

## **Every child mattered in England: but what matters to children?**

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### **Abstract**

*“Every Child Matters” under New Labour provided a framework for services for young children’s care and education. It was pushed aside by the Conservative led coalition and replaced by “More Great Childcare”. The UK as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore has obligations for legislation, policy and curriculum, specifically with regard to children’s rights and participation. On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNCRC, in practice there may be different levels of participation employed to engage children’s views in the development of policy about them. This project set out to ask children about what “matters” to them. Ninety finalist Early Childhood Studies students worked as co-researchers in this project. Five themes are discussed highlighting the powerful thoughts and ideas of children. A range of ‘child-friendly’ methods were used to collect data from children including role-play, interviews, drawings and artefacts, and story-telling.*

### **Key Words**

Pedagogical documentation, children’s voice, participation, visual research methods

## **Introduction**

Documenting what is important to children is fundamental to promoting children's rights and also has implications for ethical and principled approaches to working with children. Children and young people are an under-exploited resource in relation to their education and care. Despite this right and the rhetoric, in practice children's voice is not valued in all parts of life in the UK. This paper aims to review contemporary literature about children's voice and participation in relation to matters of importance to children. The preliminary findings of this project include five themes which have emerged in the data collected. These are presented as mini-narratives. Central to this research process was community of learners that has evolved through the exploration of pedagogical documentation and giving voice to children by illuminating on what is commonly believed or promoted in policy.

Research conducted over a four year period in collaboration with final year Early Childhood Studies students engaged children in conversations using a range of 'languages' of childhood. Drawing on the principles of 'pedagogical documentation', for both the individual student projects and a summative report, a long story of the learning and thinking about what matters to children and ways of engaging children in research is presented in this paper (e.g. author, 2010; author, 2011b). Ethical procedures in place at the University were utilised and children's identities have been protected in the conduct of this work. A key feature of this project was talking to children and facilitating their involvement in their individual projects and gaining their consent to participate was central.

At the conclusion of the four year project, it is possible now to reflect and reconstruct the participants' and the author's learning. The finished pieces of work represent a documentation of the pedagogical processes of teaching and learning. This paper also becomes the starting place for further teaching and learning, not only for myself as the author, but for future students who may become involved in the project. The project has uncovered many stories, and these mini-narratives allow children's perspectives to be made visible with the help from students acting as 'translators' (MacNaughton, Hughes and Smith, 2007). The mini-narratives enable adults to gain insights into children's worlds on issues of importance in their everyday lives.

### **A case for children's participation and voice**

Democracy and valuing the voices of children, according to Rinaldi (2005) is "a way of being, of thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world, a fundamental educational value and form of educational activity" (p. 156). Four theoretical approaches underpin this paper, namely, participation, power, critical pedagogy and pedagogy of listening. These approaches will be explored in this section to demonstrate how they fit together to underpin this research. Clark, Kj rholt and Moss (2005) suggested that "*children's active participation in learning processes has long been a central theme in progressive education*" (p. 7). However, there is a gap between the theory and reality. For example, Wyness (2009) commented that there is a gap between children's right to participate which is now embedded into policy and practice in those countries signed up to the UNCRC.

As a gauge for students to consider their role with children, Hart's participation ladder (Hart, 1992) was used. It spans from adult advocacy in which adults mediate on behalf of children in the decision making processes to children's voice which is directly and localised to children. There are several 'steps' between these two poles, which see the role of the adult

decreasing and the child's level of participation increasing (Wyness, 2009). Warming (2011) suggested that the 'least adult role' may enable children to be empowered and to have their perspectives illuminated.

Children are marginalised in an adult-centred world and they are controlled and constrained by adults within an unbalanced power relationship (Punch, 2002). This is an aspect dealt with by Foucault in which, power is viewed as ever present and dangerous (Clark, Kjørholt and Moss, 2005). For example, in an interview Foucault (1988) suggested that power is always present in relationships, "in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another" (Bernauer and Rasmussen, 1988, p. 11). Awareness of the perceived power, the relationships required to conduct research with young children were considerations in this project. The choice of methods used in this study aimed to redress the potential power imbalances. MacNaughton et al (2007) warned researchers about the additional marginalisation of children from minority groups by engaging in research methods which aim to promote the voice of the child.

