

Research Methods in Early Childhood

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Penny Mukherji & Deborah Albon



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Research Methods in Early Childhood

An Introductory Guide



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7

LISTENING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- To consider the growth in research involving listening to young children.
 - To link this to the emergence of children's rights perspectives.
 - To reflect further on ethical issues relating to involving young children directly in research.
-

An emerging principle that underpins research is one of listening to young children. Building on the previous chapter, where we thought through some of the ethical issues relating to research with young children, this chapter looks more specifically at how the early childhood researcher might develop creative ways of listening to young children and including them as participants in research. The preceding chapter on ethics looked at Lahman's (2008: 285) notion of the '*competent yet vulnerable child*' in research. Like Lahman, we believe these are two conceptualisations of the child that it is possible to hold simultaneously. In particular, the previous chapter looked at young children's protective rights in relation to research, whereas this chapter's focus is on their participatory rights – although inevitably, as the notion of the '*competent but vulnerable child*' implies, these are closely interwoven. Moreover, following Bath (2013), we see listening to children as strongly aligned to a more general ethic of care in early childhood practice and research.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEREST IN LISTENING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Moss et al. (2005) maintain that the development of interest around listening to children can be linked to the growth in the children's rights perspective across the globe. This perspective is one that embraces children's participation and recognises that children have their own views of what affects them directly, as well as their own perspectives of the world around them (Smith, 2011).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1989 and has been ratified by 192 countries, champions this principle of participation alongside enshrining the need to protect children. The notion of participation can be seen most clearly in articles 12 and 13:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child ...

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (UNCRC articles 12 and 13, quoted in Moss et al., 2005: 2)

We will return to the issue of the capability of 'forming his or her own views' as well as the issue of age and maturity later in the chapter. It is important to acknowledge that in the UK, for example, prior to the UNCRC, the 1989 Children

Act had begun to enshrine the importance of listening to children in their own right. Prior to the 1980s, international and national legislation had a tendency to view children – especially young children – as the property of their parents, as well as being incapable of expressing an opinion on matters affecting them. Thus, children were viewed as unable to form or express a view about matters affecting their lives (Taylor, 2000). This position is changing.

Underpinning the children's rights perspective is a view that children are persons in their own right – not human 'becomings' but human beings (Qvortrup, 1994). Thus, in some of the literature, children, as a group, are considered as being in a similar position to other minority or marginalised groups such as women, Black and minority ethnic groups, or people with disabilities – groups that have tended to be, 'at best under represented, more generally ignored and at worst exploited and manipulated' (Cook and Hess, 2007: 30). Thus, we might conceptualise the burgeoning interest in children's perspectives under a broader umbrella of research which actively seeks the perspectives of people from marginalised groups (Greene and Hill, 2005). To this end, Alanen (2001) develops the idea of 'generation' as a form of sociological analysis which serves to examine how children come to be distinguished as 'different' from adults and how this perpetuates inequality between these social categories. You might make a link here with the 'critical' theories discussed in Chapter 5 of this book.

Also underpinning this perspective is a view that recognises that there are a variety of different experiences of childhood according to whether the child is able-bodied or has a disability, is a girl or a boy, is living in poverty, or comes from a minority ethnic group. Other differences might relate to children's experiences of family life or whether they live in a rural or urban area, which may affect their access to early childhood services, or indeed there may be a mixture of these, such as a white boy living in an urban area who has a disability, for instance. We should recognise, then, that there is no one, universal 'child' that stands for all children (James and Prout, 1990) and that children's experiences are multiple and varied (Greene and Hill, 2005).

Increasingly, the response from public policy-makers and advocacy groups is one of developing approaches that involve listening to children, such as the 2013 UNICEF report *Child Well-being in Rich Countries* (Adamson, 2013) (see part 2 especially). In order to make a statement about children's subjective sense of their own well-being, the researchers asked children for their own perspectives on well-being, although close examination of the document shows that the children were aged from 11 years, with no younger children included in the sample. What can be said here is that there is a *general trend* towards listening to children and, as previously stated, this has its basis in children being viewed as competent in voicing their views on matters that affect them, as well as children having the right to participate in decision-making that has an impact upon their lives (Taylor, 2000). Later on in this chapter we look at the issue of 'competence' more critically.



