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# **Knock Knock! Who's there?**

## **Gaining access to children as researchers**

**Jane Murray**

**School of Education**

Postgraduate Research Degree Student  
and Early Career Researcher Annual  
Conference 2010



# This presentation considers ...

**How I addressed challenges of securing access to data in the 'real world' (Robson, 2002) for my research degree:**

'An attempt to conceptualise ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers'

**Firstly,** I present some background

**Next,** I will share five challenges I encountered while accessing data in the 'real world' for YCaR and how I addressed them

**Finally,** I will share what I learned about securing access to 'real world' data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry



# What is the Nature of the Enquiry?

- Young Children as Researchers (YCaR)
- Epistemological focus
- Asks: can young children aged 4-8 years be researchers?
- Located in field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), nested within educational research
- A critical ethnographic study... (Carspecken, 1996)
- ...within a constructivist grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006)





## Questions emerged from a preliminary study (Murray, 2006)...

- What are the nature and definitions of research in the field of early childhood education and care?
- What enquiries might be important to young children and how might they engage in them?
- What support structures and barriers might affect young children's participation in research in matters affecting them?
- How might a project develop to explore ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers? ***As part of this question, issues relating to access emerged during the study.***



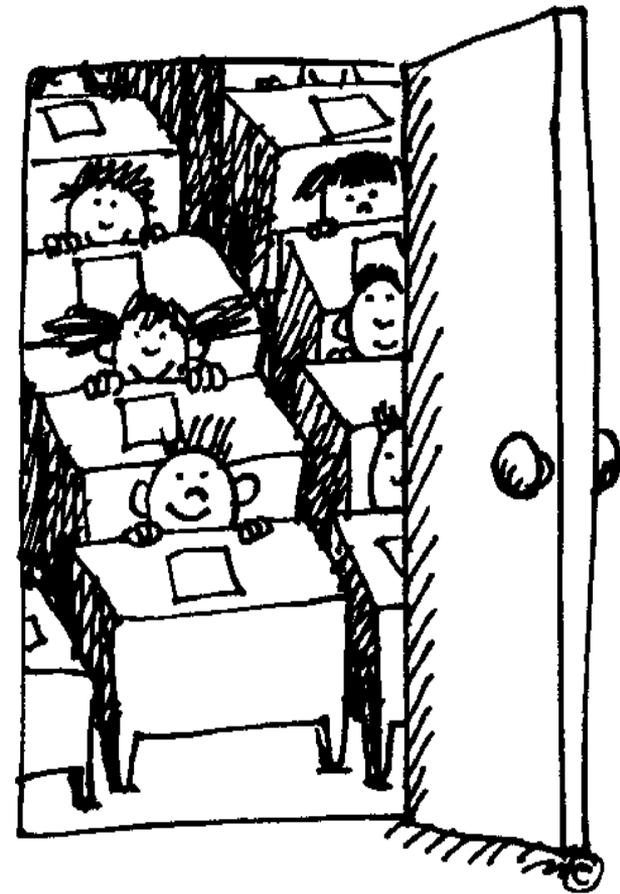


# ***In Young Children as Researchers, what is access?***

## **Why was securing access important?**

For ethnographic educational researchers...

- Access is more than walking through a door
- Access is important (Hood *et al.*, 1996; Robson, 2003; Cutler, 2004; Cohen *et al.* (2007)...
- Access leads to the data which provides enhanced understanding of people and their ideas, behaviours and cultures (Cutler, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Schostak, 2002)
- Access involves both ethical and practical issues, often predicated on each other.
- This is particularly highlighted in research involving children...





## **This enquiry was about children accessing research**

Issues of access relating to children in research refer increasingly to children's involvement in research about themselves (Brownlie *et al.*, 2006; Morrow, 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008).

