2011). This view acknowledges and asserts that 'children are now being understood as socially prepared, adequate and capable of actively contributing to their social lives and environments, just like adults' Lancaster

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(2010, p.89). I would however, go further, and concur with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Dunne, 2006) who believe that children need connectedness in relationships with others in order to develop, grow and learn.

As I read more widely, I wondered about the extent to which children should be viewed as autonomous and competent individuals. Although this paradigm underlines my thinking and practice, I also believe children are vulnerable and need the support of trusting relationships in which to explore and make sense of their world. I identified with Lancaster (2010) and Bae (2009) who reflect upon this point.

We are still learning about children and childhood

If, as suggested above, 'childhood is a shifting social and historical construction' (James & Prout, 1997, p.245) we are continually learning about children and childhood. There appears to be a recognition within the literature for on-going practitioner self-reflection on the way we work with children for this to happen (Pound, 2011; Bae, 2010; Janzen, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). I identified with Lancaster (2010, p.91) who warns that the 'assumptions, beliefs and values' we hold can impact upon our practices with children. Whilst I was designing my research I reflected:

In order for the team to include children in a more participatory role within the assessment process I need to create an opportunity for

them to explore their own constructs of childhood and children as well as being aware of each other's and how this may impact on the way they perceive and involve children in a more participatory way.'

(Goldberg, G. 07.01.2012)

The 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 65) is another tool which appears in the literature as a means of helping us to understand children and childhood (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Formosinho & Araújo, 2006). The starting point for Clark & Moss (2011, p. 8) reflexive framework for listening is based upon recognising that 'children's competencies can help adults reflect on the limitations of their understanding of children's lives; to listen to children more rather than assume we already know the answers.' Pascal & Bertram (2009, p. 254) argue that 'listening can challenge assumptions and raise expectations'. This seems to strengthen even further the argument for early year's practitioners to be more reflective and to challenge their practice and assumptions about early childhood and children if they are to learn more about them. I particularly identified with Cannella's notion of a 'critical disposition' (2005, p. 29) where those in the early childhood field are asked to question 'what we think we know' about our practice

A socio-cultural view of assessment endorses the active participation of children

A socio-cultural view of assessment places children as active participants in their community which includes 'people, environments and objects' (Cowie & Carr, 2009, p.105). The main themes emerging from the literature are that children learn through reciprocal relationships or what Papatheodorou (2009) calls 'relational pedagogy.' There is an acceptance that children can and should be involved in the assessment process. This is reflected in the early childhood educational approaches of Reggio Emilia in Italy and Te Whariki in New Zealand where view children are viewed as competent 'beings not becomings' (Clark & Moss, 2011, p.12). This child centred approach is also visible in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES, 2007) and is even more prominent in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2012) in the UK. The tools identified in the literature to support this view of assessment include pedagogical documentation, listening and observations.

Carr, (2001, p.11) discusses a 'folk model' of assessment which focuses upon a 'deficits' model of assessment which assumes that children are 'incomplete'. Her alternative is a 'credit model' which focuses on the positive, celebrates what children can do and encourages 'successful participation'.

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Learning stories used in the Te Whariki early years curriculum in New Zealand pedagogical documentation in the Reggio Emilia approach documents children's learning as a process and are seen as a 'catalyst' (Carr, 2011) for children to reflect on their work. It is used for reflection by both the child and the adult in a reciprocal relationship. Through this process of reflection and self-assessment children are given opportunities to 'contribute to their developing views about how they learn and their identities as learners' Carr (2011, p. 257).

Rinaldi (2006, p.63) argues that the goal of documentation is 'the search for meaning' and to help 'children find the meaning of what they do' by recalling and reflecting on what they do. There is an 'intrapersonal and interpersonal communication' opportunity for those who wrote it and those who read it for reflection and learning (Rinaldi, 2006, p.70; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 2007).

Listening, is also recognised as a key factor in realising children's right to participation in the assessment process. Clark and Moss (2011, p.3) advocate the mosaic approach which 'enables young children and adults to be involved in 'mean making together' and also acknowledges that children can communicate in many ways.' In my experience, working with children including those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), Special Educational Needs (SEN) and with babies, there is a need for the adult to 'tune in' to each child's individual and preferred ways of communicating. For

me, a pedagogy of listening recognises that young children are powerful agents in their own learning.

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The sociocultural view of assessment in the literature appears to assume that an early childhood setting is a 'community of learners'. Carr (2001, p.16-17) stresses the importance of 'reciprocal relationships and opportunities for participation' in order for children to understand themselves as learners. While I agree with these views I also feel that they are simplistic, in my experience it takes time to build teams and form relationships with children and parents with which we are working with. Wenger (www.ewenger.com/theory/ 2006) advises that 'communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.' This definition clarifies that communities of learners need to be nurtured; it is unlikely to just happen:

'Reflecting on my experiences as a class teacher, I remember investing a lot of time in developing relationships at the beginning of and throughout the academic year. Developing class rules together (children, assistant and teacher) and finding out about each other's strengths and areas where we needed support were just some of the strategies I used. Looking back now these related to Tuckman's (1965) concept forming, storming, norming and performing to foster group or team development.' (Goldberg, 16/2/2012)

Nutbrown and Carter (2010, p.118) believe that children should 'have a say' in the assessment of their own learning' and that the 'principle of respect is

crucial'. This notion of 'respect' is closely related to the concept of children as competent learners and refers to a more equal relationship between the child and adult.

Barriers to a Participatory Approach to Assessment with Children

Although there is an acceptance that children are competent participants in their everyday lives there is little evidence in the research to show that this has become the norm in everyday early year's practice (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Bae, 2010 & Lancaster 2010). Possible barriers for this include: perspectives adults have about 'children and childhood', 'power and control' and 'time constraints'. These issues in turn can have an effect on the quality of children's participation especially in relation to the assessment process.

There is a belief that the dominant discourses and normative views of child development, like the ones previously outlined above, continue to impact on adult's perceptions of children (James & Prout, 1997; Janzen, 2008; Cannella, 2009; Percival, 2010; Lancaster 2010). These could have implications for children's participatory role in the assessment of their own learning. Adults may underestimate children's capabilities because of the strength and influence of these normative theories of child development (Berthelsen, 2009).

The thinking of Foucault (2002) seems to resonate here. These discourses have become so well established in our understanding that they appear to have

become what Foucault describes as 'regimes of knowledge' (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007 p.34). As a reflective practitioner I identified with this theory and in my practice I recognise the need to challenge dominant discourses as well as my own 'frames of reference' (Mezirow, 1997 p. 5) to ensure they match my values and meet the needs of the children and families I work with. Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' as highlighted by O'Connor (2011, p.117) also chimed with me. This refers to an individual's 'social inheritance or unthinking disposition' (O'Connor, 2011, p.117) which can lead to the inequality between adults and children in the early years. The work of Foucault and Bourdieu stress the need to examine and reflect upon our practice and in that way that 'the process of redistributing power' (Pascal & Bertram 2009, p.259) between children and adults can be realised.

The concept of power and control is emphasised by Lancaster (2010). She believes that although children have an entitlement to participate, it is ultimately the adult who interprets children's' understanding and is consequently responsible for the decision making and therefore in a position of control. She advocates the simple strategy of checking with children 'that their perspective has been understood' (Lancaster, 2010, p.6). Brooker (2008, p.117), on the other hand, proposes 'listening' (as discussed above) as another tool which ensures that 'power tips towards the child'. Alongside a

socio-cultural method of assessment I believe these tools can give children greater control of their own learning.

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Clark and Moss (2010, p.73) point out that 'time is required to make explicit taken-for-granted assumptions about childhood.' I wondered if this was as easy as it sounds in a busy nursery setting with the everyday demands this entails. From my experience, organising time for early years setting practitioners to meet together in a meaningful way requires creativity and in reality there are many obstacles to jump through. Similarly, I reflected upon how easy it was to 'listening well' to children in this busy environment where, in reality, all good plans and intentions are often disrupted. Pascal and Bertram (2009, p.260) acknowledge that 'supporting and catching children's voices is complex, challenging and multi-layered'. However, I do believe that such exchanges are worth pursuing if challenges to long held assumptions about children can be reflected upon in order to 'transform the world' (Friere, 1970, p. 68).

The golden thread which has naturally appeared through this literature review is the call for early years practitioners to be self-reflective in their practice. Like Lancaster (2010) and Harcourt (2011), I believe that in order to further improve the way children are heard and participate in the assessment process in early years settings, a discourse with practitioner's reflecting on their frames of reference and perceptions about childhood, children and learning is crucial first step. In my view, this could then lead to the creation of

a meaningful childhood ethos on which to begin to further reflect on how child's voice is heard now and how we can improve upon this especially with regard

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to their participation in creating their a more participatory approach to assessment.

In my review there appears to be a small amount of literature exploring early years practitioner perceptions of children and childhood. My empirical research endeavours to contribute to this in a specific place and time and will link to the concept that we are still learning about children and childhood.

To arrive at a deeper understanding of how children can be involved in a more participatory role in the assessment of their learning I explored early years practitioners views of children and childhood and where these stem from. I analysed the pedagogical documentation know as learning journeys to ascertain the extent to which they promote a sociological view of assessment and I clarified and developed the emerging issues during a focus group. The next chapter of this research outlines the methodology, methods and ethical considerations for my study.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Research Aim:

Exploring early years' practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

Objectives:

- To identify constructs about children and childhood, the socio cultural view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder a participatory approach with children.
- To Implement a research project and explore the empirical data to ascertain the values and belief systems regarding children and childhood and the extent to which children have a participatory role in the documentation of their learning.
- Formulate recommendations for future early years practice and further study.

In this Chapter I will depict a picture of the context where the research took place and explain the methodology I chose to support me in carrying out my research aim. I have outlined and explained the rationale behind the methods I used to collect the data and how I will analyse the findings which emerge.

Context for the Research Study

The research took place at an inner city Sure Start Children's Centre and involved the early years practitioners. I have worked at the Centre for five years and the current compliment of permanent early years staff, with whom have developed an excellent working relationship, have worked together for two and half years. My role at the Centre is Children's Centre Teacher and I

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support the staff in the Children's Centre full day care nursery and two outreach play groups. I lead curriculum development and assessment as a means of impacting on children's learning and development. All three settings cater for children between two and four years old. The settings are inclusive and cater for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Practitioners are all Level 3 qualified practitioners or above and are all female aged between twenty-three and fifty. All three settings have good Ofsted judgements.

All three settings plan and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2007) in the same way and I have worked closely with the team to implement this. Short term planning is based upon children's interests on a weekly basis and practitioners, children and parents contribute to 'possible lines of development'. Planning meetings take place weekly and although these are brief, staff come prepared and one member of the team is given time to document the planning in more detail. All children have an individual learning journey which documents their learning in relation to age related development bands in the EYFS. Achievements are documented using anecdotal observations, half-termly long observations, photographs and examples of children's work such as mark-making and artwork are included. Parents are invited to add to these and share information from home. Practitioners' have two hours per week Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time which allows them to update children's Learning Journeys and complete reports. Part of my role is to monitor the learning journeys and have feedback

discussion meetings with staff. For some time, I have been aware and concerned that practitioners in the setting have increasing control over the learning journeys and that the children's role in the documentation of their learning and self-assessment is minimal. Through this research study I want to re-address the balance away from practitioners and allow the child's voice to be heard through their learning journeys. I began to question the purpose of the learning journeys and questioned if I had instigated and approved this practice. In my view, I always encouraged practitioners to involve children in this process so I wondered what was hindering this participatory approach. To find out I decided to explore practitioner perspectives of children and childhood and find out if this was impacting on the extent to which children's voices were heard and represented in their learning journeys.

Methodology

The research methodology that I am adopting is mainly qualitative and naturalistic in nature because the research is being undertaken in a setting where the 'study is proposed' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.39). I used an ethnographic paradigm which has supported my research proposal of understanding the social cultural environment of the early year's team in the Children's Centre, and how the early year's practitioners view 'children' and 'childhood'. Robson (2011, p. 144) describes an ethnographer's task as 'to learn about that culture, effectively to understand their world as they do'.

Therefore in my role as researcher I endeavoured to provide a thick description which 'is faithful to the world view of the participants' (McNeil & Chapman, 2005, p.118). One of the main advantages of ethnographic research for me is the 'focus on processes and relationships' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 90) however, I am acutely aware of the tensions in this. In order to make this approach robust I need to be aware that my inside knowledge as a practitioner researcher, although a real strength in this approach, may also obscure 'a vision of the obvious' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 91). Additionally, there is a concern about how much of the description of the participants' viewpoints is influenced by the researcher's 'interpretation of events' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 86). I tried to remain conscious of this during the research process in order to address this issue.

I chose to adopt a qualitative research approach as I felt that this would be the most suitable method of collecting data for a small scale social survey. The survey is exploratory and descriptive by nature and reflects the feelings and attitudes of the participants. A sample of eleven early years practitioners, within the Children's Centre has produce a significant response to my research. This has also provided me with a view of how the practitioners perceive 'children', 'childhood' and the place of the child's voice in their practice of documenting their learning.

