EDITORIAL

New Theories warrant New Research Approaches:

Extending the Toolbox of Methods for Research with Young Children

New theories, Vygotsky (1987-1998) contended, warrant new methodological approaches. In support of his claim, he adapted the microgenetic approach to note miniscule changes in children's thinking and learning over time. Although the popularity of this approach has waxed and waned, Vygotsky's notion that theory and methods are intrinsically linked receives support from Flewitt, Hampel, Hauck, and Lancaster (2014: 44) who posit that theory not only drives the choice and selection of methods but 'advances thinking in all fields of enquiry'. Acknowledging that researchers hold a variety of views on children's roles in research, Gray and McBlain (2015: 131) conclude that 'it is the methodological stance adopted by the researcher which influences their choice of method.'

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) has afforded children globally the right to express their views on matters that affect their lives. A proliferation of publications, including the Mosaic approach by Clark (2003), has attempted to empower children in research. Within the body of literature concerned with rights based perspectives, children's voices are defined as 'views of children that are actively heard and valued as substantive contributions to decisions affecting the children's lives' (Brooks and Murray, 2016:3).

To enhance and inform the discourse in this area, the Young Children's Perspectives Special Interest Group (SIG), established in 2004 at the European Early Years Research Association Conference, places emphasis on listening to children's voices to gain understanding of their learning, lives, and experiences (Harcourt and Einarsdottir, 2011). Representing international researchers and practitioners, the SIG is passionate and committed to making contributions to the field, evident in this special issue 'Hearing young children's voices through innovative research approaches' and in other works (for example, Harcourt, Perry and Waller, 2011; Murray and Gray, 2017).

We are privileged to present this anthology, the second of our 2017 SIG special issues. It contains articles drawn from research undertaken by experienced international authors and early career researchers whose work has focused on capturing the authentic voices of children by adopting novel, child friendly methods. Rather than attempting to homogenize children's experiences, the authors report evidence from a diverse range of investigations undertaken in a range of countries, including the US, UK, Tanzania, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These reports challenge conventional adult-led

approaches to research by adapting, designing and honing a range of qualitative methods and theoretical approaches that add rigour and authenticity to research findings concerned with young children's lives. Though their foci may differ, each author acknowledges the impact of the sociocultural context on children's experiences, perceptions, play, creativity and imagination.

Our first article comes from Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry, who acknowledge the contribution of visual elements to participatory research methods used with children. With reference to empirical research, their article critiques photo elicitation and the uses of critical visual methodology and they interrogate important issues concerning the uses of images in research with children, including power relationships, ownership and ethical tensions.

Bateman's article engages in theoretical debate concerning the use of conversational analysis (CA) to develop awareness of how children manage their social worlds in everyday interactions through verbal and non-verbal interactions. Transcriptions from international empirical research with children aged between two and a half and four are subject to CA to highlight nuances in para-linguistic features of talk such as gaze, gesture and voice prosody. Bateman draws on teacher-child interactions during forest walks in Wales through to children's talk about their experiences of the Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand in 2011, offering extracts from transcriptions to highlight the importance of non-verbal cues. The quote from Leo who explains the earthquake as 'the day the dinosaurs were dancing', offers unique insight into a child's interpretation of a traumatic event.

In the third article, Theobald employs an in-depth ethnographic approach that considers context and culture important factors for understanding details of the researcher-interpreter-child relationship *in situ*. The focus of her study is seventy pre-school children's perspectives on making friends when there are language differences. Video ethnography was conducted in three preschool classrooms and the findings were constructed in two phases. First, language competence rating scales were completed by teachers and second, video-recorded semi-structured interviews with drawing activities were used with small groups of children while they were playing. It is the latter aspect of the work that informs this article. Theobald found that a shared cultural heritage in not sufficient to elicit the voices of young children. In the first set of interviews, the children remained silent. During the second phase, children gave more expansive responses to open-ended questions with time afforded them to consider their views. Theobald concludes that the social context and approach used by the interpreter may enable the voices of underrepresented groups of children to be heard.

Streelasky provides the fourth article of our collection, in which she builds on the notion of social environment to embrace different global sociocultural contexts. In her exploration of learning experiences of children in Tanzania and Canada, Streelasky acknowledges the limitations of applying methods across diverse, international contexts. Employing an assets-based approach to research that highlights and values children's voices and agency, this author seeks to makes visible the values, skills,

knowledge, connections and connectedness within communities. Streelasky's analytical approaches in this comparative case study included narrative analysis, image-based analysis and thematic analysis to identify meanings within children's multi-modal texts. She found that whereas children in Canada appeared comfortable and confident in participating in the research, the approach and materials (pencil crayons, markers, pens and pencils) were novel to the children, teacher and preschool director in Tanzania and enthused them. Streelasky's findings reveal the impact children's out-of-school lives have on their meaning making at school. She concludes that children's uses of multimodal methods to highlight their meaning making at school provide a window into their experiences and she calls for greater cohesion between - and within - social and cultural contexts.