**Internationally** we have seen emerging discourses on

- Children as researchers - progression from research on children...with children...by children (Clark and Moss, 2001; Brownlie *et al.*, 2006; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008)
- 'New sociology of childhood' (James, *et al.*, 1998; Corsaro, 2005).
- Children's rights (Alderson, 1995; 2001; CRAE, 2009; UN 1989; UN 2000)

There is now patchy recognition of the child as autonomous and active, rather than an object being prepared for adulthood (Hart, 1992; Qvortrup, 1994)

Such recognition is relatively weak in England (UNCRC, 2008; DCSF, 2009)

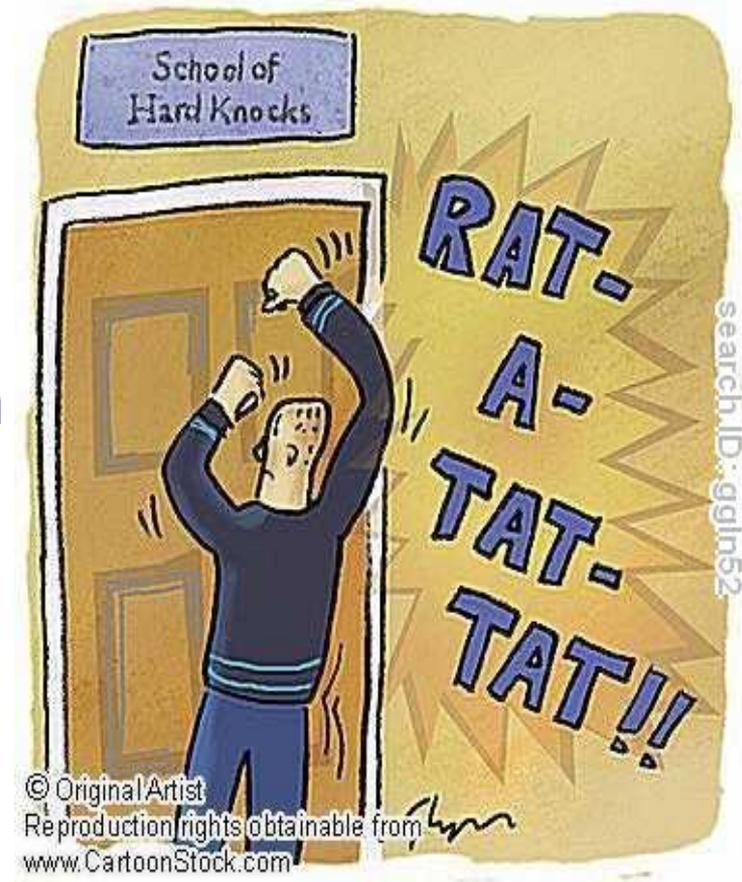




# Five challenges encountered while accessing data in the 'real world' for YCaR

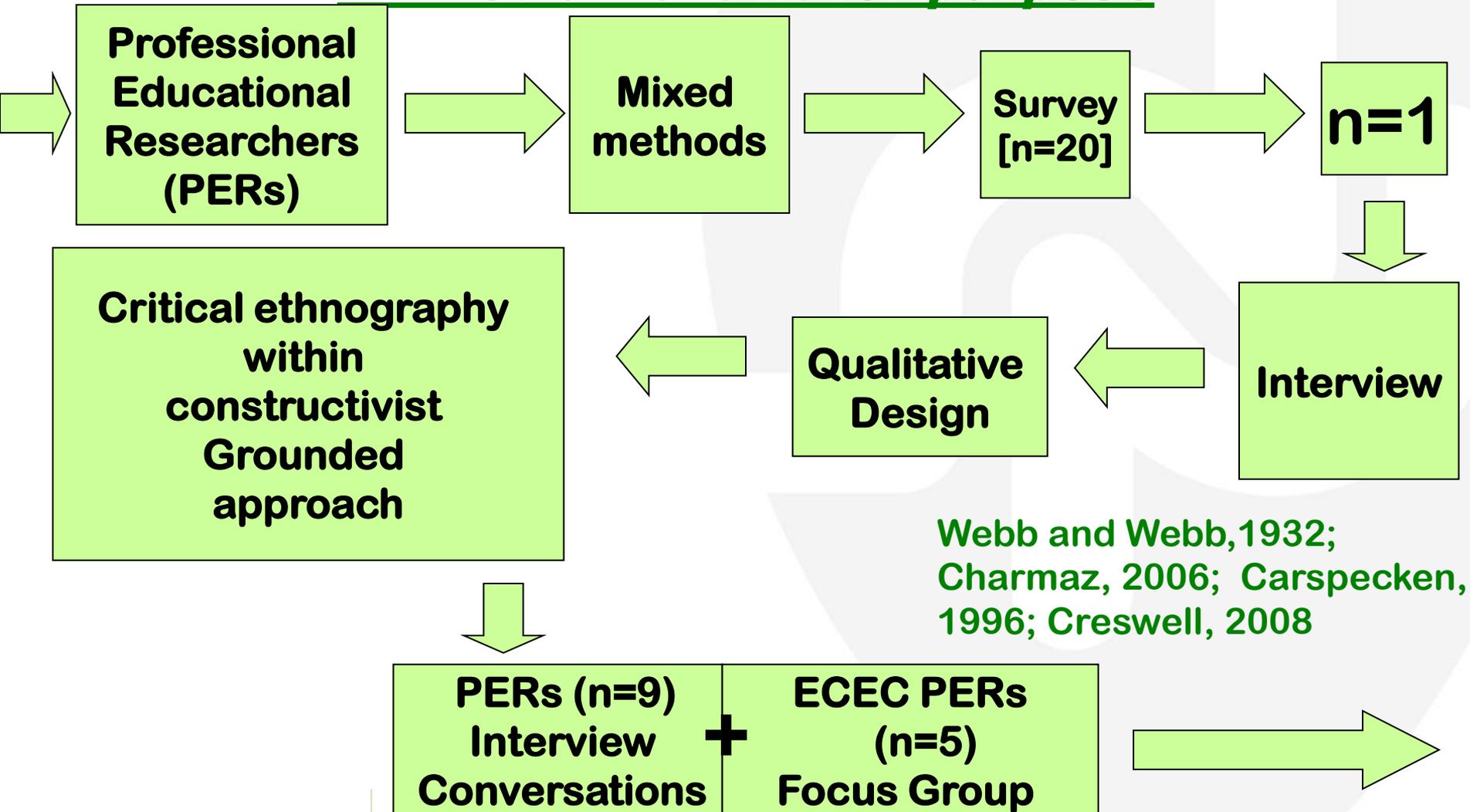
1. Establishing an instrument fit for purpose
2. Getting inside an ECEC setting
3. Gaining acceptance from setting staff
4. Gaining informed consent from primary carers
5. Gathering data on children's natural behaviours in their homes