ACTIVITY

Find out about the ways in which local government in your area attempts to gain the perspectives of children and young people about services that affect them. What areas are they interested in finding out about? What strategies are used to elicit children's views? How old are the children who are consulted - is there evidence of children under 5 years being consulted?

It is important at this point to be cautious in thinking that developments in the area of listening to children are applied equally to very young children and older children. Hyder (2002: 311) reports on the way a 'listening to children' project was caricatured as 'Babies consulted about council policy' in the local newspaper. This highlights the way young children are often viewed; as incapable of forming and expressing opinions about matters that affect them owing to their young age and immaturity.



REFLECTION POINT

'Competence' is a complex matter. How might it be defined in terms of research? Should it mean ability to understand what a research project entails in its entirety? Or perhaps the ability to answer research questions in writing or through spoken language? If we demand certain 'competencies' in order to become a 'participant' in research, *who* might be excluded?

Another interpretation of 'competence' is *experience*; that is, children having an understanding of themselves, those around them and their environment (Cocks, 2006: 255). In this sense, very young children and/or children with profound disabilities should be considered competent as they have a unique insight into their own lives. Moreover, this takes us beyond thinking about human beings according to distinct categories of 'competent/incompetent' or 'mature/immature' or 'dependent/independent' (Lee, 2001). An 'ethic of care', for instance, would emphasise our interconnectedness and dependency on each other as human beings (Bath, 2013). Furthermore, Lahman's (2008) notion of being able to hold on to the idea of vulnerability and competency at any one time adds further weight to this idea of troubling the notion of 'competency' in research and indeed human life more generally.

These are very difficult issues but they get to the heart of the 'listening' debate in relation to whose voices are elicited; whose are heard; and whose are seen as most credible.

In the previous chapter we introduced you to the work of Christensen and Prout (2002) and their idea of 'ethical symmetry'. This is an idea that starts from a position in which all children and adults are equal with respect to ethical considerations but that when it comes to research in situ, then different 'tactics' might be employed in order to research in ways that are sensitive to participants in given contexts. In order to elicit the perspectives of babies and toddlers it is highly likely that the focus group method used in the UNICEF study would be inappropriate and would, moreover, reinforce an idea of the very young child as 'incompetent' as they would be 'set up to fail' in effect. Yet babies and toddlers tell us a great deal about their lives if we take the trouble to listen, and researchers can and do endeavour to find ways of hearing their voices in research.



REFLECTION POINT

Before we think about research let us think about 'listening' in an everyday sense. Reflect on what we might mean by 'listening' to babies and young children. Does it have to involve speech? How do babies and young children communicate to us about what they like and dislike?

It might be useful here to think of a practical example such as meal times:

- Babies will often use their mouth and tongue to push out a teat or small spoon or draw it in using a sucking action.
- They may also move their head towards or away from a teat or spoon when being fed or change body position in a way that tells the person feeding them what they want to do.
- The baby's facial expressions are also indicative of whether the experience is enjoyable or not.
- And as the baby gets older, increasingly, their use of hands and early speech are important in communicating their feelings.
- If we add in the close relationship the child's parent or carer has with the baby, then minute changes in the above examples are likely to be noticed and acted upon.

In other words, in tuning into babies in a sensitive way we are 'listening' to them – 'listening' not only with our ears, but with our eyes, whole bodies and minds too. At this point it is also important to note that attention to body language is important when researching with adults too. If, when interviewing,

an interviewee's body language suggests discomfort with a question asked, the interviewer should try to 'read' such cues and perhaps rephrase the question or move on to another question. Tuning into the body language of research participants is important, but takes on increased significance with babies and very young children as many children of this age are unable to use words to communicate their feelings.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RESEARCH?

The growth in the children's rights perspective and its increasing impact on public policy-making has its parallels in a widening range of research. Cook and Hess (2007) note that since the late 1980s there has been a move away from seeing adults as speaking for children in research contexts towards one that seeks to listen to children's viewpoints and experiences. Crucially, adults are seen as not necessarily in the best position to represent children's viewpoints and experiences fully because children themselves have a unique perspective on their own lives. Thus, Greene and Hill (2005: 3) argue that:

The researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experience will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives.