In addition to Foucault's concerns about power (op cit), Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy was drawn upon. Specifically, the person viewed as a subject rather than object and a concern with emancipation through education, and giving voice to those who were silenced, oppressed or invisible. This was echoed by Redmond (2010) who suggested that children are often 'invisible' in policy and that contradictions exist between the rhetoric for children's participation and the reality. Children as an invisible and minority group in society deserve the opportunity to express their voice and to be taken seriously in matters of importance to them. This is not just a legal right enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), but it is grounded in an ethical approach to working with children.

Finally, Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012), the founder of the schools in Reggio Emilia, wrote about children and learning. He promoted a 'pedagogy of listening'. In order to realise the freedom envisaged by Freire (op cit), a pedagogy of listening and in particular the use of pedagogical documentation taps into relationships with others, and an openness to new ideas and ways of learning (Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 1998). The pedagogy of listening is underpinned by a view of children that promotes their right to participate, to be and to be heard. These values support an ethical approach to working with children as co-researchers rather than objects or subjects of research.

## **Background to the paper**

Three cohorts studied a module in a BA (Honours) Early Childhood Studies degree, respectively. The cohorts were in their final year of studies. The assessment used in this module of study was a piece of pedagogical documentation with a written rationale. The students were asked to investigate one question: What matters to children? This project was set up within the context of the policy and legislative framework Every Child Matters (ECM). This framework provided a clear agenda for improving the life chances of children in England. Although the policy landscape has shifted, the question about what matters to children remains valid under the terms of the UNCRC (1989).

## **Why every child matters**

How children are viewed varies. Redmond (2010) described the transition of children from being viewed as 'priceless' where children are allowed to 'be children' to being viewed as an economic commodity for their 'usefulness'. This is evident in the way in which neo-liberal

and contemporary policy has been written for children and families. The contradictions that exist in current policy, for example in the UK, suggests that the policies swing from being focussed on children's well-being and development to concerns about child abuse and exploitation by adults (Moss, 2007; Redmond, 2010).

The voice of the child or the agency of the child is highly contested in the policy landscape, in which economic theory dominates and drives the discourse, justifications for policy for children and families is masked in social and moral rationales (Moss, 2007). In the UK, the Every Child Matters agenda dominated policy and practice not only for early years' educators but for professionals from other disciplines working with young children. Policy, legislation, and the impact of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) all highlight children's right to voice on matters which affect them, however, the gap between rhetoric and reality exists. Children are portrayed in the media as 'victims', vulnerable and in need of protection by adults and from adults. For example Barnados (2008) research with adults in the UK highlighted that they viewed children and young people in the UK are viewed as 'vermin' (BBC, 2008). A powerful short film was produced by Barnados (2008) as a result of the study and the words spoken by the actors were the words of the research respondents. These images of children in the film were not positive and have a reductionist view of children.

The UK policy response to the UNICEF report card number 47, which placed Britain in the bottom third of the world's richest countries for children's well-being (2007) was to further promote Every Child Matters. The UNICEF report highlighted some wider societal issues which impact on children's sense of well-being in relation to children in other countries, namely pressures of schooling, family and children's views of themselves. Similar reports from the National Society for the Protection and Care for Children (NSPCC, 2014) estimated that every week in the UK 2 children die at the hands of their parents, compared with 2 children a year in Sweden. Childhood in the UK is not depicted positively, and yet children are viewed politically as the future.

### **Participation and capability vs. Protection and incompetence**

Current constructions of childhood in the UK today can be illustrated with two polarised views. One view sees the potential and capabilities of children who are active participants in society and the other view sees children as potential victims who need the state to protect them from harm. The notion of children as being vs becoming challenges these perspectives (Author, 2011a). Thompson (2008) suggested that:

*'Instead of seeing children and young people simply as family members or students or as 'becomings', that is people not yet mature enough to have an opinion or act responsibly, contributors to this volume see them as competent 'beings' whose views, actions and choices are of value' (p.1).*

She goes on to argue that children deserve more than protection that they have "an entitlement to education, health and well-being, civil and political rights" (Thompson, 2008, p.1) given to them by the UNCRC.

In the 'participants' view, children, according to Thompson (2008) and others, are capable, not only for providing authentic views about their daily lives, they are indeed 'experts' about lifestyle, experiences, relationships and those things that 'matter' to them (e.g. Alderson, 2008; Clark, 2004; Clark, Kj rholt and Moss, 2005). Child-friendly methods which enable children to express and represent their ideas in 'languages' that children feel comfortable,

such as role play, art, drama, 3-D constructions, stories, games and photos were enable children to fully participate in research (Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman, 2010).