In an original application of theory and the app 'Our Story' to study facilitation and to capture young children's curiosity and imagination, Canning, Payler, Horsley and Gomes introduce the concept of narrative affordances. According to Canning *et al*., narrative affordance refers to how children engage with the app. As in other articles in this special issue, the authors draw on sociocultural contexts and the child's previous experiences to develop chronicles of, with or about their curiosity and imagination. A case study approach comprising sixteen children between 18 months and 5 years of age, three childminders and four early years practitioners was employed. The methods included focus group discussions with childminders and practitioners, children's saved stories on iPad being uploaded to a closed online blog and shared with other practitioners and parents in the form of PDFs through email or hard copy. Observations were also undertaken of children using the apps individually, together and with adults, with narrative notes and audio recordings captured during each session. The findings reveal that narrative affordances in relation to Our Story app offer a powerful tool to gain insights into children's interests, imaginative capabilities and endeavours.

In the penultimate article of this issue, Palaiologou offers a balanced account of the extent to which the vignette approach can be a tool for participatory research with young children. According to Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney and Neale (2010), vignettes may be viewed as acts of perceptual orientation to facilitate the interpretation and belief system of the reader or viewer. Palaiologou investigates the views of children aged between 2 and 5 years on the relationships between staff in educational settings and children, parents and communities, how these relationships are formed and how they are sustained. The author notes that challenges inherent in research involving children include who selects the reported data, how they are included and how they are presented. To ensure the authenticity of the research, in this study each vignette was interpreted with the child and the adult together. Palaiologou acknowledges the potential for researcher bias when data are interpreted to address research objectives. Although vignettes may be agentic, she concludes that in striving for generalisations researchers may simply homogenise, rather than individualise their research findings. Consequently a caveat is warranted for those seeking to use vignettes or other methods in participatory research to ensure they do not ignore power and bias differentials on the part of the adult researcher.

In our final article for the special issue, Broughton departs from traditional methods of participatory research with young children to introduce the concept of Hip Hop as an approach to 'tap into young minds.' He uses the metaphor of a 'bridge' to describe continuity fostered between young children's cultural experiences at home with early childhood learning in their classrooms in the United States of America. When teachers interweave children's funds of knowledge – their perspectives, experiences and knowledge - into the curriculum to support children's freedom of expression, he claims this may augment academic standards. Citing Love (2015, 112), Broughton proposes that 'Children in Hip Hop communities of practice develop cognitive skills as they engage in observing, participating, and occupying physical and digital proximities to "Hip Hop cultural practitioners and influencers."' Broughton's methods are congruent with an ethnographic approach: he collected data over an eleven-month period by observing kindergarteners and first graders in the United States during 'Hip Hop pedagogy/play' sessions in their settings. Broughton's findings indicate that 'Hip Hop pedagogy/play' embraced children's voices and fostered consistent patterns regarding learning outcomes. His article indicates potential value in bringing the cultural experiences children encounter outside their educational settings into those settings to support learning.

We began this editorial by noting that new theories warrant new methods. This special issue captures a range of tools available to researchers engaged in research with young children. It showcases novel research methods as well as innovative applications of extant research approaches. The important influence of children's social and cultural experiences is prominent: by framing research within naturalistic qualitative approaches, authors offer valuable emic views of children engaged in research processes. The value of participatory ways of working are also foregrounded in these articles, and the view that findings in participatory research should - or could - be value free or unbiased is challenged within them. Broughton, for example, points out that the Hip Hop that forms part of some young children's socio-cultural identities can be a useful tool that enables them to participate in their educational settings. We commend to readers this exciting collection of articles. Their authors highlight innovative, rigorous research approaches that position children as active participants whose views are heard and valued, so that trustworthy evidence and authentic new theories can be constructed to inform the field of early childhood education.

Dr Colette Gray[1] and Dr Jane Murray[2]

[1] Stranmillis University College, Northern Ireland

Email: c.gray@stran.ac.uk

[2] University of Northampton, England

E-mail: jane.murray@northampton.ac.uk

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