Such a perspective is a shift in thinking about children in research. This is because traditionally, research has been carried out on children rather than with them. For Westcott and Littleton (2005), this links to the idea of the child being passive and powerless, with the focus of the research being on adults revealing children's understandings as opposed to *creating* understandings with children. While this undoubtedly still happens, since the mid-1990s researchers have increasingly been developing participatory and inclusive research strategies in which the child, viewed as a social actor, is at the centre (Barker and Weller, 2003). Underpinning this movement in thinking about children is the criticism of developmental psychology as confining children to a position of being consistently 'less able' than adults because of their supposed location in 'earlier' developmental stages. Since the mid-1990s, writers who are sometimes known collectively as embracing the 'new sociology of childhood' have criticised this view of children as 'other' to adults and the idea of developmental stages per se, and this has led to new ways of conceptualising children and childhood in research (James et al., 1998). In short, we have begun to talk about children as being more capable than we might have done previously and this, in turn, has opened up greater possibilities for children's participation in research. Let us now examine this in relation to two research projects.

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

There are an increasing number of studies that focus on listening to children. Rosen (2010) undertook a piece of research into children's perceptions of their role in curriculum development in a Canadian pre-school. Her key questions were: 'What are four- and five-year-old children's perceptions of how curriculum is developed in one preschool in British Columbia (BC), Canada? Do children think they have a role in developing curriculum at this preschool? Do they want to influence the curriculum and, if so, how?' (p. 92).

Throughout the article, you will see an emphasis on eliciting children's perspectives - an area we return to in depth in Chapter 17 - and this was seen in both the topic for investigation as well as the methods employed. Amongst the key findings of the study, Rosen found that the children were very capable research participants, who were keen to influence the curriculum and could talk about individual and collective curriculum goals. However, she highlights generational power and inequality between adults (teachers) and children, noting how this impacts on children's ability to exert power over curriculum decision-making. Therefore, Rosen (2010) draws our attention to inequalities which have their basis in age/generation much like researchers who draw attention to inequalities based on social class, gender, sexuality and 'race'.

Traditionally, parents, practitioners, inspectors and other adults have been 'listened to' in relation to the curriculum. However, this would restrict our understanding to a purely adult perspective. As Cook and Hess (2007) observe, this discounts the perspective of one of the 'key players' - children. Children may well have their own understandings and experiences of a particular service, which, as Rosen shows, is very illuminating.



RESEARCH IN FOCUS

We provide a second Research in Focus section here because we wish to highlight a different research project that similarly has at its core the importance of listening to young children (and hearing them!).

By way of contrast to Rosen's (2010) research into curriculum development in a nursery setting, Winter (2010) focused on ascertaining the perspectives of young children in the *care system*. Her research was carried out in Northern Ireland. Her focus on the care system is one which, she argues, is neglected in the literature. You will often notice that when reading the research of others, the researcher(s) will demonstrate how their research is positioned in relation to the work of others and how their own research will address any perceived gaps in

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the literature. Winter's work is framed around the idea of children's social competence and the importance of ascertaining children's views as part of decisions made in their 'best interests'.

Winter's research involved ten case studies including 39 semi-structured interviews with young children in care, their parents and their social workers. Fourteen children - all of whom were subject to care orders (which means that responsibility for their care was held between social services and the child's parents) - aged 4-7 years participated in the study. Limits to confidentiality were shared with the children explicitly in case the children alluded to possible or actual harm and appropriate adults were on hand should the interviews cause the children distress. The interviews were based around an activity: the child's creation of a 'reality box'. These were made from a range of drawings, figures, photographs (using cutting and sticking, etc., as the child wished) and represented (on the outside) how the children thought they came across to the outside world, and the inside of the box represented their feelings and perspectives on their lives at home and in care. Thus, the methods were an unusual way of encouraging children's direct participation, which is an area we examine more thoroughly in Chapter 17.

The data give a rich and detailed insight into these young children's perspectives on their lives. One child, for instance, used card and lollipop sticks to make a fence inside his box, stating: 'I put a fence around my feelings; that's why I don't want no-one to see them' (Winter, 2010: 376). The child was clear that he did not want to be identified but was keen that his work be shared with others in order to help train other adults in their work. Winter concludes that using participatory methods such as the use of reality boxes helps to ensure that very young children are not excluded from participatory processes in research and in practice. She also argues that the method should be seen as part of a wider agenda in social work of working with young children in a transparent and respectful way. In order to protect children better, it is important to hear them.