The ‘protection from harm view’ impacts on participation as an ethical consideration for research. This tenet underpins ethical research principles for children or adults as research participants (Punch, 2002; Grover, 2004). The dilemma for research with children is finding a balance between protection from exploitation and participation. However, if research is conducted within an ethical framework then concerns about harming participants should be minimised and children involved will be free to participate. Warming (2011) advocated that children are important gatekeepers and that they should be actively involved in the consent process.

Arguments against children’s voices in research suggest that because of their age and limited experience, research with children may not elicit true responses, and that adults may be better placed to speak on children’s behalf. This assumption is flawed, as McLeod (2008) argues that children’s voice is authentic and should be valued. Acknowledging that children do have ‘limited life experience’ (McLeod, 2008, p. 63) she draws on Lively (1994) to suggest that this limited life experience enable children to view things without preconceptions, and that their views are untarnished, and children believe that anything is possible (McLeod, 2008, p.63).

### **What matters to children?**

The Good Childhood Inquiry (Layard and Dunn, 2009) talked to children about “what a good life looked like” (p.11). The children said that they need loving families, friends, positive lifestyle, solid values acquired from a range of sources, good schools, good mental health and access to help if required and enough money to live amongst peers without experiencing inequality as the key issues (Layard and Dunn, 2009). These findings reflect the five outcomes of Every Child Matters which did involve consultation with children in their formulation: including for children to be “healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and to achieve economic well-being” (HM Government, 2003, pp. 6-7). Morgan (2005) confirmed the ECM outcomes in research with 700 children in the UK and he found that staying safe was the most important and economic well-being was least important to the children (p. 10).

Themes from the Good Childhood Inquiry and the five areas of Every Child Matters were explored in the literature to establish a conceptual understanding of “what matters to children” in five themes in the literature. These themes are explored in this section, namely, emotional well-being, children’s worlds especially the people of great importance to them, children’s views on health, physical well-being and safety and children’s views on education.

Firstly, research findings about children’s emotions and well-being suggest that they are part of being human and during the space of a day children express a myriad of emotions (Carter, 2009). Some research suggests that providing children with opportunities to express emotions through the many ‘languages’ available to them, enables children to be comfortable and competent in expressing their feelings (Abbott, 2001; Sorin, 2003). If the voice of children is to be considered, listening to children’s expression of emotions supports a healthy development in supportive relationships with key people. Previous research in this area has predominantly been interpreted by adults and the child’s voice has been translated by another (MacNaughton et al, 2007).

Secondly, children's worlds include those people and places closest to them, including parents and carers, siblings, friends, members of extended family and neighbourhoods (Children's Society, 2008; Morgan, 2005). Belongings and identity within a range of social contexts are also part of children's views of their world. Families are viewed as an important social unit (Khan, 2003). The Good Childhood Inquiry (2009) stated the "Life begins in the family, and from a child's point of view a loving family is the key to a good start in life" (p. 13) Feeling loved, feeling safe and a sense of belonging are central features to children's views about their world, whether it be with family, friends or other social groups (Layard and Dunn, 2009; Morgan, 2005). Children's identity is drawn from who they are in relation to those around them, where they come from and who loves them (Steel and Kidd, 2001). For example, between the age of three and six years of age, children have strong ideas about their gender and career aspirations (Archer, 1984, p. 2). This is constructed within the context of families, friendship groups and early educational influences.

Children's understanding of health, well-being and safety are also shaped by the contexts in which they live. Influential are family, school, and the media. There is a paucity of research in this aspect of children's worlds and there has been limited research to date from children. Adults play a large part in shaping children's views. There is emphasis in current policy about protection and minimising risk, and concerns about harm which society can have on children. Morgan (2005) emphasised that staying safe was the most important aspect for children, out of the five ECM outcomes. The children in this research were most concerned about strangers, smoking, knives, drugs and fire and least concerned about electricity, not being with an adult and guns. Health and safety are aspects prone to moral panics. For example, children's diet and exercise, risks of playing outdoors, unsupervised play in local areas. Harrison (2009) challenged this notion by suggesting that "When children feel safe they are able to grow into healthy and useful citizens".

