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## Children's Voices in Exploring Their Interests Using Different Media

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GOTHENBURG



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Czarecah Oropilla

*Children's Voices in Exploring Their Interests Using Different Media*

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Erasmus Mundus joint degree  
"International Master of Early Childhood Education and Care"

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
University of Gothenburg  
University of Malta

August 2014



Education and Culture DG

ERASMUS MUNDUS



## Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfillment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "C. J. W.", written in a cursive style.

August 2014

## **ABSTRACT**

Czarecah T. Oropilla

“Children’s Voices in Exploring Their Interests Using Different Media”

The importance of including young children’s voices in decisions that impact them is highlighted by international research and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This research project aims to identify the topics that young children consider interesting and to explore the ways that they like to document and share their interests with other people. The study also acknowledges the growing overlap between young children and different media technologies, and children’s lived experiences in information technology-rich environments. The research project adopted a qualitative methodology incorporating an exploratory and participatory approach. A small group of five children (4-5 years old) in Dublin, Ireland was selected to participate in a series of child-friendly and creative activities. The children were given the opportunity to select and use papers and pens, digital cameras or disposable cameras to document their interests. The information-documenting activity using their preferred media yielded children’s drawings, photographs and stories about their interests. Data suggests that there are a number of ways children could document and share their interests with other people using different media. While it may be true that there are risks particularly with the use of digital technologies, this research project demonstrates how it also has powerful potential for participation. This is especially true since it has been found that these technologies are part of the children’s everyday lives. The data also suggests that the children’s interests include personal details about themselves, their activities, of other people, and of nature and places, all of which contribute to children’s developing aspect of identity and belonging. These themes of interests also suggest that children are interested in a balance of environments and experiences. Overall, the research project demonstrates the children’s capability to participate, using their preferred media, simply because they are given the chance.

International Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care

August 2014

**KEYWORDS: UNCRC, CHILDREN’S VOICE AND PARTICIPATION, ICT, MEDIA**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses.”*

— Alphonse Karr, *A Tour Round My Garden*

Putting together this thesis is a culmination of the wonderful journey I have had in the IMEC program. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to all who have made the program possible, and for giving me an opportunity to experience it. I am humbled by all of the learnings and enriching experiences from all my classmates, visiting professors and academic members of all four institutions—Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HIOA), University of Gothenburg, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and University of Malta (UM).

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mairead Seymour, for her invaluable feedback, kind encouragement and firm support throughout the research process. I would like to extend this gratitude to the academic team in DIT, particularly to Dr. Máire Mhic Mhathúna and Cathy Kelleher for all the help, insight and support. I would also like to thank Anna May Navarrete and Dr. Carolyn Ronquillo for their added aid and boost.

I am also thankful and indebted to the early childhood setting where I have collected data and its practitioners for the kind support they extended my way. Most of all, I would like to thank the children participants themselves for participating and sharing their voices to me, and their parents for allowing their children to do so.

Finally, I would like to thank my Mom, Dad and brother for the unconditional love and support from miles away. And to Jean, my constant source of strength and inspiration, many thanks. I am blessed to have all of you in my life.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Rationale

It has been said that “children are and must be seen as active in the construction of their own lives, the life of those around them and of the societies in which they live— children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes” (James and Prout, 1990, p.8). Additionally they say that “children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults” (James and Prout, 1990, p.8). This movement led to a reconceptualization of childhood and the child—a recognition that ‘the child’ has his/her own social cultures, and is an active participant of his/her world (Veale, 2005; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Dawes, 2000 in Veale, 2005). It also resulted in an increased interest and number of researchers in the area of children’s voice and participation (Veale, 2005). However, although the idea that children as social actors is becoming popular and common (James, 2009), it seems that most studies view children as predominantly objects rather than subjects in research with a focus on child-related outcomes as opposed to child-related processes and thus, children as consumers than constructors and producers of knowledge and information (Greene & Hill, 2005).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989 is a global movement that acknowledges childhood as being separate from adulthood since children have different needs, but that children, too have human rights that need to be protected. It is made up of foundational principles and articles that explicitly articulate children’s needs and rights. Ratified in most countries of the world, the UNCRC is a framework that has been the basis for changes in policy, research and practice. It plays a major role in how children are viewed and treated as there are stipulations as to what the role of the state, adults and of the children are (Hayes, 2002; Taylor, 2000).

Several Articles within the UNCRC are very powerful in highlighting children’s voices and their participation in society. Article 12 discusses the importance of respecting children’s views in matters that affect them. Article 13 discusses children’s freedom to express their thoughts and opinions, as well as to receive information that is allowed by the law. Article 17 recognizes

children's right to reliable information from the media that would do them no harm and that they would be able to understand. These Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child have the potential to serve as an agent for change and action at policy level to give children the opportunity and a voice within society (Hayes, 2002).

With technology advances, childhoods are considerably different from that just a mere ten years ago. In a generation that is known as the information age, children are more exposed to technological tools (EU Kids Online, 2011; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013; Olafsson, Livingstone & Haddon, 2013a) that enable people to gather more information and communicate faster such as the computer, internet, mobile smartphones and tablets, which are also sometimes referred to as information and communications technologies (ICT). In the EU Kids Online (2009) research project final report, it was found that more children are using the internet and more and more younger children are getting online. As such, younger children are getting more information faster than they would have because of ICT, and the EU Kids Online research project identified the possibility of risks alongside potential opportunities in children's lives.

However, with more information younger children are getting through different media, there is little research on how children participate in this discourse. It seems that the children's voice in constructing shared information through different media and technologies is hardly given attention. Children's participation is still limited to being consumers and audiences of information created by adults as children and young people have been placed in a passive and lower position of power than that of adults (Christensen & Prout, 2005; Veale, 2005). While children have the freedom to express, and their views must be respected (UNCRC, 1989), children's voices are seldom heard.

It is the researcher's belief that children's voices should be heard. It is argued that their thoughts, point of views and opinions are a reflection of how they construct meaning. One very good example of hearing children's voices was conducted by Start Strong Ireland (2011) in its consultative project called *If I Had a Magic Wand—Young Children's Visions and Ideas for Early Care and Education Services*. The children were consulted on what children would change in their country (Ireland) if they were given a magic wand. One theme that emerged from

the children's responses was to change the weather because they wanted to spend more time outdoors. This is very relevant and meaningful to children, and is reflective of what is important and significant for them.

This research has been informed and inspired by the conception of the Mosaic Approach, which offers research methodologies that enable children's voices to be heard. The proponents of the Mosaic Approach view children as "experts in their own lives, skilful communicators, rights holders and meaning makers" (Clark and Moss, 2005, p.5). As such, they have developed a framework for listening to children that is multi-method, participatory, adaptable, focused on children's lived experiences and embedded in practice (Clark and Moss, 2011).

## **1.2 Research aim and questions**

### *Research Aim*

The aim of this study is to explore young children's interests and the ways that they document and share these interests with others.

### *Research Questions*

This research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What topics do young children consider interesting?
2. In what ways do young children document and share information on topics that interest them? Do they prefer old media tools or newer technologies?

In the discourse of children's agency and participation, there has been a recommendation to "gain more insight into the way children actually help to shape their environment" (Jans, 2004, p.40). By listening to their opinions, views and thoughts on this topic and attempting to answer these questions, the researcher hopes to highlight children's agency and participation and their capability in their roles as active members of society. It would also contribute to the pool of knowledge within the field of early childhood education and mass media as it is anticipated that the results will highlight the importance of including young children's voices in an information technology-rich environment as informed by the international research and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first chapter offers an overview of the background and rationale for conducting the research project where the main aim and research questions are explicitly stated. The second chapter is a review of related literature relevant to the research project to give foundation on underlying concepts and ideas. Chapter three opens up with a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical framework in which the research is situated in. Methodological strategies are then discussed and rationalized. Ethical issues and limitations are included in this chapter. The key findings emerging from this research project will be presented in Chapter 4. This will include themes that have emerged from data collection, as well as excerpts of the participant's views and opinions along with a discussion of the researcher's interpretation of the key findings in relation to the existing literature. Chapter five will offer a brief conclusion and possible impact and implications. Recommendations for future research in the same topic and field will be presented as an invitation for further inquiry.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section is composed of three main parts. The first subsection discusses concepts arising when listening to children's voices. A review of literature on children's agency and participation will follow. The section will end with an examination of researches done on children's place in mass media and newer technologies.

### **2.1 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Conceptualised in 1989 and ratified by most nations in the world, the UNCRC views children as having human rights and protection. It acknowledges children's rights and needs in 54 guiding articles that could be categorized into four groups—survival, development, protection and participation. The UNCRC upholds the view children as being competent, strong, active, participatory, meaning-makers, and fellow citizens.

The UNCRC has been used as a framework in policy making, curriculum writing and nation building. It has been the basis for a great number of projects on children's welfare, protection and health. However, Taylor (2000) noted that “in general it is adults who write about and debate the issue of rights for children. This might be interpreted as symptomatic of the power relationships, which confine children to subordinate roles in their societies, or might simply be seen as an inevitable phase in the process of change” (Taylor, 2000, p. 21.)

Article 12 of the UNCRC is centrally relevant to this research in clearly stating that children have a right to be involved in decisions affecting them (UNCRC, 1989). This article gives importance to hearing and listening to the children's voices when policies, projects, and efforts on behalf of children are to be undertaken. In support of this article, particularly in doing research with children, O'Kane (2000) expounds that “this right extends from decisions affecting them as individuals, to decisions which affect them as a collectivity—an acknowledgement that they are social actors in their own lives (p.256).” Furthermore, O'Kane (2000) reiterates that social researchers, who are mostly adults, play an important role in creating spaces and opportunities for children to be listened to through the use of child-friendly, participatory techniques.

The advent of listening to children's voices has been brought about by a number of policy movements all over the world. As outlined above, the UNCRC (1989) has been one of the most influential and in some cases legally binding. Taylor (2000) looked into children's rights in the UK in terms of education. She found that while there are efforts at community level to listen to children's voice through children and youth advocacy centres, there are still limited opportunities for children to be heard and to be agents in the educational system. Taylor (2000) concludes that by using the UNCRC as a framework, a shift in policy and practice would give way for children's voices to be heard, and that it is important because "giving children a voice in decision making makes them visible and gives them stake in that process, thereby reducing the chances of their wanting to sabotage it" (p. 32).

## **2.2 Listening to Children's Voices**

Long gone are the Victorian days when children were said to only be 'seen and not heard' (Sherwin, 1996). There is a prevailing thought that "children are and must be seen as active in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live ... not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes" (James and Prout, 1990, p.8). Additionally proponents say that "children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults" (James and Prout, 1990, p.8).

Listening to children is a way to recognize their capabilities as experts and agents of their own lives, and respecting their rights and worth as human beings (Greene and Hill, 2005; Roberts, 2000). As such, in a number of recent research studies, there has been a shift in the children's role and position from 'object' to 'subject' (Greene and Hill, 2005) and further to the status of 'participant' (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000). Recent efforts show that "children are not simply objects, either of concern, of research or of a media story" (Roberts, 2000, p.229).

The range of research giving importance to listening to children's voices stretches across and within different disciplines. There were earlier efforts to listen to children's voice within the fields of health and medicine (Begley, 2000; France et al., 2000), education (Gersch, et al. 1996;

Detheridge, 2000), social work (Smith, 1996), mental health (Glaser, 1996), religion (Nesbitt, 2000), law (Oakley, 2000; Sherwin, 1996), and mass media (Van der Molen & Van der Voort, 1997; Nikken & Voort, 1997).

It is important to give children a venue for their voices to be heard within an environment that is largely run by adults. To quote Mayall (2000), “Children’s understandings both complement and reinforce macro-studies in indicating that their rights are poorly recognized, and that social policies should directly address children’s interests, rather than, simply, adult’s interests” (p. 134).

However, it has been pointed out that there is a difference between listening, hearing and acting on children’s voice even if the three activities are frequently merged as one activity: “there have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely in what children have had to say” (Roberts, 2000, p. 238).

### *Listening Towards Participation*

More efforts are being made to have consultations with children in creating policies that will affect them. This is important because, just as Mayall (2000) has discussed, “analysis of children’s own understanding of the social conditions of childhood is an important precondition for considering what policies are appropriate to enable children to lead satisfying lives” (Mayall, 2000, p.134).

Recent efforts in listening to children’s voices are geared towards increasing children’s participation in the environments in which they are situated in. More national governments are heeding the call to respect children’s rights to participation by providing venues for children to be consulted in regards to policies to be implemented. The National Children’s Strategy (2000) in Ireland was put forth, setting specific and explicit goals to include children’s voice in research, policy and programme making. Efforts to include children’s voice in national policy making were informed by the UNCRC. Consultations were held for children and young people by various institutions within Ireland. One example of such effort is ‘Young Voice: Have Your

Say’, which was dialogues with young people on how they can be more fully included in their society as part of a European programme called ‘Structured Dialogue’ (NYCI, 2014). The children and young children’s voices in these efforts have been translated into policies that have been drafted and implemented in Ireland. Currently, Ireland’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is working towards A National Policy Framework for Children & Young People for 2014 – 2020. Apart from this framework, the DCYA have provided different venues for children to have their say and participate through different initiatives. Examples include Teenagers and Children Talking in Care (TACTIC), an effort within the field of care and social work, the Inclusion Programme, which aims to target seldom-heard young people and encourage them to take part, the DCYA Children and Young People’s Forum (CYPF), which was established in 2004 to act as an advising panel when pursuing issues involving children, and the DCYA Children and Young People’s Participation Partnership Committee, which oversees the implementation of proposed development plans.

### *Children’s Interests*

Another way to act on children’s voices is through incorporating children’s interests in their activities. Within the realm of pedagogy, Seitz (2006) proposed a four-step plan to build on children’s interests and to incorporate their interests into the children’s existing activities. Circular in nature, the four-step plan starts off with identifying children’s interests through provocations in the form of exposure to different experiences and engaging in conversation with the children that Seitz (2006) calls ‘Sparks’. Once the interests or ‘Sparks’ have been identified, providing opportunities and experiences within the field of interest, having conversations and asking further questions follows to deepen the children’s interests. The cyclical plan continues on once other sparks of interests are identified (Seitz, 2006).