I felt that the traditional criterion of 'validity', 'reliability', 'generalisability' and 'objectivity' to determine the 'trustworthiness' of research did not easily relate

to the qualitative research proposed here (Denscombe, 2010, p. 298). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 42) suggest 'credibility', transferability', dependability' and 'confirmability' as alternatives. Robson (2011, p. 155) highlights that their attempt to redefine traditional terms adds weight to the argument that qualitative research is 'unreliable'. However, I believe that the nature of my research would make it difficult for another researcher to duplicate this study in an identical manner if I were to use these traditional methods.

Conducting member checks is a 'crucial technique in establishing 'credibility' (Lincoln & Guba, p.314) and also helped to keep my role 'honest' (Lincoln & Guba, p. 208). Using member checking to review my analysis of the data helped to ensure that I had captured a true reflection of participants' views. At first I questioned my close relationship with the setting however, an important tenet of 'credibility' and 'confirmability' is the development of 'cooperative and interacting relationships' (Lincoln & Guba, p.105). This again confirms the strength of my role as practitioner researcher. Other techniques include the writing of a reflective journal throughout the process and being systematic in my approach towards data collection and analysis which will act as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, p.319). Triangulation of the data, also gives weight to establishing confirmability. Triangulation occurs when more than one data source is used and they are validated against each other (Lincoln & Guba, p.283). Therefore, the findings from my research are discussed with reference to the data from the varied sources.

'Transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, p. 316) is provided in the 'thick description' of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, p.219) whereby others can make an informed decision on the suitability of the research being transferable. Dependability is achieved where the researcher's decisions and 'methodological shifts' (Lincoln & Guba, p.324) are made explicit and bias is reviewed to determine the degree to which there has been a reliance upon predetermined theories.

Denscombe (2010, p.303) states that 'the analysis of qualitative data calls for a reflexive account by the researcher concerning the researchers self and the impact on the research.' Therefore, I have endeavoured to be open and honest about my values and beliefs and how these are impacting throughout the research process by drawing upon my reflections in my journal.

Methods

For my research I decided to use a 'layered' (Denscombe, 2010, p.91) approach using the following methods to gather my data and I feel these would build upon each other to allow me to gain a deeper understanding of the present situation. I believe that by examining practitioners' perspectives in this way my research is more rigorous and robust.

Literature Review

The literature review supported me to contextualise my research within the research and theories which have been carried out previously. Before commencing a literature search I identified sub questions from my research aim and identified several key words in order to keep my search focussed (Keeble & Kirk, 2007, p.70). I gathered relevant literature for the review by: conducting database searches using strategic search terms (definitions in literature review); by locating sources included in earlier reviews; and searching for core texts by title or author credibility or knowledge of their being a main contributor in the field. I also identified parameters for my search to help with my focus (Keeble & Kirk, 2007, p. 73) (Appendix 7).

I tried to assess the quality, credibility and trustworthiness of the material in order to develop an academic rigor to my work. To do this I established author credentials and the academic institution to which they are affiliated. Consideration was also given to the methodology used and peer evaluation. I was systematic in my organisation of material by making accurate notes, keeping an on-going record of references and by filing material under themed sub-headings: constructs of childhood; child' voice and participation; assessment and relevant theories.

A Likert Scale Survey

I felt that an inventory would be the quickest and easiest way (Robson, 2011) to elicit the information about practitioner's perceptions of the children and childhood and place of the child's voice in documenting their learning. This approach also allowed me to compare the different perceptions of the participants and provided me with 'a greater degree of discrimination' (Bell, J. 2002, p.229). I decided to put my statements relating to these into the form of a Likert scale in order to measure respondents' attitudes. I used a standard five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a neutral point neither agree nor disagree. A series of statements related to my research topic were placed the left hand column so that practitioners could express the extent to which they agree with them (Appendix 8 &9).

There are, however, some issues to consider in using this method of data gathering. I was interested in Robson's (2011, p. 303) discussion about measurement scales with reference to attitude. He observes that attitude is a 'slippery' term and highlights the problem that 'it is not possible to assess something like attitude by means of a single questionnaire.' However, he goes on to say that using a set of ten to twenty statements provides a way of 'triangulation; the responses to each gives something of a 'marker' on the respondent's attitude.

Another concern highlighted by Robson (2011, p.311) is that likert scales 'may introduce an acquiescence bias' (i.e. a tendency to agree with

statements). He suggests that statements should reflect a negative and positive position as a way of reducing this (Robson, 2011, p.304). Another consideration is the formation of statements to use. Robson (2011, p.254) suggests that these need to be carefully thought through so that they are 'understandable and unambiguous' to the participant. This is my main concern however; I understand the importance of piloting the likert scale in order to 'weed out inappropriate, poorly worded or irrelevant items' (Fogelman, K. & Comber, C. 2002, p.130). (Appendix 8 & 9)

Robson (2001, p.419) also says that data analysis falls into two categories namely exploratory which 'explores the data trying to find out what they tell you' and confirmatory which 'seeks to establish whether you have actually got what you expected to find.' In my research the Likert scale will be exploratory; the statements will not assume a positive or negative tone. On the other hand, the documentary analysis and the focus group may contain elements of both.

Documentary Analysis

I analysed a sample of ten Learning Journeys (a form of pedagogical documentation) and looked for examples of children's voices to determine how children's voices are heard and recorded at this moment in time. Krippendorff (2004, p.18) states that this is an 'unobtrusive measure' and is 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use.' (Appendix 12 & 13)

Reliability and validity appear to be the central concerns with the use of this method. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 277) maintain that these concerns are 'not serious' in their view 'documents are a 'rich source of information' and 'contextually relevant'. It is important to understand the purpose of the document and its relevance to the research question. The purpose of the document is important when interpreting the results of analysis as well as its relevance and the truth of recordings. Concerns about this method can be eased if it used as part of the method of triangulation (Robson, 2011, p.375).

Scott (1990) suggests that documents could be assessed according to four criteria:

- 'Authenticity' (Knowing the reliability of the authors)
- 'Credibility' (accuracy of records)
- 'Representativeness' (availability of documents)
- 'meaning' (need to understand the meaning of key phrases abbreviations)

For the purposes of this research the issues can be addressed as I work closely with the nursery team, I regularly review the documentation which is readily accessible to me in my role and I am familiar with the terminology within the documents. I believe my role as practitioner researcher is a strength when analysing this data.

When looking for examples of the child's voice in the Learning Journeys I felt that an initial coding system would help me to develop categories that could then be used to 'build the analysis' (Charmez, 2006, p.45). I kept in mind Fitzgerald's (2007, p.292) advice that 'collecting, collating and analysing data in documentary research is an iterative process that requires checking, re-checking and refining key themes, concepts or ideas.'

Focus Group

The focus group consisted of six early year's practitioners. Conducting a focus group enabled me to clarify attitudes and ideas emerging from the initial survey at a complementary and deeper level. My experience of a previous focus group is that participants are able to build on one another's responses and come up with ideas they might not have thought of in a 1-on-1 interview. I felt that a focus group led by myself as facilitator would encourage colleagues to be more open and honest in their response (Ribbens, P. 2002).

In order to develop my research skills I decided to use a recorder to clarify uncertainties which appeared when I analysed the group notes. This allowed me to give my 'full attention' to the group and provided me with 'detailed data' (Charmez, 2006, p.32). A clip log was then used as a means of organising the recordings into manageable sections. Each section was logged and coded according to: the participant who spoke on the clip; the time counter for the beginning and end of the clip; the subject under discussion and the categories

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for themes which were added at a later stage as emerging from the data.
(Appendix 16)

Although the participants are familiar with each other, I was aware, whilst planning the focus group meeting that I could not take their usual good working relationships for granted. With that in mind I drew upon Tuckman's (1965) forming stage which is 'characterised by talk about the purpose of the group'. Reflecting upon this supported me in making a final decision on the structure for the meeting.

I felt that a thematic coding approach (Robson, 2011; Charmez, 2006) where all parts of data were coded, labelled and themes identified and grouped together would fit in well with the data provided from a focus group. Thematic coding helped me to report on both the 'experiences, meanings and the reality of participants' and how these 'are effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (Robson, 2011, p.474).

Data Analysis

For me, one of the main things I needed to consider through the research process was to keep a clear 'open mind' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 303) and not to let my prejudgements cloud my analysis and interpretation of the data. I have a natural tendency to want to be fully informed and have answers for the majority of situations which could arise. I do not like surprises! With this in mind I gave some serious thought to the way I approached my analysis and

interpretation of my research data. This is a view echoed by Robson (2011, p. 468) who says researchers need to be aware of the 'deficiencies of the human analyst' in focussing on 'first impressions' and 'positive instances'.

I started the process of data analysis in the early stages of the research project because as Robson (2011, p. 408) states 'messages stay hidden and need careful teasing out'. Watling & James (2007, p.351) agree that 'this is a key recognition, that analysis pervades each and every aspect of qualitative inquiry'.

I also carried out the analysis of the data by organising the gathered information in a 'systematic' and 'professional fashion' (Robson, 2011, p. 407) for example, documenting such evidence as source, date, time, place and possible themes. Robson goes on to suggest that 'Ideas will always come but they can very easily go and be lost, unless you note them down.'

When analysing the data I used both predetermined codes and codes emerging from the data. I also related these themes to key concepts identified in the literature. In this way I felt I captured the voices of the participants as well as at the same time being academically rigorous. This also supported the 'transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.316) of my research.

Ethics

Ethical considerations are of crucial importance in any research (Robson, 2011; Busher & James, 2007). The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) provides a set of ethical guidelines for use by educational researchers. I identified several which had particular relevance to my research. I highlighted each point in turn and outlined how I intended to tackle the ethical issues in my research (Appendix 3).

In summary, I have given a detailed rationale for my research which was qualitative in nature and followed an ethnographic paradigm. I have outlined the methods I used to collect the data and analyse the findings. In addition, I have offered a detailed account of the ethical considerations. The next chapter will identify the main findings from the research and present them under the themes which I identified.

Chapter 3

Analysis of the Findings

Research Aim:

Exploring early years practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

Objectives:

- To identify constructs about children and childhood, the socio cultural view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder a participatory approach with children.
- To Implement a research project and explore the empirical data to ascertain the values and belief systems regarding children and childhood and the extent to which children have a participatory role in the documentation of their learning.
- Formulate recommendations for future early years practice and further study.

In this section, I will firstly explain how I analysed the data. Then I will present the findings through a description of the themes emerging from the three data sources; the survey, the Learning Journey documents and the Focus group interview. My analysis of the data identified four themes: there are a variety of views of children and childhood; there is a strong ethos of the importance of relationships; Children are valued, respected and listened to and the extent to which children's voices are included in the assessment documentation (Learning Journeys). I will show how I used these themes in order to analyse and build up a picture of the early years practitioners' perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning by cross referencing the data under these themes. I will also make reference to the relevant

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literature throughout the section in order to give an external perspective to my research. In my opinion this approach will strengthen my claim in terms of credibility and triangulation.

How I analysed the data

The Survey

Initially, I was feeling apprehensive about beginning the data analysis of the survey (Appendix 10). Previous experience had left me feeling a bit out of my depth and revisiting a similar task was not something I was relishing. In fact, the process took a few weeks of revisiting the data, reading, re-reading and noticing patterns and themes which were emerging until I felt immersed in the data and had a grasp of what it was telling me:

‘I want to make sure I get a feel for everything first before trying to make sense of it-this will stop me from making judgements about the responses’ (Goldberg, G. 03.04. 2012)

I approached the data by tallying the responses in what Robson (2001, p.416) calls ‘single-transfer coding’ onto a blank questionnaire ‘to enable me to see the frequency of the responses to each statement’ (Appendix 10). The temptation to start analysing before I had completed by systematically recorded the results was strong, however, I remained disciplined in my approach. I found this to be easy and straightforward once I kept myself in check.

I then looked at the responses for each statement in turn and wrote initial memos to record my thoughts and reflections. I did this on more than one occasion in order to 'build up a picture' (Robson, 2011, p.174) and then I began to analyse the responses in more detail.

Then I read individual respondents' comments (Appendix 11) several times and made memos under each one making reference to the responses to each statement. I then identified key words or themes which occurred in the margin and in different created a colour code for easier identification of the themes.

Documents: Learning Journeys

I randomly chose one learning journey from each respondent in the questionnaire and made notes against each one according to set criteria on a pre-prepared pro-forma (Appendix 12). As the amount of data available was large, I decided to base my documentary analysis on the period between January to March 2012 (the spring term 2012). I purposefully and ethically did not link each document to the number I gave each respondent on the survey. However, when analysing the documentary evidence I wondered if I had made a mistake and agonised over this for some while:

'I've realised that what I want to do is to build up a picture of the settings views as a whole not individual practitioners. I feel that the

respondents' anonymity may be jeopardised if I take this approach.'

(Goldberg, G. 05.04.2012)

I followed the pre-set criterion I had decided upon and I indicated the occurrence of these for each document on the pre-prepared data analysis pro-forma. When this was completed I went through the data from each document analysing the evidence several times under each criteria. I annotated the completed pro-forma and then highlighted the themes which emerged. Following this I also added two other emergent criteria - 'context' (putting the observations of children in context of the environment, location and who else was involved) and children's' work. Finally, I looked through the data for each document several times to look for any other evidence and emerging patterns which I may have missed.