Children spend a lot of their childhood in nurseries, schools and other educational institutions. However, these are adult led worlds in which children have very little control. Learning is a personal journey and yet children are moved through the schooling system towards targets which are nationalised and their performance at school has a direct link to the 'quality' of the teaching. In recent years, token efforts have been given to children's voices or rather pupil voice in Ofsted visits and on school councils, but at the end of the day, it is the adult who determines what learning is and assesses the child.

### **Pedagogical Documentation**

Pedagogical documentation is a method for making 'learning' visible. It relies, on the assumption that children are competent and capable, are co-constructors of knowledge and it is based on an appreciation of the respectful relationships that support learning through dialogue and exchange. Alcock (2000) suggested that it is "One way of respecting children as people in a shared culture is to include their voices in documentation" (p. 20). It is a participatory form of research which engages participants in critical action and reflection.

Rinaldi (2006) described the process of documenting learning as:

*'Materials collected during an experience, but they are read and interpreted at the end. The reading and recalling of memory therefore takes place after the fact. The documents (video and audio recordings, written notes) are collected, sometimes catalogued, and brought back for rereading, revisiting and reconstruction of the*

*experience. That which took place is reconstructed, interpreted and reinterpreted by means of the documents that testify to the salient moments of the path that was predefined by the teacher: the path that made it possible for the objectives of the experience to be achieved (p. 63).*

This was the process adopted for this project, by myself as the documenter of student learning. I have read and re-read the work of the students, in photos, video footage, drawings and constructions and critically reflected on what children have said about what is important to them (Vecchi, 1998). Pedagogical documentation is a technique for recording not only children's learning and development by educators it is a tool for planning and reflection of the learning of the educators too. Thornton and Brunton (2009) described documentation as: "not a final summary of a project but an ongoing record of the process of learning and a tool for predicting and planning, what might happen next in children's learning." (p. 82)

The documentation created by the students, takes the research into the visual methods realm. Fleckenstein (2002) suggested that visual images are not neutral or objective and they are 'read' and interpreted by the viewer like other texts. With this in mind, the images and narratives selected for this paper, have several layers of selection involved, firstly the children who created the work, secondly the student who chose the work to be included and finally by myself the narrator who is telling the story about What Matters to Children? The images presented can be interpreted in multiple ways because "the viewer brings own cultural and social understandings as well as their unique life trajectories to the act of interpretation" (Thompson, 2008, p. 10).

The starting place for each student was to gain children's perspectives on a contemporary issue, such as health, safety, home or school concerns. In order to do this a range of strategies were used to document children's perspectives. These included photographs, drawings, video and voice recordings, artefacts and 3D models created by children and tours of familiar and unfamiliar environments. Drama, music, movement and story-telling were used by the students to elicit children's perspectives and to enable children to communicate their ideas.

### **Research methodological issues**

The theoretical underpinnings for this paper require the selection of methods that promote children's authentic engagement and participation in research, challenge existing imbalance of power so that children's words, ideas and thoughts can be expressed openly and transparently so that they are valued. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of visual research methodologies such as visual ethnography, visual sociology and pedagogical documentation this piece of work is situated within the qualitative methodologies within a post-structuralist paradigm. Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012) suggested that children communicate in a hundred or more languages. It was for this reason, the participants of the research utilised a range of data collection methods including photographs, drawing, 3 D models to gain children's perspectives on a contemporary issue, these were considered to be more 'child-friendly'.

Thompson (2008) argued that children's voices are not always visible, in similar ways to women and other minority groups. Qualitative methodologies are often more suitable to ensuring 'marginalised' groups voices are heard' (Thompson, 2008, p. 1). Great care needs to be taken when research is conducted with children (Punch, 2002). For example, awareness of the researchers own perspectives on the issue, consider validity and reliability issues inherent

in the research process to ensure that the context for the research is appropriate and that language used is clear.

Relationships and building rapport are critical in ensuring that children are not too daunted by being involved in the research process (Punch, 2002). Foucault (date) reminds us of the power relationships and the potential for imbalance. As researchers in this project, the awareness of the potential for a power imbalance was ever present. Hence, 'child-friendly' methods were chosen to collaborate with children to answer the research question. Children and the students became 'producers of knowledge' by deciding to employ visual methods to collect data. Visual research affords students and children opportunities to share their experience, opinions and perspectives in participative research (Thompson, 2008).