**How did I address these challenges?**





## Access Challenge 1: *An instrument fit for purpose*





# Research Behaviours

Explore with an aim

Want to explore

Explore with an aim which changes during the process

Find a solution

Conceptualise

Use and apply findings in new contexts

Can communicate what they have achieved

Develop increasingly better understanding of the world through exploration

Explore broadly

Go beyond instinct

Plan Investigate

Believe what they are doing is good

Can replicate output

Make links

Can communicate what they attempt to do

Reflect on process

Base decisions on evidence

Are systematic

Build on others' work

Find out why things happen

Gather data

Explore without an aim

Take account of context

Are focused on their chosen activity

Use processes that are fit for purpose

Participate with others

Find out how things happen

Explore with a fine focus

Increase knowledge

Question

Enquire

Do no harm

Examine problems

Reflect on results

Can replicate process

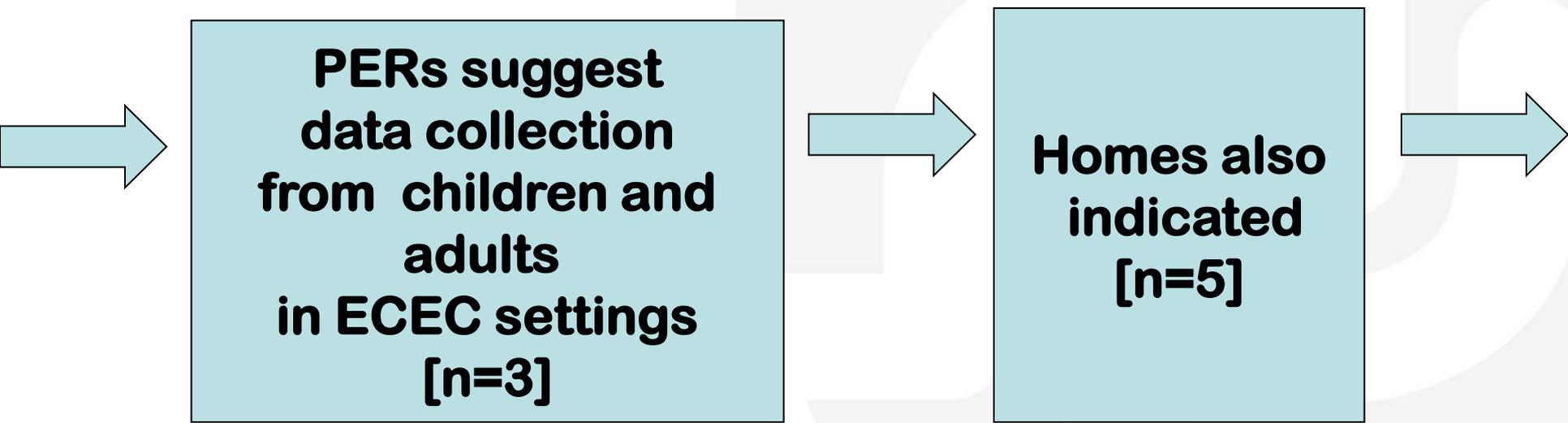
Are objective

Test and check

Seek a solution



## **Access Challenge 2:** **Getting inside an ECEC setting**



Sylva et al., 2004; Feinstein *et al.*, 2008;  
Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1986;  
Hart and Risley, 1995; Yee and Andrews,  
2006



## Participating Settings in Primary Schools (n=3)

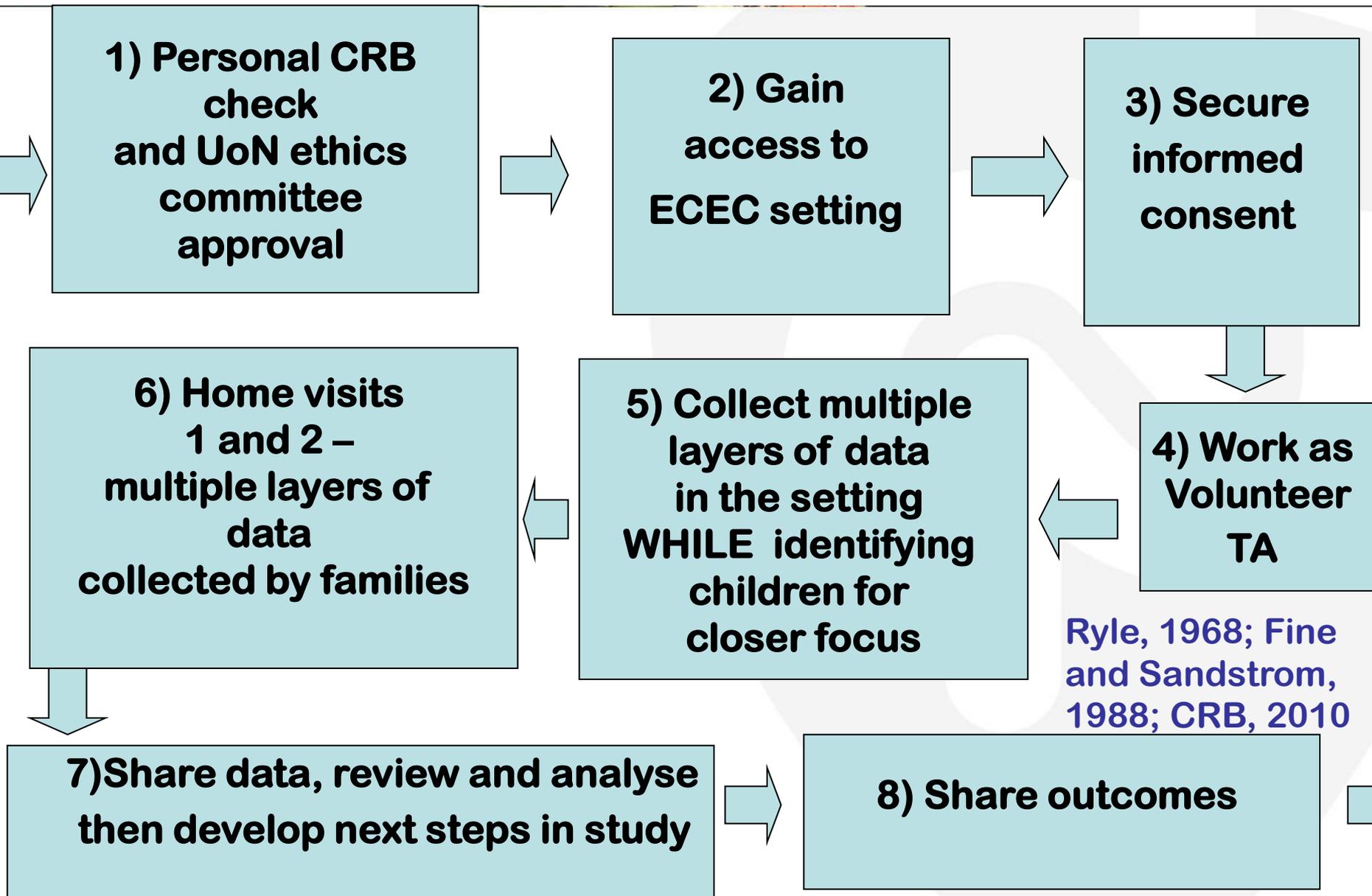
<b>Setting A</b>	<b>Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)</b>
<b>Setting B</b>	<b>4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=7)</b>
<b>Setting C</b>	<b>4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=5)</b>