A movement for the use of emergent curriculum is also being used in early years’ services in the United States of America, Canada and Australia. The emergent curriculum makes use of the children’s interest and voice sourced from play, interactions and conversations in planning out projects and activities within the early years setting (Jones, 2012), which is similar to Seitz’ (2006) plan presented earlier. Contrasted with a standardized curriculum that comes prescribed with a syllabus and definite and generalized reading lists and activities, the emergent curriculum



gives children an opportunity to co-construct their activities and environment together with their teachers and parents (Jones, 2012). The Queensland Studies Authority (2014) has listed a number of benefits and key features of the emergent curriculum that highlight children's active participation in the process in their professional learning guidelines. These include recognition of children as agents of their own learning, opportunities for children to make choices and begin to take increasing responsibility for their learning, and purposeful and intentional curriculum planning with children that builds on their interests. Acknowledgment of children's questions, queries and wonder about the world, giving importance to exciting, challenging and motivating learning experiences as well as opportunities for sustained and focused interest in learning by children, enhanced opportunities for the development of children's self-expression, oral language and creative abilities are also highlighted (p.2).

Efforts at acting on children's interests have also been documented in Canada (Stacey, 2009; O'Keefe, 2013), which are primarily proposed within the early childhood educational setting, but have been identified as beneficial for parents at home as well. Children are more invested in the learning process when they find the activities and the environment meaningful because they are interested in it (Jones, 2012; O'Keefe, 2013). Additionally, children take on active and engaged roles throughout the process, making them want to learn, experience and ask more questions (Queensland Studies Authority, 2014).

### *Children as Researchers*

Another way of translating children's voice and interests into action has been demonstrated through the use of child-friendly research methodologies, such as the Mosaic Approach. For a long time, the research process has been controlled by adult researchers trying to standardize and structure experiments with children in laboratories (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). The way the research topic and question is framed, what to study about children and how to study children, as well as interpreting the data in terms of adult discourses about children's development show the power relationship that give adults the status of being experts on children (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000). However, placing children in laboratories and assessing them in a standardized manner did not reveal children's true competencies as everything was controlled by adults. Their voices in standardized assessments and laboratory experiments were not considered and heard.

Bronfenbrenner viewed laboratory experiments on children as “the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 19). In response to this, Margaret Donaldson, one of Piaget’s most influential critics of the standardized assessment process he was implementing, found that by comparing Piaget’s original experiments with situations that make sense to them, the children’s true competencies are revealed (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). This brought about a shift of perspectives on children in research by differentiating ‘research on children’ and ‘research with children’. Mayall (2000) discusses the different approaches to research with children:

“The first approach to research accepts the generational order; it assumes the superiority of adult knowledge, and the relevance of documenting childhood in the light of that knowledge. The second approach questions the generational order; good information about childhood must start from children’s experience. In order to get good data, children are to be taught by the researcher that power issues between children and adults can be diluted or diffused to the point where children can accept the adult as one of themselves. But, according to my information from children, they think otherwise: a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children.” (Mayall, 2000, p.121)

The call for a child-friendly methodology that enables researchers to listen to children was heeded by the conceptualisation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001). This approach is an integrated way of listening that acknowledges both children and adults as co-constructors of meaning through a combination of visual and verbal methods (Clark & Moss, 2011). It is also a response to the call for social researchers to use research methodologies that aid in listening to young children’s voices and to understand their lived experiences (O’Kane, 2000; Greene and Hill, 2005). It is particularly helpful for doing research with younger children because it is a framework that uses different methods in recognition of the different languages and voices of children through the use of participatory activities to highlight the children’s role as experts and agents in their lives (Clark & Moss, 2001). It is also reflexive in that it involves children, practitioners and parents alike reflecting on meanings and interpretations, and adaptable in that it could be applied to different settings and contexts in the field of early childhood (Clark & Moss, 2001). The Mosaic Approach is a listening framework that gives more importance to looking at

children's lived experiences rather than gaining knowledge about them, which could be embedded into practice as an evaluative tool and an everyday practice (Clark & Moss, 2001). Upon publication of the paper on Mosaic approach, different authors have reviewed and have used this approach to include children's participation in their research (Clark, 2007; 2010; Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012; Baird, 2013).

Additionally, the Mosaic Approach regards children as having an active role in research and pedagogy. Clark (2005) discusses this shift in the view of children as she discusses the conception of the Mosaic Approach:

“Viewing young children as competent communicators require researchers and practitioners to readdress their relationship with young children and therefore their roles. The Mosaic approach includes an element of role reversal for the adults involved. Children participate as documenters, photographers, initiators and commentators. Children play an active role, taking the lead in which ideas, people, places and objects are given significance.” (Clark, 2005, p. 25)

The Mosaic Approach makes use of multitudes of creative interactive methods to engage children in research. Acknowledging that children may be able to voice their thoughts in opinions through other media, the Mosaic Approach has made use of the children's drawings, tour mappings, as well as children's photographs to collect data. Findings collected through these methods are then brought back to children to have further conversations with them, which sometimes happen in what Clark and Moss (2001) call a child conference, a child-friendly version of interviews or focus group discussions.

Ultimately, the use of child-friendly methodologies to listen to children acknowledges their role and part in the society. Such methodologies also give children a venue to voice their concerns, and participate in a wider context that has been dominated by adults far too long. The Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) has paved the way for children to have their say in creating learning spaces that suit their needs.

## **2.3 Participation**

Lansdown (2010) identified a need for clarity of the definition of participation, especially within the context of children's rights as well as the need to face the challenges that hinder children from actively participating, one of which is the presumption that children are incapable because they express in ways that adults could not understand. Lansdown (2010) argues for the provision of appropriate protection to the children in the course of participation, as well as to acknowledge the need to measure participation indicators such the extent, quality and impact of participation. Lansdown (2010) proposed that the extent of participation of children could be assessed through the level of participation, which she classified in three levels: 1) consultative participation 2) collaborative participation 2) child-led participation. Consultative participation involves adult-initiated activities to seek out children views, understandings and opinions. Collaborative participation involves a shared decision-making process and output for both children and adults. Child-led participation involves child-initiated activities, wherein adults act as facilitators for support.

Lansdown (2010) has pointed out the difference between merely listening to children through consultations, and actually hearing children by having activities that they have initiated. In the United Kingdom, a movement called 'Participation Works' spearheaded by the Children's Rights Alliance for England and the National Children's Bureau has published a report on children's participation in decision-making in 2010. The report identified the need to involve children in decision-making in issues that impact their lives. They have also found that children feel that being able to voice their opinions was just the first step to participation. Being provided with feedback with decisions, ultimately through actions generated by incorporating their thoughts and opinions, is an equally important stage for children in the process of participation. Children have also reported being amenable to adults making decisions on their behalf, but have voiced an appreciation for being given the rationale to the decisions being made.

### *Rights-based Participation*

In addition to Article 12 of the UNCRC, in 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has published the General Comment No. 12 which discussed the rights of children to be heard by providing the legal grounds to do so and explicitly setting out the scope of children's

participation rights. A resource guide to the UNCRC General Comment No. 12 published in 2011 further expounds the importance and usefulness of the UNCRC addendum. In the guide, Lansdown (2011) identified the basic requirements for effective and ethical participation of children. Characteristics of rights-based participation for children include being transparent and informative in that the children must be provided with information on their rights and how they could participate; voluntary such that children could participate without being forced to do so; respectful in the way children's views are treated and are given venue and opportunities to be realised through child-initiated ideas and activities; relevant such that children could use their experiences and capabilities to express views on issues that are meaningful to their lives; child-friendly such that environments and methodologies are fit and appropriate for children; inclusive such that everyone is involved, even those who are marginalized; supported by training pertaining to the adults' preparation to be more effective in supporting and facilitating children's participation; safe and sensitive to risk to minimize danger, hazards and risks that might affect children by participating; and accountable in that there is a commitment to give feedback, monitoring and evaluation.

Venues and settings where children could participate effectively have also been identified in the resource guide. Children's participation could be practised and realised in the family, in alternative care, in healthcare, in education, in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities, in the media, in the workplace, in judicial proceedings, and in situations of violence as long as the basic requirements for effective and ethical participation as prescribed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, is actively acknowledged and followed (Lansdown, 2011).

Challenges that affect children's participation have also been identified in the resource guide (Lansdown, 2011). The document outlines factors that hinder children's participation including a lack of awareness and training among adults to recognize children's rights to have their voices heard and participate as well as the way adults view children also hinders children's participation, especially when children are regarded as lacking competence to participate in decision-making processes (Lansdown, 2011). Another identified hindrance is the lack of awareness among the children themselves that they have the right to voice out their thoughts and participate, particularly certain groups of children that are highly marginalised within this

discourse which include very young children, children with learning disabilities and those for whom the national language is not their mother tongue (Lansdown, 2011). Barriers to children's participation were also found in different settings such as the school and the community where children could potentially participate, and this includes legislative and policy barriers, attitudinal barriers, practical and personal barriers, as well as lack of knowledge, training, and resources to support child participation (Kelleher et al., 2014) — all of which resonates with the identified barriers in the resource guide for UNCRC General Comment 12 (Lansdown, 2011).

Along with the obstacles and hindrances, however, comes a list of strategies to ensure full and better implementation of children's participation. Lansdown (2011) proposes introducing a legal and policy framework to act as a firm foundation for the implementation of children's participation on a macro and national level. Furthermore, Lansdown (2011) proposes raising adult awareness through systematic, ongoing and integrated training and capacity-building for those who work with and for children. It has also been suggested to have children representatives to create opportunities for children and youth to engage in the political arena by identifying key issues and concerns affecting them (Lansdown, 2011). Providing children access to accurate and age-appropriate information about their rights through a range of media is also another important step to raise awareness of children's participation (Lansdown, 2011). Qualitative and quantitative data collection and monitoring of the extent to which participation rights are respected is also recommended as well as having public campaigns that promote respect for children's right to be heard (Lansdown, 2011). Lastly, it has been recommended to monitor governments' commitment to children, increasing transparency and accountability through child budgeting — that is reviewing government allocation and spending on children's right to be heard, which often times receive less priority than other children's rights (Lansdown, 2011).

In the light of the UNCRC Article 12 and General Comment No. 12, Lundy and Stalford (2013) have identified opportunities and challenges for child participation as well as recent developments in the European context. They have created a brief guide to make adult workshops more young person friendly in their report for the Eurochild Conference 2013 entitled 'Building an Inclusive Europe: The Contribution of Children's Participation'. The brief guide include simple suggestions as to how to create, foster and encourage young people to have their voices

heard during workshops such as the use of their names, inviting them to co-chair a meeting, considering the physical layout of the venue, doing away with formal titles and qualifications, avoiding the use of acronyms and jargons that young people might not be able to understand, diversifying presentations through visual and movement activities, among others (Lundy and Stalford, 2013).

### *Seldom Heard Young People*

In the discussion of rights-based participation, there are groups of children whose voices are marginalised and seldom heard. In the report ‘Promoting the Participation of Seldom Heard Young People’, seldom heard young people are identified to be the “young people whose voices are not heard in decisions that affect them and/or who are not benefitting from services designed to meet their needs” (Kelleher, Seymour, Halpenny, 2014, p. 24). Kelleher, *et al.* (2014) have conducted a literature review on best practice principles to promote children’s participation through identification of core aspects of participation, its barriers and challenges, as well as approaches to improve inclusion of seldom-heard children in macro contexts. The report highlighted the need to further review and identify who belongs to seldom heard groups because seldom heard people may exist within a larger seldom heard group, and sometimes even exist in multiple, overlapping and diverse manners which contributes to impeding their capability to participate further (Kelleher et al., 2014). One such group is children in their early years, which have been identified as a group that is seldom heard, difficult to reach and thus, are less engaged in available services (Roe & McEvoy, 2011 as cited in Kelleher et al., 2014).

Although there are a number of barriers that hinder seldom heard young people, such young children, to participate, the review offers possible course of actions to overcome barriers to children and young people’s participation towards building a culture of participation in the whole system. The report found that representation through formal structures often times overshadows those who are not directly representing the group of people such that there was a call to adopt methods that are more appropriate and responsive to the needs and voice of seldom heard young people through informal methods (Kelleher et al., 2014). The use of mass media and information and communication technologies has been identified as one potential method that could be

utilised and integrated to raise levels of participation of seldom heard young people (Kelleher et al., 2014).

The next section will explore children's place in mass media through the use of information and communication technologies, highlighting possibilities and potential for its use to promote children's voice and participation.

## **2.4 Children and Mass Media**

Over recent years, there has been a rapid succession of changes in the world of mass media, most especially within the realm of information technology. Information previously communicated through words on paper or word of mouth has been replaced by newer technological media tools (Calvert, 1999; Singer & Singer, 2001). Various kinds of media also referred to as information and communication technologies (ICT), are now being used to spread information. Information technologies have been earlier referred to as 'electronic devices used to transmit and received symbolically coded messages' such as the radio and television that 'both transmit information from a central source to a mass audience' (Calvert, 1999, p. 3). With the advent of computer technologies and the internet, which has been simplified through its interface design making it more user-friendly than it was in its early years, it has become easier to communicate and share information to other people (Calvert, 1999). The internet, which interconnects various computer systems throughout the world, is a 'gateway to information' that is readily accessible and made friendly through the use of audio, visual and interactive media (Calvert, 1999). Most children nowadays live in an information-rich environment in what has been referred to as the interactive age. Information in the form of photographs, videos, among others is now easier to access and pass around through the use of computers and the internet. Interacting with these technologies is part of the children's everyday realities, thus an experience that is taken for granted (Calvert, 1999). And while undeniably, the content of the information impacts on children's lives it is argued that 'the technology used to present content is just as important as the content itself' (McLuhan, 1964 as cited in Calvert, 1999, p. 2).



### *Participation using different media*

Different kinds of media have been described to have distinguishable characteristics in terms of participation of its audience or user. McLuhan (1996) distinguished ‘hot’ media from ‘cool’ media. A ‘hot medium’ is one that extends one single sense, for example seeing or hearing, in ‘high definition’ as it is able to provide a great level of detail and are more often than not, self-explanatory and explicit. On the other hand, ‘cool media’ gives only a meagre amount of information such that so much has to be filled in by the listener. ‘Cool media’ therefore, are more implicit and considered to be low definition. Examples of ‘hot media’ include the radio, contrasted with the telephone, which is considered a ‘cool medium’ when talking about the sense of hearing. Photographs, which when contrasted with cartoons, are considered to be a ‘hot media’ because of the visual detail it gives the audience (McLuhan, 1996). In terms of participation through the use of media, McLuhan (1996) discussed saying that “hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience” (McLuhan, 1996, p. 33).