Ethical approaches are of paramount concern in working with children. Anonymity and privacy are key aspects which need to be upheld in any research. Concerns about the 'sensitivity' of the research topics under investigation and concerns about how adults deal with these issues in order to protect children from possible harm (Powell and Smith, 2009). Consideration about the benefits for children for children's participation, were also factored into research. These benefits primarily included children's perspectives on a range of contemporary issues being made visible for the first time. Powell and Smith (2009) suggested that research methods selected should 'engage' children in the process by using 'appropriate' methods.

A requirement for all students participating in this module was to complete an ethics form and to gain ethical approval for conducting research with children in accordance with the University's procedures. Students also needed to approach gatekeepers such as parents, head teachers and nursery managers to gain access children. Each child who participated was given an age appropriate consent form and given the option to withdraw from project at any time. Where photographs have been used, these have been used with the consent of the children and their families. However, where possible, children's narratives have been illustrated by using images of their work or artefacts. The following image contains examples of children giving their consent to be part of the project.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH 1 HERE

## **Methods**

The project started with the assumption that children can communicate in many ways. It was also assumed that children would enjoy talking, drawing, and creating artefacts about things that were important to them. Children's contributions included drawings, videos and short films, drama, posters, stories, 3D constructions and photographs. Children aged from 18 months to 8 years were recruited personally by the 90 students involved in this project. In total 250 children were asked "What matters to them?"

As discussed previously, the methods are derived from the post-structuralist paradigm and concerned with both visual sociology and critical pedagogy. Pedagogical documentation falls within post-modern paradigms and reflects the lived experiences of children. By using visual imagery to illuminate children's thoughts and ideas about what matters to them, we are able to find "ways of forging connections between human existence and visual perception" (Finley cited in Denzin and Lincoln, p. 644)

Interpretation and analysis of the artefacts created required the use of methods from visual sociology and anthropology (Banks, 2001). In addition, consideration was given to the literature and the findings of the Good Childhood Inquiry and the five outcomes of Every Child Matters in analysing the data. In examining the materials, the questions asked included:

1. What is the piece of documentation about? What is the central message being conveyed?
2. Who made the piece of documentation? When was the documentation created and what was the rationale for its creation?
3. Who else was involved in the creation of the documentation? What is their perspective on the piece of work?
4. What is the 'child's voice' in the piece of documentation and how has it been presented?
5. What is the social and cultural context in which the work was created?

This paper represents another form of documentation, it is a product of social relations (Banks, 2001) and as such, an awareness of the combined impact of the "material, the symbolic, the social, and the cultural" ever present in the work. Each piece of documentation has an 'internal narrative' with a subject, place, time and story (Banks, op cit).

## **Results**

The results of this study provide some rich examples and illuminate what is commonly promoted in policy about what matters to children. Data was analysed in terms of frequency of specific factors in the work of the children observed in the range of data sources. This was considered within the context of the current and past political agendas in the UK aim to make a 'better' future for children. Namely, by ensuring children's health and safety so that children can enjoy a good life and achieve to their potential so that one day they will contribute to the society. High quality early years education and care is an investment in the future. In broad terms, the children's views on what matters to children after the first year of the study are summarised in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Building on the results of the first year and considering the second year of the study, the following five themes were chosen to analyse and consider in depth. Table 2 presented below provides an example of a typical response and a visual example for each theme. Highlighted in grey are the themes carried forward for the purpose of discussion in this paper.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

## **Discussion**

Highlighted in the words of the children, was the gap between rhetoric of policy and reality in children's every day lived experiences. When analysing their findings, each student compared their results to the five outcomes of ECM. When the findings of the group as a whole were considered, five new themes emerged. These themes were related to the words and thoughts of children, and what they thought was important. One example will be presented under each theme.

### **Theme 1: Emotions**

"Emotions are the language we share with all other humans" (Neville, 2007) and this is central to the theme. Children openly expressed feeling of joy and sadness and these were represented visually and orally. Expression of emotions is an important skill as emotion can be an 'on-off' switch for learning and motivation (Vail, 1994; Harrison, 2004). The focus on children's feelings is related to their everyday experiences. For example, when a 9 year old girl was asked about what made her happy she replied:

*'My dog makes me feel happy quite a lot. When you feel ill- you just sit next to her. It feels really comfortable and she makes you feel better. Another thing that makes me happy is elephants. I don't really know why! Christmas makes me happy. 1. I get lots of presents and 2. We always have a good time when everyone comes around'*

*'My friends make me happy a lot. They are nice to me and play with me all the time. It makes me feel really happy- warm and cozy inside. Special people like disabled people because they just smile at you and say hello. Being happy and nice to an old person'.*

These comments were supported by her drawing below which depicts a lot of happy and smiling people which included both family members and friends.

