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Knock Knock! Who's there?
Gaining access to children as researchers

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This presentation considers …

- **The nature of access to data in educational research**

- **How I addressed some challenges of securing access to data for my research degree**

The Enquiry:
Young Children as Researchers (YCaR)

- **Attempts to conceptualise ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, could develop as researchers and may be considered researchers**

- **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), nested within educational research**

- **Critical ethnographic study (Carspecken, 1996)**

- **…within a constructivist grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006)**

What is access for ethnographic educational researchers?
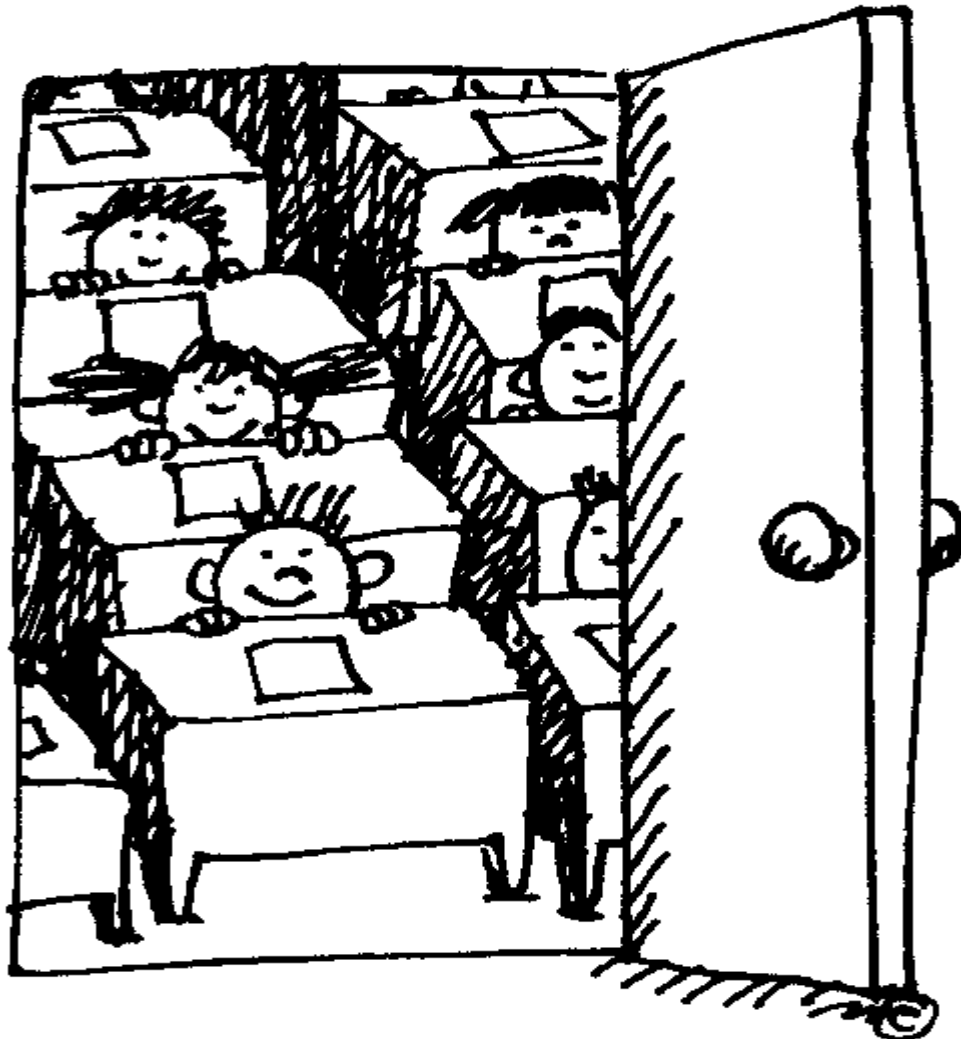
(Hood *et al.,* 1996; Robson, 2003; Cutler, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2007)

(Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Schostak, 2002)