### *Children as Consumers than Producers of Information*

For a long period of time, children were considered subjects or consumers rather than the producers or participants in the field of mass media. During the boom of television in the audiovisual age, children’s views and reactions to the content of television programmes were investigated (Atkin & Gantz, 1974; Atkin & Gantz, 1978; Drew & Reeves, 1980; Drew & Reeves, 1984; Bourne, 1986; Van der Molen & Van der Voort, 1997). While the research focus shifted to how children learn and comprehend through television programs (Buckingham, 1997; Smith and Wilson, 2002; Fisch, 2004; Yanich, 2005; Smith, Pieper and Moyer-Guse, 2008; Seker & Sine, 2012) towards the latter end of the century, the results identified that children were considered to have a passive role rather than an active role in the field of mass media. Children’s voices were hardly heard in this field, and there were not a lot of possible opportunities for them to participate, until the passing of the audiovisual age, towards the digital and interactive age of this day.

### *New Media: ICT and Young Children*

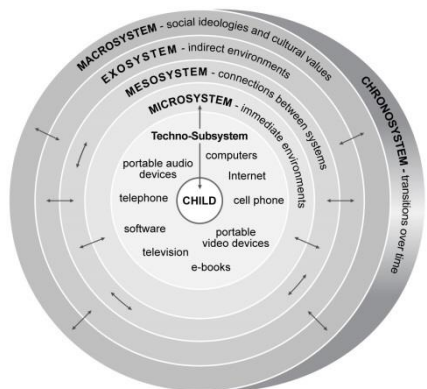
Technological advances have also impacted children's lived experiences. It is easier for young children to gather information as well as share it, due to continuous technological upgrades. In a generation that is known as the interactive information age, children are more exposed to technological tools such as the computer, internet, mobile smartphones and tablets (EU Kids Online, 2011; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013; Ólafsson, Livingstone & Haddon, 2013; Smahel, et al, 2012) that enable them to gather more information and communicate faster. In the EU Kids Online (2009) research project final report, the authors found that more children are using the internet and younger children are getting online. Statistics for Ireland highlight that 58% of the total population has an internet connection, and that 96% of 14-17 year olds are internet users. The same report shows that 94% of 11-14 year olds are online while 61% of six to ten year olds are also internet users. Although a high percentage of parents are also using the internet, some countries report children's usage exceeding that of their parents such as Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). As such, the research project identified the possibility of risks alongside potential opportunities in children's use of ICTs.

Although a number of studies have looked into children and adolescents' digital media use and experiences, few of those studies include very young children's experiences (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Holloway, Green, Livingstone, 2013). It has been reported that "domestic consumption of internet by very young children has had little research attention" (Holloway, Green, Livingstone, 2013, p. 10). The EU Kids Online Report has found that most research is carried out with teenagers rather than young children (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). Further, upon review of literature, it has been found that out of 1200 studies, only one out of five included children under nine years of age and a meagre 4% (about 50 studies) included children from birth to age four (Holloway et al., 2013). In their research guidelines, the EU Kids online recognized the difficulty in gaining young children's perspectives, as well as the importance of doing so. Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon (2013) have noted that while younger children are going online, 'it is difficult to get information straight from them' (p.17) on the topic as their responses were not viewed as reliable and valid for a long time. However, they have argued that nowadays children seem more 'capable of constructing and defining their own social lives' (Ólafsson et al., 2013, p.17) but that there must be careful consideration on which methodologies to use to ensure

validity of the research, especially for younger children. This is strengthened by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which discusses how important it is for children’s views to be considered and taken into account, especially in matters affecting them. Holloway et al. (2013) have argued that new technology use is something that affects even the youngest children as it is a reality in their everyday lives within their immediate environments.

### *The Technosubsystem*

Bronfenbrenner (1989) situates the child in dynamic interrelated ecological systems that undergo change through time. Bronfenbrenner discusses how change within the ecological systems influence and impact children’s lives. In his original manuscript on the Ecological System in 1989, Bronfenbrenner placed mass media in the Exosystem—a system that is far removed from the system wherein the child is situated, also called the microsystem which is typically comprised of the home and the school. During those times, being in the exosystem, mass media was viewed as having little or indirect impact on the child.



**Figure 1. Johnson and Pupilampu's Ecological Techno-Subsystem**

In recent times, researchers have revisited this notion and came up with a remodelled framework of the ecological systems theory to include current mass media realities. Johnson and Pupilampu (2008) acknowledge the permeation of mass media and technology in the children’s immediate environment, which they called the ecological technosubsystem that is located within the child’s microsystem. In their proposed framework, they highlight children’s direct interaction with mass media technologies

(See Figure 1). The newly proposed ecological technosubsystem has been further researched and validated by Johnson in 2010, firmly recognizing the influence of mass media technologies in children’s lives.

### *Media Literacy*

The current discourse involving ICT and children includes the opportunities and benefits to be gained as well as potential risks and disadvantages through its use. Several countries like Greece, New Zealand, Norway and Ireland have included the use of ICT within early childhood settings through their national early childhood curricula. Early childhood organizations such as the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have also produced documents that provide their stand on ICT in the early years. The NAEYC published a position statement paper on the use of technology in partnership with the Fred Rogers Centre for Early Learning and Children's Media in 2012, which recognizes that technology and interactive media are here to stay. It acknowledges that children's experiences with technology and interactive media are increasingly part of the context of their lives, which must be considered as part of the developmentally appropriate framework. The NAEYC position paper also argues that using these media with young children pose a number of benefits if used appropriately and responsibly. Additionally, the document highlights the need for both adults and children to become responsible digital citizens (NAEYC, 2012). Likewise, as a follow-up to the EU Kids Online report, Holloway et al. (2013) found that as contemporary parents seem to see value in allowing their young children to use digital technologies, there is a need for adults, most especially parents, to further develop their digital social skills. Being mindful of uploading children's photographs and videos in the World Wide Web is something that parents should be mindful of in the realm of digital literacy (Holloway et al., 2013).

The review of related literature has yielded support for this research project's aims. The UNCRC alongside international researches that highlight the need to increase young children's participation and avenues for their voices to be heard, have informed this research's tools and methods, which are to be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives a detailed account of the research design and methodology used in achieving the aim of exploring the ways that young children document and share their interests to other people. This chapter includes comprehensive descriptions of the research process from tool design, preparations and implementation.

### **3.2 Research Strategies**

#### **3.2.1 Research Design**

Doing research on children's lived experiences is an acknowledgement of their capabilities as experts and agents of their own lives (Greene and Hill, 2005). Researchers have identified the need to have a multiplicity of methodological approaches (Greene and Hill, 2005) in highlighting children's voice and participation. It is also important to note that in answering the research questions, careful selection of the data collection methods should be observed as the methods should fit the questions asked (Greene and Hill, 2005; Dockrell, Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). Using child-friendly participatory methodologies as such help in levelling power relations between the researcher and children participants (Veale, 2005). It also sheds light on children's cultures in different contexts (Dawes, 2000 as cited in Veale, 2005). Additionally, participatory research methods offer a more flexible environment for research and an avenue for children to explain their interpretations of reality (O'Kane, 2000). It was with these issues in mind that this research project was designed and formulated.

The project is a small-scale qualitative and exploratory study. The qualitative nature of the design enables the researcher to make use of data gathering tools and approaches that best fit with the goal of listening to young children's insights and voices. It makes use of multi-method and participatory research methodologies that are inspired and informed by the Clark and Moss' Mosaic Approach (2010), which is created with the aim of highlighting children's voice, agency and participation, as outlined in Chapter 2.

### **3.3 Data Generation**

#### **3.3.1 Data Gathering Phases**

Clark and Moss (2001) suggest having two stages in using the Mosaic Approach. Stage one entails children and adults gathering and documenting information on the topic being looked at and Stage two involves putting together the different pieces of mosaic through reflection and dialogue. Subsequently, they have added Stage three to the Mosaic Approach, which emphasises the link of listening to young children and putting what has been said and heard into action. The researcher designed the data generation schedule as suggested by the authors of the Mosaic Approach.

Upon gaining access, informed consent and permission from parents and the children (see section on Gaining Access), data generation commenced. The research project consisted of a number of phases that were meant to spread out in three weeks as presented in Table 1. Phase 1 was designed to pave the way for the researcher to build rapport with children and staff, get to know the children and the environment through observations and interactions. The researcher played, coloured, and chatted with the children in an informal and playful manner in an attempt to lessen the power inequity between the researcher and the children. She took part in the after-school service's routine with the children through the games and activities such as playing hide-and-seek, tennis matches and dinner preparations. Additionally, an introductory book was read to the children as a way of explaining the research project, conceptualisation and design of which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter. Storytelling of the book gave the children an opportunity to ask questions in an informal manner. Phase 1 also included child conferences that involved a self-portrait drawing activity for the researcher to get to know each child better, as well as to build rapport. Through these activities, the researcher sought to make the children feel as comfortable as possible around her. She shared information about herself to the children, mostly about her own interests and activities, and she answered all of the children's questions about the research project. It was also in this phase that the researcher asked the children if it was okay to audio-record the conversations, most especially the child conferences. She explained that audio-recording the conversations will help her remember all of what they have told her. The children were able to give assent in this regard.

The second phase involved child conferences to find out about the children's interests. It involved a continuation of creative participatory methodologies such as drawing up an interest concept web for each child to find out their interests. The researcher asked the children "What are the things you really like? Or what are your favourite things?" and the children's responses were recorded in their interest concept map. The interest concept web of the children's interest was utilised as a means to document and organize their identified interests that came about during child conferences. It offered a creative way for children to see their words being organised and placed on paper. At this phase, the children's responses were limited to the things that they could think of right then, and as such, the data generated did not include their other interests, which were covered by the take-home task given to them in the next phase of the research project.



In the third phase of the project, the children were given the choice to select their preferred media that they wanted to bring home to collect information about the things they find interesting. They were also given individualised take-home kits where they could place all of their materials such as their drawing or the cameras for safe-keeping.



The children were invited to participate in a child conference to select their preferred media. The child conferences were completed when the children were willing to do so. A picture survey chart was initially shown to the children to discuss their prior interactions with the different media. The researcher found that showing the children the actual media and



talking about them proved to be more helpful than the picture survey chart. The picture survey chart just ended up as a way to document the children's selected media.

Different kinds of media were offered to the children to choose from. Drawing and writing tools consisted of

colouring pencils, crayons and markers, as well as coloured and white sheets of papers. Both disposable cameras and digital cameras were also available to the children.

For the information-documenting activity that took place in the children’s homes, the children were asked to draw or take photographs of the things they really liked or their favourite things using the media they had selected. This instruction was written on a small piece of paper and was included in the children’s take-home kits as a reminder, just in case the task was forgotten.

The final phase consisted of child conferences on the information and materials that the children had collected using the media they had chosen. The children gathered, facilitated by the researcher, to talk and to share about the topics they have collected. Also in the fourth phase of the research process, the researcher asked the children about what they wanted to do with the information and materials they had gathered.

**Table 1. Data Generation Schedule**

Phase 1	After-School Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rapport Building and Getting to Know You</li> <li>- Project Familiarization through Storytelling with Children</li> </ul>
Phase 2	After-School Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child Conference</li> <li>- Self-Portrait</li> <li>- Interest Concept Web</li> </ul>
Phase 3	After-School Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child Conference</li> <li>- Visual Pictograph survey</li> <li>- Take-Home Kits</li> <li>- Tool Selection and Distribution</li> </ul>
	Children’s Homes	**Children collect information and material at home using their preferred media
Phase 4	After-School Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child Conference (sharing)</li> <li>- Decisions on output/material</li> </ul>



It is important to note that during the period for data generation and collection, the four phases overlapped depending on each child's willingness to participate and their schedule. As data was gathered in an after-school service, the children's schedules were not regular, most especially since data collection began right after the Easter holidays when some of the families were away on holidays. Consequently, flexibility on scheduling the activities with the children had to be observed throughout the three research phases. This is also especially true since some of the children did not want to take part at the time when others were engaged in the activities. Due to this, activities had to be done several times over depending.

### 3.3.2 Tools and Methods

As discussed earlier, a number of child-friendly methods were utilised in this research such as a storybook, children's drawings, children's photographs, child conferences and observations (See Appendix 3). The researcher also kept field notes of observations and reflections of the research process. Further details on the tools and methods are discussed below.

#### *Storybook*

A book entitled "What We Are Going to Do Together" was created by the researcher prior to the data generation process. An online photobook service was used to create the storybook. It entailed a careful selection of words and photographs to be included in the book. Once all words and photographs were in place using the online photobook tool, the storybook was printed hard-bound with glossy pages, and delivered to the researcher.

The storybook was written in the voice and point of view of the researcher. In the book, the researcher introduced herself and her interests through carefully selected and validated photographs, which were a mixture of personal photographs taken by the researcher herself and web-searched photographs and images as



well. The book was also designed to introduce the research project to the children and explain the research process and the children's role in the process. It was interactive such that the children had to answer some questions asked in the book during storytelling.

The storytelling activity was an avenue for the children to ask questions and voice their thoughts about the research project. The storybook proved to be a very useful tool to lower the researcher's level of authority and power, and for the children to accept the researcher as part of the setting. Having the storytelling session created a comfortable and familiar atmosphere among the children and the researcher (see Appendix 4).

### *Children's drawings*

Children were given the option to draw themselves and the things that they like in the second and third phases of the research process. Various kinds of papers and colouring materials were provided so that children could choose which one they wanted to use. In using children's drawings as a method for collecting data, the research project gave the children another avenue to voice their thoughts apart from using their words. Additionally, Veale (2005) say that drawings 'can offer insight into children's individual experiences' (p. 261).

### *Children's photographs*

Children were also given the opportunity to take photographs of the things they were interested in. Both disposable and digital cameras were made available as tools for the children's information-documenting activity in their homes. The use of cameras and photographs are a piece of the Mosaic Approach that has been found to capture their lived experiences (Clark & Moss, 2010):

“Cameras offer young children the opportunity to produce a finished product in which they can take pride. Children who have seen members of their family take photographs, poured over family albums or looked at photographs in books and comics, know that photographs have a value in the ‘adult world.’ This is not always

the case with children's own drawings and paintings.” (Clark and Moss, 2011, p.28)

Additionally, it is an alternative form of communication for children that is both fun and appealing (Clark & Moss, 2010). The choice of cameras (and other media) was entirely up to the children, and it is one of the main goals of this research project.

