

Listening to young children: where are we now and where next?

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30th anniversary UNCRC

This November is the 30th anniversary of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is a time to look back to ask what has been learnt as well as to look forward to what needs still to happen in terms of addressing children's rights in an ever increasingly challenging world.

Listening to young children's perspectives about daily life in early childhood provision has been an important element of implementing the participation rights enshrined in Article 12 and Article 13 of the UNCRC

View of the child

How we view children influences our relationships with children, our expectations and our practices in research and in learning contexts.

General Comment 7 and 12

General Comment 7 affirms the rights of the youngest children (under 8):

‘early childhood is a critical period for the realisation of these rights’

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006: 1.

General Comment 12

Affirms the right for children’s views to be heard and taken seriously but also for the provision of appropriate support as children form their views

Listening to young children's views and experiences: where are we now?

Key themes

- Who am I? Young children's sense of identity and wellbeing
- Who is with me? Relationships between adults and young children
- Where am I? Early childhood environments

Mosaic approach

- The Mosaic approach is an applied, participatory, ethnographic approach.
- Originally developed as a specific set of research tools for including young children's voices in an evaluation of children's services in the UK
- This approach places research participants as co-constructors of meanings.

View of the Child

Young children as ‘experts in their own lives’ (Langsted, 1994)

Young children as skilful communicators

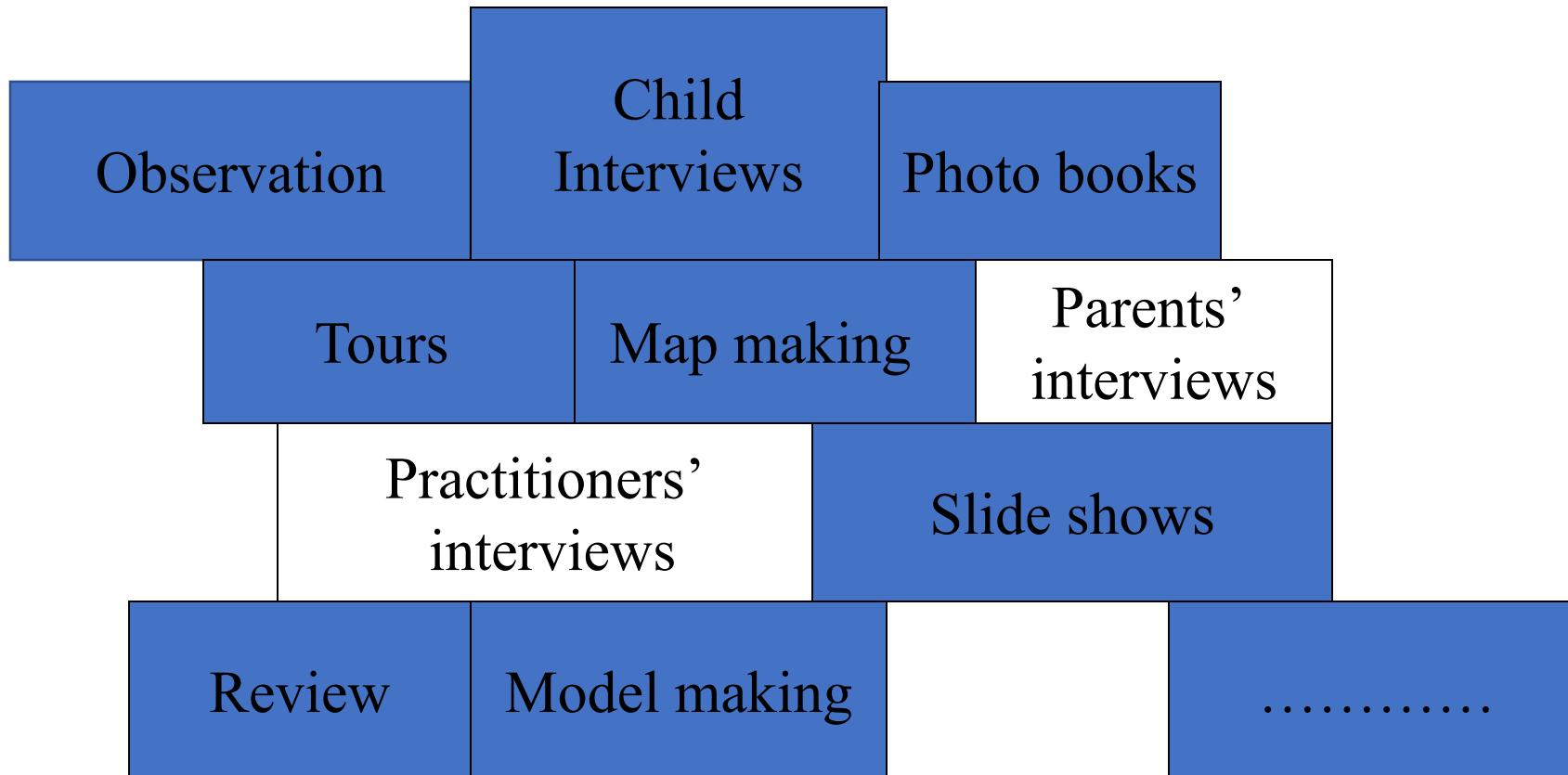
Young children as active participants

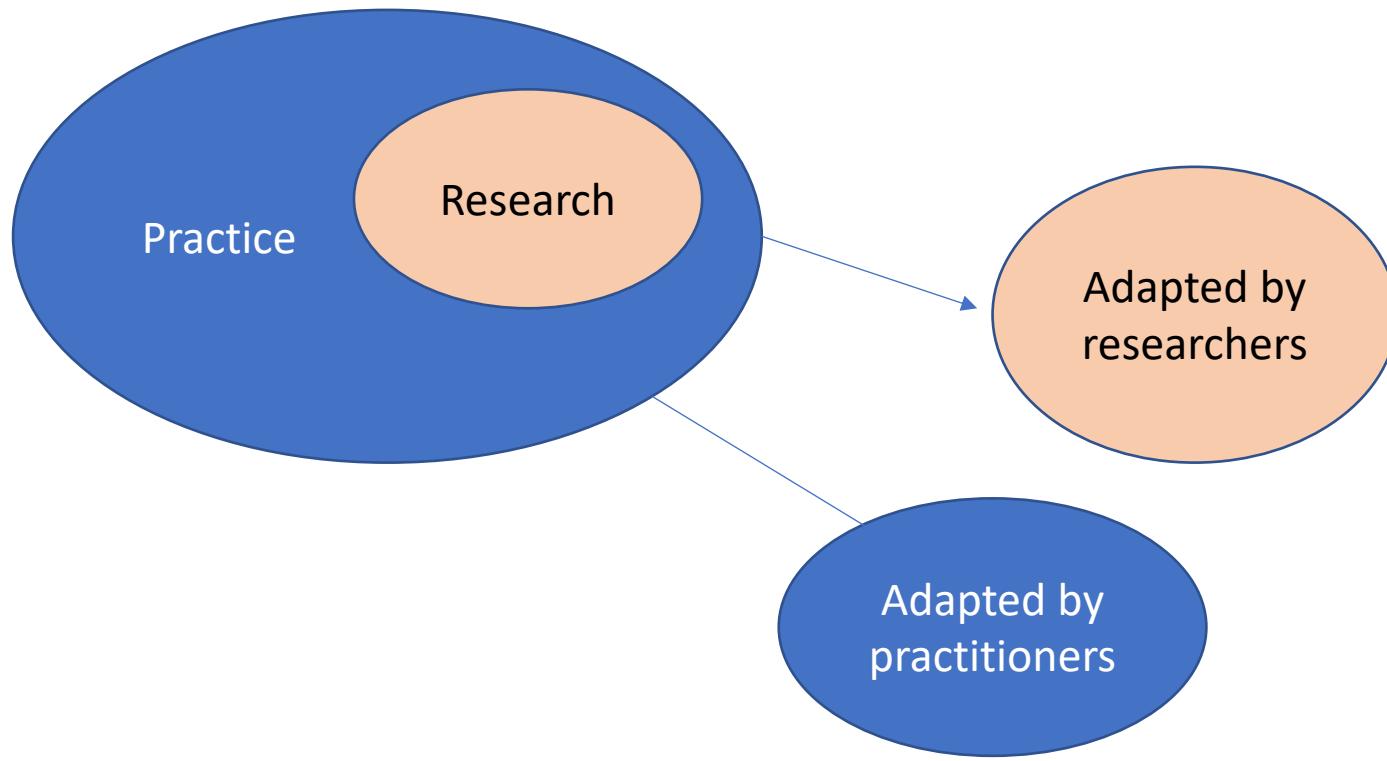
Young children as meaning makers, researchers and explorers

Clark and Moss (2011) have developed a respectful, participatory methodology, the Mosaic approach, when researching with young children. In this approach, children's voices are fore-grounded in each data generation method where they are invited to voluntarily engage (or not to engage) with the research. In their work, Clark and Moss identified a number of different mediums that could be used as 'participatory tools' to prompt children's oral and visual representations of their own perspectives, such as child interviews, photography, tours, mapmaking and drawing.