Focus Group

The focus group gave me the opportunity to 'amplify and understand' (Robson, 2011, p.296) the issues emerging from the survey and the document analysis. I concentrated on the variety of views respondents hold about children's capabilities, the current place of the child's involvement and contribution in the assessment of their learning and whether our views of children and childhood have an impact on the way we interact with the children in our settings. Six practitioners attended the Focus group. To start I reminded the participants of my research focus and I shared some initial findings (Appendix 15). Initially I had troubled over whether I should share findings but on deeper reflection I felt

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this would allow me to complete 'member checks', (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.314).

I recorded the meeting and afterwards used a clip clog to document the conversations (Appendix 16). I soon realised that I had a lot of information and I knew I would need to narrow down which components were more directly related to my research question. Comparing the data from the three sources I was able to develop a 'focus code' (Charmez, 2006, p.59). Consequently, I was able to identify the four themes emerging from the data.

The following sections discuss the findings under the themes I identified from the data analysis. I believe that this approach will highlight the 'layered' (Denscombe, 2010, p.91) nature of the study and strengthen the claim to triangulation and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.42)

There are a variety of views about children and childhood

The first half of the survey was specifically related to the respondent's perceptions of children and childhood (Appendix 9 section 1). I was surprised at the range of views expressed so I looked for areas of commonality first. The majority (eight or more) of respondents 'feel' that 'Children are dependent and vulnerable' and that 'Childhood is preparation for adult life'.

This immediately raised a question for me regarding practitioners' perceptions of children as vulnerable and I wondered if this was the starting point for their interactions with children or were there other underlying reasons. The literature indicated that the dominant postmodern view is that 'childhood is a

social construction' and that children are 'active social beings' in their own lives (James & Prout 1997, p.29). On the surface, the main view in the settings based on the above responses, appears that children are perceived as dependent and vulnerable and in need of adult intervention. However, there were inconsistencies very apparent in the very mixed responses to the following three statements in the survey which indicate that this is a complex issue with many variables:

- Children are experts in their own lives
- Children are autonomous, competent and consistent individuals
- Children are 'empty vessels' and the adult role is to fill them with knowledge and skills

These mixed response demonstrates that there are many constructs of childhood existing in the settings because of each practitioners 'unique social and cultural lens' (Lancaster, 2010, p.85) through which they view the world and everyday experiences. The analysis of where practitioners' perceptions about children and childhood stem from (Appendix 11 section 2) appeared to confirm this view. Nine respondents mentioned their own childhood specifically. One respondent (Appendix 11 2P.1) reflected deeply upon the negative impact of her early year's education in a religious setting: 'This experience (over 40 years ago) has indelibly imprinted itself on my psyche-revealing the potential of early years experiences to become the individual, for better or worse.' She quoted the Jesuit saying 'Show me the boy of seven and

I will show you the man'. Deep reflection on her experiences has led her to think in different way and highlights that negative experiences in childhood can be powerful and influence the way we provide opportunities and activities for children in the future through reflection. This resonates with Friere's (1970 p.68) concept of 'praxis' which suggests 'reflection and action' upon the world can lead to transformation.

Three respondents specifically mentioned that raising children and being a parent have influenced their views. Furthermore, education, professional training and learning through experience appeared to have had an impact on practitioners' views and have altered how they perceive things. Another said:

'I believe that we are all individual people with our own interests and ways of thinking. However, regardless of which culture, religion or belief we grow up with we all develop our own ways of thinking and understanding children or childhood. In some areas our thinking and practice might reflect our cultural or personal experiences but our own practical work is based around individual children's learning, interest and ability.'

This suggested that educational training and knowledge of early years theory combined with the experience of working in educational settings can challenge our view of children and childhood.

Analysis of the learning journeys also demonstrated that practitioners' perceptions about children and childhood were mixed. On the one hand, the

data suggested that children are competent; there is a celebration of children's achievements and recorded observations are positive and highlight children's strengths and their interests. On the other hand, children could be viewed as vulnerable and dependent because the learning journeys are evidently the main responsibility of the adult.

At the focus group I shared the wide ranging views about children's capabilities expressed in the survey (Appendix 15). There was a belief from the large majority of participants that children are perceived as 'vulnerable' when they start at a setting. Practitioners agreed and made reference to children at the settings who have child protection plans or are have a 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF) (CWDC, 2009) in place. This is certainly a major part of the practitioner role within the Children's Centre and safeguarding is a high priority within everyday working practices. Therefore, when answering statements on the survey it appeared that dependence and vulnerability are viewed in different contexts and there are times when practitioners feel children are more dependent and vulnerable than others.

To extend this thinking, I questioned the group as to whether children can be 'dependent and vulnerable' at the same time as being 'autonomous, competent and consistent' and 'experts in their own lives'. There was a surprised response from one practitioner: 'that's true.' All practitioners agreed. Competence was viewed as something children achieved once they had 'settled in' as 'children become more 'self-assured' because they attend every

day.’ There was a belief that ‘some children know what they want and some children need guiding’. One practitioner said: ‘when we see children as vulnerable and dependent we’re not necessarily thinking they are vulnerable and dependent they’re not totally, we are thinking about their age and development and different stages in their life.’ This suggested that in practice practitioners perceive children to be both competent and dependent at the same time because ‘in real life’ practitioners experience “‘both and’ children instead of ‘either or children’” (Kallialla, 2011, p. 239).

There is then a sense that practitioners believe that the spectrum which these statements about perceptions of children and childhood exist are not clear cut. There are situations and contexts where children’s vulnerability, dependence, autonomy, competency and consistency are on a sliding scale. Moreover, there is a perception that there are other influences involved such as age, stage of development, the environment and the quality of relationships which impact upon this. One practitioner summed it up: It’s too ‘hard to generalise with these statements’. The analysis suggested that there is a range of views about perceptions of children depending on the situation and context and not solely based on practitioner’s individual perceptions of children’s capabilities.

To help me reflect further on this I wondered if the Focus group discussion could help the Early Year’s team reflect on their views of children and childhood. All practitioners agreed that ‘our practice is similar so we must be

doing something right' and that 'Individual opinions will always be different; it's like learning from each other.' This suggested that practitioners have an awareness of 'the ability to recognise one's own value position and assess competing perspectives and their potential impact is necessary for rational decision making' (Robins & Callan, 2009, p. 17).

I then asked whether a common ethos about how we view children was needed as starting point for interactions and particularly a more participatory approach whereby children's voices are include in the learning journeys. The consensus of opinion was that children can't be generalised as they are individuals and at different developmental stages therefore a 'one size fits all' statement would be limiting. The literature has shown mixed views. Kallialla's (2011, p.240) view is that "it's not enough to construct a generalised image of the child.' Practitioners at this setting appear to identify with her emphasis on the importance of the individual child. I identified more with Bruce (1987, p.3) who argues that 'until we are clear about the stance from which we view children, we cannot begin to work with them...our assumptions about the child are crucial in influencing our practice.' Waller (2009, p.11) agrees and goes further to emphasises 'the need to continually reflect upon this.'

During the focus group practitioners agreed that the differing views of children and childhood which exist in the settings and our own individual upbringing all contribute to a healthy working relationship in that different opinions help us to learn from each other. In fact, the opportunity to meet at the Focus group

gave practitioners the time to reflect and they suggested having more times to meet and discuss as they believed it would impact and improve practice. One practitioner mentioned that time would be a barrier to this. The literature drew attention to this and other barriers however, Carr (2011, p.268) emphasised the importance to 'sustain the effort of having conversations in a busy early childhood setting.'

There is a strong ethos of the importance of relationships

Within the data there was consensus with five statements out of ten (Appendix 10). Three of which are related to this emergent theme of the importance of relationships:

- Social interaction is of crucial importance for children's learning and development.
- Children and adults can learn from each other.
- Children can influence my own understanding of teaching and learning.
- I listen to children and act upon their views.
- I regularly support children to be active participants in their own lives.

The comments made by the practitioners at the end of the survey supported these initial responses (Appendix 11 section 1). Six out of ten specifically mentioned the importance of relationships for children's learning. Five

mentioned the importance of the adult and the key person relationship in order to support children's learning and development: 'Children have key workers to enhance and develop their individual needs.' Another went further and explained 'The key principle in allowing and encouraging children to be active participants in their own learning and development is a strong relationship between the setting, key person of the child and parent.'

These comments strengthen the responses to the survey and are a further indication that there appeared to be a strong ethos of the importance of relationships especially between the practitioner and child. This reflects the EYFS (2007) theme 'positive relationships' which underlies the practice within the settings. However, there appears to be an emphasis on the key person as the main facilitator. The EYFS (2007, card 2.4) describes a 'key person' as having 'special responsibilities for working with a small number of children' helping them to feel safe and cared for and meeting the needs of individual children and responding 'sensitively to their feelings, ideas and behaviour.' In the documentation, this approach is emphasised in that each 'key person' is responsible for the documentation of children's development and progress in their key group.

The practitioners appear to identify with the work of Vygotsky (1978), as they value the importance of social interaction as a means of enhancing child development. It appears that they believe in the importance of reciprocal relationships in order to learn from each other, which Carr (2001, p.16) believes 'are pivotal to the first messages about the self as learner that

children receive' and is at the heart of the Te Whariki curriculum in New Zealand. The literature highlighted the importance of reciprocal relationships for learning. Janzen (2008, p.291) believes that children should be 'seen as meaning makers within their lives through their relationships with others' and similarly Berthelsen et al (2009, p.6) state that 'through reciprocity individuals (children and adults) jointly construct knowledge.'

The Focus group provided the opportunity to discuss the tension existing between the responses to the statements: 'Children are 'empty vessels' and the adult role is to fill them with knowledge and skills' and 'My role is to identify children's missing experiences and skills and then plan to fill these gaps in children's learning' where the majority of respondents agreed. Mixed views were expressed about the former; whilst the majority agreed with the later (Appendix 10 S6 and S11).

Some practitioners felt that children were not born with skills but through a relationship they could develop them. Other participants felt that this view was 'too harsh' because as 'soon as they're (children) born they constantly start to learn but you need the relationship' which reflects James and Prout's (1997, p.8) paradigm of childhood as 'a social construction' where children are seen as 'active' participants in their own and in others' lives. All participants agreed, however, that it was the adult role to provide children with new experiences and opportunities. Another said 'If we just left them how would they get any

skills.’ There was a strong emphasis through the discussion of the importance of relationships for children to be able to learn and ‘acquire skills’.

There was also agreement that the learning environment provided and the relationship with a key person was key to supporting children’s growing competence as they ‘settled in’. Dunne (2006, p. 15) believes that ‘young children are vulnerable and therefore dependent’ but he affirms that this does not negate a deficit view of childhood but points out the ‘human dependency’ which is part of all our lives. Certainly Christensen & James (2006) and Lancaster (2010, p 90) call for ‘the thinking that understands children as both ‘social beings’ and as ‘social becomings’ which ‘provides a more inclusive and more comprehensive description of their daily lives.’ Whilst seeking clarity about how can children be viewed as dependent and vulnerable but also autonomous and competent at the same time practitioners agreed that children do learn from each other as one practitioner clarified: ‘it’s human nature we learn from each other, adults can influence children’s development, children can influence each other’s development but they can influence our way of thinking and how we can contribute to development by looking at their interests and needs. All participants agreed that they do learn from children when we plan from their interests. This confirmed findings from the survey and learning journeys regarding the importance of relationships and planning from children’s interests.

Presentation of the Findings

Children are valued, respected and listened to as individuals

Under the section of the survey titled Early Years Practice (Appendix 10 section 2) there was strong agreement with five out of ten statements (as outlined in the previous section).

These agreed responses gave me an initial flavour of what practitioners perceive about their practice with children. Children appear to be valued, respected and listened to as individuals and practice appears to reflect Rinaldi's (2006, p. 64) 'pedagogy of listening'. Five out of ten practitioners highlighted the importance of listening in the comments section of the survey (Appendix 11 section 1):

- 'Talk to them, explain and listen to views...this could be verbal and non-verbal'.
- 'We have many processes to relate to children'.
- 'Children must be seen and heard'
- 'Each child is an individual and shouldn't be compared with another as each need is different.'

It is suggested here that voice is not solely by way of verbal communication. This resonates with Clark and Moss (2011, p.7) who recognise 'the different 'voices' or languages of children' in their framework for listening where

children can 'speak to adults through their play, their actions and reactions'.

The analysis of the documentary evidence showed that children's speech and communication including gesture and non-verbal communication was recorded in 8/10 learning journeys. This appears to back up findings from the survey: that practitioners value what children say and place importance on relationships. These findings suggest that practitioners prescribe to a 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.65) and are 'tuned in' (Lancaster, 2006, p.4) to the many ways children communicate. Documenting children's perspectives in the ways illustrated (Appendix 14) that children's voices are valued.

During the Focus group discussion about the possibility of creating a setting ethos, practitioners showed respect for individual children in arguing against a generalise one fit suits all way of thinking and working. Respect is also shown through the planning based on children's needs and interests and the choices children make as 'part of everyday practice'. (Appendix 16)

The extent to which Children's voices are included in documenting their learning

Views from the survey concerning assessment were also mixed. For me this was noteworthy because it led me to reflect back to my original purpose for this research. I was concerned that practitioners were the main drivers of the Learning Journeys and that an over-emphasis on outcomes for children in relation to EYFS development bands (EYFS, 2007) was hindering a participatory approach with children in the documentation of their learning.