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Educational researchers must secure access…
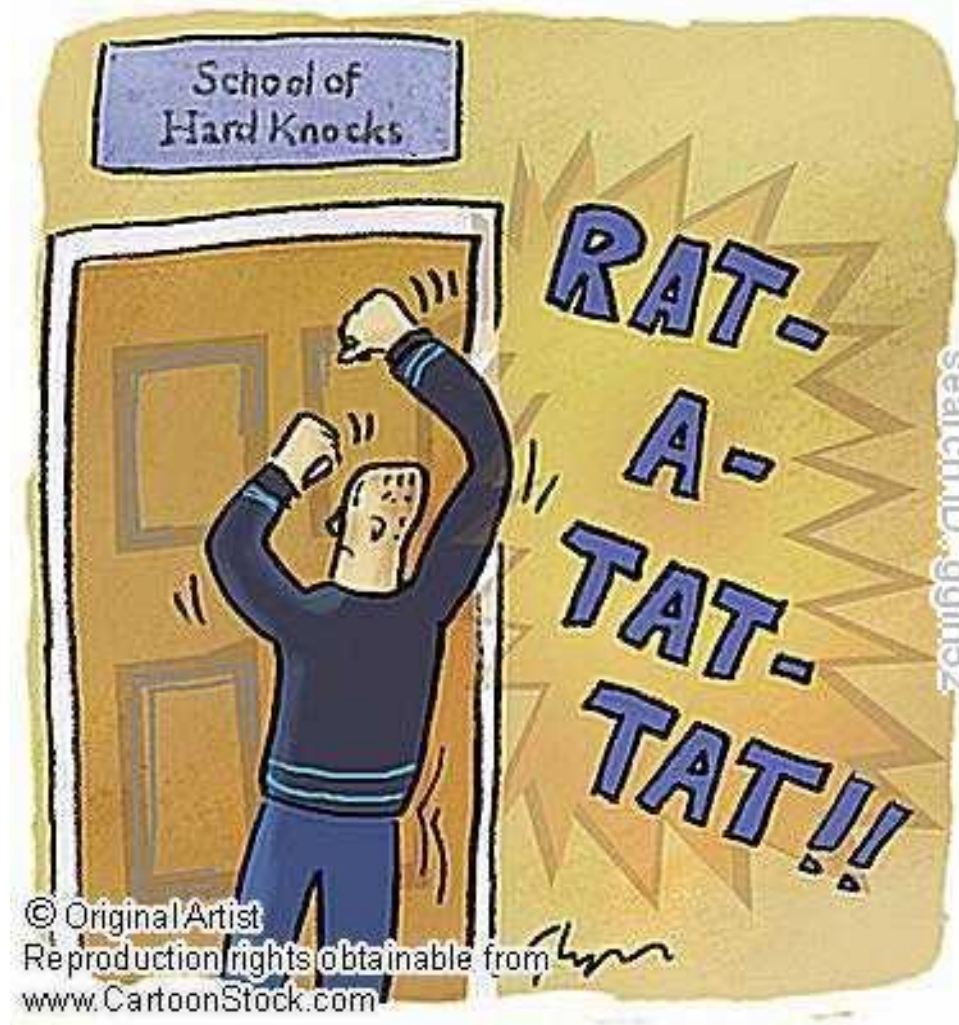
(US Government, 1949; BERA, 2004; Morrow, 2008)

(Homan, 1991)

(Rossi *et al.,* 2003; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005; Gibson and Twycross, 2007; Coyne 2010)

(Homan, 2001; Lewis and Porter, 2004; Greig *et al.*, 2007; Sime, 2008; Coyne, 2010)

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Access and children's research involvement

(Brownlie *et al.,* 2006; Morrow, 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008).

(James, *et al.,* 1998; Clark and Moss, 2001; Corsaro, 2005).

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Children are 'human beings, not only "human becomings" ' (Qvortrup, 1994:18).