However, we should be mindful that creative methods in research, such as the reality boxes used in this study, may not result in a deeper understanding of an issue. Spending time with children and *being available to them* (a point we raise in Chapter 17) remain very important for practitioners *and* researchers. One might also ask: Would some children see the activity purely in terms of a cutting and sticking task?

ETHICAL ISSUES WHEN INVOLVING YOUNG CHILDREN IN RESEARCH

The previous chapter was dedicated to examining the issue of ethics in research. In this section, our aim is to build on this and examine some of the particular ethical considerations that need to be taken into account when *directly* involving young children in research.

In Chapter 6 we noted that an important consideration in research is whether it is of some benefit to the participants (Robson, 2011a). In involving children directly in research and listening to their perspectives, we believe that there are many positive benefits, not least that the researcher gains access to the viewpoints of a key stakeholder group in early childhood research – the children themselves. As a consequence of carrying out research that involves listening to children, the researcher is adding to a body of research that views children as experts on their own lives, sees eliciting children’s perspectives as possible and takes children’s ideas seriously. By participating in research, children have the opportunity to learn a range of skills, such as those relating to speaking and listening, as well as learning about their environment and their place in it, in new and exciting ways (Driskell, 2002). In addition, participatory research methods, which we discuss further in Chapter 17, allow children more ownership over research and this can mean that they are more motivated to participate (O’Kane, 2008). But while there are positive benefits to listening to children, we should always be mindful of Woodhead and Faulkner’s (2008: 35) caution that ‘respect for children’s status as social actors does not diminish adult responsibilities’.

Increasingly, research with children is being governed by codes of ethics, which lay down the protective responsibility researchers have towards children who are participants in research. In this sense, research that involves children can be viewed as constituting a ‘risky’ activity (Allen, 2005). These risks are not of the same kind as found in biomedical research; in the types of early childhood research we are discussing in this book, the risks are more likely to be ‘social than physical’ (Allen, 2005: 20). In other words, the child is unlikely to come to physical harm, but the researcher needs to consider the social and emotional harm they might inflict upon the child participant.



REFLECTION POINT

What social and emotional harm might come to young children in a piece of research?

Think about this in relation to the following hypothetical research examples:

- filming babies at lunchtime in a study aiming to look at adult-child interactions during meal times
- interviewing six children of 3-4 years as a group about what they like or dislike about coming to nursery
- carrying out research looking at children’s lack of mathematical understanding in the area of conservation of number, involving children aged 5 years in various tests outside of the classroom.

If we take each hypothetical example in turn, in the first instance, the researcher would need to consider the impact of filming on the babies. S/he would need to tune in sensitively to the reactions of the babies. It is likely, for instance, that if the babies stop feeding and/or are clearly moving their faces away from the camera, they may be distressed and so filming should cease immediately and the researcher may need to move further away. The filming may also make the parent or carer feeding the baby uneasy, which might also impact negatively on the meal-time experience. As a consequence, it might also influence the findings of the research.

In the second example, what if the subject matter has little interest for the children? Possibly, traditional forms of group interviewing may be inappropriate as they may involve sitting for long periods when the children would rather be playing with their friends. In other words, there may well be a power imbalance, with adults deciding what to talk about, as well as when and where this should happen. In addition, when interviewing children as a group, the researcher would need to ensure that *all* children have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion, rather than some voices dominating. The questions asked would need to be carefully thought through to ensure *all* the children are able to understand what is being asked of them, especially given that children often feel the need to 'get it right' when asked questions by an adult. This would also need thinking through in terms of whether English is the children's first language or whether any of the children have communication difficulties. Finally here, the researcher would need to consider how a child might feel if they say something that is potentially ridiculed by the rest of the group, as well as how they would deal with this issue if it arises.

In the final hypothetical example, these mathematics tests may have little meaning for the children and take the children away from their usual activities in the classroom. The work of Donaldson (1979), although involving test situations too, emphasises the importance of tests being *meaningful* to children and demonstrates how children are able to perform at a higher level when this is the case. Hatch (1995) highlights the need to establish rapport with young children in research and make them feel comfortable. One aspect of this is the choice of place to carry out the research. Hatch argues that children are likely to be more comfortable in a familiar setting, whereas this hypothetical example sets out to put children in an unfamiliar setting, which may be unsettling and, at worst, distressing for the child. In addition to this, the research appears to be aimed at demonstrating children's lack of competence in mathematics as opposed to what they can do and could therefore be regarded as unethical. This last example, then, might also be regarded as damaging to children as a group – beyond those children involved directly in the study – because it might reinforce a view of young children as lacking or incompetent in some way (Alderson, 2000). It is far better to develop a research idea that is framed positively. So, if interested in early mathematics,

the researcher could frame her question in such a way as to focus on how to support/enhance young children's mathematical thinking within the classroom, for example.