However, the survey also indicated that there was strong agreement to the statements that 'children are capable of assessing their own learning' and that practitioners 'regularly include children's voices and views in the assessment of their learning.' (Appendix 10 S7, S15)

Although there were mixed responses to 'assessments should only be based on practitioner observations and knowledge of child development', the majority of practitioners perceive that 'the main purpose of learning journeys is to map out individual children's learning in relation to EYFS Development Bands' and that their role is to identify children's missing skills and then plan to fill these gaps in children's learning' (Appendix 10 S8, S17, S11). For me, these statements have connotations of 'teacher knows best' and what Carr (2001, p. 11) calls the 'deficit' model of assessment. However, in my teacher role at the Centre, I know and see the evidence that planning is based upon children's interests but there appears to be strong evidence to suggest that practitioners perceive their role is to fill in the gaps which again for me has connotations of the 'deficit' model of assessment. The learning journeys (Appendix 13) also suggest that the children appear to have limited participation, so would suggest that assessment is the domain of practitioner. This resonates with Lancaster (2010) who claims that adults are often in the position of power when deciding what to understand from children's understandings. It was however, clear that the next steps for children's learning documented in the Learning Journeys build on children's strengths, not on what a child cannot do. The comment section of the survey shed some

more light on this. The majority of respondents agreed that children should be involved in the assessment of their learning as indicated by the respondent's comments in the survey (Appendix 10 Comments section 1).

During the Focus group (Appendix 16) one practitioner said that children's involvement in assessment and planning 'happens already e.g. developing the role play area stems from ideas, actions and a voice'. Others felt that 'children can only learn knowledge and skills if their interests, likes and dislikes are included in planning and teaching. Another commented that 'practitioners can ask open-ended questions at the end of each activity/work created by child to understand how they view their own work'.

These comments suggest that children assess their work during activities either by self-assessing or by the adult acting as a facilitator 'encouraging' and 'asking questions,' thereby supporting children to 'become aware of themselves as conscious learners,' so that 'conscious self-assessment' can be developed (Glazzard & Percival, 2010, p.11). This also supports the theme of relationships already identified above.

I wondered how these views were demonstrated in practice. I referred to the documentary evidence and began by highlighting occurrences of the child's voice. This showed that there were many examples of children's voice in the simplest form, in that their words and phrases were included, however, it was not apparent that children were actively involved in the process. Yet, the more I revisited the data the more I realised that there was more hidden below the

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surface than I had originally thought. Although I noted down instances where a child's speech was recorded, I decided to look a bit deeper and record the type of communication documented:

'This is an amazing experience. It seems that each time I read or revisit the data I am peeling off another layer of the puzzle in order to gain a deeper understanding of what might be going on-It's exciting! It's like looking for hidden treasure. I got a real surprise from this and it lifted my spirits at a time when I was feeling stuck and worrying about the quality and quantity of my data.' (Goldberg, G. 21. 4. 2012)

When I noted all the instances of communication as evidence of the child's voice and categorised them the results were insightful and I found this exercise helped me to discover evidence I had previously missed (Appendix 14). This appeared to also back up findings from the survey: that practitioners do value what children say and place importance on relationships. This reflects Rinaldi's (2006, p.85) belief that 'the central focus' of pedagogical documentation 'is on the relationship between the children and adults.'

The main evidence which demonstrates that children are involved in the assessment of their own learning is as follows:

- Talking to self while reading and involved in role play: This has connotations of Vygotsy's hypothesis that 'private speech reflects children's potential for self-direction, to plan, guide and monitor their own goal-directed activity.' (Stanley, 2011, p.16)
- Conversation with peers during role play: This resonates with Bruce (1987, p.17) who believes 'through play, children can actively manipulate, rearrange, act on and reflect on their learning.'
- All the documentation had evidence of children interacting with others .In one example two children were supporting each other as they worked together to solve the problem of manoeuvring a car which was stuck demonstrating that 'mean making'(Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p.145) is made through interactions which others is recognised and valued.
- Non-verbal communication: It appears that practitioners recognise that adults can learn much from children and their perspectives about their learning by observing their 'voice' through their 'intonation, gaze, gesture and posture' (Kupfer, 2011).
- Children's comments on what they can do are recorded by practitioners. This suggests that children's own assessment of their learning is valued.

There appears to be a strong element of knowledge and skills in the Learning Journeys. For example, children's knowledge of shape, number and colour is recorded which picks up findings from the survey where there appeared to be a focus on development bands and outcomes. This could indicate that the process of children's learning is not recorded or given as much prominence as respondents perceive.

There was little direct evidence to suggest that children have an input in to their learning journeys which was alluded to in the survey. I noted examples of children's work in half of the learning journeys but it was unclear who had chosen to include them. It could be possible that children are given the opportunity to reflect on learning journey but the conversation is rarely recorded or not visible. Whereas, Rinaldi (2006, p.63) sees documentation 'as a possibility for reflection and 'the search for meaning.'

The survey showed that practitioners perceive that they regularly include children's voices and views in the assessment of children's learning. However, the documentary analysis did not directly back this up; there was evidence in two out of ten learning journeys of practitioners reflecting with children. Therefore, during the focus group I wanted to find out what else was going on a daily basis.

The strong relationship in the team was evident, they were concerned at this finding and began to constructively consider their practice: 'Some of the evidence is in the planning', 'is there more focus on photos than recording observations?' and 'obviously it's something we need to look at because we

think we're all doing it but maybe we're not doing it enough'. Practitioners were keen to highlight possibilities where children's voice occurred in practice.

Choices and planning according to children's interests were identified as ways in which children participate in their learning. There was a majority view that children make choices as 'part of our everyday practice', Lancaster (2006, p.8) identifies providing choice as a means for children to 'express their perspectives.' It was also acknowledged that staff change planned activities in accordance with children's interests: 'we work with them whatever they choose rather than enforcing what has been planned'. A view endorsed by Rinaldi (2006, p.10) where practitioners base their teaching 'not on what she wants to teach but on what the child wants to learn' and whereby the practitioner and child 'search together for the best ways to proceed.' This also links back to the theme of relationships discussed above. Other ways children were included in the assessment of their learning were through displays which can be 'a focal point for ...daily communication, reflection, memory and interaction' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.57). Circle Time was also highlighted as a 'tool for self-assessment' (Chadwick & Webster, 2010, p. 93) where practitioners' ask 'what have you enjoyed this week? Or What would you like to do next week?' Additionally, practitioners' identified time constraints, an over reliance on recording and observations rather than interacting with children, and minimum child: adult ratios, as barriers to involving children fully in the self-assessment (Appendix 16).

Conclusion to findings

The main findings emerging from the data are that: There are a variety of views about children and childhood however, it was agreed that children can be vulnerable, dependent, autonomous and capable at the same time depending on the context, relationships and the environment. Children's age and stage of development is also seen as an influence within this. The variety of views stemmed from practitioners' own experiences of their upbringing, raising a family, professional training and experience of working in the early years field. Some practitioners had reflected deeply on their childhood experiences and it appears that they have transformed the world for others through their reflection and action (Friere, 1970). There is also a strong ethos of the importance of relationships with a strong belief that each child is an individual and that learning takes place within reciprocal relationships. Children are valued, respected and listened to, and the extent to which children's voices are included in the assessment process. The findings indicate that although there are some elements of the traditional view of assessments the settings have and are moving towards a more socio-cultural approach. There was agreement that the differing views of children and childhood and our upbringing all contribute to healthy working relationships, in these different opinions help us to learn from each other. In addition, practitioners were able to reflect upon their practice and the dominant discourses outlined in the survey. This notion of reflection has and continues

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to be a golden thread weaving through the study. The next chapter draws together all the elements of the study in the conclusion.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Research Aim:

Exploring early years practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

Objectives:

- To identify constructs about children and childhood, the socio cultural view of assessment and the barriers which may hinder a participatory approach with children.
- To Implement a research project and explore the empirical data to ascertain the values and belief systems regarding children and childhood and the extent to which children have a participatory role in the documentation of their learning.
- Formulate recommendations for future early years practice and further study.

In the conclusion, I will summarise my findings linked to the objectives above and make a personal assessment of the field work which I undertook. I will also make reference to the literature which has informed my research, and reflect upon my learning throughout the research process.

Summary of findings

The purpose of this research was to explore early year's practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in the assessment of their own learning. It was prompted by a concern that assessments and the documentation of children's learning was primarily practitioner led. I also

wanted to find out to what extent the child's voice is heard and the extent of their participation in creating their learning journey. In addition, I wanted to use the study as a basis for deep reflection on current practice and to use the findings to begin a dialogue to support the early year's team to develop policy and practice.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

The Literature review highlighted that perceptions of children and a participatory approach to assessment is complex. The post-modern paradigm views children as 'active social beings' (James & Prout 1997, p.29) in their own lives and in order to grow and develop children need to be in a relationship with others (Vygotsky, 1978). The literature also demonstrated the changing nature of childhood throughout history and as a result there is a call for those in the early years field to continually reflect and use research in practice in order to continue learning about children and childhood. A 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.65) was advocated as another tool to support this approach. Building on the post-modern view of childhood a socio-cultural view of assessment promotes that children should be included in the assessment process and that they are capable of self-assessment (Carr, 2011). Pedagogical documentation, reciprocal relationships between children and adults, a pedagogy of listening and observations are seen as the main tools to facilitate this. How adults perceive children, adults' power of control and time constraints were highlighted as specific barriers to including children

in a more participatory approach in the assessment and documentation of their learning. Self-reflection by adults was identified as a golden thread weaving through the literature review, as it is seen as imperative if a more participatory with children where their voice could be heard.

Conclusions from the Findings

Through the empirical data four main themes emerged as result of the study: There are a variety of views about children and childhood; there is a strong ethos of the importance of relationships; children are valued, respected and listened to and the extent to which children's voices are included in the assessment documentation.

The responses to the survey showed that there are many constructs of the child existing in the setting. During the Focus group however, participants were able to discuss and reflect upon the variety of views expressed. The majority of practitioners' view children as 'vulnerable and dependent' and safeguarding policies and procedures appeared to impact upon this view. It appears that the high prominence of safeguarding within the Children's Centre policy and practice and the notion that children 'need safeguarding' is a very real one for the participants. Similarly, the changes to the revised EYFS (2012) derive from a number of serious case reviews and echoes participants' consciousness for safeguarding thereby impacting on the perception that children are 'vulnerable' (Kitzinger, 1997, p. 184).

On the other hand, there was also a realisation that practitioners completed the survey whilst reflecting in different contexts and with differing interpretations of the statements. Through the discussion during the Focus group it appears that children are perceived as both as both vulnerable and competent which correlates to the post-modern view that children are 'social becomings' (Lancaster, 2010, p. 89) and 'active social beings' (James & Prout, 1997, p.29).

There were also differing views about children being viewed as 'empty vessels' with some participants believing that children are 'empty' and they need an adult to give them the skills and experiences. Others perceived children being wired from birth to be an active participant and to start reciprocal relationships and express their needs.

There appears to be strong evidence, across the three sources of data, that practitioners perceive that they do 'fill' the child with knowledge and skills. However, the findings indicate that this is based to a high degree on children's interests rather than on the adults' terms. Moreover, it appears that the adults have a 'position of power' over this.

From the survey and the Focus group discussion there was a strong perception that children's 'voices' are included in the Learning Journeys. Practitioners believe that everyday practice displays, circle time, choices, observations, conversations with children demonstrate that they are involved in the assessment process. They also perceived that this would be evident in

the learning journeys. Practitioners perceive they involve children in practice, with the main emphasis being on observations as a means of listening to children and documenting their learning in relation to the development bands. In practice, the Learning Journeys appeared to reflect that adults were in control of the assessment process with some child involvement.

Deeper analysis of the learning journeys did show that children can and do contribute to the assessment of their learning however, this was implicit. I believe one of the reasons for this is the need for evidenced based assessment by national, local government. This has been intensified by the settings learning journeys and assessments being used to demonstrate good practice within the private sector. And similarly, in a recent Ofsted inspection where there was an interest in children's progress since entry with the focus on outcomes. In my opinion, there is a balance to achieve within this and it will take courage for the team to address and challenge dominant ideas about early childhood and develop a 'critical disposition' (Cannella, 2005, p.29) to support continuous reflection about these discourses and individual practitioner frames of reference.

All participants welcomed sharing views during the Focus group. Comments such as: 'it was interesting how we could all express our views'; 'it should happen more often' and 'practitioners views should be heard more often' demonstrate the practitioners openness and willingness to reflect on their practice. The literature (Harcourt, 2011; Lancaster, 2010 & Bae, 2009),

highlighted the necessity for self-reflection as a means of challenging practice and assumptions about children and childhood and in my view is crucial if a participatory approach to assessment is to be realised. It was pleasing that participants appeared honest in their conversations about their childhood and this demonstrated the 'authentic' relationship between the participants and me as researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 105). This relationship of 'trust' lends 'credibility' to my research (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 257).