(United Nations (UN), 1989; 2000)

(Brownlie *et al.,* 2006; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008)

(Alderson, 1995; 2001; Laming, 2003; HMG, 2004; 2006; Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), 2009)

(United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2008; DCSF, 2009)

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How this enquiry developed
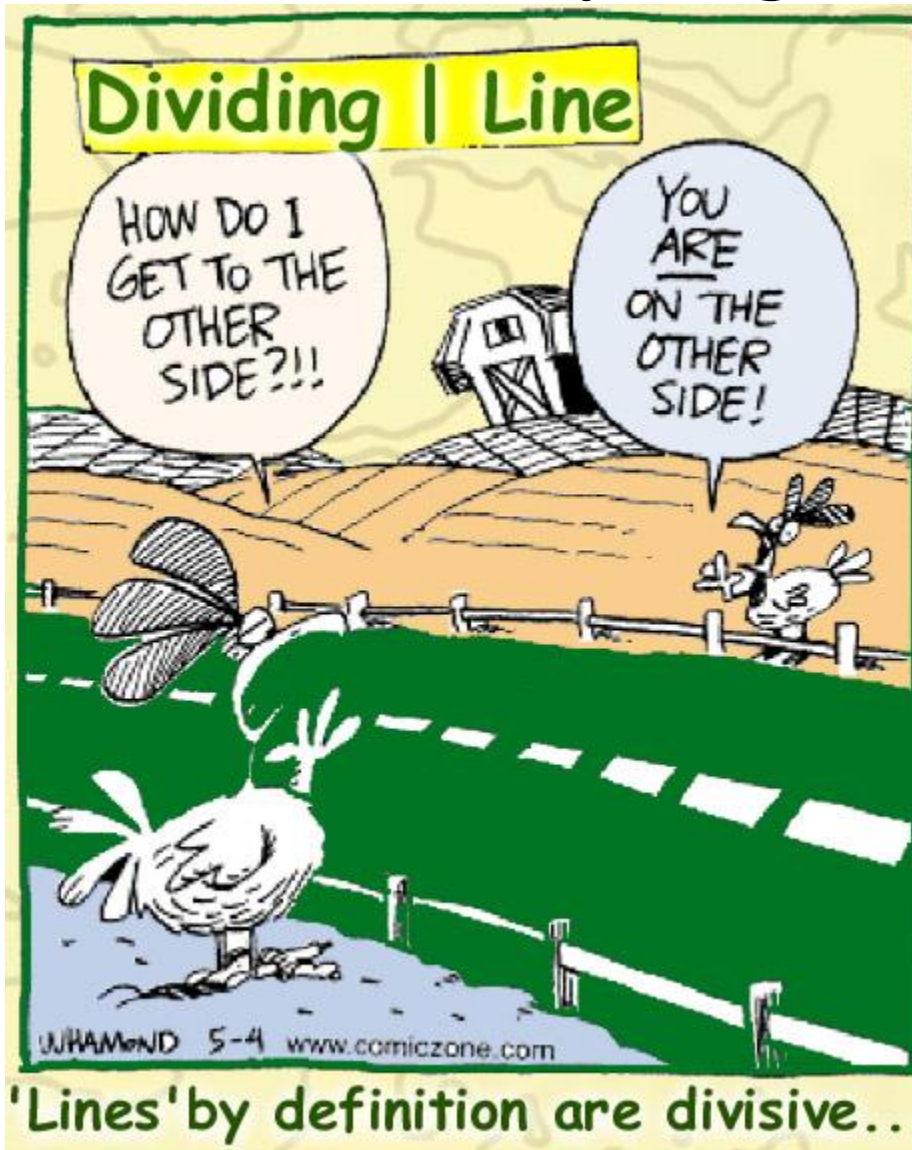
(Hargreaves, 1996; Hillage *et al.*, 1998)

(Edwards et al., 2005)

(Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 2007; National College for School Leadership (NCSL), 2007)

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Can children 0-8 years be researchers?

Psychological Perspective	Sociological Perspective
"NOW TELL ME ABOUT **YOUR** DEGREE— CHILD PSYCHOLOGY WASN'T IT?"	
(Goswami and Bryant, 2007; Piaget, 1970; Meltzoff, 1995; 2007; Wellman and Gelman, 1992; Davies and Stone, 1995; Gopnik and Meltzoff, 1998)	(UN, 1989; Laming, 2003; Alderson and Morrow, 2004; CRAE, 2009)

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Barriers to young children being researchers and being recognised as researchers

(Rutter, 2002)

(OECD, 2006; UN, 2008; DCSF, 2009)

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Preliminary enquiry (Murray, 2006)

Professional Educational Researchers (PERs)	ECEC Setting Leaders (SLs)

Findings included:

- Both PERs and SLs believe children aged 8 and younger do not have sufficient agency
- Both PERs and SLs doubt the capability of children aged 8 and younger to research.