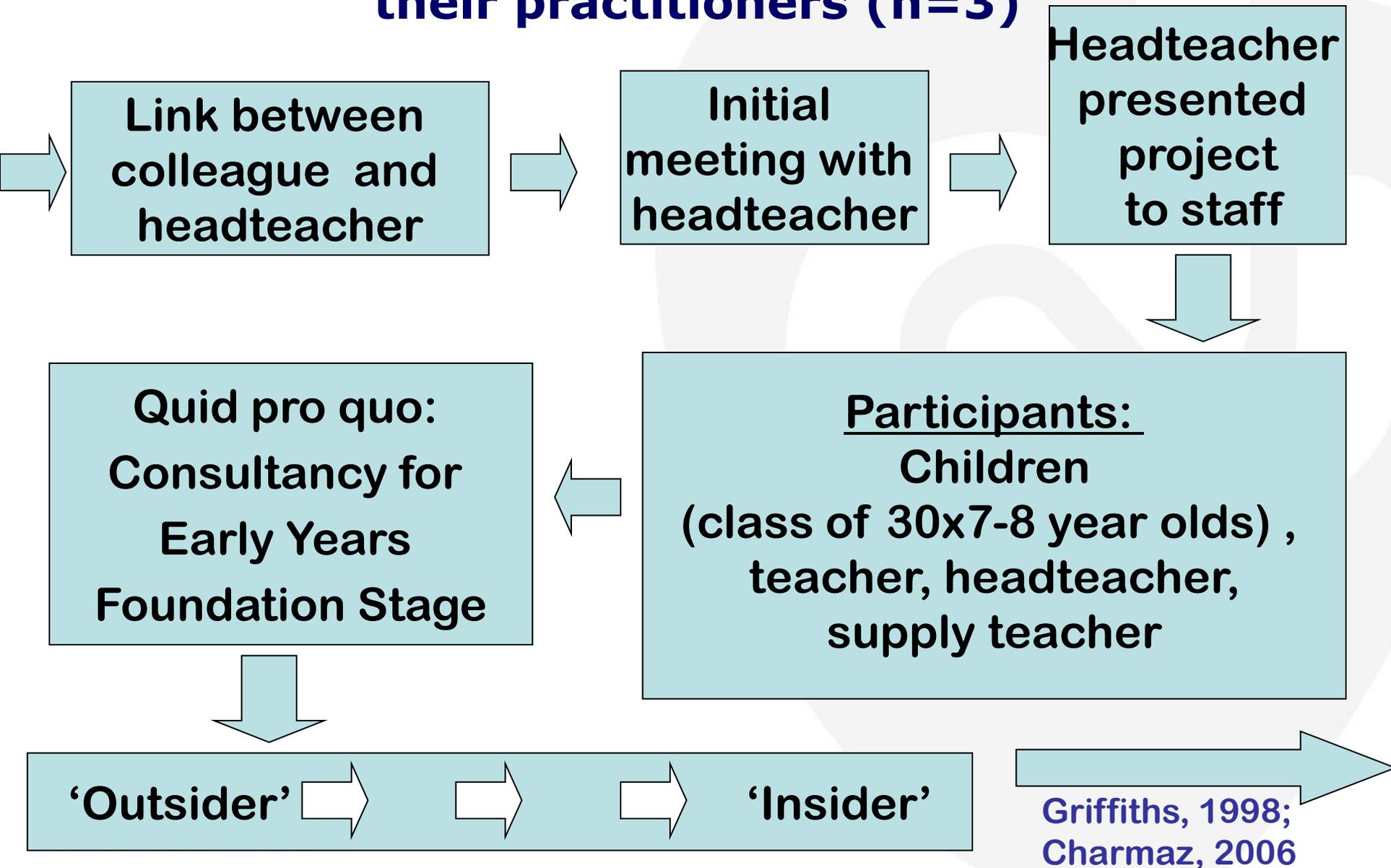
## Participating Families (n=5)