### *Child conferences*

Conversations with children were an important part of this research project. Using the terminology used in the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2010), one on one conversations and group discussions with children were called child conferences which provided a more formal setting for the children to talk about themselves, their interests and their media preferences. There was a need to be flexible in terms of the number of participants in each child conference as it was not all the time that children wanted to participate especially since “the decision to use participatory techniques in an individual and group setting meant that children (with their informed consent and permission from their carers) could dedicate specific times for their participation in the research process” (O’Kane, 2000, p.139). Flexibility was also observed in terms of the venue of the child conference. Clark & Moss (2010) have pointed out that child conferences may need to be conducted on the move, and thus may be conducted both indoors and outdoors.

Child conferences were held throughout the research process. The children were asked open-ended questions that “allow children to structure the nature and extent of their response” (Dockrell, et al 2000, p. 55). There were also other creative participatory activities embedded within the child conferences such as the children's self-portraits, the picture survey chart and the children's interest concept web. Designed to transition from Phase 1 and Phase 2, the children's interest concept web was a way to document what the children identified their interests to be during conversations and child conferences with the researcher. While the interest concept web proved to be an effective way to talk about the children's interest, especially since some of them enjoyed having all their favourite things written down surrounding their names, it was limited to what the children could think of and reported at that very moment.

### ***Observations***

Both naturalistic observation and participant observation were utilised in this research project. The observations offered the researcher “invaluable evidence on children’s real-life experiences and their reactions to those experiences” (Dunn, 2005, p.87) as well as an avenue to practice reflexivity. The children’s reactions, questions and behaviours towards the researcher were recorded in field notes as a means of reflecting on the impact of the researcher to the children. It also offered another avenue for the researcher to observe the children engage in the things they are interested in and an environment that is natural to them.

#### **3.3.3 Pilot Testing of Tools and Methods**

In order to ensure that the data collection tools and strategies were appropriate and suited to children’s level of understanding, knowledge, interests and particular location in the social world (Greene and Hill, 2005), it was essential to have these validated and pilot-tested.

The data collection tools were designed to address the research questions in child-appropriate ways using elements of the Mosaic Approach. A couple of early childhood practitioners and a researcher in the field of early childhood education and care were asked to review and comment on the guide to validate the language used and the questions to be asked of the children. Following this process, the data collection tools were pilot-tested with a five year old girl for further validation. Revisions were made to the data collection tools in response to the comments received during the validation and pilot-testing phase.

### **3.4 Gaining Access**

The research project was conducted in Dublin, Ireland. The children participants were selected from an early years’ service catering for children from two and a half years to six years old. The service consisted of a montessori and junior school as well as an after-school programme for parents who work full days. The after-school programmes were divided according to the children’s ages and were based in three different centres within walking distance of each other. It was in the after-school programme for children aged five to eight years that the participants of this research were selected. The after-school service is privately-run and has been in service for

two decades. It is located in the heart of an affluent suburban part of Dublin. Therefore, the children who attend the early years' service are of middle to higher socio-economic status.

As Morrow and Richards (1996) noted, children behave in different ways in different settings so the choice of where to carry out the research is as important as how to carry it out. The after school service, where the children spend most of their weekday afternoons, as well as their homes, where they spend most time at the weekend, were selected primarily because the children are most comfortable in these environment as it is part of their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, the after-school service and the children's homes were selected for practical as well as safety and security reasons. Conducting participatory methodologies with the children was more practical within the after-school service, where the researcher was able to blend in with the environment. The home, however, is the microsystem in which the child is most comfortable in, but is a locale where the researcher would not be as effective and welcome primarily for safety and security reasons. Furthermore, selecting the home as a research locale is an acknowledgement that children are active members of their family systems (Dunn, 1988 as cited in Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

### *Ethical Issues*

As the research project involved participants that are considered to be 'less powerful', a number of ethical issues were carefully reviewed and considered. In accordance with the Research Ethics Guidelines of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the gatekeeper letter (Appendix 1), information kits and consent forms (Appendix 2) for children and their parents were written and compiled. The Head of School who reviewed the ethics application also required an assessment of risk form for field research and 'less powerful' subjects under 18 years of age, as well as an assessment on the impact on the human subject(s) and/or researcher. All of these required forms were filled out for review.

As mentioned above, it was necessary for the researcher to gain access from the early years setting and the children's parents. Non-probability and purposive sampling were used to identify the participants for this research project. The sampling strategy allowed the researcher to set criteria and select participants who were willing to be involved in the project. It also ensured

easier access within the time-frame of the research project. With the help of the after-school programme staff, six children were identified, all of whom were four to five years of age and of which were three girls and three boys. The researcher sent out information kits and consent forms to the children's parents. In an attempt to aid the researcher in gaining access, the school principal sent the parents emails informing them about the research. Children were given consent forms as well, which they completed with their parents. No child was forced to take part against their will, as was clearly stated in their consent forms. As such, while all parents of the six children gave consent for their children to participate, only five children chose to participate.

### *Research Participants*

The five children who chose to participate were very invested in the whole process. As expected, they were very different from each other despite being within the same age bracket. The three girls and two boys had all attended an early years' service when they were younger, they all attended different schools within the area and came to the early years' service for its after-school programme. Two of the children were siblings and two of them were best friends. The children typically moved and played in separate social circles.

#### **3.4.1 Ethical Considerations**

Apart from the required ethical approval and forms, the researcher's role and the children's role as active participants in the research project were given much consideration and were carefully reviewed.

### *The Role of the Researcher*

The role of the researcher is crucial to a research project involving children as participants. "Researchers are obligated to examine reasons for carrying out research and ends that their research might serve. It is important also that we do not fall into the trap of thinking that listening to children and understanding their experience of the work is a simple matter, either methodologically or politically" (Greene and Hill, 2005, p. 18). As such, apart from the research design and data generation strategies, the motivation of the researcher must be reviewed. Greene and Hill (2005) stated that the motivation to understand and describe children's experiences vary from researcher to researcher. They identified possible motivations and described them as

follows—a) to reflect an interest in the experience itself, b) to advance human psychology by considering children as persons of value and persons with rights, c) premised on the view that children are not all the same (no universal childhood; unique and valued experiences of his or her own world) (Greene and Hill, 2005).

Apart from the tools selected, doing research with children should also consider personal style, facilitation skills and interaction with the children (Christensen and James, 2000). The researcher needs to be aware about the dynamics of power in which children are situated, where the subordinate position of the children cannot be ignored and must be accounted for by the researcher (Mayall, 2000). Researchers are advised to think of ways to give up some power in the research by giving children the freedom to choose the time and the place of interviews (Mayall, 2000). One example of this was noted in Corsaro and Molinari's (2000) work when Bill, the researcher, gained acceptance into the children's peer culture by lessening his adult authority status and taking part in everyday routines and activities with the children.

As such, in this research project, the researcher acted as a general helper around the early childhood service, playing with children, colouring, chatting with them. The first three days in the first week were spent with the children to become a familiar figure, to get to know them, to build rapport and to introduce the research project to them. This was an effort to “find ways of engaging with the child or young person in order to build a relationship where respect, openness and genuine intent to listen are evident” (O’Kane, 2000, p.151).

### *The Role of Children*

Greene and Hill reiterate (2005) that studying children's experiences is an acknowledgement of their capabilities as experts and agents of their own lives. As such, this research project viewed children as active participants in the research process instead of just the subject or topic of research (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000). There is a working assumption that children are actively engaged in making sense of the whole research process once they are engaged in it (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000). To aid this process, an introductory book and storytelling session was introduced to help explain the research project to the children. This activity also

aided in getting the children's informed consent to participate as it was told to all six identified children, and one child expressed his wish not to participate afterwards.

Also in keeping with ethical guidelines, consideration was given to maintaining confidentiality. Pseudonyms were also used throughout the research write-up to ensure anonymity. No photographs, drawings or conversations that identified children were utilised. Data generated and collected was handled with utmost care, and was kept in a safe and secure location under the researcher's protection. All data generated and collected will be stored only until the research project has concluded, and will be disposed of / destroyed carefully to ensure safety, security and anonymity of the participants.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Following the data generation phase of the research process, there was a need to review the data generated and collected. Data collected through the audio-recorded child conferences were transcribed. The researcher's field notes and reflective journal also informed the results and analysis. A process of reading and re-reading followed in order to become familiar with the data gathered. Data were analysed by grouping together arising themes, going from the specific to the general (Thomas, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Using a general inductive approach, the frequent, dominant, or significant themes were observed to emerge from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). The themes were then discussed in light of the research questions and in further detail using vignettes of conversations and the children's drawings and photographs in support of the emerging themes.

### **3.6 Limitations**

The main limitations of the research project included finite amounts of time and resources. Data generation had to be manageable as the research had to be completed within a limited amount of time. A great amount of time was required to develop, validate and pilot-test the tools and strategies to ensure that the research was child-friendly.



Although a limitation insofar as it restricted the number of cases that could be incorporated into the study, it was also strength in terms of the quantity of time spent with each child participant, and thus the quality of the interactions and conversations with them. However, having a limited number of sample coming from a very specific research locale and because the data collection methods were responsive and tailor-fit to the children participants.

Another limitation was the researcher's occasional difficulty in understanding the children's accent, and her own capability to explain herself in a manner that the children would understand. Additionally, due to the fact that the researcher came from a background very different from that of the children's and the research setting, there may have been cultural subtleties that she may have unconsciously overlooked.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, findings that emerged from the analysis of data collected throughout the research process are presented. It begins with a reflection on the research process with the children to contextualise the research project data findings. A discussion on children's interactions with their preferred media will then follow. The data emerging from the children's information-documenting task at home will be discussed further in light of relevant literature. It is important to note that this chapter goes hand in hand with the previous chapter to provide the reader with a more well-rounded presentation of data and analysis. It is important to remind the reader that this research aimed to explore the ways young children document and share with others things that interest them.

### 4.2 The Research Process with Children

Engaging children in a research project was both rewarding and challenging, and proved to yield findings along the way. Preparations to make each tool and activity child-friendly took a great amount of time. It was found that even the smallest details mattered—such as the language used when conversing with them, the amount of time spent with them and the nature of the activities done with them. Most of all, it was found that it was very important to build rapport with them before starting to ask the children to participate.

The researcher's way in was through a storybook. As discussed in the previous chapter, a picture storybook was made to make the research process explanation more engaging and child-friendly. The children's reactions toward the storybook were of fascination, approval and excitement. They were fascinated that they got to know the researcher through photographs of herself engaged in different activities, as well as of the fact that she made the book by herself: "*Did you make this book?*" was a question they would ask the researcher. They were also very curious about the researcher as they kept asking, "*Where are you in this picture? Did you take these photos? Who is that with you?*" The storybook also offered the children explicit ways of how they would be able to participate. They were able to relate and share some information about themselves and their interests during the storytelling session. Most of all, because of its

interactive format, the children were also able to explicitly express their approval and assent using the storybook. It proved to be a helpful way for the children to relate to the research project in a manner that they could easily understand. As this research project hopes to highlight children's voice and participation, the children's reactions to the storybook was a finding in itself. Their enthusiasm to learn more about the research project made it easier for the whole process to unfold.

After the storytelling session, the children were not only interested in the research project and excited to engage in the activities. They also expressed

interest in getting to know and spending time with the researcher such that every time the researcher had to leave, they would walk her to the door and ask when she would return and ask if they could play again. This interest in the researcher has also been revealed by the children's photographs as four of the five children took photographs of the researcher when they selected their preferred media.



Initially, the researcher thought it was because she was the most convenient one to take a photograph of, which was why the children took her photo. However, through the child conferences, they revealed that most of them took photographs of the researcher because, "*I like you*" and because "*I want to show you to my mom and dad.*"



Interest in the researcher has been brought home by the children. Sam and Dylan reported having conversations with their parents about the researcher which led to them to take photographs of the world map specifically the researcher's country of origin (Philippines). They also coloured in a printed out flag of the Philippines which their parents showed and printed for them. The children did not indicate if this activity was initiated by their parents, but they were happy to share it with the researcher in the child conferences.

As mentioned above, this was an interesting finding in doing a research project with children. Although participating in a research project was a new activity for them, the children's interest in it emerged in the different research phases, especially when new activities and media were introduced to them. Much like their interest in the researcher, the children's interest in the research project manifested in a number of photographs pertaining to the activities, materials and media involved. They voiced interest not just through their photographs but through their questions and enthusiasm to get started on the activities. Some took photographs of the cameras itself, some of the colouring pens, pencils and crayons, and some of their take-home kits. It seems that because the children find the activities interesting and meaningful, they are very enthusiastic and willing participants, which is congruent to publications supportive of the emergent curriculum (Jones, 2012; O'Keefe, 2013). Because they are co-constructors of meaning, children take on roles that are more active and engaged in the whole process (Queensland Studies Authority, 2013).

Apart from building rapport, it has been found that one had to be flexible when scheduling activities with children. In this particular research project, the children had different schedules and preferred to do the child conferences at different times. Some of the children would rather be engaged in play with their peers than to participate in the child conferences immediately. There were also times when some of the children would not be in the after-school service. Also, after the initial child conference with the storytelling session of the book about the research project, the children were very excited about participating and wanted to speed up the process. As such, one also had to be prepared to either move the process faster or slower. Keeping all necessary materials nearby and ready was essential to suit the children's schedules and moods. The researcher did this by making sure that she brought all of the materials every time she was there so that whenever the children were ready and indicated the interest to participate at a particular time, they could start an activity or pick-up where they left the activity. The researcher also asked the practitioners if she could use an area which was not being used during the time she was there to make sure all the things were prepared once the children were ready. The area selected was indoors, in an adjacent room to where the some of the children were doing their homework. This ensured that the children participants would not feel uncomfortable about being away from their peers. The particular room was also selected because it was quiet, and thus audio recording

was easier. There were times when the room was not available for use, and during those times, the other adjacent rooms were utilised by careful selection of a quiet corner table. The use of the common room meant, however, that the other children who were not participants of the research projects were spectators and commentators to everything. They asked a great number of questions about the research project, and some even asked if the researcher could talk to their parents to see if they would be allowed to participate too. During these times, the researcher brought out the storybook to explain the research project to the other children as well, and she tried to answer diplomatically that maybe in future research projects they would be participants as well. Because the children participants often heard the researcher explaining to the other children that there were just limited amount of children who could participate, it somehow created a bond amongst the group and the children participants seemed to be glad that they were a special group.

All of the above illustrate how the children respond to the researcher and the research process, which are important findings emerging from this study. It emphasizes the importance of taking time to make the children at ease with the researcher and the research process as well as establishing a respectful relationship with them.