The research has allowed 'the world appear anew through' my data (Charmez, 2006, p.14) and is a good starting point to begin to implement change to practice as a result. In my opinion, the practitioners are well placed to reflect more deeply and challenge their assumptions. The literature review identified tools to support those in the early years field in challenging their assumptions and 'habitus' (O'Connor, 2011, p.117). Firstly, the ability to self reflect (Lancaster, 2010; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Cannella, 2005); the research showed that practitioners in the study have been reflective and have requested further opportunities to reflect as a team in order to challenge and improve practice (Appendix 16). Secondly, listening well to children to understand what they are communicating without preconceived ideas (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). Again the research has shown that practitioners respect and value the many ways children communicate; through verbal and non-verbal means and choices. This ability to listen 'can challenge assumptions and raise expectations' Pascale and Bertram (2009, p. 254). Finally, subscribing to a socio-cultural method of assessment which

emphasises the importance of reciprocal relationships whereby children and adults learn and reflect together (Rinaldi, 2006; Carr, 2001). Although practitioners use learning journeys to record children's achievements and development bands the findings also demonstrated that there were elements of this approach implicit in the learning journeys.

Recommendations from the study

Recommendations from the research can be made at a local and wider level. This research is a first step in sharing complex notions about the settings perceptions about childhood, children and their inclusion in the assessment process and has potential for further development.

The first recommendation would be to give 'time' to allow settings to further reflect and explore children and childhood which would then impact on the way practitioners interact and involve children in a more participatory way. One of the outcomes from the Focus group suggests that the shared discourse allowed practitioners to deconstruct and reconstruct normative perceptions of children and childhood existing in the setting. More opportunities for reflection in the future could help the team 'to discover a more complex truth about the potential of children' (Nimmo, 1998, p. 310). This could have further implications for all aspects of children's and practitioners lives including the learning environment and behaviour. Talking and thinking about practice with colleagues can ensure that we do not fall into

the trap of thinking that there is one right way. If we accept that children's learning is influenced by their relationship with others, peers and adults, then we need to recognise our views impress on children, therefore there is a need to continually and critically reflect on our perceptions and practice (Bath, 2009). This could be achieved through team meetings by including a fixed 'reflection' agenda item whereby reflection on Learning Journeys and the current literature or research could be discussed.

A second recommendation is to develop a more participatory approach with children with regard to self-assessment and the documentation of their own learning. I recommend that there needs to be a shift from documenting children's learning outcomes in terms of the EYFS (2007) developments bands to include the 'processes' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.39) 'learning dispositions' (Carr, 2001, p.47) and 'characteristics of effective learning' (Early Education, 2012). Initially this socio-cultural approach to assessment can be achieved by practitioners using planning time to work together with children within a reciprocal relationship to document learning the learning journeys. However, there is an implication for training and support for practitioner's here to ensure confidence and consistency in the approach. Alongside training a continual reflection on the documentation as a 'self-assessment and self-evaluation' tool (Rinaldi, 2006, p.62) will facilitate practitioners' professional development in this area.

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A third recommendation is for practitioners to receive training about a 'listening culture' (ncb, 2011) if a more participatory approach to children's assessment is to be realised. The research emphasised listening as a means to challenge assumptions and involve the children in a more participatory way (Clark & Moss, 2011; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Lancaster, 2006). I suggest that through an exploration of 'the mosaic approach' (Clark & Moss, 2011) and the 'Listening as a way of life' materials produced by the National Children's Bureau (2011) the team will develop a more participatory approach to assessment and tools to enhance the developing culture of reflection.

A final recommendation would be to create a teaching and learning policy which reflects the rights of each child to have voice in the documentation of their learning, the ethos of self-reflection and which recognises the importance of a 'listening culture' (ncb, 2011) for this to be realised.

At a wider level this research has 'transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.124). I believe I have 'provided sufficient information about the context' and methodology I employed to carry out my research. In this way another researcher will be able to 'make a judgement' as to its relevance for their research.

To further this study, I believe that observations of practitioner interactions with children could be another method to employ which may shed more light on practice and how children are involved in the assessment process. This

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could highlight if and how practitioners encourage and support children's self-assessment of their learning.

Finally, I believe that a 360° view involving children, families, the wider staff team and partners would generate a better understanding of the perceptions of children and childhood in our community. This idea resonates with the concept of 'participation' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.175) where the wider community is involved in reflecting on the documentation of learning. In this way children's right to have a voice (UNCRC, 1989) can be realised in practice.

Personal Assessment of the Field Work

In this section I will draw attention to what was troublesome, what went well, and what could be done to further improve the study.

What was troublesome?

Initially, I struggled to strengthen the analysis and write 'thick description to facilitate transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219) from the survey (Appendix 10). The quantitative aspects of the survey did not suit my research style and it took many drafts before I was feeling less uneasy about what I had written. I persevered by writing memos, reorganising and re-coding data and presenting it in different formats to help me to make sense of what it was telling me. I also struggled to reserve judgement about practitioners' responses at times:

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'I was surprised at the array of answers from the questionnaire! I am amazed that so many practitioners perceive children as vulnerable? I needed to remind myself that the responses were only an indication. As TB (Tutor) keeps stressing 'they are perceptions not truths!' (Goldberg, G 09.04.2012)

Although I feel that the 'layered' (Denscombe 2010, p.91) approach to my research was a real strength I also struggled with wealth of data I felt my research did get 'messy and tangled' (McGillivray, 2009, p.276) at times:

'I am in danger of having too much breadth and not enough depth or 'thick description' There is much information I'm struggling with - what can I leave out especially since the layered approach has given me a wealth of data? I need to reflect what is truly significant for my research question and remember 'thick description is better than watering down respondents words.' (Goldberg, G. 26.05. 2012)

Looking at the learning journeys which were familiar to me required close scrutiny. I am glad I had prepared a format to capture explicit (a priori) data and was not over reliant upon implicit (emerging) data (Appendix 12).

I was conscious that my deep ingrained practice and of working closely 'in my own culture' over a number of years meant that I may not have challenged all my own beliefs regarding the setting. There are things I take for granted and I realised that 'getting the necessary distance to be reflexive can be problematic' (Solberg, 1997, p.128). However, through continual member checking (Lincoln

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& Guba, 1985 p.219) during the focus group, through the 'thick description' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p.219) of the research process and through my reflective journal I believe I have been open and honest in order to counteract this issue.

My inexperience as a researcher also showed when analysing the recording of the Focus group. I was disappointed that I did not follow up certain tensions which had arisen. In a longer study, I would hope to be able to follow up issues arising. For example, I would examine where practitioners' perceptions stem from and explore practitioners' understanding of pedagogical documentation more deeply.

What went well?

The research process has had a positive impact on my continuous professional development. I have become a more confident researcher and I believe my 'thinking' is more methodological (Blaxter et al, 1996, p.62). I particularly relished immersing myself in the data and was excited by 'digging around' looking for other meanings which may be buried below the surface. I have developed my natural sense of curiosity and I took more enjoyment from the process of the research than in previous studies:

'I feel I am more aware and in control of my task driven nature! And now feel I am in a state of 'unconscious capability' (Schratz and Walker, 1995) (Goldberg, 10.04.2012).

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This was particularly apparent during the early stages of my research design when an observation by my tutor threw my thinking off course. Although I was feeling 'muddled' for quite some time I kept reminding myself to trust the process and allow myself to 'to experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion (Schön, 1991, p.68). I feel my research has been stronger because of this.

My strong relationship with setting and the staff team meant that issues over trusting the researcher were minimised. For example, one member of staff who was feeling overwhelmed with her work load declined. I was pleased that she was comfortable enough to be honest and not feel pressurised by my senior position.

The pilot exercise of the questionnaire was extremely valuable and I gained useful insights from my pilot group. From this I grouped the statements under two predetermined categories and added a comments section to collect emerging data. I also reworded the research participant paperwork in a more relaxed user friendly style. (Appendix 8, 9 and 5)

I was pleased I took on board the tutors' advice to be organised and set up filing systems for my data including the literature. 'TB was impressed with my organisation of the data. I would have found locating information a nightmare otherwise.' (Goldberg, G. 9.5.12) Similarly, my self-discipline to meet deadlines in order to obtain tutor feedback on my approach and progress has been invaluable to my learning. The Gantt chart (Appendix 4) was a particularly useful tool in this process.

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My area of research has allowed to me to read more widely in an area I am passionate about. As a way broadening my theory base regarding early year's assessment I was looking forward to engaging with new texts as well as becoming more familiar with theory. Revisiting and reflecting on the literature and theory throughout the research has helped me to make more sense of it. To become immersed in the information regarding the assessment and pedagogical documentation used in the Reggio and Te Whariki approaches is something I have appreciated. This has allowed me to reflect on my journey as a teacher and discover where my assumptions about assessment have come from and how they have changed and are changing. Through the process I certainly have developed a greater 'self-awareness' (Goleman, 1998, p.26) and found new ways at looking at myself and reflecting upon my 'frame of reference' (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

The literature has made me realise I need to question and balance national and local government policy in a more critical way to ensure it marries with the 'values and beliefs' of the children and families I work closely with (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). In the past I have been too accepting of government and LA initiatives especially with regard to young children's assessments. The literature has allowed me to reflect upon this in a serious way and I will be taking this new learning with me. Furthermore, this study has been an opportunity for participants' and me to expose and explore our assumptions and beliefs. The experience of trying to ascertain perceptions of children's capabilities reminded me of 'iceberg theory' (NPQICL booklet 9, p.10). This is

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where individuals of a team are likened to icebergs, where polite behaviour floats on the top and beliefs and assumptions are floating below the surface. This process has enabled the team to begin to challenge to our long held beliefs and assumptions which like the iceberg are often hidden below the surface or buried deep in our subconscious.

I believe through on my research journey I have demonstrated effective research skills. I have shown how I my skills have built on previous studies and I believe I shown 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 1995, p.54) and have challenged my learning and used the literature to move my thinking forward. I am truly excited about sharing and implementing my recommendations within the settings where the study took place and eventually with the other settings I support.

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Appendix 1**MA Education Dissertation Proposal Form****MA Education Dissertation Proposal Form**

Student Name: Gail Goldberg		Supervisor: Professor Tony Bertram	
Single Research Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	Double Research Project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dissertation			x
Title of Research:	Exploring early year's practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice when documenting children's learning.		

Write a short paragraph describing the focus of your research.

I am interested in gaining an understanding of early Year's practitioner perspectives about 'children' and 'childhood'. In addition, how these perceptions impact on the place my setting gives to children's voice especially in relation to the children's involvement in the assessment process.

I want to be able to explore the values and belief systems within the early years Children's Centre setting (full day care nursery and two sessional playgroups).

I want to find out to what extent the child's voice is heard and their participation in creating their learning Journey at the Children's Centre. My initial feeling is that the majority of the assessments are based on practitioner observations and perceptions of children during child initiated and adult led activities. I want to explore this further and gain a deeper understanding of this process from the practitioner's point of view.

I want to use this research as the basis for deep reflection on current practice and to use the findings from the research to recommend change and to develop a more meaningful Teaching and Learning Policy in the future. This should have 'transferability' (Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) *Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research*. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* London: Sage Publications) for others who might widen their understanding of the issue of children's perspectives through my study.

List your proposed research questions and/or hypothesis.

I want to gather practitioner's views as to:

- What values and principles do practitioners hold about children and childhood and where do these stem from?
- Do practitioners believe we should further include children's voices in the process?
- To what extent do practitioners feel the child's voice should be heard?
- Whose voice is heard the loudest in our assessment process?
- Whose voice should be heard the loudest?
- How do practitioners include the child's voice now?
- How we can further include children's voices in the process?
- What steps need to be taken to further develop children's involvement in their assessment?
- Are there any barriers which may prevent practitioners from including the child's voice further in our assessments?

List the area(s) of literature to be reviewed and the key authors you intend to refer to.

Areas of Literature

Perceptions of 'children' and 'childhood'

Assessment in early years

Mosaic approach

Listening to young children

Educational theorists

Observing children

Citizenship in Early Years

Early Years Foundation Stage

Key Authors

Aries, P. (1962) *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* New York: Vintage Books

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Describe the research methodology that you intend to use (Quantitative, Qualitative, and Critical).

I intend to use qualitative and flexible research methods (with some quantitative) data based upon Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research (3rd edn)* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd

I will use an ethnographic paradigm which supports my research proposal of understanding the social cultural environment of the Children's Centre, and how the early years practitioners view 'children' and 'childhood'.

I will validate my research via triangulation: literary review, Likert questionnaire, focus group and documentary evidence (children's learning journeys) and researcher's journal.

I will pilot the questionnaire and focus group discussion questions at another setting I am involved with to ascertain the feasibility of my proposed methods of data gathering.

Describe the research methods that you will use (observation, interviews, and concept map) and provide an indication of your sample size(s) and how you will analyse the data.

- Documentary Evidence: I will conduct content analysis of eight learning journeys to ascertain if and how the child's voice is involved in the assessment process.
- Likert Questionnaire to be given to all nursery and playgroup staff. I will give staff time within the working day to complete the questionnaire. I will group responses to emerging themes.
(Thematic coding)
- Focus group with between four/six nursery staff and two/four playgroup staff. I will note down key words, phrases, suggestions on flip chart paper during the session and I will group responses to emerging themes (Thematic coding). The structured part of the focus group interviews will pick up the emerging themes from the questionnaire survey. Therefore, the study will be layered thus giving it some internal triangulation.
- My literature search will also be systemised and therefore I feel legitimately part of my methods. Concepts from the literature review will underpin both the context of the study and its analysis.

- I will also use my journal which will document my own learning, perceptions and feelings throughout the research process

Provide a timetable or flow chart of where, when and how you intend to undertake the research.