Young Children as Researchers…
**YCaR**

Accessing Data in YCaR

Focus areas emerging from preliminary study:

- Nature and definitions of ECEC research;
- How the project might develop;
- Enquiries that might be important to young children and how they engage in them;
- Support structures and barriers affecting young children's participation in research in matters affecting them.

5 challenges in accessing data.

Access Challenge 1:
An instrument fit for purpose

Professional Educational Researchers (PERs) → **Mixed methods** → **Survey [n=20]** → **n=1**

Critical ethnography within constructivist grounded theory approach ← **Qualitative Design (interviews)** ← **Interview**

(Webb and Webb,1932; Charmaz, 2006; Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2008)

PERs (n=9) Interview Conversations + **ECEC PERs (n=5) Focus Group** → **Research Behaviours Framework** →
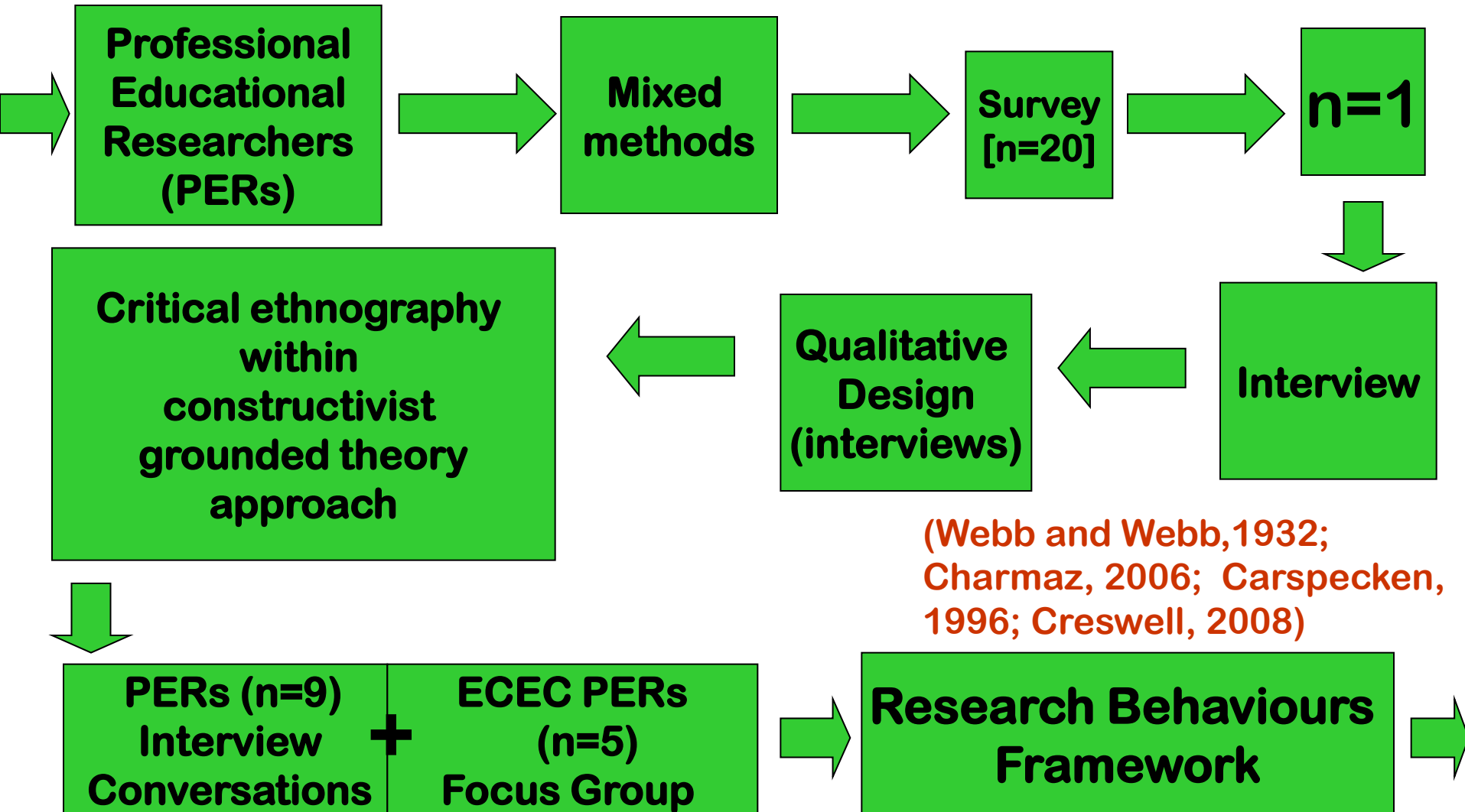
Access Challenge 2:
Getting inside an ECEC setting