### *Sources of data*

Once the children were comfortable with the researcher, the children were invited to participate in a series of child conferences and child-friendly activities. As discussed in the methodology section, the children were also given the chance to bring home different media with the task to take photographs or draw pictures of the things they are interested in. As such, sources of data for this research project came from the children's photographs and drawings, supported by the child conferences and observations.

### *Conversations with Children*

As an element of the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2010), child conferences were conducted to generate verbal data from the children. At this point, it is important to note that the child conferences did not always consist of groups of children. As this study was interested in finding

out how children like to communicate their interests it was important that the research focused on the way that children liked to convey information. One finding from the research was that children engaged when provided with the opportunity to become involved in a way that appealed to them. For example, Jane (age 5, female) and Charlie (age 5, male) opted to play with their peers in the garden area and do their child conferences individually once they were ready to do so. Dylan (age 5, male), Sam (age 5, female), and Bea (age 4, female) on the other hand, preferred to do the child conferences together, most times, Jane and Charlie.

Another interesting thing to note is the children's responses to sharing their outputs in the child conferences. Although all children expressed fulfilment and satisfaction from being able to document their interests in the way they wanted to, it was observed that some children expressed hesitation over sharing them to other people, especially those whom they were not comfortable with. Sam, for example, was a shy girl whom the after-school practitioners described as being 'slow to warm up'. As above, she was comfortable to be in child conferences with Dylan, who was her sibling, and Bea, who was her best friend. Sam was also amenable to sharing her outputs with Jane and Charlie, who was part of the group of children participants. This finding suggests that while it seemed that the children shared more information about themselves when their peers were sharing information about themselves, not all children were comfortable disclosing information about themselves even with other children.

The selectivity of people they were comfortable to share the outputs with was also true when the children were asked what they wanted to do with their final outputs, which were mostly the drawings and photographs. All of the children asked the researcher for copies of the photographs that they had taken. The researcher had all of the children's photographs printed. All of the children expressed joy and excitement over having copies. Upon asking what they would like to do with their copies, however, the children had different responses: Dylan said, "*I will hang it up on my wall in my house.*" Bea said, "*I will keep it in my secret diary.*" Jane said, "*I will make a book and stick them there.*" Sam said, "*I will show it to my mom and dad.*" Charlie, on the other hand, said, "*I don't know.*" The researcher was curious as to whether they would share it with other people. Almost all of the children, except Jane, said they did not want to show the photographs to people other than their closest family and friends. This finding suggests that

children do not always like to share their outputs, and that they choose the people they share information with. It is thus important to consider their voices when uploading their photographs and videos in social networking websites where other people could see them. This is in agreement with the UNCRC's Article 12, discussing the children's right to be respected for their views, as well as Article 16, which is the children's right to privacy. Adults should be mindful of leaving and uploading children's digital footprints, in the form of photographs, videos, among other media, in social networking websites because children might not want to have their photographs or videos there (Holloway et al., 2013).

Additionally, it was not all the time the children wanted to engage in conversation. Some of them used words sparingly, not wanting to expand more, and not wanting to be asked over and over again to do so. In the child conferences when they shared about their material from their take-home information-documenting activity, where they were asked to draw or take photos of their interests, more often than not, the children let their photographs and pictures speak for themselves. To them, it seemed obvious what they have taken photos of and drew the things because they are interested in it. Asking them about the photos somehow felt redundant as there were times when they just wanted to show the pictures and not really talk about them. As such, much of the data presented in the following section come from the children's drawings and photographs, and is supported by vignettes of conversations from the child conferences.

#### 4.3 Children's selection of and interaction with different media



As outlined in Chapter 1, finding out the ways that children like to document their interests was one of two central research questions that underpinned this study. In separate child conferences, the children were asked to select the media they preferred to bring home and use for the information-documenting activity in their homes. They were also given special individualized take-home kits where they could put all the media and their outputs for safekeeping. All of the children reacted with enthusiasm to this activity. Excitement was

observed in their facial expressions, body language, and as well as from their words. All of the children displayed eagerness to select and use the media they prefer at home.

The children were given the task to either draw or take photographs of the things they like. It is notable that quite a number of photographs were taken by the children pertaining to the activities, materials and media used in the research project. Some took photographs of the cameras, some of the colouring pens, pencils and crayons, and some of their take-home kits and of the researcher. One child, Bea, took photographs of the instruction reminder page from her take-home kit, because “*I like it!*” Participating in a research project was a new activity for them and their interest in it emerged in the different research phases, especially when new activities and media were introduced to them. They voiced interest not just through their photographs but through their questions and enthusiasm to get started on the activities.



Data on the children’s reasons for selecting the media that they used and their interaction with them were generated through child conferences, observations and informal conversations. The children came back and shared their experiences with the use of their selected media as well. Stories on their choice of media were organized into themes below.

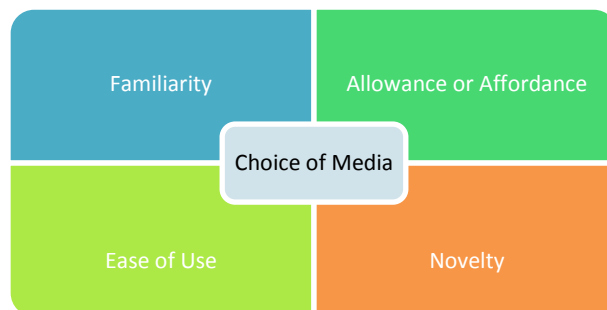


Figure 2. Components of Children's Decision-making for Media Preference



## *Familiarity*

Children expressed preference for media that were familiar to them. All of the children selected to bring home paper, crayons, markers and coloured pencils primarily because they were familiar with them and they were proficient in the use of this media as they used it in their homes and school setting. While the media was something that they have reported they were familiar with, not all children participants have data that come from their drawings. It is also noteworthy that the children's drawings varied from child to child—some children had more drawings than others, some children put a great amount of detail that had very specific meanings and could not be easily interpreted, which could have been brought about by different drawing skills levels. Some children even expressed that they did not want to draw even if they have been observed to colour and draw for long periods of time. This finding suggests that children may have different ways of expressing. Other ways could be explored for them to be able to express themselves further—something that is acknowledged by the Reggio Emilia founder Loris Malaguzzi in his poem '*The Hundred Languages*', in recognition that there are a number of ways for children could speak out and communicate if given different means and media to do so. This is also the inspiration and root of Clark & Moss' (2010) Mosaic Approach—making use of multitudes of ways to listen to children.

While all of the children have reported being familiar with the digital camera, only one child knew of the disposable camera. This suggests that digital cameras were tools that had a firm place in the children's immediate environments. This finding has been supported by the children's accounts themselves: Bea shared that her parents had cameras as well, "*but in their phones.*" Similarly, Charlie shared, "*my dad has that camera.*" An internet service provider in Ireland has made a similar conclusion. It has been found that about 70% of Dublin households own digital cameras as well as other portable online devices that could take photographs such as smart mobile phones (Eircom, 2013). This finding is also consistent with the existence of the ecological techno-subsystem in the children's immediate environments (Johnson, 2010).

Familiarity in terms of usage was also expressed in the selection of camera tools. Jane initially chose the disposable camera because "*I used this before when I was a baby.*" Similarly, Sam

chose to use a digital camera since she has one at home and “*I know how to use it.*” This suggests that some of the children considered comfort and familiarity when selecting their media. Familiarity with the use of technology has been linked with classroom success as well as self-esteem (Wilson, et al, 2011), suggesting that preference for the familiar has benefits for children’s outputs and confidence.

### *Novelty*

On the other hand, some of the children selected the digital camera because they reported having no experience of using it. From what the children said, it seemed that the idea of a novel activity using this medium was appealing to them. While the children were not able to explicitly state ‘novelty’ as a reason for choosing the media they had selected, it manifested through the children’s questions about how to use the camera and their body language. Excitement and enthusiasm were noted in their faces as they placed the digital cameras in their take-home kits. The idea of being able to take photographs of the things they liked was something that they looked forward to. All of the children took a good number of photographs of their interests, which proved to be the richest source of data for this research project.

This finding suggests that although the children were familiar with the digital camera, it was still novel to them because they had limited access to it. Correspondingly, Eircom (2013) has also found that although there is a high number of digital camera technologies available in Dublin households, children’s access level were only at 27% for children five to twelve years of age. This access level is low relative to children’s access to other technologies such as tablets, iPads and other mobile internet touchscreen technologies.

### *Allowance or affordance*

Alongside familiarity and novelty, the children also considered ‘allowance or affordance’ when selecting the media they preferred to use. Allowance refers to the permission granted to act within set regulations usually by adults who, most times, decide on behalf of the children; and affordance refers to clues in the environment that indicate possibilities for action (Gibson, 1977).

The children expressed concern over being allowed to use the media, and to bring them home. One child, Sam asked the researcher, “*Can we really bring these things home?*” when selecting her preferred media. The research project gave them an environment and avenue to participate and use their selected media, not just in the early years’ setting but also in their homes. Additionally, Jane told the researcher, “*Can you stay and talk to my mom when she gets here so that she will know that it’s okay for me to take these home, okay?*” She asked this to make sure that her parents would allow her to use the media, and she would be able to make use of the affordance brought about by the activity.

Allowance and affordance were also intertwined with the children’s wish to use the media independently. They expressed the wish to be able to use the digital cameras’ functions with minimal guidance, which reflects children’s capabilities and agency. For example, upon being asked if he asked for help in using the digital camera, Charlie shared, “*I did not ask a lot of help from my mom. But I did not know how to delete the photos.*” Similarly, Dylan recounted that he was able to use the media on his own except for when they had to charge the camera, “*My mom and I had to charge the camera. You know, we had to do it twice!*”

The findings seem to indicate the children’s yearning for higher levels of access which may translate to higher levels of participation. Adults’ beliefs that children lack the competence and experience to participate or the view children’s participation may undermine adult authority have been identified as a challenge to children’s participation rights (Lansdown, 2001; Lundy & Stalford, 2013). Children are not given much allowance and affordance through these arguments. However, giving the children the space and the chance to participate is something that is important to children because it offers them new skills, builds their self-esteem, and they have a great deal they want to say (Lansdown, 2001). Additionally, Lansdown (2001) found that children want to be involved in issues affecting them because it challenges the sense of impotence often associated with childhood, it empowers them to tackle abuses and neglect of their rights, they think that adults often get it wrong, they feel their contribution could lead to better decisions, they feel it is right to listen to them when it is their life at issue and they want to contribute to making the world a better place. Furthermore, it can be fun and giving them

allowance and affordance to participate offers them a chance to meet with other children from other contexts, environments, ages and experiences (Lansdown, 2001).

### *Ease of use*

While there were no reports of difficulties of use that came from the children who selected digital cameras along with the papers and writing tools, Jane, who initially chose to use the disposable camera, came back and asked to exchange the disposable camera for a digital camera because it was “*very tricky to use.*” On the other hand, when he was explaining that he did not have to ask for much help from his parents in operating the digital camera because, “*it’s easy*”, Dylan conveyed that the digital cameras was user-friendly. Ease of use is something that technology developers aim for. As such new media technologies are being used by younger children because they do not require complex motor skills to operate (Holloway, et al., 2013). The digital camera, for example, can be operated just by pressing a limited number of buttons.

Consequently, the photographs captured by the disposable camera differed in quality relative to that captured with the digital camera. Photographs that were taken using the digital camera were much clearer in quality than that of the disposable camera. Photographs taken from the disposable camera were blurry, grainy and out of focus. Printing out the photographs from the film was also more expensive, making it more costly, resource-wise. The need to exert more energy in operating the disposable camera (e.g. turning the film wheel before being able to press the button to take photos, peeking through the small hole to focus on subject), as well as the high-cost for printing the pictures from the film seem to add up to the list of barriers for this media tool to promote participation and children’s voice.

Overall, the children’s preferred media suited their strengths and purposes. The process of the children being able to select the media was in itself a step towards hearing their voice and respecting their rights to participation. Giving them a chance to use and interact with their preferred media recognised children as empowered actors and contributors in the digital age.

#### 4.4 Children's Interests

As discussed earlier, the children selected their preferred media and were given the task to either draw or take photographs of their interests. Most of the materials that came back from this task were photographs taken by the children. Some of the children brought in drawings of some of the things they are interested in, and it was noticeable that some of the drawings were of activities or situations that the children could not take photographs of themselves. While all of the children gave verbal accounts and justifications of some of their drawings and photographs in child conferences, the children shared their output having accomplished a task they were given, which implied that all of the materials pertained to their interests. However, on reflection, the researcher acknowledges that more of the children's input on the analysis could have also been included as an acknowledgment of children's competence, but since the time spent with them was limited, grouping of themes of their interests were done by the researcher. Due to this, the researcher acknowledges that there may be other ways of grouping the data from the children, and as suggested by Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon (2013), readers are invited to cross-examine interpretations.

The researcher was able to identify four major themes emerging from the children's photographs, drawings and child conferences about their interests. It seems that the children were interested in personal details about themselves, their activities, of other people, and of nature and places. These themes have been summarized in the illustration below (See Figure 4).

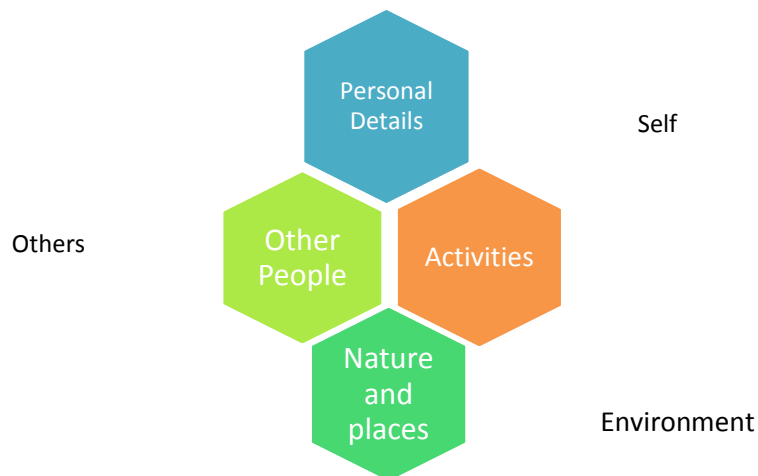


Figure 3. Themes of Children's Interests

In the illustration above, the themes have been further categorized into three—self, others and environment. Personal details about themselves fall under the ‘self’ category while activities and other people fall into the ‘others’ category. Children’s interest in nature and places falls into the ‘environment’ category. These categories illustrate young children’s growing and expanding systems. If one was to try and situate the themes of the children’s interests into the Ecological Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the figure below may be a good representation (See Figure 5), wherein personal details about themselves are located in the microsystem being in the child’s immediate environment, activities, places and other people are in the mesosystem where different environments interconnect, and fantasy and nature are in the exosystem and macrosystem due to ideologies, ideas and thoughts coming from indirect systems.