I will undertake my research at a Sure Start Children's Centre where I will involve the staff and management at the full day care nursery for children ages 2-5 and two sessional playgroups for children aged 2-4.

Timetable for Research:

Week beginning 23th January: Gain and obtain letter of consent to undertake research from Centre Manager.

Week beginning 20th February: Send out research information sheets and consent forms to staff. Be available to discuss my research project in further detail

Week beginning 27th February: Pilot Likert questionnaire and possible questions for focus group with a group of early year's practitioners who will not be participating in the full research study. Edit methods of data gathering as highlighted via the pilot

Week beginning 19th March: Give out Likert questionnaires (Cover staff in order for them to complete the questionnaires in work time). These will be completed anonymously and I will request that members of staff will place them in an envelope in my pigeon hole when completed. Begin to carry out analysis of responses and identify emerging themes

Week beginning 26th March: Conduct content analysis of children's learning journeys. This will be completed on-site. Learning journeys are not removed from the Centre in line with data protection procedures.

Week beginning 2nd April: Further analysis of likert questionnaires and children's learning journeys. Use interpretations to edit focus group questions and focus.

Week beginning 23rd April: Conduct Focus Group (use existing time allotted for an early years staff meeting) Begin to carry out analysis of data from the focus group.

Week commencing 7th May: Begin to write up interpretation and findings of results

15th June: Submit a draft of my emergent findings and reflections on my research to my tutor for comment

Student Signature:

G. S. Goldberg

Date:

09/02/2012

Supervisor Signature:

Date:

Module Leader Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2

Request for Ethical Approval

Section 1 – to be completed by the researcher

Full name	Gail Goldberg
Module number and title (student researchers only)	EDU7001 MA Education (Early Years) Dissertation
Research Proposal title	Exploring early year's practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice in documenting children's learning.
Funding body applying to if applicable	N/A
Brief outline of proposal (including research questions where appropriate) You are also asked to submit with your application copies of any questionnaires, letters, recruitment material you intend to use if these are available at the time of requesting approval	<p>Write a short paragraph describing the focus of your research.</p> <p>I am interested in gaining an understanding of practitioner's perspectives about 'children' and 'childhood' and how these perceptions impact on the place the setting gives to children's voice especially in relation to the children's involvement in the assessment process.</p> <p>I want to be able to explore the values and belief systems within the early year's team of a Children's Centre setting (full day care nursery and two sessional playgroups).</p> <p>I want to find out to what extent the child's voice is heard and their participation in creating their learning Journey at the Children's Centre. My initial feeling is that the majority of the assessments are based on practitioner observations/ perceptions of children during child initiated and adult led activities. I want to explore this further and gain a deeper understanding of this process from the practitioner's point of view.</p> <p>I want to use this research as the basis for deep reflection on current practice and to use the findings from the research to recommend change</p>

	<p>and to develop a more meaningful Teaching and Learning Policy in the future.</p> <p>I want to gather practitioner's views as to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What values and principles do practitioner's hold about children and childhood and where do these stem from? •Do practitioners believe we should further include children's voices in the process? •To what extent do practitioners feel the child's voice should be heard? •Whose voice is heard the loudest in our assessment process? •Whose voice should be heard the loudest? •How do practitioners include the child's voice now? •How we can further include children's voices in the process? •What steps need to be taken to further develop children's involvement in their assessment? •Are there any barriers which may prevent practitioners from including the child's voice further in our assessments? <p>Drafts of participant information letter and consent forms are attached. At this time questionnaires have yet to be developed.</p>
<p>Level of research, e.g. staff, undergraduate, postgraduate, master's (award related), MPhil, PhD</p>	<p>MA</p>
<p>Please outline the methodology that would be implemented in the course of this research.</p>	<p>My focus for my research is based on my strong belief that young children are confident, capable and have the ability to be included in decisions which affect them. Reflective practice and lifelong learning are also key values of mine which have influenced my decision to complete an MA and to choose this area for my research.</p>

	<p>I intend to use qualitative and flexible research methods based upon Robson, C (2011) New World Research.</p> <p>I will use an ethnographic paradigm which supports my research proposal of understanding the social cultural environment of the Children’s Centre, and how the early years practitioners view ‘children’ and ‘childhood’.</p> <p>I will validate my research via triangulation: literary review, Likert questionnaire, focus group and documentary evidence (children’s learning journeys) and researcher’s journal.</p> <p>I will pilot the questionnaire and focus group discussion questions at another setting which I am involved with to ascertain the feasibility of my methods of data gathering.</p> <p>Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary Evidence: I will conduct content analysis of eight learning journeys to ascertain if and how the child’s voice is involved in the assessment process. • Likert Questionnaire to be given to all nursery and playgroup staff who agree to participate. I will give staff time within the working day to complete the questionnaire .I will group responses to emerging themes. (Thematic coding) • Focus group with between four/six nursery staff and two/four playgroup staff. I will note down key words, phrases, suggestions on flip chart paper during the session and I will group responses to emerging themes. (Thematic coding) • I will also use my journal which will document my own learning, perceptions and feelings throughout the research process
<p>Please indicate the ethical issues that have been considered and how these will be addressed.</p>	<p>Ethical guidelines and research principles issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (www.bera.ac.uk) form the basis of my ethical considerations.</p>

	<p>‘Responsibility to Participants’</p> <p>Respect for all Participants: ensure all participants are treated ‘fairly’, ‘sensitively’, and with ‘dignity’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will create opportunities for all colleagues to complete questionnaires and take part in the focus group during work time• During the focus group activity I will introduce a ‘Community Learning Contract’ which will enable participants and researcher to have their needs met, to have the confidence that their opinions will be discussed respectfully and to keep themselves safe. <p>‘Voluntary Informed Consent’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research Participation Information sheet will outline the objective of my research to ensure that participants are fully informed.• Participants to sign a letter of consent form.• I realise the importance of seeking consent from the relevant persons in order to be able to analyse documentation. For the purpose of my study, I have full access to the children’s ‘learning journeys’ on a daily basis as part of my role within the Children’s Centre is to regularly monitor these. <p>Right to Withdraw</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It will be made clear that having signed the letter of consent participants will be able to withdraw at any time. <p>Detriment Arising from Participation in Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is the possibility that individual participants may feel that their perspectives are judged as incorrect or inappropriate. Therefore, during the focus group activity I will introduce a ‘Community Learning Contract’. This will be discussed amended as deemed necessary and agreed. This will enable participants and researcher to have their
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	<p>needs met, to have the confidence that their opinions will be discussed respectfully and to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>Privacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All contributions will be kept confidential and anonymous (pseudonyms will be used) • I will keep information in a secure place (locked drawer at setting) and it will be destroyed after use (by shredding). <p>Disclosure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My findings will be available when my dissertation is completed and the implications of my findings for our Continual Professional Development (CPD) will be discussed and action planned.
<p>Please indicate any issues that may arise relating to diversity and equality whilst undertaking this research and how you will manage these.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all participants have an equal amount of time to contribute their opinions and sufficient time (as required) to complete the questionnaires. • Ensure participants receive the same information regarding the study.
<p>Please indicate how participants will be debriefed about their involvement in the research process and or provided with opportunities for reflection and evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will ask participants at the end of the focus group activity for feedback on the experience and regularly review what has been discussed and seek clarification. • I will present my findings to the staff team for reflection and discussion. In the future we will continue to work together to refine the settings ethos regarding the place of the child's voice in documenting their learning.

Please answer the following questions by circling or highlighting the appropriate response:

1. Will your research project involve young people under the age of 18?

YES

NO

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If yes, do you have an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau?

YES

NO

2. Will your research project involve vulnerable adults?

YES

NO

3. For which category of proposal are you applying for ethical approval?

Category

A

B

Confirmation of ethical approval

Section 2 – to be completed as indicated, by module leader, supervisor and/or chair of ethics sub-committee

For Category A proposals:

I confirm that the proposal for research being made by the above student/member of staff is a category A proposal and that s/he may now continue with the proposed research activity:

For a student's proposal – Name of module leader or supervisor giving approval	
For a member of staff's proposal – name of chair of FAEC (or nominee) giving approval	
Signed	
Date	

Category B proposals:

I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and that all requirements for category B proposals have been met.

On behalf of students (only):

Name of module leader or supervisor	
Signed	
Date	

On behalf of members of staff and students

I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and that s/he may now continue with the proposed research activity:

Signed	
Name of chair of FAEC (or nominee)	
Any conditions attached to this ethical approved (attached on a separate sheet)	Yes No
Date	

Checklist of submissions required for category B proposals:

Outline summary: rationale and expected benefits from the study, with a statement of what the researcher is proposing to do and how	
Explanation of the methodology to be used	
An information sheet and copy of a consent form to be used with subjects	
Details of how information will be kept	
Details of how results will be fed back to participants	

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Letter of consent from any collaborating institutions	
Letter of consent from head of institution wherein any research activity will take place	

Appendix 3

Ethical Considerations

Guideline 9:

I will operate within an 'ethic of respect for any persons involved directly or indirectly in the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively and with dignity and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, sex, race, religion, beliefs and lifestyle or any other significant difference.

Considerations for Research:

I will create opportunities for all colleagues to complete questionnaires and take part in the focus group during work time in order to minimise stress which may incur if I intrude on participants personal time. During the focus group activity I will introduce a 'Community Learning Contract' which will enable participants and researcher to have their needs met, to have the confidence that their opinions will be discussed respectfully. I will regularly check that participants 'understand the research, their role in the study and any implications it has for them' (Robson, 2011, p. 202)

Guidelines 10,11 and 14:

Voluntary informed consent will be obtained from all participants and a full explanation of the purpose of the research, how it is to be used and to whom it is to be reported will be provided.

Considerations for Research:

Before conducting my research I will outline the research topic and reason for the research to the Children's Centre Service Managers (CCSM) in which the pilot research (Fogelman, K. & Comber, C. 2007, p.130) and actual research will take place and permission will be requested. All members of the early year's team at both Centres will be given a Research Participation Information sheet (Appendix 5) outlining the objective of my research to ensure that they are fully informed (Busher, H & James, N. 2007) and letter of consent form (Appendix 6) to sign if they choose to take part. I will give participants 'time to think about participation' (Robson, 2011, p. 202). I realise the importance of seeking consent from the relevant persons in order to be able to analyse documentation. However, for the purpose of my study, and I have full access to the children's 'learning journeys' on a daily basis because, part of my role within the Children's Centre is to regularly monitor these.

Guideline 15:

'Researchers must recognise the right of any participant to withdraw from the research' and participants must be informed of this.

Considerations for Research:

It will be made clear that having signed the letter of consent participants will be able to withdraw at any time during the research process (Busher, H & James, N. 2002).

Guideline 23:

'Researchers must make known to the participants any predictable detriment arising from the process or finding of the research.'

Considerations for Research:

During the focus group activity, there is the possibility that individual participants may feel that their perspectives are judged as incorrect or inappropriate by others. Therefore, I will introduce a 'Community Learning Contract'. This will be discussed and amended as deemed necessary and agreed. This will enable participants and researcher to have their needs met, to have the confidence that their opinions will be discussed respectfully and confidentially and to keep themselves safe.

Guideline 25:

'The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm'

Considerations for Research:

In the interest of confidentiality, participants will be made fully aware before beginning the questionnaire and the focus group that comments and opinions will be anonymous and seen by no-one other than myself and my tutor (Fox et al 2007).

Guidelines 26-28:

I will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) and inform respondents of how data will be stored, used and reported.

Considerations for Research:

To ensure the necessary protocols of ethics were met, the University provided me with a Research Ethics Guidelines and Checklist (BCU, 2011) in which I detailed my intentions to conform to the policy adopted by them (added to final document in appendix 2). The data collected will only be used for its original stated purpose and securely held by me until the project has been submitted for marking. All contributions will be kept confidential and anonymous (pseudonyms will be used where necessary) and data will be destroyed after use (Busher & James, 2007).

Guideline 31:

It is 'good practice to debrief participants at the conclusion of the research and to provide them with copies of any reports'

Considerations for Research:

My findings will be available to all participants and the CCSM during the research process in the form of 'member checks' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) and when my dissertation is completed (Busher & James, 2007). The implications of my findings for our Continual Professional Development (CPD) will be discussed and action planned.

Guidelines 43-47:

'All educational researchers must protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring they conduct their research to the highest standard.'

Considerations for Research:

I am conscious of my position as the Children's Centre Teacher and the position of leadership I have in the setting. I will endeavour to ensure that my objectivity does not waiver or that the data is not skewed by my perceived authority and by my own assumptions.