| PERs suggest data collection from children and adults in ECEC settings [n=3] | → | Homes also indicated [n=5] | → |
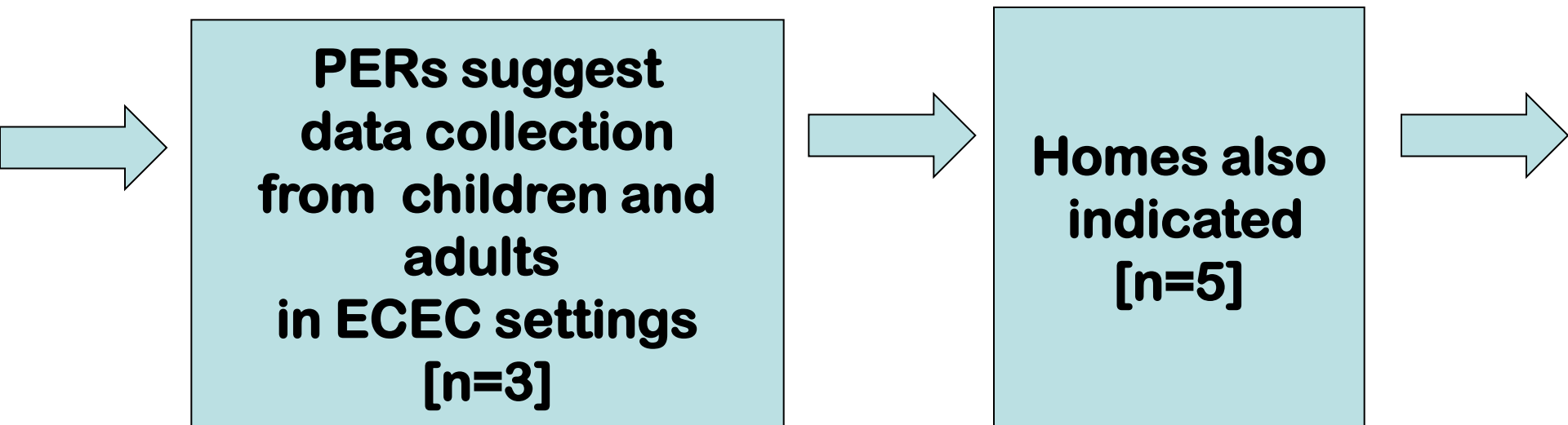
(Sylva et al., 2004; Feinstein _et al.,_ 2008)

(Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1986; Hart and Risley, 1995; Yee and Andrews, 2006)

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Participating Settings in Primary Schools (n=3)

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

(Pollard and Filer, 1996).

Participating Families (n=5)

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

Study Design for Accessing Data in Settings and Homes

1) Personal CRB check and UoN ethics committee approval

2) Gain access to ECEC setting

3) Secure informed consent from SL and staff

6) Home visits 1 and 2 – multiple layers of data collected by families

5) Collect multiple layers of data in the setting WHILE identifying children for closer focus

4) Work as Volunteer TA

(Ryle, 1968; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; CRB, 2010)

7) Share data, review and analyse then develop next steps in study

8) Share outcomes

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

Link between colleague and headteacher → **Initial meeting with headteacher** → **Headteacher presented project to staff**

Quid pro quo: Consultancy for Early Years Foundation Stage ← **Participants:** Children (class of 30x7-8 year olds), teacher, headteacher, supply teacher

'Outsider' ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ 'Insider'