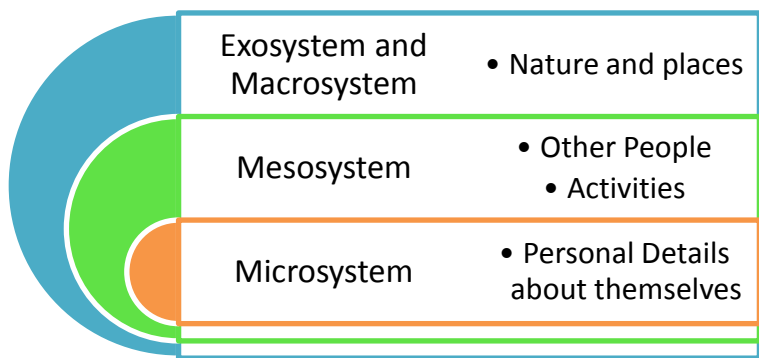


Figure 4. Situating themes of children’s interests in ecological systems

Figure 6 shows that some themes of children’s interests (represented by bubbles in purple) overlap in some ways. Some of the themes have been merged into subthemes. Children’s personal details overlap with all of the other themes. ‘Personal details’, ‘activities’ and ‘other people’ overlap with each other, mainly because of the activities the children do with other people. Activities that children are interested in could be further categorized into subthemes that have been merged with ‘nature and places’, depending on the type of activity and where the activity occurs: digital indoors and, nature and the outdoors.

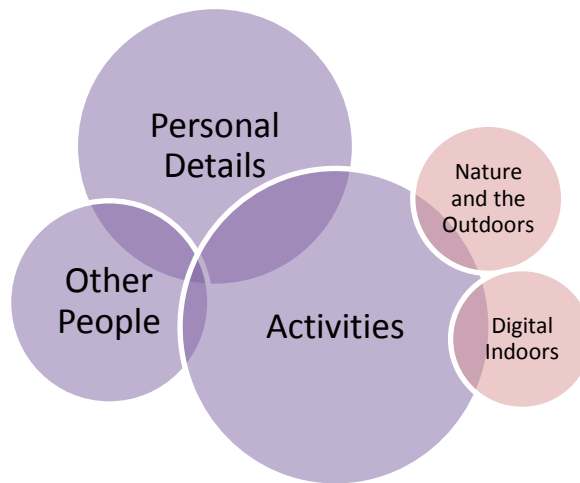
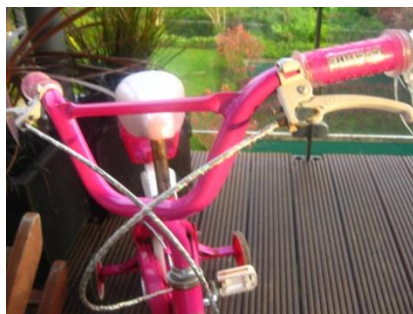
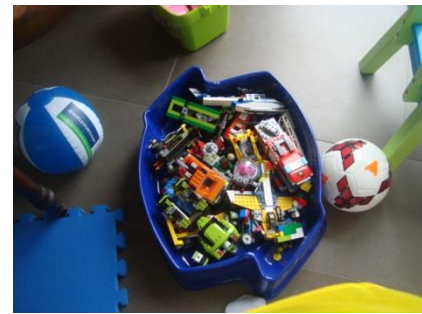


Figure 5. Themes of Children's Interests: Overlaps and Characteristics

### Personal Details



Details pertaining to themselves include a great number of things that mostly reflect ownership and personal space. Most of the children took



photographs of things that belong to them—things that they had ownership over. Photographs of teddy bears, blocks, bikes, balls, clothes and birthday card invitations were captured by the children. When they talked of these things, they quick distinguished what was theirs and what was not theirs. Some took photos of their own drawings, showing pride over something they had accomplished. Dylan, for example, recounted a story about a pair of shoes that did not fit him anymore: *“They used to be mine but now they’re too small ‘cause I had them when I was four. But I like them.”*

Likewise, having their own space is something that also emerged from the children’s photographs. Spaces for play, leisure and for putting up their outputs and artworks were

something that the children found interesting and meaningful. Photographs of their houses, their play rooms, their art corner and their treehouse were captured by the children.



Children's interest in ownership and their personal spaces is something that reflects the children's developing sense of self and belonging. This may also be part of their identity formation, which is a process that is never completed because of its complexity (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). During the early years, children are figuring out the social conventions and the institution of owning something (Kim & Kalish, 2009). At this point in their lives, they are building on their skills, character and identity. Owning something translates to responsibility over the things owned, which the children may feel proud of. This resonates in the finding that it is around the age four and five that children appreciate different ownership rights (Kim & Kalish, 2009; Kanngisser & Hood, 2014).

The same is true for having personal space. Children are constantly expanding the bounds of their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and thus need a space where they can feel safe, secure and happy. This is in line with Article 31 of the UNCRC which highlights the children's rights to leisure and play activities within the confines of a safe environment, and Article 27 which discusses the child's right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Moreover, having their own personal space to cherish may be an indication for a need for a space where they can have more power and control in a mostly adult-dominated world. Moss and Petrie (2002) discussed the notion of children's space as a physical space with relational elements in which there is negotiation and reciprocation between children and adults. They argue that it is linked to an 'ethos, constituted by certain understandings of children, a certain type of relationship between children and adults and certain ethical perspectives' (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p. 9-10).



Another personal detail that emerged from the photographs is the children's desire, curiosity and capability to use the media on their own through what is now more popularly called "selfies". In a photograph of himself, one child asked the researcher to "*Guess what I'm holding in that photo? It's the camera!*" It seems that being able to take photographs of themselves was something that the children found interesting as it features their strengths and capabilities. Although the children did not state it explicitly, they seem to be saying, "*Look, this is what I can do*" through these photographs. Having been able to take the photographs themselves, even of themselves on their own, may be interpreted as a celebration of their abilities. Once again, this may be connected to children's identity formation. It may be an attempt to understand their own power and limits through their interaction with the world they belong in (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001), of which media is part of (Johnson & Pupilampu, 2008).

### **Activities**

The children's activities were also something that emerged as interesting to the children. It is important to note that children tend to refer to these activities mostly as 'play' or 'playing.' This is important as children enjoy learning, exploring and manipulating things in order for them to develop social, physical, and problem-solving skills (Bruce, 2001). Play activities give children a sense of freedom to choose and explore, either by themselves, with peers or other people (Bruce, 2001). They are able to express themselves and make sense of the world in which they move and live (Bruce, 2001; David et al., 2003).

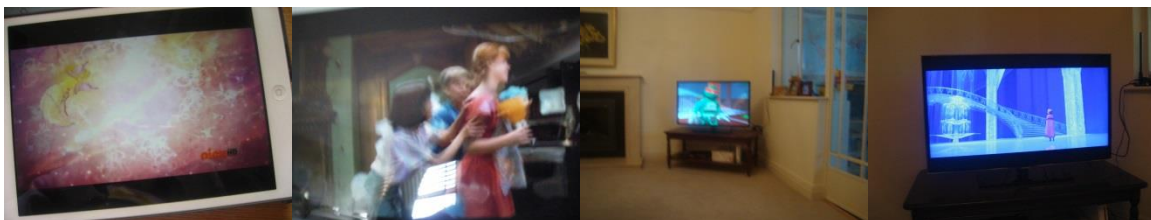
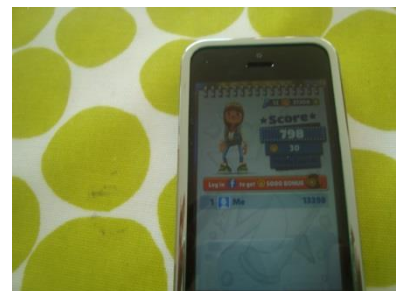
The types of activities that children identified as interesting to them were reflected in their photographs and described by them during the child conferences. Also, although some of them were not able to take photographs of them engaged in the activities that they liked to do, some children drew themselves kayaking or swimming at the beach. Some activities involved interaction with other people, while other activities could be a solitary affair. This interaction of the child's personal details, of the activities and of other people are illustrated in Figure 6. This interaction indicates that children situate themselves within the centre of the action or of the

activity. For example, some of the children, such as Charlie and Jane, drew themselves doing something they like. On the other hand, some of the children, like Dylan and Sam, asked their parents to take photographs of them engaged in the activities they like. Additionally, this interaction of the child with other people through activities is also something that indicates that children are social beings and that they are fully immersed in a world of relationships and interactions (Wyness, 2012).

The children's activities were further categorised into two, depending on the nature of the activity and its location. Children's activities were found to be either digital, such that activities included the use of digital and electronic media tools, or traditional in that there was no digital and electronic media involved. Examples of digital activities included the use of television sets, tablets and mobile smart phones for games, music and watching movies and television shows. Locations of the activities were either indoors or outdoors. It was noticeable that the activities that were digital in nature were mostly located indoors and most of the more 'traditional' activities were outdoors in combination with nature, hence the subthemes 'Digital Indoors' and 'Nature and the Outdoors' (Figure 6).

### *Digital Indoors*

The theme 'Digital Indoors' features children's photographs of the movies and shows that they liked to watch and the games they liked to play using electronic devices. The children took photographs while they were engaged in the activities using the different digital technologies. Digital technologies included smart touchscreen phones, iPads, tablets, and the television.



According to the children, popular movie and television animation characters included those from contemporary shows such as *Disney's Frozen*, *Peppa Pig*, *Ninja Turtles*, *Winx* and *Lego Star Wars*.

Not only did children identify their favourite television and movie characters but it was apparent that popular songs among them emanated from the mass media. These included the song *Let It Go* from the movie *Frozen*, the FIFA World Cup Song entitled *Wavin' Flag*, and *Oppa Gangnam* style, a *YouTube* song craze. Children's interests were not restricted to modern or contemporary influences as some also described their interest in older movie characters such as *Pippi Longstocking*.

Conversations with the children also revealed that the use of digital devices was a typical or daily reality for them. Below is a conversation during one of the child conferences illustrating children's experiences and thoughts on the use of digital technologies:

Researcher: Do you play the games on your mom's iPad?  
Jane: I use an iPad, but it's my own  
Researcher: Really?  
Jane: Well, it's my moms  
Bea: I have my own iPad that [somebody] gave to me but it's only games  
Jane: I can take pictures on mine  
Sam: I have a camera and I take photographs and games  
Researcher: Oh really?  
Sam: And I have my own pink camera with all the movies and the games  
Dylan: I'm going to buy a DS  
Researcher: You have a DS? Or you're going to buy one?  
Jane: I already got a DS and I'm not even a boy.  
Sam: I'm going to buy a DS too.  
Dylan: No you're not, Sam.  
Sam: I'm going to buy a DS  
Dylan: No no no no no  
Sam: I'm not.. My mom said I can choose the tablet or the DS  
Bea: Oh the tablet is for big big girls. It's like for big big girls and boys that are seven.  
Researcher: Well, are you allowed to use a tablet?  
Bea: No.  
Jane: I'm allowed and I'm only four  
Bea: I'm only five  
Researcher: But are you guys allowed to use it?  
Bea: Are you? [*speaking to Jane*]

Jane: I am!  
Bea: Are you seven?!  
Researcher: Why do seven year olds get to use it? What about younger children, like you?  
Bea: Well, they're just not allowed because what if they, what if they get sticky fingers on it?  
Researcher: Mhhmmm..  
Bea: And what if they mess up people's phones and make everything sticky? Like Uncle J, he dropped his phone in the toilet and then smashed it  
Researcher: Did he? Oh no, and then what happened?  
Bea: He had to get a new one and he still has that phone and it smells like toilet.  
Researcher: Oh, it still smells like toilet  
Dylan: Toilet?  
Researcher: Yeah, cause it fell inside.  
(*Children laughing and giggling*)  
Sam: Who flushed it?  
Researcher: I don't think he flushed it down, it just fell. Was it an accident?  
Bea: It couldn't get out again.  
Sam: Oh oh oh, once my mom's phone fell in the toilet and she needed to get a new one and she got one.

This particular conversation yields children's different beliefs and experiences about the use of digital technologies. It is apparent that all children have experiences with digital technologies in one way or another, and that it is very much a part of their daily lives as they talk about their experiences so casually. Some of them, like Jane, Sam and Bea shared that they own a digital device, and Dylan is on his way to buy one. Another point that surfaced was that children relate the type of digital technology to age and gender. It seemed that they think that the Nintendo DS gaming device was for males, while the other digital devices were for both genders. The conversation also highlighted the use of tablets, which the children apparently think are different from iPads and other smart touchscreen technologies, and the allowance of its use is limited to seven-year old boys and girls. It would seem that the reason behind the allowance was the children's limited capacity to keep the tablet safe and clean. On the other hand, the conversation also highlighted adults' mishaps over handling the technologies, which the children find funny. The attitude towards the mishap, however, is one of replacement because of what they have observed to have happened to their relatives. Alongside with this conversation, informal conversations and observations with the children reveal that children tend to use the digital technologies under supervision of adults when they are younger. It seemed, from the conversations, that children were given more allowance to use the devices as they grow older.

This finding echoes those found in the EU Kids' Online study of children aged zero to eight use of the internet. It suggests that it might be "appropriate that children grow up with digital resources as part of their everyday experience, guided in their use through the active engagement of parents and older siblings, thus making digital technology a normal part of a child's social development" (Holloway et al., 2013, p.25). The study also explains that younger children are using digital technologies due to its simple design interface that allows children, even babies and toddlers to use without difficulty (Holloway et al., 2013).

### *Nature and the Outdoors*



Although the children expressed interest in being indoors and interacting with digital technologies, nature and the outdoors was something that their photographs and drawings revealed they liked. This interest in nature and the outdoors was expressed a great number of times over the research process, not just through the children's drawings but through child conferences, their interest concept webs, as well as during informal conversations in the early years' service. This emergent theme is easily the one with most photographs and drawings by the children.