<b>From</b>	<b>Child (age)</b>	<b>Other participating family members</b>
<b>Setting A</b>	<b>Child A (7)</b>	<b>Family A: Mother / Father [no siblings]</b>
	<b>Child B (8)</b>	<b>Family B: Mother / Father / Sister (10)</b>
<b>Setting B</b>	<b>Child G (4/5)</b>	<b>Family C: Mother / Father / Brother (8) / Grandmother 1 / Grandfather 1 / Grandmother 2 / Grandfather 2</b>
	<b>Child H (5)</b>	<b>Family D: Mother / Father / Brother (4)</b>
<b>Setting C</b>	<b>Child M (5)</b>	<b>Family E: Mother / Father / Sister (4)</b>

# Study Design for Accessing Data in Settings and Homes



# Accessing Setting A: Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)



## Access Challenge 3:

### Gaining acceptance from setting staff in Setting B

4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an EYFS unit  
and their practitioners (n=7)

Setting A leader  
encouraged Setting B  
leader to participate

Setting B leader  
and I: shared history

Storytime cements  
acceptance

Setting B teacher  
and I: shared history

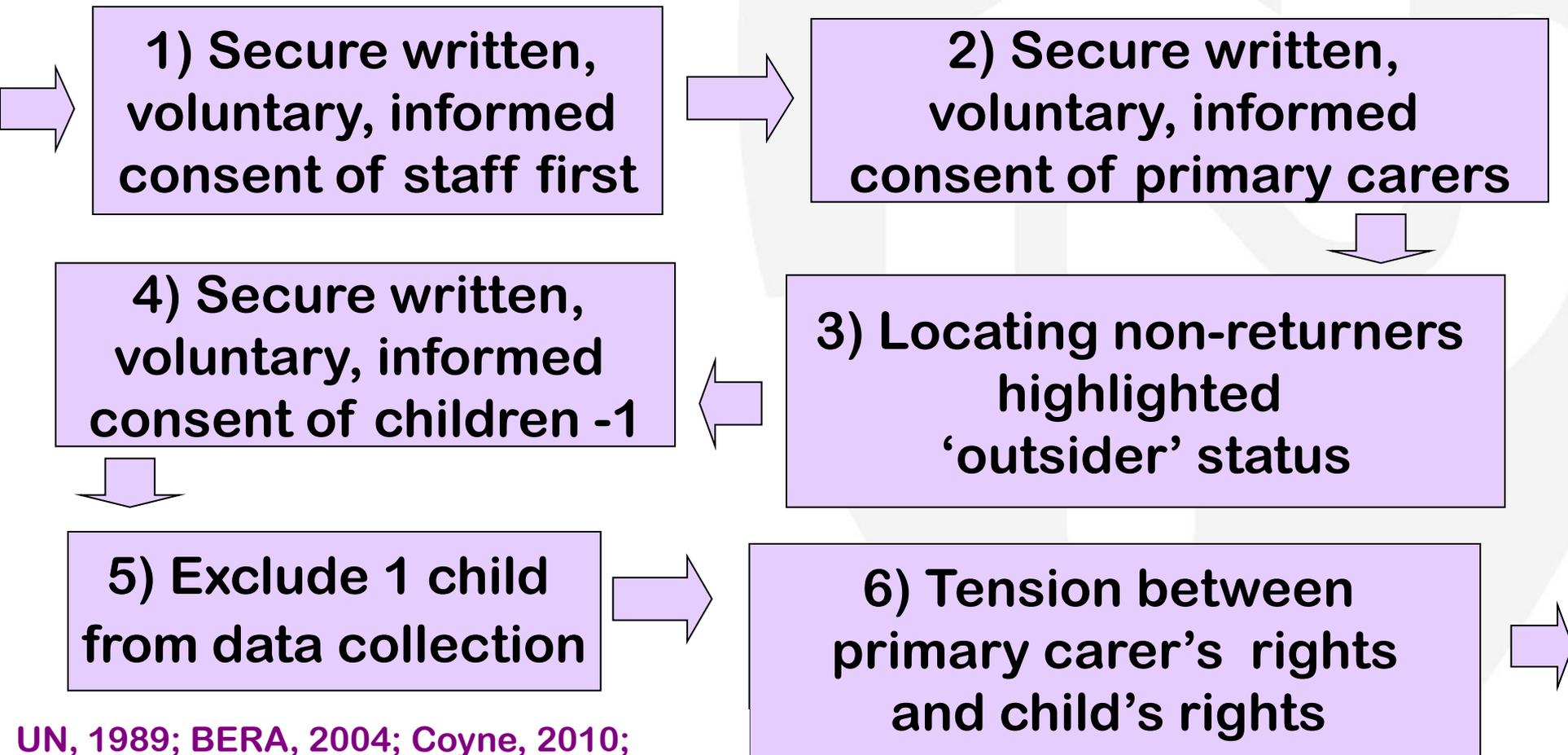
**Weak acceptance by new Practitioner**  
Indicates importance of trust and positive relationships  
through communication and actions over time