Deborah Moore, Anne-Marie Morrissey & Natalie Robertson (2019): 'I feel like I'm getting sad there': early childhood outdoor playspaces as places for children's wellbeing, Early Child Development and Care, DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2019.1651306

Mosaic approach: multimethod and polyvocal





See case studies in Clark, 2017. Third edition

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Who am I? Young children's sense of identity and belonging

Who is with me? Relationships between adults and young children

Where am I? Early childhood environments

Living Spaces study

- Planning, designing and developing indoor and outdoor provision with young children
- Three year longitudinal study. Funder: Bernard van Leer Foundation
- Clark, A. (2010) Transforming children's spaces: children's and adults' participation in designing learning environments. Abingdon: Routledge



Aims of the study

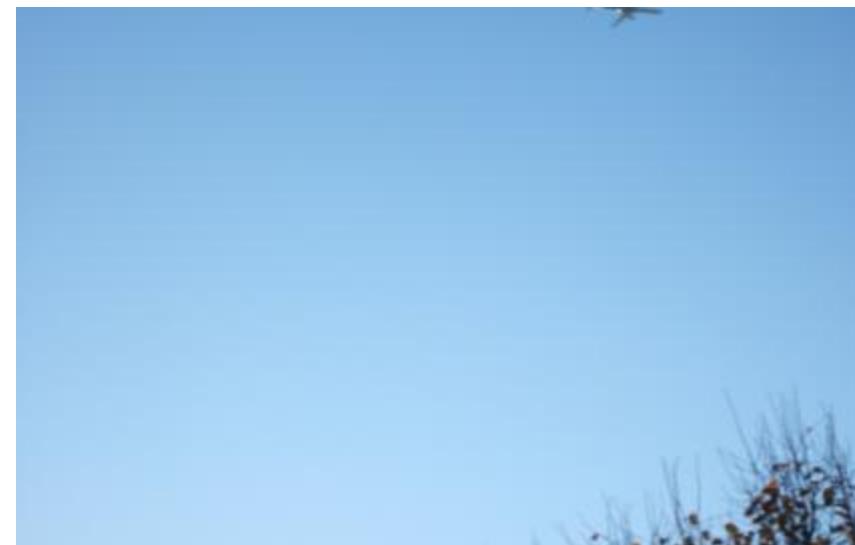
Research question

How can young children's views and experiences inform the planning, design and development of early years' provision?

Process involves:

- **Co-constructing meanings with participants**
- **Facilitating exchange and influencing practice**

Vignette: Samina's images



Samina What's that? That's you?

Researcher That's me. Yes this is me, and it
says...because there's something
else in the picture, I don't know if
you can see it, it's very small?

Samina Aeroplane.

Researcher [Laughs] So two years ago you took
a picture of an aeroplane and you
took an aeroplane this time, as well, didn't you?
I thought that was quite funny. So I decided you
may be liked aeroplanes, but I don't know.

Saminal...I love...home and I like...Bangladesh ...country.

Researcher Oh right, yes, and that's your country and that's why you like aeroplanes. Ah, of course, that makes a lot of sense, yes. ...

Slow research

‘These ever changing stories and relations open the spaces of research for something new to emerge if we were to slow down and experiment with stories (data) that glow.’

Millei, Z. and Rautio, P. (2017)
‘Overspills’ of research with children: an argument for slow research, *Children’s Geographies*, 15 (4) 466-477

Personal markers



Personal markers

Icelandic study using photography

- Map with their neighbourhood and own house
- Own flower pot
- Artwork on display made by the children
- Organizational charts with the children's names including birthday charts and attendance charts

Einarsdottir, J. (2005) 'Playschool in pictures: children's photographs as a research method', Early Child Development and Care, 175 (6), 523-541

Personal markers

'The children also tried to position themselves in the preschool by material and ownership. One way to show that they felt at home and belonged in preschool was to point out their own possessions when they walked around preschool taking pictures. Many of the children took photographs of their personal possessions in the preschool (eg. artwork that they had created that was hanging on the walls.) Lisa took a picture of her artwork that was hanging from a shelf and said, 'This is mine.' They also took photos of places that were pleasurable for them, such as the nap area, outdoor area and art room.'

Einarsdottir, J. and Ólafsdóttir, S. M. (2019) 'Children's perspectives on belonging in Icelandic preschools' in Murray, J. et al (eds.) Routledge International Handbook of Young Children's Rights. London: Routledge, p.385- 398

Invisible connections

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or grey or black-and -white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, trade, authority, agency. When the strings become too numerous that they can no longer pass among them they leave: the houses are dismantled ; only the strings and their supports remain....'