(Griffiths, 1998; Charmaz, 2006)
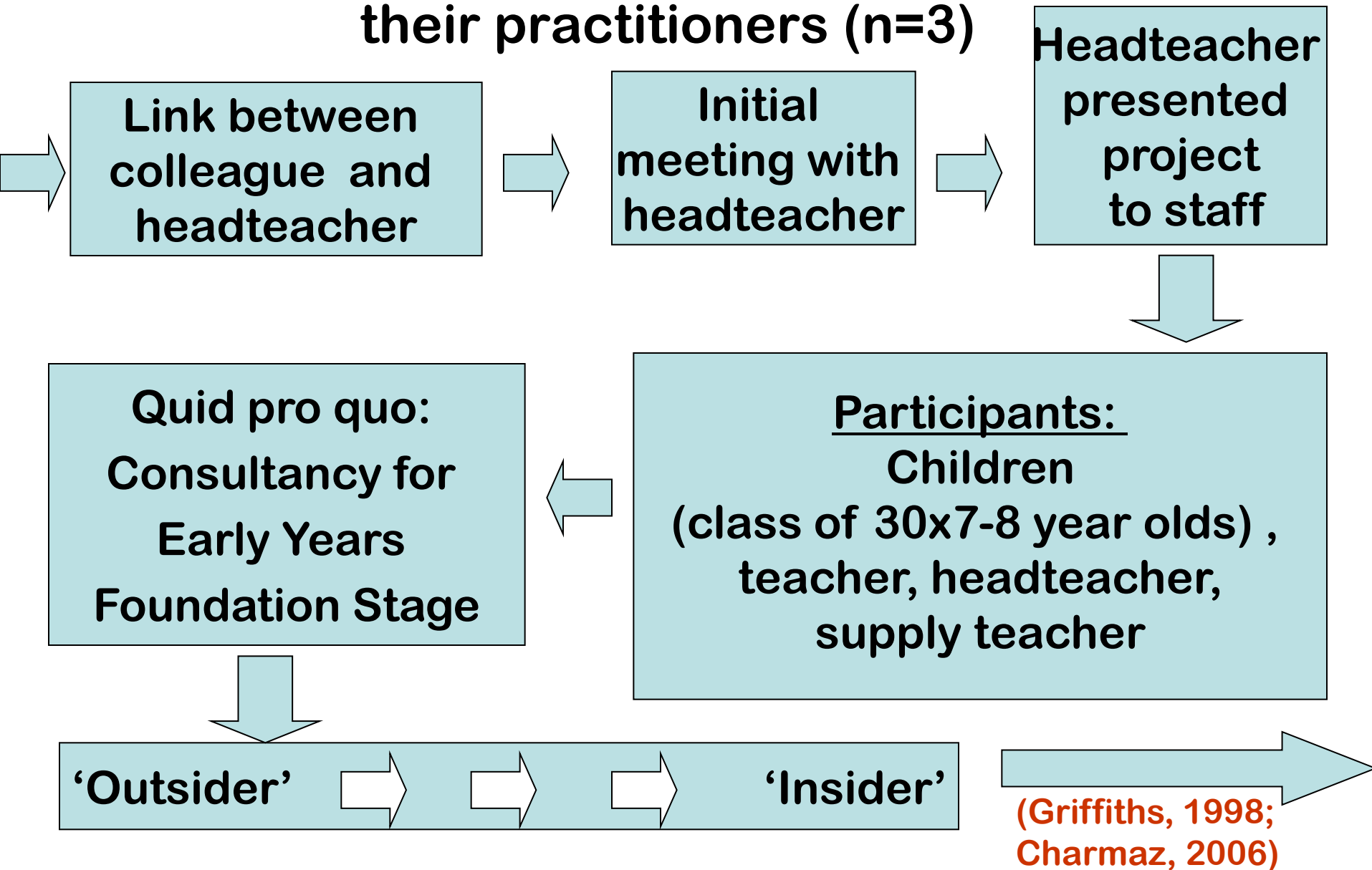
Access Challenge 3:

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)
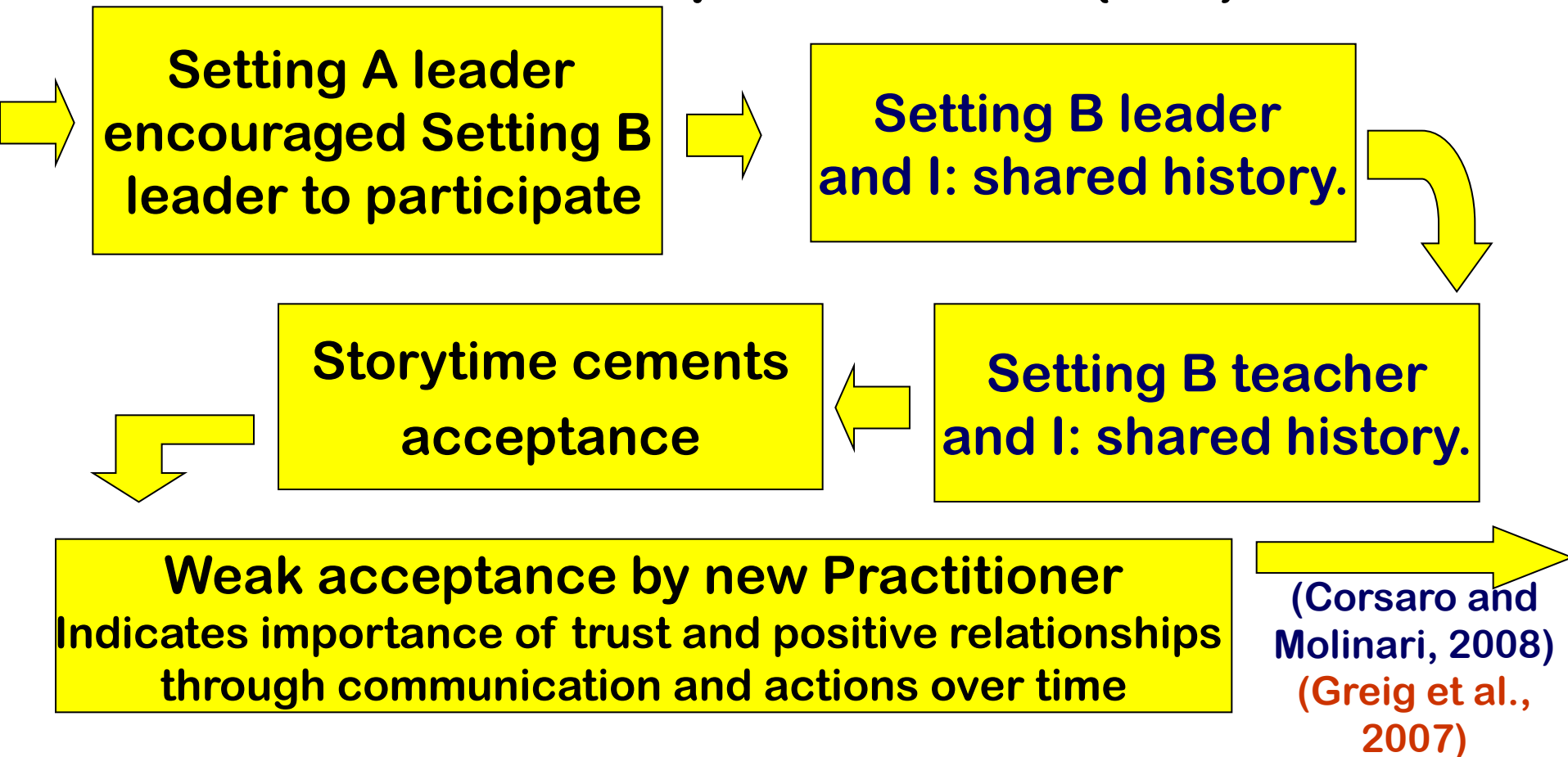
Access Challenge 4:

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)

1) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of staff first

2) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of primary carers

4) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of children -1

3) Locating non-returners highlighted 'outsider' status

5) Exclude 1 child from data collection

6) Tension between primary carer's rights and child's rights
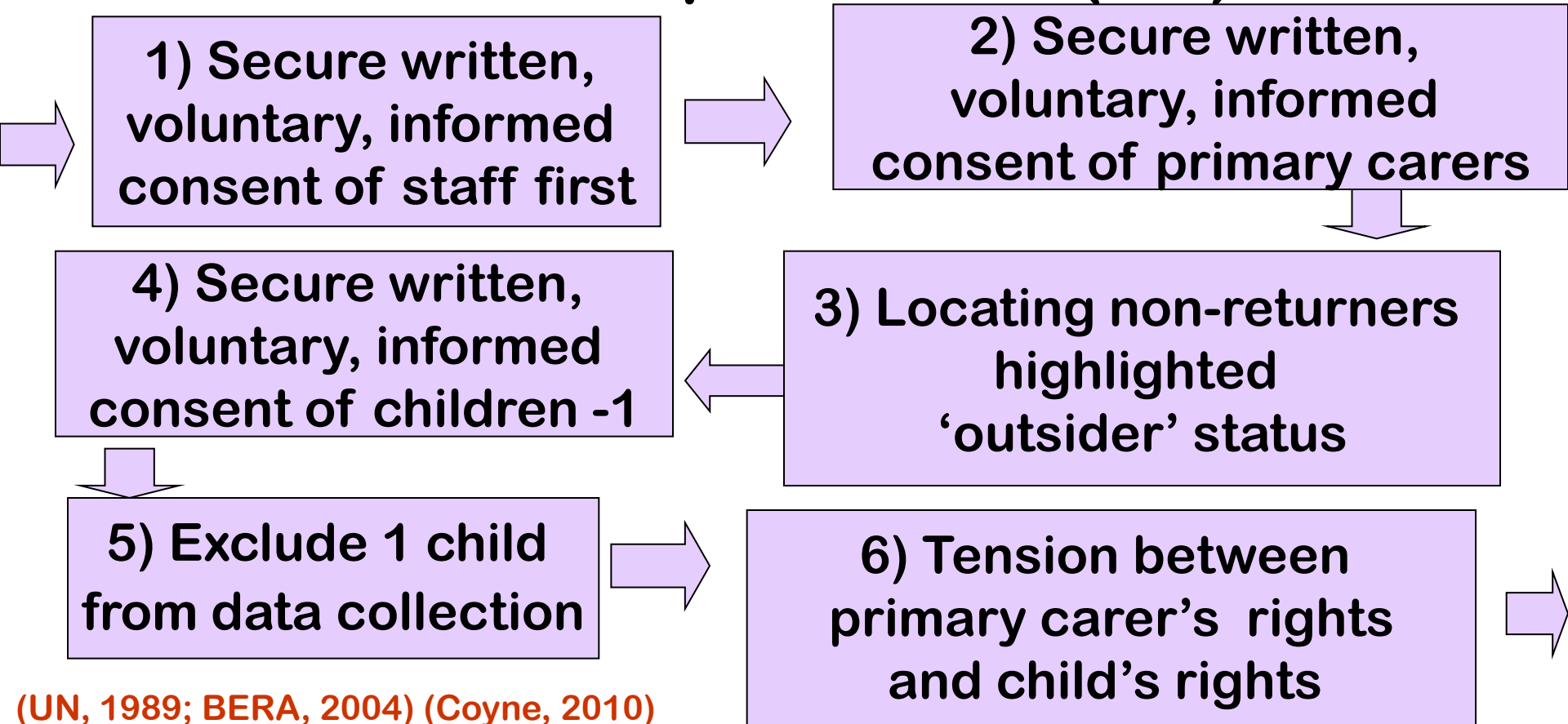
(UN, 1989; BERA, 2004) (Coyne, 2010)
(Skelton, 2008) (UN, 1989; BERA, 2004)

Access Challenge 5:
Gathering data on children's natural behaviours in their homes [n=5]

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

2) Assume 'outsider' status In 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

- **Challenging context**
- **Researchers cannot not expect access to settings 'as a matter of right' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 55).**
- **Majority of staff, children and parents amenable to participating in this study**
- **Some challenges in accessing data**
- **Legislation and guidance (UN, 1989; BERA, 2004) have limitations**
- **Legislation and guidance can deny children their rights.**

Key features for accessing data effectively and ethically in this study were:

- **detailed preparation**
- **time to create shared experiences**
- **sensitivity to participants**
- **strong communication**
- **positive, equalised relationships**
- **facilitation of trust**
- **luck**

STILL…