As you can see, there are many ethical implications in research with children and it is important to think this through when designing a piece of research. This can be linked to the degree of children's involvement in the research. Alderson (2005: 29–30), for instance, outlines three main levels of child involvement in research. These are as follows:

- '*Children as unknowing subjects of research*'. Here children do not know that research is being carried out and are not asked for their consent.
- '*Children as aware subjects*'. Here the design of the research is tightly within the control of the adult researcher.
- '*Children as active participants*'. Here there is flexibility over the methods used in the research. Furthermore, children themselves may become involved in planning and carrying out research projects.

Each of these levels of involvement implies a different conception of childhood, ranging from seeing the child as innocent or the child as needing controlling to the child as confident and competent (Alderson, 2005). In a similar way, Woodhead and Faulkner (2008) ask whether children in research are viewed as objects, subjects or participants, each representing changing understandings of the competency of children, as well as changing perceptions relating to the degree of sensitivity accorded children in relation to their rights and welfare.

But seeing children as competent and able to participate actively in research has ethical implications. You will recall that in the previous chapter we stressed the importance of gaining the consent of parents and other possible gatekeepers prior to research being carried out, as well as gaining the consent of the children. But this may not be as straightforward as it seems. As Alderson (2005) observes, what do we do if a parent withdraws their consent for their child to take part in a piece of research but the child is keen to participate? Similarly, what do we do if a few children object to being observed if the researcher wishes to observe a whole-class situation? Children are increasingly being seen as able to consent to participate in research as well as withdraw from research (Farrell, 2005) and, as the previous chapter noted, the notion of informed consent and the right to withdraw from research are key ethical concepts in any piece of research. Alderson (2005) does not offer any 'easy' answers to questions such as these, but she highlights the need to enter into dialogue with the children and adults involved to talk through the issues that have been raised by such dilemmas. David et al. (2005) maintain that rather than 'answering' ethical dilemmas such as those stated, we should recognise that such dilemmas are likely to multiply as awareness increases around the relative powerlessness of children in relation to adults.

Issues of power also need to be considered in relation to choice of method. It is important to recognise that there may be conceptual issues around interviewing children, for instance, which can be hidden in research. Westcott and Littleton (2005) argue that children may not be used to being listened to seriously. Further to this, Clark (2005) points out that all forms of communication between adults and children involve questions of power. She argues that an adult who views young children primarily as needing *protection* and as *vulnerable* may emphasise a strong role for adults and a relatively powerless role for children. Conversely, an adult who views children as capable of taking an active role in research is likely to have higher expectations of children in terms of the degree to which they are able to participate. An emphasis on children's communicative competence may, therefore, require a reappraisal of the relationships between children and adults (Clark, 2005; see also the discussion of communicative competence in relation to disability in the previous chapter). We explore this further in Chapter 17, which looks at creative approaches to listening.

Another compelling issue linked to the power differential between adults and children relates to tokenism. If the 'listening' is tokenistic then it merely reinforces this power differential (Brooker, 2011). Moreover, as Bath (2013) asserts, listening in the minority world is often linked to the notion of the individual as consumer, as can be seen in public consultation exercises and the like. Such exercises are premised on the idea that human beings should be viewed as individual, autonomous *consumers* as opposed to interconnected *citizens*, which seems far removed from the ethic of care that we would want to champion as important in underpinning the idea of listening to children. Hart (1992) uses the visual image of a ladder to encourage reflection on the levels of children's participation in research.

If one imagines an upright ladder with rungs, Hart (1992) conceptualises a gradual shift from the bottom rungs where children are manipulated and the listening is tokenistic to one where, at the top of the ladder, children share in the decision-making of a project. Sometimes children's involvement might only be at the level of 'decoration' such as having a balloon launch with children to showcase a particular piece of research, while the children may not have been part of any other aspect of the project. You might like to think about this in relation to the inclusion of photographs in your research projects. If your research involves children directly, for example asking them about an aspect of the nursery day, it might be appropriate (with permissions) to either take photographs yourself of the children engaged in this aspect of the day or to encourage children to take their own things of interest. However, if your use of photographs is merely to embellish the written-up study and adds no weight to any points you want to make in relation to the study you have undertaken, then we suggest it is mere *decoration* and should be avoided. We are sure you can see that these different usages of photographs represent very different rungs on Hart's participation ladder. You should note that we thread through discussion about the use of photographs elsewhere in the book.