*(Calvino, Italo (1997) Invisible Cities,
Vintage Classics, 76)*

Who are the ‘invisible children’
that you have come across?

What makes the ‘invisible children’
hardest to listen to?

What could help increase these
children's sense of belonging?

Listening to young children's views and experiences: where are we now?

Who am I? Young children's sense of identity and wellbeing

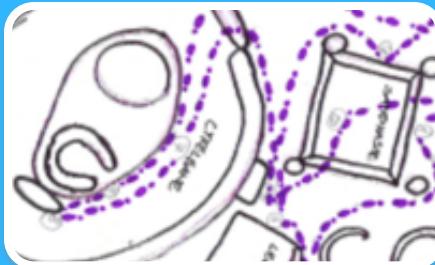
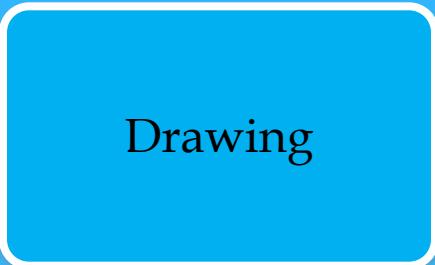
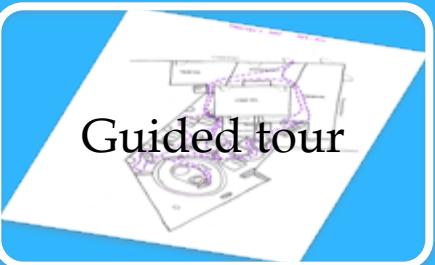
Who is with me? Relationships between adults and young children

Where am I? Early childhood environments



Professionals Seeking Children's Perspectives (2014-2015)
Persille Schwartz and Laura Detlefsen, Danish Evaluation
Institute, Denmark and
Alison Clark, UCL Institute of Education, London UK

Adapting the Mosaic approach



Vignette: Kristian

Line compiled a small circle of photographs with each of the three children in her group involved in this project. These individual maps had written text describing each photograph in the children's own words. In the centre of the map was a space small enough for one child to fit in. Line decided to place each of these maps on the floor in the playroom (hallway).

After several months of compiling and living with the maps Line decided it was time to remove them from the floor. Kristian noticed what she was doing and exclaimed:

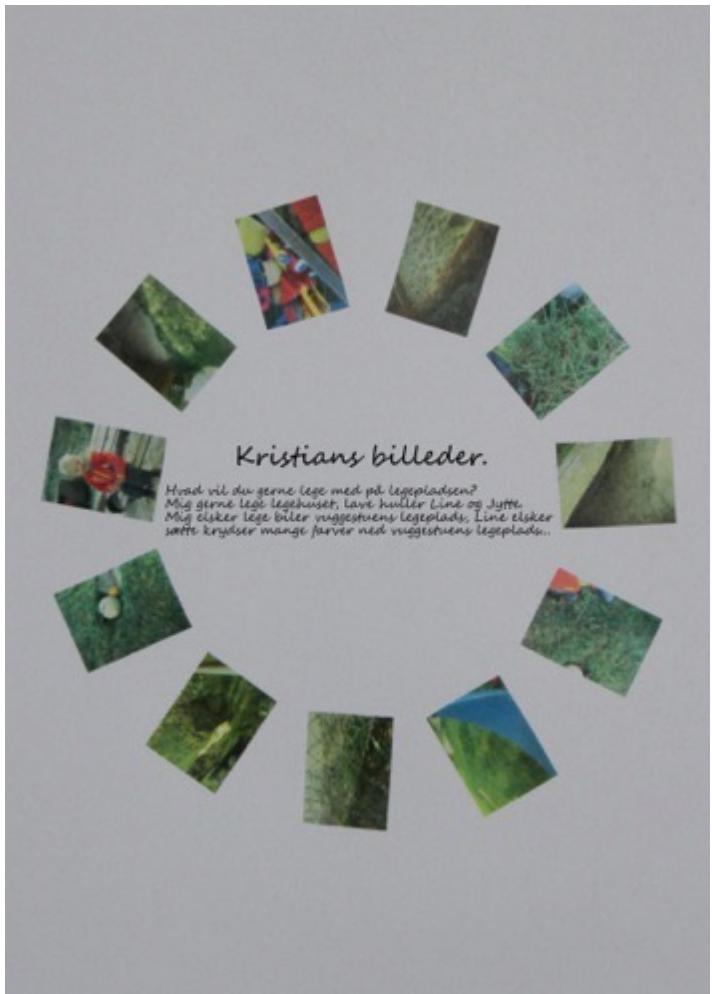
'Hello. Don't you like me anymore? You are moving me!'