It was noticeable that all of the children had a tendency to draw themselves engaged in activity under clear skies on a sunny day. Jane drew herself playing on swings and slides outdoors. She



did not offer an elaboration on her drawing, but she mentioned that she enjoyed playing in the garden with her friends during one of the informal conversations in the after-school programme. Similarly, the children mentioned enjoyment over water activities such as going to the beach or kayaking in the lake, or even in their backyards. For example, Charlie drew himself kayaking in the lake on a sunny day with a duck

alongside him. Another child, Sam, even captioned her drawing with “ILICSWIMIN”, which is her phonetic way of spelling out “*I like swimming.*” Her drawing shows herself, her sibling and cousins in a pool in their backyard with her mother watching over them. Stories of their past holiday trips to the beach were frequently mentioned. Interestingly, while the children expressed enjoyment over visiting the beach in Ireland, they reported being unable to swim in it because “*it is too cold!*” Most of them reported having to ride airplanes to go to a place where they could actually immerse themselves in the waters of the beach.



Children also reported interest in playing outdoors in the gardens and backyards of their homes. Two of the children, Charlie and Bea, took photographs of their favourite places to play in such as their tree house and their swing.



They reported playing in these areas with their siblings and sometimes their neighbours. They explained that they felt happy when

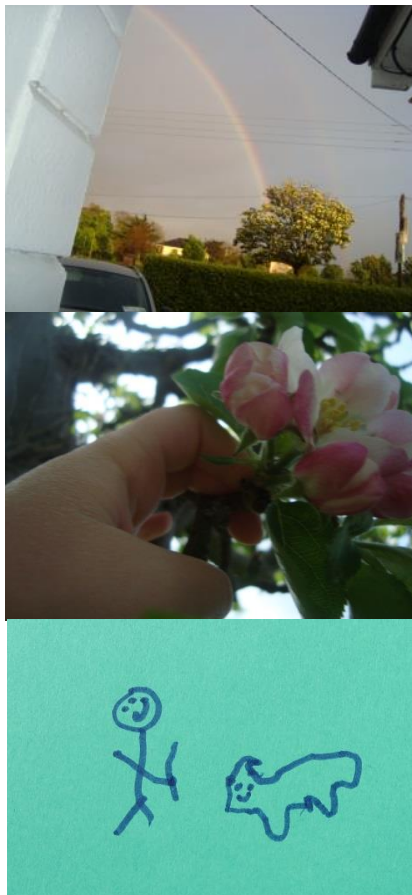
they were able to play outside their homes or schools. It has also been observed in the early years’ service that the children enjoyed playing outdoors regardless of whether the play was structured such as sports or games, or unstructured such that they made up their own play using the different materials available.



In the children’s photographs and drawings of themselves outdoors, the children expressed happiness over being able to interact with nature without boundaries. Sam drew herself and her brother playing outside their house and described how she played “*with the birds and the sun and the flowers.*” Bea also took a photograph of her toes. She said, “*I like wearing no socks!*” In her subsequent photographs, she asked her mother to take a photograph of her while blowing bubbles in her backyard with bare feet on the grass.



Another outdoor activity that the children documented to enjoy is gardening. Dylan said he liked to water his mother's plants in the garden and that he also liked to dig and transfer soil: *"That's me, gardening and planting. I like to garden."*



Some of the children took several nature shots such as of the rainbow, of the flowers in their backyard, and even of the stones they had collected from the beach. This fascination with nature sometimes came with verbal explanations, and sometimes through the children's actions. Bea was able to justify that she took photos of the stones because *"they are love heart stones (in shape), I like love heart stones."* Dylan's interest in nature manifested through his actions as he reported asking his mother to put the camera on the video setting so he could take a video (which he calls a movie) of a lady bird walking on the pavement near his garage.

Children also appeared to value nature especially when they had formed deeper relationships with it through such things as their pets. Charlie said, *"I want to take a photo of my dog. But he does not live with us, he lives in the barn where we used to*

*live.*” Being unable to take a photograph of his beloved pet dog, he just drew himself playing fetch with his pet dog.

Children will always be interested in being in nature and the outdoors—may it be rainy or sunny, with or without play equipment because it is a complete learning environment that caters to children’s cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and physical needs (Bilton, 2010). Furthermore, Ouvry (2003) suggests that being in the outdoors has benefits for children. Being in the outdoors and with nature offers movement and risky freedom, as well as unique opportunities for learning and developing behaviour. She also argues that children have a right to access the outdoors on a daily basis (Ouvry, 2003). As such, an increasing recognition of the importance of being in the outdoors in the early years can be found in both government and non-government reports. In Ireland, for example, Start Strong held a consultation with children to find out what they would change if they were given a magic wand. Interestingly, one of the findings from that consultation was the children’s desire to change the weather so they play more outdoors (Start Strong, 2011). Consequently, it strengthens Siolta’s stand with involving children in outdoor activities. Siolta, Ireland’s National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, emphasises the importance of the outdoors to children’s well-being in its second standard which discusses children’s environments (CECDE, 2006). Siolta recognizes the need for a balance of environments—both indoors and outdoors must be available simultaneously for children because it is crucial to provide developmentally appropriate yet challenging, diverse and creative and enriching experiences for children (CECDE, 2006).

### **Other People**

Children’s interest in other people also emerged from the data. Interest in other people was often reported to be concurrent with activities that they liked and the places they liked to visit. Nuclear family members were the most frequently mentioned. All of the children took photographs of at least one of their nuclear family members. In one child conference, Jane recounted that she wanted to take a photograph of her mother but that her mom did not allow her to. Dylan and Sam took photographs of their parents and siblings, Charlie took a photograph of his brother, and Bea took photographs of her father. Furthermore, all of the children mentioned their family members



in one way or another throughout the research process. Holiday trips, parties, and trips to the shops and shopping centres were mentioned by the children. Relatives were also included in the children's photographs, drawings and stories. For example, in one drawing, Sam drew herself in her mother's arms as a baby while her brother was in her father's arms and her two aunts had her cousins in their arms as well. When talking about the drawing, she shared the drawing was when her aunts came over to her house for a visit.



The children also shared stories about other people apart from their family and relatives when they were talking about their photographs and drawings. A couple of children took photographs of their friends in school, with whom they liked to play. Charlie reported he liked playing with his brother and neighbours on his neighbours' trampoline, which he could easily access because of the broken fence between their houses.

While all of the children were interested in the people who were firmly in their immediate social circles, one child also expressed interest in other people. Jane took a photograph of an Irish dancer in the shopping centre she went to because of her interest in Irish dancing. From this child's accounts in child conferences, people who were associated with activities that she liked were interesting to her.



This interest in other people is a firm confirmation that children are fully immersed in a social world that is full of interactions and relationships (Wyness, 2012) and that there is indeed a social nature to children's cultures (Moss and Petrie, 2002). Interactions and relationships are also acknowledged as a quality standard this intersects with all areas of child development (CECDE, 2006). Additionally, children gain knowledge and skills as they share activities and experiences with people coming from different contexts (Moyles & Adams, 2001).

## 4.5 Messages from the data

Stepping back and reflecting on the data from the research project reveals key messages:

- Children’s interests are very much dependent on the child’s experiences within his or her own individual and unique ecological system and family culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which is also dependent on the allowances and affordance adults give them. In his in-depth review of Gibson’s Affordances, Greeno (1994) argues that for every constraint that restricts a person from behaving or engaging in an activity in a particular way, an affordance condition could be put in place so that the behaviour, action or situation could be realised in an environment. As such, affordances are more than just physical conditions for movement. It could be considered as preconditions for activity or conditions for constraints leading to a general development of an activity. The preconditions could be viewed as “interactive relations of agents with other agents and physical systems” (Greeno, 1994, p. 343). This research project demonstrates the children’s capability to participate, using their preferred media, because they are given the chance. This chance gave the children allowance and affordance to participate, and as such served as the precondition for the activity. Chances, allowances and affordances are factors that also seem to be influential to the children’s participation. Likewise, Lansdown (2011) identified adults’ lack of awareness and training as a factor hindering children’s participation, which may have an influence on their decision to give children the chance and allowance to do so.

- While it may be true that there are risks to children’s participation, particularly through the use of digital technologies, this research project demonstrates how it has powerful potential.

The interaction between child and technology (or content) is what determines the ‘effect’

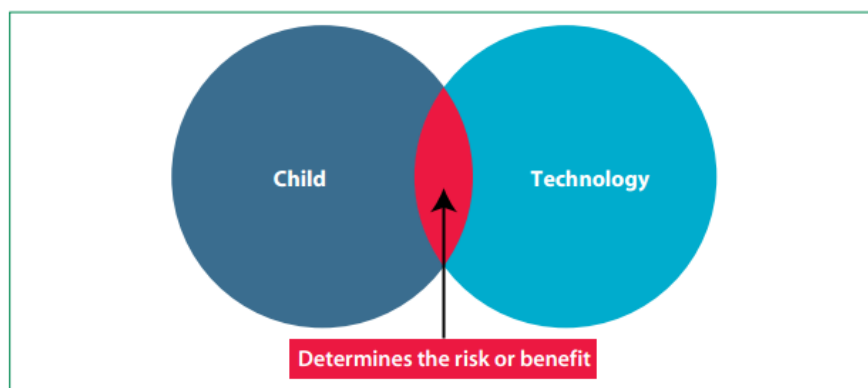


Figure 6. Interaction of Child And Technology. Byron Review, 2008. p.29

The Byron review in the UK has come up with a model to illustrate how to determine children’s risk and benefits when they interact with technology. The model shows that the potential benefits and risks lie

within the overlap of the interaction between children and technology.

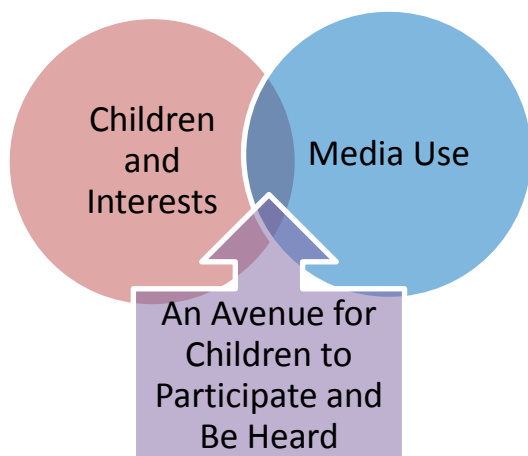


Figure 7. Adapted Model of Research based on Byron Model

It is also important to note that this research project found a huge overlap between media and the child. The children's photographs and stories through the child conferences reveal that they are living in media-rich environments and those interactions with newer information and communication digital technologies are part of their

lived experiences. As such, this research project adapted the Byron model to illustrate the findings. The content and focus of the framework has been realigned to capture the essence of this research study, which focused on young children's voice and agency within a discourse that is mostly adult-led and adult-centred. While the Byron review model views the overlap to determine the risk or benefit to children, this research project views the overlap as a potential avenue for children's participation and voices to be heard as illustrated in Figure 2.

- Some children are interested in participation activity and some are not. This is something that adults will have to respect, especially when engaging children with activities. Doing so upholds the children's right to have a voice and say in matters that affect them (UNCRC, 1989) because ultimately, participation seem to affect them in some ways. Furthermore, children seem to prefer different ways to do so. Giving the children options to participate, for example, through the use of different media, seems to be a good avenue for children's participation and voices to be heard. Kelleher et al. (2014) proposes the use of different methods—both formal and informal in encouraging children and young people to participate. In addition, as Lansdown (2011) argues that providing children access to accurate and age-appropriate information about their rights through a range of media is also another important step to raise awareness of children's participation. The children may not be sufficiently informed about the ways they could participate, which may affect their decision to do so. It is thus important to take time and

expound the different manners and approaches to children to encourage more and higher levels of participation (ibid).

- Children are interested in a balance of environments and experiences. Children are interested in being both indoors and outdoors and digital and traditional activities. In his study examining children's experiences of the outdoor environment, Kernan (2006) argues that children's experiences are limited by boundaries and the connectedness of the indoors to the outdoors. Physical surface layouts of the environments as well as access granted by adults either constrain or give children the affordance to explore and experience the outdoors (Kernan, 2006 as cited in Hayes and Kernan, 2008). Research by Hayes and Kernan (2008) found that a number of factors severely limited the time and space available to play outdoors, which in turn affected the frequency and duration of play opportunities outdoors. As such, more children are indoors, engaged in activity that often involves digital technologies (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009). Staying indoors and consuming digital technologies is not such a bad thing—it is in the realm of protection to uphold children's welfare and safety (UNCRC, 1989), and there are social, cognitive and even health benefits to media and technology use (Buckingham, 2007; Kirsh, 2010). In fact, 'children make active choices when, where and with whom to consume media' (Wyness, 2012, p.190). Children are growing up differently than their older peers. They grow up in a microsystem with a techno-subsystem in place (Johnson and Ptoplampu, 2008), with a convergence of media options and possibilities for children (Buckingham, 2007). The advent of technology and the seemingly digital indoor nature of childhood is not one that should be considered a displacement, but of a convergence, a blurring of boundaries (Buckingham, 2007). But in creating a nurturing and balanced environment and experiences that will fulfil children's needs and interests, trained and knowledgeable adults, in the form of parents and practitioners, are much needed to heed the call (Hayes and Kernan, 2008).

- Themes of children's interests contribute to children's developing aspect of identity and belonging. In their quest to building their identity and finding where they belong, children focus on experiences and activities, which mostly involve interactions and relationships. Siolta recognizes the importance of building positive identities as 'it is ... only once a child has an

established sense of self that she/he can begin to identify with other children and adults that she/he encounters in the setting on a regular basis' (CECDE, 2006, p. 108). Interestingly, this theme is also included in Ireland's Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), which could be seen as an affirmation of children's interest in this theme. Additionally, the children's emerging themes of interests could also be related to Aistear's (NCCA, 2009) three remaining themes 'Well-being', 'Communicating', and 'Exploring and Thinking'. To help the children in these fields, a nurturing pedagogy is suggested by Hayes and Kernan (2008), which involves having inclusive learning environments as well as trained practitioners who are aware, knowledgeable, and respectful of children's rights as outlined by the UNCRC (1989).