INSERT IMAGE 7 HERE

This child also commented about school and after school activities which gave her please. Feeling like she "achieved something" was of great importance, especially external rewards such as winning medals. Conversely, when the same child was asked about what made her feel sad, she responded:

*'There are quite a lot of things that make me sad. On the news the bad things made me sad. Like earthquakes they are quite sad because all the children go missing. When children get cancer that makes me quite sad because they are people my age dying out there.... when people go missing-I can't remember her name- I think she is still missing and they might have killed her. I don't like death- it puts me down quite a bit. I have to think of something that cheers me up'.*

The same nine year old was asked about what made her sad at school, in contrast to her previous response, she said:

*'When I get shouted out by the head teacher or by my teacher- it is very sad- I just feel like I want to cry. When you have to stay in at break and I wanted to cry but couldn't- I found it annoying and tiring. She got really angry at me because I didn't understand it. The head teacher is nice to parents but not nice to kids- but that is her technique I think'.*

She continued to discuss what people made her feel sad:

*'My brother and sister make me sad by arguing. I don't like it. I feel very grumpy inside, not happy. I don't like it when David Cameron makes really bad choices- he makes me sad because he does not make the right decisions for the world'.*

Finally, the things that previously gave her the most joy, her outside school activities, there were some things that made her so sad she felt like giving up.

*'Drama does have its ups and downs because they shout at us a lot when we get things wrong- it is not nice! Dance is the same- she shouts at us really loud. Gymnastics is probably the worst- they shout at you and scare you- it is the shock of it- I feel unhappy- you just don't feel right inside- you just don't want to do it anymore!'*

INSERT IMAGE 8 HERE

## **Theme 2: Children's worlds**

Within the theme of children's world, families and children's perspectives will be presented as an example of this theme. Families were of significant importance to children involved in this project. This finding is supported by the Good Childhood Inquiry. Children were asked questions about families: What makes a family? What does it feel like to be part of a family? Why are families important?

According to the children, families are 'altogether, safe places, show love, and made up of kind and helpful people. Image 2 illustrates the 'top' words that children used to describe their family. Overwhelmingly, children viewed their family positively, using words like fun, loving, caring. When children were asked about what it felt like to be part of a family, they responded saying it felt: lovely, safe, happy, cared for and excited. Another family focussed question, asked children about why families were important. For example, their responses were related to their feelings, safety, health and well-being.

*"They feed you and keep you healthy."*

*"Families keep you company and you are never alone."*

*"They cheer you up if you are sad."*

*"They look after you and keep you safe."*

*"They make you happy."*

*"You would be sad if you had no family."*

*"Families are always there for you."*

*"They make you feel like you belong."*

(XXXXXX project)

Children also recognised that families are not always perfect, but they form a safety net. For example, one child said: *"they love me and I love them and sometimes they don't like me when I'm naughty."* (Liam (6 years) - (XXXXXX project))

### **Theme 3: Health**

Body image was a recurrent theme in the project. Cheatum and Hammond (2001) and Kirsh (2000) defined body image as internal feelings that a person has about themselves, these can be positive and negative. The impact of the media and celebrities in the development of identity has been highlighted in research related to children's health and well-being. For example, Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) found that due to exposure to 'idealised' images, children were more likely to have unrealistic views about real life role models, preferring thinner adult figures as being 'princesses' like the ones in the experiments(????).

Image 3 and 4 provide an example of how children have idealised views about themselves and what they want to become as an adult. Knighting, Rowa-Dewar, Malcolm, Kearney and Gibson (2010) in their draw and write study concluded that children's drawings enabled them as researchers to use an open ended method by tapping into children's' worlds through familiar communication methods.