Line was shocked by his reaction and was left unsure of what to do next.

Line said: 'I had to find out what to do. I said to colleagues: 'Uh Oh! This has happened- what do I do now?' One of Line's colleagues suggested how about asking Kristian to help you find a solution?

Kristian's response was to pick the map up and move it several metres away next to where his mattress is placed each day in daycare. He declared: 'Now its perfect.'

Kristian's circle



Empathy

Curiosity

Uncertainty

Uncertainty

‘It is an exercise in engaging with uncertainty (Mercieca, 2011) , where adults are released from the need to know with certainty.’

Mercieca, D. and D. P. Mercieca (2014) EPS becoming ignorant: questioning the assumption of listening and empowerment in young children. *Educational and Child Psychology*, Vol. 31 (1) p. 22-30

The value of slow knowledge

‘This repeated engagement with the children slowed down the adult journey to deciding upon meanings. It gave time to think about what a child was saying, to listen again or differently, and offered the potential for new interpretations.’ (p.42)

Cook, T. and Hess, E. (2007) What the camera sees and from whose perspective: fun methodologies for engaging children in enlightening adults, 14 (1) 29-46

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An aerial photograph of a school campus. The image shows a large green football field with white yard lines and goal posts. To the left, there's a black asphalt parking lot or paved area with some trees. On the right, there's a long, low-profile building with a blue roof and light-colored walls. The overall scene is a mix of natural and man-made elements.

Outdoor Spaces

Outdoor personal markers

Study of two early childhood centres with contrasting designs, working with 30 4 and 5 year olds

Ruby declared during her mapmaking storytelling that the grassy area under ‘the very old tree’ was where ‘we can stop and relax here’ and that her ‘brother used to play here too’

Deborah Moore, Anne-Marie Morrissey & Natalie Robertson (2019): ‘I feel like I’m getting sad there’: early childhood outdoor playspaces as places for children’s wellbeing, Early Child Development and Care, DOI:
[10.1080/03004430.2019.1651306](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1651306)

'I feel like I'm getting sad there'

I don't like that spot...it feels like if I jump in there I will fall over onto the concrete, it feels like I'm getting sad there'. Alice

Deborah Moore, Anne-Marie Morrissey & Natalie Robertson (2019): 'I feel like I'm getting sad there': early childhood outdoor playspaces as places for children's wellbeing, Early Child Development and Care, DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2019.1651306

Childhood experience of nature?

- The importance of direct sensory experience of biodiversity
- The value of proximate access to nature allowing children to explore nature in order to build up personal and meaningful relationships with the natural world

‘The children interacted with the environment constantly, collecting using, reducing and rebuilding new stories of sticks, stones, shells or cones. All items served for multiple purposes in common imaginative play themes, such as weapons and food (or even hairdresser equipment) to mention just a few.’ (p.20)

Thomas Beery & Kari Anne Jørgensen (2018) Children in nature: sensory engagement and the experience of biodiversity, Environmental Education Research, 24:1, 13-25, DOI: [10.1080/13504622.2016.1250149](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1250149)

Where are the private spaces?

Are private spaces harder to find in kindergartens now
than in the past?

Controlled spaces

‘This is where we cross our arms and cross our legs.’ Jules

Clark, A. (2010) Transforming children’s spaces: children’s and adults’ participation in designing learning environments. Abingdon: Routledge

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Listening to young children

Where next?



Listening to young children's views and experiences

- Where are the gaps?
- How to listen and act upon the views and experiences of all children?
- How to continue to build accumulative knowledge with children about matters that affect their lives?



Listening to young children's views and experiences

How can kindergarten and school spaces be more attuned to young children?

What opportunities do young children have for in depth play and the gathering of slow knowledge?



How to keep young children visible
beyond ECE as citizens now?

Selected Publications

- Clark, A. (2017) *Listening to young children: a guide to understanding and using the Mosaic approach*. Third edition. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing.
- Clark, A. (2014) Developing and adapting the Mosaic approach in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. and Robb, M. (eds.) *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: Sage, 200- 209.
- Clark, A. (2011) Breaking methodological boundaries? Exploring visual, participatory methods with *adults* and young children. Children's perspectives and participation in research. Special Issue. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* , 19 (3) September, pp. 321-330.
- Clark, A. (2010) *Transforming children's spaces: children's and adults' involvement in designing learning environments*. London: Routledge

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