- What adults do with children's outputs and materials matter to children. As identified in this study, some of the children expressed a preference to keep their output and materials private. Holloway et al (2013) have pointed out that most children nowadays have digital footprints all over the World Wide Web brought about by posts by their parents, other family members and even family friends. Further they argue that:

"These digital footprints are created for children who are too young to understand or consent (or who may not even be born, if their parents post ultrasound scans). Children's future ability to find, reclaim or delete material posted by others is uncertain." (Holloway et al., 2013, p. 23)

It was pointed out that although the digital footprints may have been shared without malicious intent, parents and family members have to be aware that these accounts will be with the children for the rest of their lives and they might not be happy with this inheritance (Holloway et al., 2013). It is important to remember that 'these children have not chosen to have a digital profile, they have not chosen what they want to make public or with whom they want to share this information (Bakardjieva, 2010 interviewed in Kadane 2010, as cited in Holloway et al., 2013).

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This research project was completed in Dublin, Ireland. It was a small-scale research project that aimed to explore young children's interests and the ways that they document and share these interests with others. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What topics do young children consider interesting?
2. In what ways do young children document and share information on topics that interest them? Do they prefer old media tools or newer technologies?

This research project has been conceptualised in the light of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and in recognition of the growing overlap between children and new technologies. This research project acknowledges children as full members of society who are capable of participating and voicing their opinions. As such, this research project sought to be both protective and respectful of children's rights, as well as empowering to highlight children's agency. As Wyness' (2012) describes, this research project viewed children "not simply [as being] prepared for a later real world [as] they actively help sustain, reproduce and create society as children" (p. 182). They were seen as very competent partners and collaborators in this research project. Children's competence manifested through all of their outputs using different media—through the cameras, photographs, their drawings or their words and actions. The research project was conducted in four phases that involved child-friendly and participatory tools and methodologies. The methodology was carefully designed and carried out to ensure child-friendliness of all tools and methods, such as the storybook and the take-home task, to which the children responded with enthusiasm and excitement. Through the methodology, the research questions were explored in depth.

The research project revealed much about the topics that children find interesting. The themes that emerged from the data revolved around the children, their activities as well as the nature of their activities, the people they do these activities with and the places in which they engage these activities in. The findings suggest that children are interested in a balance of environments—both indoors and outdoors, and a balance of activities—both digital and involving nature. More

importantly, however, the research project revealed children's capacity to engage in different ways to share their interests with others. For the most part in this research project, the children chose to use digital cameras as their media for documenting and sharing their interests. They reported choosing this media because it was familiar and easy to use. And although they were not able to explicitly state that they were happy that they were allowed to use the digital camera in the research project, it manifested in their body language and enthusiasm to participate in the activities. Children's drawings were also rich sources of data for this research project, especially when paired with children's stories from child conferences.

Overall, the research project was able to attain its aim to explore children's interests through the use of different media. It was also successful in demonstrating ways in which children could be collaborators and partners in a research project, in a manner that is respectful of their rights as children, both protective yet empowering.

## **5.2 Implications and Recommendations**

It is noted that while findings are limited to the research location, are contextualized and cannot be generalised, the emerging data offers a fertile ground for further research, which could be drawn from the implications.

*The child  
is made of one hundred.  
The child has  
A hundred languages  
A hundred hands  
A hundred thoughts  
A hundred ways of thinking  
Of playing, of speaking.  
-Malaguzzi, 1993*

Above is an excerpt of Malaguzzi's (1993) poem "The Hundred Languages of Children," which the researcher finds fit in the light of reviewing this research project's implications. The research project was able to highlight the many ways children could document and share their interests, through the use of different media. And as the findings have confirmed a growing overlap between the children and the use of different media, particularly newer digital technologies exist.

One implication of this research is to give children more chances and possibilities to be able to use these technologies to express their voice and participate in matters affecting them. Along with this implication comes another proposition which is a need for adults to give children the space, avenues and access, as well as the allowances and affordances to do so. Further, as demonstrated by the research project, there are a number of child-friendly, participatory ways that are respectful of children's voices and rights to be able to contribute meaningfully. What is essentially needed is to go beyond listening. Clark et al. (2005) view this as part of democratic and respectful process between children and adults that may lead to possibilities of radical change in different fields. Including children's inputs in research analyses is one recommendation to further involve children's participation in research processes. Another suggestion for future work is to replicate this research project in different research locations in recognition of children's different contexts and environments. Finally, findings from this research project could be utilised in an early years' environment to strengthen the integration of children's interests with their learning. Doing so may be helpful in creating a more caring, nurturing and respectful environment for children in which they would further thrive, grow and develop. Hayes and Kernan (2008) view this as having a nurturing pedagogy in the early years—that is acknowledging children's strengths and capabilities, their interaction with their peers and environment and the crucial role of adults in the children's lives.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: GATEKEEPER LETTER

25 February 2014

Name  
Position  
Institution  
Address

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am Czarecah T. Oropilla, a graduate student taking an International Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care in the Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of the programme, I am required to complete a research thesis in the area of early childhood care and education. I am interested in exploring the ways that children aged 5-6 years document and share information about topics that interest them with other people. The project will involve a number of phases. The first phase will build rapport between the researcher and the children and will be an opportunity for everybody involved in the project to ask questions in an informal manner. The second phase will focus on small group discussions with the children to find out about the topics that interest them. It will also incorporate some creative group activities in the form of storytelling about my research project, and visual pictograph surveys to find out their media preference. As I am planning on a participatory approach, I intend to let the children decide how they want to document the topics of interest (in paper form using crayons and other materials or using digital cameras or recorders). The third phase of the project will involve the children taking home their preferred tools over a weekend to record their interests. The final phase will entail a group discussion about the materials collected by the children.

In light of the above, I write to request your permission to conduct my study with a small group of children (4/5) attending the after-school programme at your centre. I also include draft copies of the proposed information sheets/consent forms for the children and their parents for your information. If permission is granted, the research will be conducted using the guidelines of the Research Ethics Committee of the Dublin Institute of Technology. To this end, all information will be treated with utmost respect and confidentiality, and participants' identities will be protected.

Below is a table of my proposed schedule and activities:

Week 1	2 days	Rapport Building Getting to Know You Project Familiarization Storytelling with Children
Week 2	2 days in centre;  2 days at home	Initial Child Conference Visual Pictograph survey & Tool selection Tool Distribution  **Children documentation at home
Week 3	2 days	Collection of tools Child conference: sharing

Should you have any questions on my research, please do not hesitate to contact me through my email: [rhea.oropilla@gmail.com](mailto:rhea.oropilla@gmail.com) or my mobile phone number +363862771000 any time. I would also gladly come by to discuss more detail about the research project if you wish.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Czarecah T. Oropilla  
IMEC student

Noted By:

Dr. Mairead Seymour  
Dissertation Supervisor

## APPENDIX 2: PROJECT INFORMATION KIT

Dear Parent,

My name is Eya Oropilla and I am a graduate student on the International Masters Programme in Early Childhood Education and Care based in the School of Social Sciences and Law, at the Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of the programme I am undertaking research to explore what young children think are interesting topics and the ways they like to document and share these interests including their preferences for digital technology and media.

**What does the project involve?** If you are agreeable, a consent form for your child will be sent home. You are encouraged to talk your child through the consent form and complete it together. If your child indicates their willingness to take part, they will be invited to participate in a series of small group discussions called child conferences. The purpose of these conferences is to build rapport with children, explain the research project, talk about the things that interest them, which could be events that they have witnessed, trips they have taken, activities with family members, incidents they have observed, news about pets, details about their favorite toys or activities, or other things that they want to share with other people, and the way they like to document their interests. The child conferences will lead to an information-documenting activity using their preferred media. The children's preferred media may be in the form of paper, crayons and pens (drawings and write-ups), disposable cameras (still photos) or digital video and photo cameras (still photos and/or videos). The children will bring home their preferred media for a weekend, and they will be sharing the information they have gathered in a child conference the following week. Questions to be asked in the child conferences will be sent to you in advance. In order to fully capture what each child says I would like to audio-record the conference. All information will be treated with utmost care and confidentiality, and no names or identifying factors will be used in the project. All information and outputs will be kept in a secure place, used only for the purposes of this research project and destroyed at the end of the process.

**What will happen to the findings?** The findings from this research project will contribute to the pool of knowledge in the field of early childhood education and care, children's rights, voice and agency. Information gathered may be used for journal articles, presentations or other publications in this field. Some outputs such as photographs taken by the children may be included in the write-up. The children's outputs or photographs to be included in the write-up will be carefully selected by the researcher and no photographs identifying the children will be used.

**When and where will the data gathering take place?** The child conferences will take place during your child's attendance at their after school programme. As outlined above, after the initial child conference they will be documenting/ capturing their topics of interest using their preferred media tool for a weekend at home. The information they have gathered/documented will be discussed with the group the following week.

**Further information:** For further information about the research project or should you have any questions or concerns regarding the research project, please contact Eya Oropilla at 086 277 71 00 or [rhea.oropilla@gmail.com](mailto:rhea.oropilla@gmail.com)









**Consent:** If you are agreeable to your child participating in this project, please fill out the enclosed consent form and kindly return as indicated on the form.

Thank you very much! ☺

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS RE: CHILD'S PARTICIPATION**

Researcher's Name: Eya Oropilla
Faculty/School/Department: Dublin Institute of Technology School of Social Sciences and Law, International Master in Early Childhood Education and Care
Title of Study: Exploring Young Children's Interests Using Different Media
Name of Early Years setting: Parents' Name:
<p>I have been given sufficient information about my child's participation in the project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the project:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>I am agreeable to having the child conferences audio-recorded:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>I am happy for my child _____ (name) to take part in the study.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>I am happy for my child's artworks and outputs to be used in publications arising from this project. I understand that no identifying photographs or images will be used:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p><i>Thank you very much for your participation in this research project.</i></p>
Signed _____ Date _____
Name in Block Letters _____

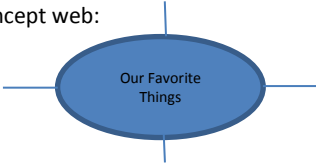
## CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN

Researcher's Name: Eya Oropilla	
Faculty/School/Department: Dublin Institute of Technology School of Social Sciences and Law, International Master in Early Childhood Education and Care	
Title of Study: Exploring Young Children's Interests Using Different Media	
Child's Name: Early Years Setting: Parent's consent given: <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Please ask the child to mark a happy face if they agree to participate or a sad face if they do not wish to participate.	
I am happy to talk about things I like:	 
I know that I can go back to my group at any time:	 
You can tell what I said in your book, but do not give my name or school:	 
You can use my pictures and drawings in your book:	 
<i>Thank you very much for your help. 😊</i>	

## APPENDIX 3: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, MATERIALS, STRATEGIES GUIDE

Below is a guide for data collection. It serves as a flexible framework and strategic guide for the data collection phase.

Schedule	Activity	Strategies/Tools/Materials
Before Easter		Tool Validation and Pilot Testing Tools and Materials
Week 1	Rapport Building	Spending time with the children in the setting
	Getting to Know You	Child Conference (individual, pair or small group of children): Tell me a little bit about yourself. What makes you feel happy? What are the things you like? Would you like to draw a picture of yourself?
	Project Familiarization: Storytelling with Children	Child Conference (group of children): Storybook about the research project (will illustrate after comments). I am Eya. I am a student just like you. I go to school just like you. I'm just a little bit older. I like rainbows, computers and books. I like to sing and dance. I like taking photos of my favorite things. I like watching my favourite television shows and going to the cinema. I am making my own book, but I need help. I need you. Yes you. I need you if you think you can help me. I need to know what young children (like you) are interested in because I like learning new things about other people, especially children. Do you think you could tell me the different things you find interesting? Do you know what interesting means? Interesting things are the things you would like to learn more about, or things that you enjoy learning about. They could be things that you really really like, like your favorite things! They could also be really important things that you also want to share with other people. We could pretend we are news reporters. If you were a news reporter, what would you report about? Apart from knowing what you are interested in, I would like to find out how you would choose to share it with me. There are lots of different ways for you to share your interests with me. For example you could draw a picture, take a photograph, or write a book about it. Let me know what you need and I will do my best to give you papers, pens or cameras that you might need. You can bring the materials home for a weekend (Saturday and Sunday) and bring them back the following week so we could talk about how you collected information about your interest. We could pretend you are making a news report. If you were a news reporter, how would you report about your interest? Once we're all back here, we could talk about what you have done and share it with me and your friends. We can also think about other exciting ways to share your interests with other people as well! So, do you think you can help me? Yes? No? Thank you very much for helping me! Alright, I am soooo excited to work with you! Let's go! ☺
Week 2	Initial Child Conference (Day 1)	Child Conference (group) Explain to the children the process: Give children flags they can raise up if they want to speak and have a turn. The rule is everyone has to listen to the person speaking. Start the conference by listening and singing to "My Favorite Things" sung by Julia Roberts. Questions to be asked: What are your favorite things in school? (What things are you interested in in school?) What are your favorite things at home? (What things are you interested in
** Will include children's weekend (May 3-4)		

		<p>at home?)          Do you have favorite things/interests in other places?          Who do you like to be with when you want to learn more about your interests?          If you were a news reporter, what would you report about?          →As the children are answering, write up their answers in a sheet in a concept web:</p>  <p>Can you think of ways you can share your interests with other people?          What are the things you think you could use?          What things would you like to use to gather information about your interests and share it with others?          If you were a news reporter, how would you report about your interest?</p>
	<p>Day 2          Visual Pictograph survey &amp;          Tool selection</p>	<p>“I have some pictures here of some materials we use to capture/document and share information about things we are interested in to other people.”          (Show pictures of 1) Paper 2) Pens and Crayons 3) Disposable Camera 4) Digital Camera one at a time and talk about experiences with each one.          Stick each picture in a chart, and ask children to raise their hands if they have had experience using it by themselves)          What are your experiences of using these materials?          Who do you use these materials with?          Are you able to use them on your own?          Where do you use these materials?          Which materials would you like to use for collecting information about your interests?          Why would you want to use this material to collect information on your interest?</p>
	<p>Tool Distribution           **Children documentation at home</p>	<p>Have the children select materials they would want to use for collecting information on their interests. Remind them to gather the information over the weekend and bring their output in the following week.</p>
Week 3	<p>Collection of tools</p>	<p>Child conference (individual/pair/group)          Can you tell me about what you have done over the weekend?          What is your report about?</p>
	<p>Child conference: sharing</p>	<p>Why did you choose to collect information about this?          How did you collect information about your interest?          Did you have help from other people when you were doing this?          Can you think of other ways for you to collect more information about this topic?          How do you think we could share this to even more people? Can you think of other ways?</p>

#### APPENDIX 4: STORYBOOK

The storybook that was designed and used for this research project is attached in a separate folder with the bound copy of this research project.