THE CHILD AS RESEARCHER

On the face of it, it would seem that young children might be incapable of being researchers; a view that has its basis in a perspective of young children as too young, too immature and too lacking in the qualities needed to be a researcher – qualities developed with age. These might include a certain level of verbal skills or an ability to record information that can be shared.

However, Mary Kellett (2005) argues that children can be *taught* the skills that will enable them to become researchers. In early childhood literature, there are numerous examples of writers who emphasise young children's curiosity, their inbuilt desire to explore and their creativity (e.g. Athey, 2007; Bruce, 1987; Robson, 2011b). In other words, if we were talking about the motivation and ability of young children to explore the world around them, we would be saying that this is present from birth.

Alderson (2000) argues that in many schools (we would extend this to all early childhood spaces), children are engaged in research on a regular basis. However, this type of research tends to remain unpublished. Examples of this might be:

- a group of 3- and 4-year-old children going out of the nursery to conduct a traffic survey following the interest a few children have shown in the transport that passes on the main road near to the setting
- a baby exploring the different textures, shapes, sounds, tastes and smells of objects in a treasure basket
- a group of 5-year-old children investigating how they can stop a lump of snow from melting (they have brought it inside excitedly on a snowy day and want to preserve it).

Alderson (2000) points out that this type of research tends to be viewed in terms of children 'practising' being a researcher as opposed to it being important, real-life research. She argues that children are often interested in research that has a practical implication and achieves an element of change. Moreover, Driskell (2002) notes this, saying that projects about the physical environment are often highly motivating for children.



CASE STUDY

In a module that asks students to evaluate an environment such as a local post office or local woodland as a learning environment *beyond* their workplace (that is, a nursery or school), Lina looked at the playground near to her nursery. Rather than conducting the evaluation alone, she encouraged the 3-4-year-old children to take the lead

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in this. She found that very few of the children used the local playground and was intrigued why this was the case. She asked them what they would like to see in the playground and took the children there on a series of visits. The children drew pictures and she noted their comments next to the drawings. They also took photographs and took her on a tour of the playground telling her what they liked and disliked about it.

Primarily the children thought the playground was 'mostly for big kids' and felt that the equipment that was there was in a poor state of repair. However, Lina was surprised when some of the children stated that they liked the coloured lines on the playground surface (denoting the way space is used in different sports). She observed these children walking along the different lines and attributed their interest to other observations she had made relating to the trajectory nature of these children's schemas (see Athey, 2007, for a discussion on schemas).

Lina made a display of the children's evaluations of the playground in the nursery and was later encouraged to move the display to the local library as part of ongoing community efforts to improve the quality of play spaces for young children in the area. She found that the physical environment was a topic that children were keen to investigate and share their views about.



KEY POINTS FROM THE CHAPTER

- There has been a growth of interest in children's participation and projects that involve listening to young children. This is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and a view of the child as a competent, rather than passive, co-constructor of knowledge.
 - There are positive benefits to listening to children in research, not only for the researcher, but for children themselves.
 - There are ethical issues that need to be thought through in relation to involving young children in research, not least the relative power of the adult researcher in relation to young children.
 - Finally, there is a growth in interest about children as researchers. This reflects a more equitable balance of power between the child researcher and the adult researcher.
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FURTHER READING

Brooker, L. (2011) 'Taking children seriously: an alternative agenda for research?', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9: 137-49. This article makes a strong case for children's participation in research and emphasises the need to avoid tokenism.

Clark, A., Kjørholt, A.T. and Moss, P. (eds) (2005) *Beyond Listening: Children's Perspectives on Early Childhood Services*. Bristol: Policy Press. An interesting collection of contributions all concerned with listening to young children and with relevance to both early childhood research and practice.

Woodhead, M. and Faulkner, D. (2008) 'Subjects, objects or participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children', in P. Christensen and A. James (eds) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*, 2nd edition. Abingdon: Routledge. A chapter that looks at changing conceptualisations of children in research.

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