Corsaro and  
Molinari, 2008;  
Greig et al.,  
2007

## Access Challenge 4:

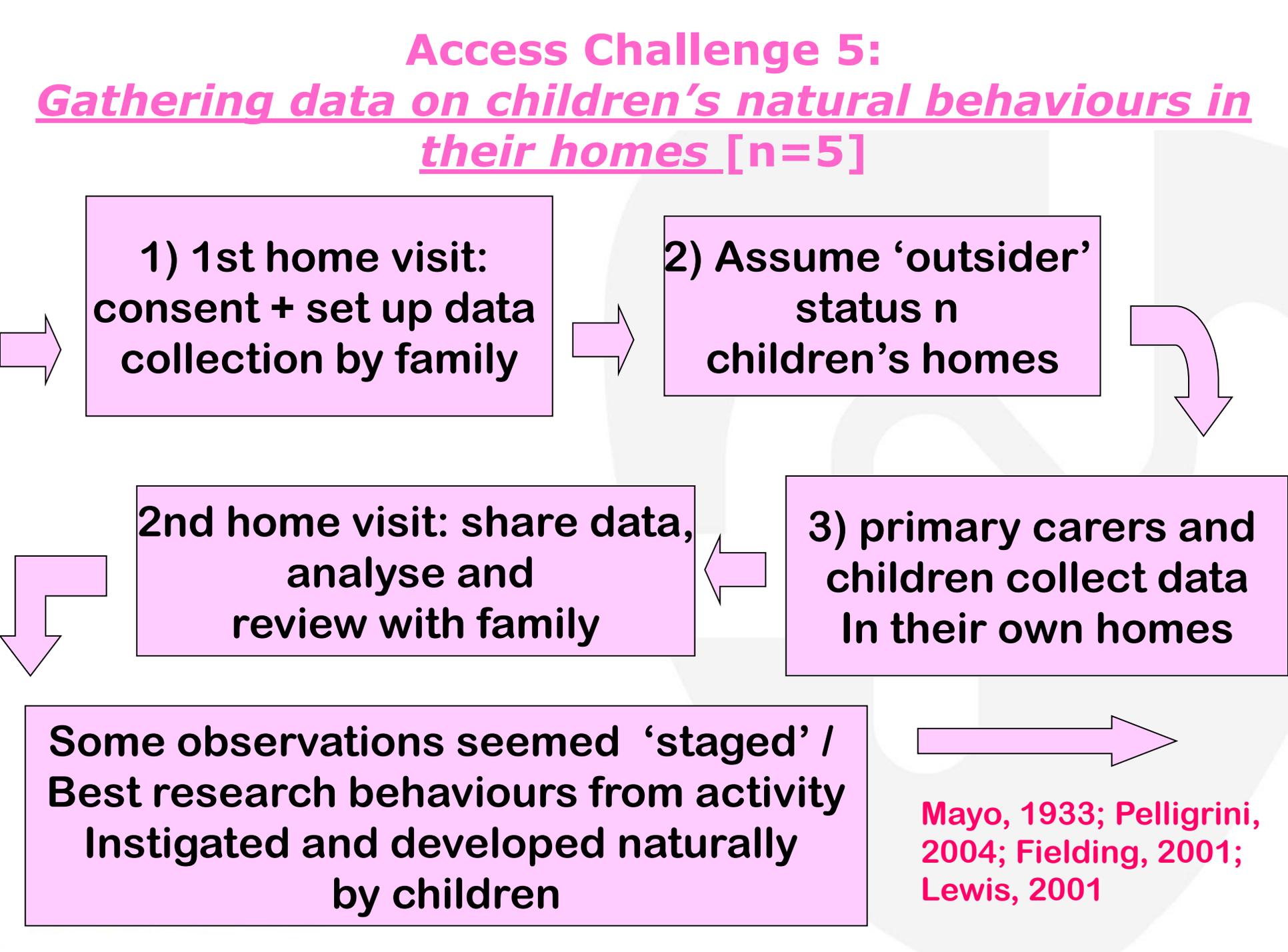
### Gaining informed consent from primary carers in Setting C

4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in EYFS unit and their practitioners (n=5)



# **Access Challenge 5:**

## **Gathering data on children's natural behaviours in their homes [n=5]**



```
graph TD; A[1) 1st home visit: consent + set up data collection by family] --> B[2) Assume 'outsider' status n children's homes]; B --> C[3) primary carers and children collect data In their own homes]; C --> D[2nd home visit: share data, analyse and review with family]; D --> E[Some observations seemed 'staged' / Best research behaviours from activity Instigated and developed naturally by children];
```

**1) 1st home visit: consent + set up data collection by family**

**2) Assume 'outsider' status n children's homes**

**2nd home visit: share data, analyse and review with family**

**3) primary carers and children collect data In their own homes**

**Some observations seemed 'staged' / Best research behaviours from activity Instigated and developed naturally by children**

**Mayo, 1933; Pelligrini, 2004; Fielding, 2001; Lewis, 2001**



## **Conclusions: What did I learn about securing access to 'real world' data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry?**

- Researching with young children in England presents a challenging context
- Researchers cannot expect access to settings 'as a matter of right' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 55)
- Accessing children's research behaviours presented challenges
- The majority of staff, children and parents were amenable to participating in this study. However, problems presented by a minority can significantly affect access to empirical data
- Legislation and guidance (UN, 1989; BERA, 2004) have limitations
- Legislation and guidance can deny children their rights



## What enabled me to address challenges to accessing 'real world' data for the YCaR enquiry?

- Detailed preparation
- Time to create shared experiences with participants
- Sensitivity to participants
- Strong communication
- Drive for positive, equalised relationships
- Facilitation of trust
- A little luck





# STILL...

# UNDER CONSTRUCTION