Appendix 4

Gantt Chart

December	January	February	March
<p>Abstract 3 scholarly texts Choose one theory or concept which helps me to think about my area of focus and the situational, emotional and relational forces you face in conducting the research and write a short piece about my reflections using the theory or concept. Read Robson on the protocols and practicalities of my chosen methods. Think about the ethics of conducting the fieldwork and write a short piece on how I will address these. Refine research question and research design and submit to Chris. Include ethics statement and timetable. Continue academic reading 8th: Crec: Literature search Complete research proposal</p>	<p>12th: Crec: Fieldwork & ethics, data analysis</p> <p>Continue academic reading</p> <p>20th Write and submit for comment a draft of my literature review</p>	<p>9th: Crec: Report dissertation structure and Presentations 24th Write and submit for comment a draft of my planned research design, timetable and methodology Begin to complete request for ethical proposal Complete research ethics guidelines and checklist Design letters of participation Obtain letters of consent</p>	<p>16th Write and submit for comment a draft of my ethical statement</p> <p>If possible commence research week beginning 26th Research to take place at children's Centre \nursery which I support as my role as a Children's Centre Teacher.</p>

April	May	June	July
<p>13th Write and submit for comment a draft of the context of my chosen study site.</p> <p>Commence research week commencing 26th Research to take place at children's Centre nursery which I support as my role as a Children's Centre Teacher.</p>	<p>Analysing and interpreting the data</p> <p>End of May is last date for reading new Literature.</p>	<p>15th Write and submit a draft for comment of my emerging findings and reflections on my research. This is the last date to submit drafts to tutor.</p> <p>Continue to redraft and ask colleague to read.</p> <p>Check references are written correctly.</p>	<p>Continue to redraft and adapt as necessary to ensure word count is accurate. Ensure all appendixes are prepared. Complete front cover and BCU cover sheet.</p> <p>31st: assignment due in at 13.00 3 hard copies</p>

On-going journal entries

Appendix 5

Participant Information Form

Dear Colleague,

Research Participation Information Sheet

At the present time I am in the process of completing a Master's Degree in Early Years Education. As part of my dissertation I am looking forward to undertaking a research project and I would like to invite you to take part in this study; however, before you decide please take time to read the information contained in this letter.

My research topic is: Exploring early year's practitioner perspectives of the place of the child's voice when documenting children's learning.

I intend to undertake this research through an analysis of a sample of children's learning journeys, individual practitioner questionnaires and a focus group led by myself. A copy of the focus group questions will be issued in advance.

I will ensure that participation in these activities can be completed within work time. You will not be required to add your name to the questionnaires and these will be retained in a secure place. Your anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the questionnaire or focus group that might identify you to a third party.

Please place completed questionnaires in the marked envelope in my pigeon hole by 24th March at 4 pm.

Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you decide to take part please keep this letter for your reference and please sign the attached consent form and pass it on to me. If you do decide to take part you are still eligible to withdraw at any time.

The results of this research will be analysed, the findings summarised and reflect upon in my dissertation. The findings from this research project will be available from September 2012. I envisage using this information as a starting point for the setting to reflect upon the perspectives we hold with regard to the place of the children's voice in our documentation of children's learning.

Gail Goldberg

MA Education (Early Years) EDU 7001

If you have any further questions about my research project please feel free to discuss them with me.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours Sincerely

G. S Goldberg

Gail Goldberg

Children's Centre Teacher

Appendix 6
Children's Centre
Research Consent Form

Name of researcher: Gail Goldberg	
Title of research: MA Dissertation	
Have you read the attached information Sheet?	Yes/No
Were you offered the chance to ask questions and discuss the research project?	Yes/No
If you asked questions, were they answered satisfactorily?	Yes/No
I understand that I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time and without explanation.	Yes/No
I agree that my anonymous comments and views can be used as part of and within this research project.	Yes/No
I agree to take part in this research Project	Yes/No
Signed:	
Please print name:	
Date:	

Appendix 7

Parameters of Literature Search

- **Timescale:** Initially I will focus my search on the literature published in the last five years, key texts in the field and then extend the search to include material published in the last ten years. I will update my literature search regularly until mid-June in order to keep abreast of new research relevant to my topic.
- **Geographical scope:** Australasia, Europe and Scandinavia because these link closely with the UK philosophy of early years education and care.
- **Age range:** early years (birth to five).
- **Types of literature:** Journals, books, e-books, UK government published material.

**Appendix 8
Draft Survey**

Research Survey

Do not write or sign your name on this Survey.

Please place completed questionnaires in the marked envelope in my pigeon hole by (date to be decided)

Below are some statements which could describe adult behaviour when involving and listening to young children in early year's settings and possible beliefs about children and childhood. Which views do you identify with?

- Please read each statement carefully and tick the box which best describes your views.
- Please answer each statement as truthfully as possible in order for me to reflect upon an accurate response.
- Where possible the term 'practitioner' applies to you personally.
- All information collected will be kept confidential.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Children and adults can learn from each other					
Children are dependent and vulnerable					
Childhood is preparation for adult life					
Children can influence my own understanding of teaching and learning					
The main purpose of 'learning journeys' in my setting is to map out individual children's learning in relation to Early Years Foundation Stage Development Bands					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning journeys reflect the learning process not just outcomes					
Learning journeys do not provide an accurate reflection of the children's learning					
I include children's voices and views in the assessment of their learning					
As a practitioner I consistently listen to children and act upon their views					
Children are autonomous, competent and consistent individuals					
The practitioner role is not to identify children's missing experiences and skills and plan to fill these gaps in children's learning					
I regularly support children to be active participants in their own lives					
I frequently allow children to be involved in the daily planning, delivery and evaluation of their learning					
Children are 'empty vessels' and the practitioner role is to fill them with knowledge and skills					
Children are not capable of assessing their own learning					

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social interaction is of crucial importance for children's learning and development					
Children are experts in their own lives					
Assessments should only be based on practitioner observations and knowledge of child development					
I regularly use learning journeys to explore and reflect upon my own practice					

Comments

Please use the space below to express any other views regarding:

- **The place of the child's voice in documenting their learning**

e.g. do you think children should be involved in the assessing their own work and if so how would you make that happen?

- **Where your views about children and childhood stem from? Can you give examples?**

e.g. from my own experiences in childhood, from my personal religious beliefs, etc.

- **Any other comments:**

Appendix 9

Research Survey

Below I have written some statements which could describe adult behaviour when involving and listening to young children in early year's settings and possible beliefs about the perceptions of children and childhood.

Which views do you identify with?

- Please read each statement carefully and tick the box which best describes your views.
- All information collected will be kept confidential so please do not write your name on this questionnaire.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perceptions of children and childhood					
Children are experts in their own lives					
Children are dependent and vulnerable					
Childhood is preparation for adult life					
Children are autonomous, competent and consistent individuals					
Children and adults cannot learn from each other					
Children are 'empty vessels' and the adult role is to fill them with knowledge and skills					
Children are not capable of assessing their own learning					

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social interaction is of crucial importance for children's learning and development					
Learning journeys cannot provide an accurate reflection of children's learning					
My Early Years Practice					
My role is to identify children's missing experiences and skills and then plan to fill these gaps in children's learning					
I regularly support children to be active participants in their own lives					
I frequently allow children to be involved in the daily planning, delivery and evaluation of their learning					
In my setting 'Learning Journeys' reflect the learning process not just the outcomes					
I regularly include children's voices and views in the assessment of their learning					
I do not allow children to have a voice and participate in the assessment of their learning					
The main purpose of 'learning journeys' in my setting is to map out individual children's learning in relation to Early Years Foundation Stage Development Bands					

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a practitioner I do not listen to children and act upon their views					
I regularly use learning journeys to explore and reflect upon my own practice					

Comments

Please use the space below to express any other views regarding:

- **The place of the child's voice in documenting their learning**
 (E.g. Do you think children should be involved in assessing their own work? If so how do you think you could make this happen?)

- **Where your views about children and childhood stem from?**
 (E.g. From my own childhood experiences, from personal religious beliefs or cultural beliefs?)

- **Any other comments:**

Please put your completed questionnaire in the marked envelope in my pigeon hole by Thursday 29th March.

Thank you so much for your response

Appendix 10

Survey results

Results of Research Survey

Below I have written some statements which could describe adult behaviour when involving and listening to young children in early year's settings and possible beliefs about the perceptions of children and childhood.

Which views do you identify with?

- Please read each statement carefully and tick the box which best describes your views.
- All information collected will be kept confidential so please do not write your name on this questionnaire.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Section 1: Perceptions of children and childhood					
S.1 Children are experts in their own lives	4	2	3	2	
S.2 Children are dependent and vulnerable	8	1	1	1	
S.3 Childhood is preparation for adult life	6	3	2		
S.4 Children are autonomous, competent and consistent individuals	4	1	5	1	
S.5 Children and adults cannot learn from each other				2	9
S.6 Children are 'empty vessels' and the adult role is to fill them with knowledge and skills	3	2	2	2	2
S.7 Children are not capable of assessing their own learning		1	2	7	1
S.8 Assessments should only be based on practitioner observations and knowledge of child development	1	3	1	5	1

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
S.9 Social Interaction is of crucial importance for children's learning and development					
S.10 Learning journeys cannot provide an accurate reflection of children's learning	1		5		1
Section 2 My Early Years Practice					
S.11 My role is to identify children's missing experiences and skills and then plan to fill these gaps in children's learning	7	2	1	1	
S.12 I regularly support children to be active participants in their own lives	6	5			
S.13 I frequently allow children to be involved in the daily planning, delivery and evaluation of their learning	6	4	1		
S.14 In my setting 'Learning Journeys' reflect the learning process not just the outcomes	5	5		1	
S.15 I regularly include children's voices and views in the assessment of their learning	6	5			
S.16 I do not allow children to have a voice and participate in the assessment of their learning				3	8
S.17 The main purpose of 'learning journeys' in my setting is to map out individual children's learning in relation to Early Years Foundation Stage Development Bands	5	4	2		
S.18 I believe that children can influence my own understanding of teaching and learning	8	3			
S.19 As a practitioner I do not listen to children and act upon their views				3	8

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S.20 I regularly use learning journeys to explore and reflect upon my own practice	5	4	1		1

Appendix 11

Transcript of Comments from the Survey

1. The place of the child's voice in documenting their learning

(E.g. Do you think children should be involved in assessing their own work? If so how do you think you could make this happen?)

1P.1 I believe children are the main instigators of their own learning and development-they have an innate drive to explore, play, push boundaries and interact with their surroundings. Practitioners should facilitate. The key principle in allowing and encouraging children to be active participants in their own learning and development is a strong relationship between the setting, keyworker of the child and parents. It is absolutely crucial for parents to be an active participant and contribute to the settings ethos for their child-with two way consistent feedback.

1P.2 I believe that children can be encouraged to look at and assess their own work by practitioners. This can be varied cross the age group and also depends on individual child's ability. However, practitioners can ask open ended questions at the end of each activity/work created by child to understand how they view their own work

1P. 3 Yes children's views and ideas and interests should be involved in assessing. Children's work should be collated in a large scrap book so small and large pieces and be collected and preserved. The planning time should include time when children look at their learning journeys and reflection discussions take place this would help to check understanding and reinforce learning

1P.4 It happens already eg: developing the role of the play area stems from ideas, actions and a voice outside or the chalkboard. A member of staff will ask a variety of questions what have you draw, do you like it what is it doing. This is attained on a regular basis.

1P.5 When children are doing things they may attempt again without adult intervention if not they are encouraged). Children may want to build on experiences and we may ask them what they would like to do next allowing the child to make that decision or an agreement can be made with the child to ask them to try something new

1P. 6 Yes I do let them look at their work and whatever comments they make to document it in their learning journeys

1P. 7 Yes

1P.8 It is vital for children to have a voice in their learning, they can teach everyone new ideas and ways of completing activities

1P. 9 Yes Definitely children should assess their own work because from that, it will show their level of confidence and show others how they are progressing

1P. 10 I strongly agree that they should be involved in assessing their work. In our setting we encourage children to have an active role in their learning journey.

1P.11 Yes, I think they should be involved. Showing them their learning Journeys what they are doing or have done. Talk to them, explain and listen to
These could be verbal and non-verbal

2. Where your views about children and childhood stem from?

(E.g. From my own childhood experiences, from personal religious beliefs or cultural beliefs?)

2P. 1 My views regarding children and childhood experiences built on my own childhood, where parental religious beliefs led to a non-secular education during my own early years. This experience (over 40 years ago) has indelibly imprinted itself on my psyche-revealing the potential of early year's experiences to become the individual, for better or worse. 'Show me the boy of seven and I will show you the man' (Jesuit saying) I hope to be a positive memory and impact on children in my setting.

2P. 2 I believe that we are all individual people with our own interests and ways of thinking. However, regardless of which culture, religion or belief we grow up with we all develop our own ways of thinking and understanding children or childhood. In some areas of our thinking/practice might reflect our cultural or personal experiences but our own practical work based around individual children's learning, interest and ability.

2P. 3 Personal experiences and from having looked after many children. Mainly through education and understanding how children learn and the different theories involved in these processes

2P. 4 From raising children myself. I have always been a 'hands on' parent. Not always judge or presume. Question, look and observe. Allow a child to express

2P. 5 Being allowed to explore mostly an outdoor life at a young age allows children to think, make choices and have the ability to decide their future actions. Children are vulnerable and need the right guidance to help them understand rules and boundaries to help keep themselves and others safe and this is why adults are important in helping teach children

2P. 6 From my own and of my own children's childhood

2P. 7 Mainly my own childhood experiences, then how I have brought my own children up and how I could have improved their upbringing

2P. 8 I think it stems from my upbringing. My parents were always explaining processes and ideas they had and were great listeners to my own ideas.

2P. 9 From my childhood experience

2P. 10 My own experiences and family relationships

2P. 11 Personal belief, Cultural beliefs, Parental beliefs

3. Any other comments:

3P.1 All answers given to statements assume there are no extenuating factors affecting the children. However, this rarely (if ever) occurs.