### **Theme 4: Safety**

Research conducted in Australia suggests that crime and safety are real issues of concern for young children. In particular, children were concerned about feeling unsafe when walking around their local area, particularly at night time. The Australian Childhood Foundation (2008) reported that children feared becoming victims of crime. Tolbert Kimbro and Schlacter (2011) suggested that parents' fears about their neighbourhood impact on children's outdoor play, and by extension, this would influence the child's views about safety outdoors. Examples in this study include Tom (6 years) (see image 9) and in his annotation, *"robbers eat drugs, set houses on fire, shoot people and crime is a very bad person"*. This is sharply contrasted by Andrew (image 8) who drew a picture of a fly swatter when he was asked about what he needed to feel safe.

INSERT IMAGE 9 HERE

The outdoor spaces were identified by children as an important place for them in their local area, but sometimes did not feel safe. Farver, Ghosh and Garcia (2000) found that children exposed to violence were more likely to have lower self-esteem, have poorer sense of well-being and have less feeling of control over themselves and the world around them. They also reported that children living in more violent areas were more likely to feel unsafe in their outdoor environment and have more violent content in their drawings due to their life experiences (Farver, Ghosh and Garcia, 2000).

This study used children's drawing to give children the opportunity to illustrate what happens in their local area. The drawings were coded according to violence observed by children. Image 10 is a collection of photos taken by eight year old Harry. He walked around his local park and took photos of things he liked and disliked. Harry likes "skateboarding around" and "being free and running around in the open space". He dislikes "no swings", "did not like graffiti or the rubbish lying around" "did not like seeing teenagers standing around". Harry's

negative impression about the local outdoor play spaces were reinforced by his mother who rarely let him play there unsupervised because of her concerns for his safety.

INSERT IMAGE 10 HERE

## **Theme 5: Learning and education**

School, learning and education was a common theme in the data. In particular children had views about the question: What is education? Glazzard (2012) reported that children's views on their education are increasingly the focus of education policy makers. Young children tend to be more positive and enthusiastic about schooling and education than older children (Glazzard, 2012). In a piece of cross-cultural research in the USA, Li, Yamamoto, Luo, Batchelor and Bresnahan (2010) described how children acquire learning beliefs through socialisation. Children learn culturally valued attitudes about school, learning and education from their families, teachers, peers, school and the media. The views expressed by children as provided above in Table 2 highlights that children understand that schooling is linked to their future and employment and are therefore culturally derived. For example,

*Education is the reason we go to school so we can get jobs when we grow up.*

*It was heartening to see that children know that learning is not confined to school attendance:*

*Learning is something we do all the time. There is always something to learn.*

*Learning isn't always done at school. We never stop learning.*

(XXXXXX project)

## **Concluding comments**

Children are experts about their own lives (Alderson, 2008). The small insights presented in this paper show that children have views about what is important to them. The challenge for educators and other professionals working with young children is to find ways to ensure children's views are sought, considered and included in adult worlds. Cagfliari, Barozzi and Giudici(2004) suggested that:

*'Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, especially an educational project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with others, within a framework of shared values' p. 28).*

Pedagogical Documentation is a mechanism that facilitates dialogue, discussion between adults and children, parents and the wider community. As a community of learners collaboratively conducting this project, the students were able to explore the value and power of pedagogical documentation through literature, examples of work and in practice; trial ways of working ethically with children in participatory research and looking for authentic opportunities for giving 'voice' to children (Cagfliari, Barozzi and Giudici, 2004).

As educators, we need to be cautious about using visual research methods with young children and how we as adults interpret these. Thompson (2008) stresses and challenges us to consider:

*'What right do we have as adults to know the hidden worlds of children's culture and to have them illuminate this through visual means? We may wish to access this knowledge to advocate on their behalf in order to bring children's voices more powerfully into the process of policy development'* (p. 26).

On the other hand, by "developing rich narratives of interpretation through dialogue across generations, situated in a commitment to realising the social, cultural and political roots" (Thompson, 2008, 33) we have the potential to influence and advocate.

The challenge in the next 25 years of the UNCRC and beyond will be to continue to pursue the rights for children and to promote participation, democratic values and authentic involvement in decisions about their lives. Future research about what matters to children will inform policy and practice and is central to living out the values and intentions of the UNCRC. In conclusion, Image 11 highlights very clearly what children think it means to be an adult, what kind of adults do we want them to be:

- *Boring- you can't play anymore because you're too old*
- *Old*
- *Bossy- When you are an adult you can boss people around, that's what my mum does.*
- *Get married and have babies*
- *Independent- You can do what you want when you're grown up. When I'm older*

INSERT IMAGE 11 HERE

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