3P. 2 I feel children can only learn knowledge and skills if their interests, likes and dislikes are included in planning and teaching. This gives children opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence to engage in learning processes

3P. 3 This is a fascinating area I would gladly like to help in any way I can

3P. 4 We obtain many processes to relate to children. Remember no child's views are always the same. The development process can be different for most children. This is why children have keyworkers to enhance and develop their individual needs

3P. 5 Each child is an individual and shouldn't be compared with another as each need is different. The right support at an early age makes the world of difference

3P. 11 Children must be seen and heard

Appendix 12

Documentary data (Collection Sheet)

Docum-ent number	Evid-ence of child's voice	Type of evidenc e of child's voice (spoken, work, next steps)	Evidenc e that the learning process is reflected	Evidence of the learning process (sequence of photographs , next steps followed through, other)	Evidence that outcomes are documented in relation to developmen t bands	Evidence of outcomes in relation to developmen t bands (area of learning, age band)	Other observations

Appendix 13

Analysis of Findings from Learning Journeys

The evidence, patterns and themes which emerged from the learning journeys were:

- Children's speech and communication including gesture and non-verbal communication was recorded in 8/10 learning journeys. (as already mentioned above)
- All learning journeys had many examples of 'snap shot' observations on their own or with photographs. These were also linked to EYFS areas of learning and development bands.
- Many observations demonstrated children's learning qualities such as disposition, attitude, involvement, well-being and working in collaboration with others and on what children can do .Clark 2011 p. 18 observations 'contribute to our understanding of children's lives' from an adult perspective.'
- Learning process and next steps were recorded in 8/10 learning journeys
- Also relationships: Practitioner and child reflecting together on their learning journey occurred in 2 of the documents. One gave a running commentary with question by practitioner and response by the child. I noted that the dialogue (including gestures) 'felt alive even though the questions were mainly closed.' (Goldberg, G. 2012). The evidence showed that the child was revisiting experiences and that pauses, which were indicated by ellipsis, were followed by the child's reflections. The sharing of the learning journey allowed the child the opportunity to remember, revisit the experience or activity. The second example

documented the child's response verbally and through gestures. The child comments on what he did and points to the area in the learning environment where the activity took place and with whom how shared it with. (include Rinaldi, Carr young ch reflecting on their learning)

- Children's work was evident in five learning journeys however, it was unclear who had chosen to include them.
- Evidence of child's knowledge was recorded for example: shape, size, name of objects, colour, animal, number name.
- There are seven examples of the process of children's learning across the ten learning journeys. Six of these reflect short-term activities over one session or during a part of a session. One of these is where a next step has been followed through over two weeks.

Appendix 14
Evidence of the Child's Voice in the Learning Journeys

Evidence of the Child's Voice in the Learning Journeys	
Type of communication	Occurrence
Verbal	32 in total Some are longer conversations or blocks of speech (two discussions with child and practitioner with Learning Journey, nine are part of a long observation with multiple conversations with child on their own, child with child and child with adult)
Verbal responses linked to knowledge of shapes, number, size, name of colour, object, colour or vocabulary	10
Child's comment on what they can do including extending ideas and thoughts.	9 Two examples of practitioners reflecting with children on their learning journey
Child communicating need	7
Child speech during role play imitating adults eg filling up with petrol and playing teachers	4
Conversation with peers	5 (1 example of two children solving problem of 'cars' not working' and helping each other to move, turn around and 'get back on the road')
Child talking to self (whilst reading)	1
A response to adult questions	4 (2 in the form of learning journey discussions)
Communicating concern for others	2
Non-verbal	19 in total smiles/laughs (3) show excitement but doesn't describe (1) showing/pointing (13) copying action ie cutting(1) dancing (1 expressing response to the music)

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Appendix 15

Summary of Findings shared with Focus Group

My summarised results from the survey and documentary analysis were:

- All respondents agree that children should be included in the assessment process.
- Evidence of a strong emphasis on development bands and outcomes for children.
- Responses indicate that children are listened to and valued.
- A strong ethos of the importance of relationships to support children's learning.
- A belief that children and adults can learn from each other.
- More agreement between practice based statements than statements concerned with respondents perceptions of children and childhood.

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Appendix 16

Clip Log

Clip Log of Focus Group Interview

Each section is logged and coded according to 1) the participant (P) who is speaking on the clip, 2) the time counter for the beginning and end of the clip and 3) The subject under discussion. The categories are the themes highlighted which I identified at a later stage as emerging from the data.

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
GG 0:00/1:40	10/05/12	GG: Welcome and reminder of research focus	none
GG 01:41/02:29	10/05/12	GG: Sharing of findings to date based on survey and documentary data	Member checking
All & P3 02:30/02:36	10/05/12	Agreement with findings. Relationships seen as strength	Relationships
GG: 02:37/04:10	10/05/12	GG highlighted tensions within the responses to the survey	Variety of views about children and childhood
GG 04:11/05:55	10/05/12	P4 arrived GG summarised meeting so far and continued to highlight tensions	Member checking
P2 &P3 05:55/06:24	10/05/12	Agreement that each statement on the survey can be read differently depending on the context/ asking statements verbally will elicit different answers	Context/situation
P3 06:25/06:39	10/05/12	Children are vulnerable and dependent when they start nursery. The practitioners' role is to help them be independent, secure and safe.	Perceptions Relationships/adult as facilitator
P5 06:40/06:45	10/05/12	The environment plays a part in supporting children to be independent	Adult as facilitator
P2 06:46/07:02	10/05/12	Children's dependency and vulnerability depends on age and stage of development	Perceptions
P5 07:03/07.08	10/05/12	The extent to which children are viewed as dependent and vulnerable depends on the individuality of each child	Individuality Perceptions
P1 07:09:/07:23	10/05/12	Children can be confident and capable through relationships with others	Relationships
P6 07:24/07.34	10/05/12	View expressed that all children are vulnerable not just those attending the settings	perceptions
P2 07:35/08:05	10/05/12	From the viewpoint of child protection all children are vulnerable. The adult role is to safeguard them. All participants agreed wholeheartedly with this.	Perceptions/ perceptions influenced by Safeguarding Policy
GG 08:06/08:22	10/05/12	GG asked if children are seen be dependent and vulnerable can they be viewed as autonomous and competent at the same time?	Member checking
P5 08:22/08:39	10/05/12	All participants in agreement. Acknowledgement that some children know what they want to do and others need guiding	Perceptions
P6 08:40/08:55	10/05/12	Children become more confident, self-assured and independent when they attend the setting everyday	Perceptions
P6 08:56/09:36	10/05/12	Children become less dependent and vulnerable through relationships with the staff	Relationships

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
GG 09:07/09:51	10/05/12	GG; If children are dependent and vulnerable I am left wondering how children can also be viewed as experts in their own lives and how adults and children can learn from each other?	Member checking
P1 09:52/10:16	10/05/12	'That's true'. Participants spend time individually reflecting upon this	Reflection
P2 10:17/10:58	10/05/12	Children are not totally dependent and vulnerable it depends on their age and stage of development. It is human nature that adults and children can learn from their peers and from each other	Perceptions Context/situation Learning in a reciprocal relationship
P5 10:59/11:18	10/05/12	Children can influence adults thinking and how adults can contribute to children's development by considering their needs and interests. Other participants agree.	Perceptions Adult as facilitator Relationships
P5 11:19/11:26	10/05/12	Everyone learns from each other	Learning in a reciprocal relationship
P1 11:27/11:38	10/05/12	Staff plan from children's interests so in this way we learn from each other	Learning in a reciprocal relationship
GG 11:38/11:54	10/05/12	GG clarifies and summarises thinking so far: Our perceptions about children and childhood vary according to the real life situations and contexts we work in. It is difficult to define one view because of this.	Member checking
P2 11:55/12:05	10/05/12	Perceptions change due to differing situations, (all participants agree), children's different ages and stages and the environment.	Perceptions
P3 12:06/12:17	10/05/12	The individuality of the child is a key factor in the way children are perceived	Perceptions
P5 12:18/13:23	10/05/12	It is difficult to generalise our perceptions of children. All the adults here are different personalities with different capabilities and skills. It is the same with children.	Perceptions
GG 13: 24/13:48	10/05/12	GG asked participants to reflect upon the tension between the responses to: My role is to identify children's missing experiences and skills and plan to fill these gaps vs. children are empty vessels and the role of the adult is to fill them with knowledge and skills	Member checking
P5 13:49/14:08	10/05/12	Children are not empty vessels because children start learning as soon as they born	Perceptions
P1 14:09/14:21	10/05/12	Our role as practitioners is to provide children with new experiences which they may not experience anywhere else. They can learn from each other too. All participants agree	Perceptions Practice Learn in a reciprocal relationship
P6 14:22/14:41	10/05/12	Children are empty vessels because they haven't had experiences and it is our role to give them experiences and help them learn skills. If we just left children how would they get skills?	Perceptions Relationships

P2 14:42/14:58	10/05/12	Children considered empty vessels because they do not have life experience. Adults cannot leave children they have to provide opportunities and skills.	Perceptions Relationships
P3 14:59/15:16	10/05/12	Children need adult's to learn skills. Talking to them so they can get language from you.	Perceptions Relationships
Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
P6 & GG 15:17/15:26	10/05/12	View that children are not born being able to talk	Perceptions
GG 15:26/15:39	10/05/12	GG facilitated discussion about what children can do from birth. Communicate needs, look for food, cry when distressed.	Perceptions communication
P2 15:40/16:20	10/05/12	Children born with some experiences. Children need support to guide them through their lives. Settings provide routine. Children feel safe to be independent from this.	Perceptions
P5 & P2 16:20/16:32	10/05/12	How we view children depends on the context	Context/situation
P4 16:33/16:57	10/05/12	Viewing children as empty vessels sounds too harsh because as soon as children are born they constantly start to learn but you need the relationship	Perception Relationship
GG 16:58/19:10	10/05/12	GG discussed tension between statements where practitioners' agreed they included children's voices in the assessment process however this did not seem apparent in practice through the analysis of the learning journeys. Therefore what else happens on a daily basis?	Member checking
P3 19:11/19:25	10/05/12	Children involved in Planning, interest sheets	Evidence in planning
P2 19:26/20:16	10/05/12	evidence of children's participation in learning because there is over reliance on photos and recording	Barriers
P3 20:17/20:24	10/05/12	We all need to think again, obviously we all think we are doing it but maybe we are not doing it enough	Reflection
P5 20:25/20:45	10/05/12	If children want to play with a favourite toy it is made available. It's part of our everyday practice	Perception Respect/Listening
P3 20:45/21:07	10/05/12	Practitioners cannot write down every time a child chooses to do something	Barrier
P2 21:08/21:45	10/05/12	Children's interests drive the planning. If children's interests change on a daily basis the planning is reviewed straight away	Relationships Respect/Listening
P3 21:46/22:05	10/05/12	Children are able to put resources away and choose something else. The adult is not always involved.	Respect Perceptions
GG 22:06/22:15	10/05/12	How are children's views about what they are learning?	Member checking
P2 22:16/22:25	10/05/12	Displays and record what children say	Respect/Listening

P3 22:26/23:10	10/05/12	Circle time. Ask children what they enjoyed and what they would like to do next week. If they want to do the same activities we try to make it different and move it on.	Respect/listening Relationships
P1 23:11/23:23	10/05/12	Recording is difficult due to staffing. We don't have enough time.	Barriers
GG 23:24/24:46	10/05/12	GG asks participants to reflect upon why there was more agreement with responses under our early practice than perceptions of children and childhood. Does this affect our practice?	Member checking
P3 24:47/25:11	10/05/12	Different views help practice to improve. It is good to have a mix	Perceptions

Clip	Date added	Description	Categories
P2 25:12/25:47	10/05/12	Practitioners' differences are good for children so they can learn in different ways. It's natural for everyone to have different views.	Respect
P6 25:48/27:31	10/05/12	Our backgrounds can impact on our work. People from different generations have different views. Practitioner details different views of generations of her family	Perceptions
P3 27:32/28:13	10/05/12	Participant prioritises the rights of children she works with because it gives them self-esteem and confidence. This is as a result of her childhood. She supports them to do things independently of the adult.	Perceptions respect
P5 28:14/29:38	10/05/12	Concern that treatment of children as vulnerable has led to less freedom for children today. Safeguarding restrictions (risk assessment) is seen as red tape.	Perceptions influenced by policy
GG 29:39/29:43	10/05/12	GG asked for feedback about the focus group	Member checking
P2, P5,P3, 29:44/33:48	10/05/12	We could express our views, it should happen more often, There is more concentration on recording rather than interacting with children.	Respect Reflection
GG 33:49/33:58	10/05/12	GG asked how this session can help our practice in the future	Member checking
P3 33:59/34:27	10/05/12	It is good to know our practice is similar. Our opinions will always be different which is good like learning from each other.	Perceptions Respect
GG 34:28/34:43	10/05/12	GG asked if a common ethos about how children are perceived is needed	Member checking
P2 & All 34:43/37:59	10/05/12	All Participants' in agreement that children cannot be generalised in this way. Each child is different and an individual.	Perception Respect
GG 38:00/38:51	10/05/12	Thanking participants	none

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MA Education (Early Years) EDU 7001