Realising Innovative Partnerships in Educational Research
Theories and Methodologies for Collaboration

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Realising Innovative Partnerships in Educational Research examines the underlying principles and actions that support the development of and engagement in partnerships in educational research. With social justice at its core, the work in this book represents various architectures of innovation, whereby new ways of thinking about partnership research are proposed and practices of teaching and learning are reconciled (or not) with existing education contexts and practices.

With contributions from educational researchers and practitioners from New Zealand, and international commentaries provided by established scholars in the field, the book draws together key experiences and insights from students, teachers, community members and researchers in tertiary, community, school, and early childhood settings.

The research in this book seeks to address a gap in our understanding, extending knowledge beyond simply the benefits of partnership work, to examine how successful partnerships can be initiated, enacted, and sustained over time. This book invites reflection on the following provocations: Why engage in partnerships for educational research? How has this happened in the past and what needs to happen for the future? What is unique about the New Zealand context and what might researchers in other countries learn from our collaborative and culturally responsive research methodologies? What could be some of the underlying principles that support the development of and engagement in collaborative research? How do we evaluate the effectiveness of research partnerships in education to shift the focus to the future?
Realising Innovative Partnerships in Educational Research
EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Volume 1

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Scope:

Partnerships and collaboration are two ideas that have transformed teacher education and enhanced teacher professional learning, enquiry and research. Increasingly, the changing context in which teachers work requires them to continually update and enhance their knowledge and skills, and to engage in different forms of professional development in order to understand the needs of their pupils and the communities they come from. This underlines the need for stronger partnerships to connect teachers with each other, with teacher education providers, with local communities, with local government, and with business and National Government Organizations (NGOs). Educational partnerships as a concept recognises the new ecology of digital interconnectivity, the need for stronger collaboration at all levels, and a new collective responsibility for education. Partnerships in the form of transnational education, public-private collaborations, interactions between formal and informal educational organisations, collaborations between tertiary organisations and industry/the service sector and amongst schools and between schools and their communities have emerged as strong policy and practice drivers. This series aims to span this broad understanding of partnership and make a contribution to both theory and practice.
Realising Innovative Partnerships in Educational Research

Theories and Methodologies for Collaboration

Edited by

Rachel McNae and Bronwen Cowie
The University of Waikato, New Zealand

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Elaborating Local Research Agendas: Reimagining Innovative Research Partnerships ................................................................. ix
Rachel McNae and Bronwen Cowie

Partnerships, Networks and Learning in Educational Research: Contested Practices ........................................................................................................ xvii
Susan Groundwater-Smith

**Section I: Research Partnerships with Students**

Introduction: Partnerships with Students .................................................................... 3
Rachel McNae

1. ‘It’s Cool, People Your Same Age Being in Charge of You’: Enacting Student Voice through Classroom Governance Partnerships ........................... 9
Emily Nelson

2. Research with Children: An Example from Early Childhood Education/Early Years Settings ........................................................................................................... 21
Kathryn Hawkes

Maria Kecskemeti, Carol Hamilton and Ashlie Brink

4. Partnership among Multicultural Peers in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Moving beyond Research Boundaries ........................................... 45
Vishalache Balakrishnan and Lise Claiborne

Section Commentary: Reflections on Enabling Authentic Partnership .................. 55
Dana Mitra

**Section II: Research Partnerships with Teachers**

Introduction: Supporting Innovation through Collaborative Research with Teachers in School and Tertiary Settings ......................................................... 61
Beverley Cooper

5. Teacher-Researcher Partnerships: Working Together to Enhance Young Children’s Learning in Mathematics ............................................................................. 67
Brenda Bicknell and Jenny Young-Loveridge

6. Blurring the Boundaries: Teachers as Key Stakeholders in Design-Research Partnerships for Mathematics Education ................................................. 77
Sashi Sharma
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

7. Rethinking the Associate Teacher and Pre-Service Teacher Relationship: Powerful Possibilities for Co-Learning Partnerships ............................................................... 87  
   Donella Cobb and Ann Harlow

8. Research as a Catalyst for Cross-Disciplinary Partnerships amongst University Lecturers ........................................................................................................... 97  
   E. Marcia Johnson, Elaine Khoo and Mira Peter

Section Commentary: Learning in and from Intentional Partnerships between University Researchers and Teachers .......................................................... 109  
   Catherine H. Reischl

## Section III: Research Partnerships within and across Organisations

**Introduction: Partnership as Knowledge Building and Exchange amongst Stakeholders** ........................................................................................................... 117  
   Bronwen Cowie

9. Sharing at Kaipaki School: Inquiry and Digital Legacies ............................................. 123  
   Dianne Forbes and Steve Dunsmore

10. A School-Researcher Partnership with Pragmatism at its Core ................... 135  
    Anne Hume and Jane Furness

11. Culturally Responsive Relationships Promoting Partnerships between Schools and Indigenous Māori Families and Communities ......................... 147  
    Mere Berryman and Therese Ford

12. ‘It’s a Living, Breathing Entity’: Research Partnerships, Young Children and the Environment ................................................................. 157  
    Janette Kelly with Marion Dekker, Kathryn Hawkes, Fiona Mackay, Julie Sullivan and Gill Wright

13. The ‘Mantle Underground’: A Case Study in Informal School-University Partnership ........................................................................................................... 169  
    Viv Aitken

Section Commentary: Reflections on Tiers of Partnership Possibilities .............. 181  
   Coral Campbell

## Section IV: Research Partnerships with Community

**Introduction: Community Partnerships Creating Spaces for Democratising Enterprise** ........................................................................................................... 191  
   Terry Locke

14. Dance on Campus: Partnerships and Participation in Tertiary Dance Education and Community Dance Practice ................................................................. 197  
   Karen N. Barbour
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Enhancing Youth Leadership through Community Partnerships: A Case for Christchurch</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rachel Hawthorne</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Community Engagement through Continuing Education in a University: Older Adult Education with Māori Elders</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Brian Findsen</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Community Partnerships in Sustainability Education Research</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Claudio Aguayo and Chris Eames</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section Commentary: Partnerships with Communities</strong></td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Karen Edge</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section V: Research Partnerships with Multiple Institutions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Roger Moltzen</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>A Cross-Cultural Partnership in a Tertiary Setting</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Noeline Alcorn</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Finding Places of Connection in an Inter-University Partnership: An International Collaboration</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Jenny Ferrier-Kerr and Paul Haxton</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Nadine Ballam, Sally Peters and Vanessa Paki</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sonja Arndt, Eva Alerby and Susanne Westman</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section Commentary: Partnerships in Pursuit of an Internationalisation Agenda</strong></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Susan Bridges</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section VI: Concluding Thoughts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Partnership Research: A Relational Practice</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bronwen Cowie and Rachel McNae</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TABLE OF CONTENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ELABORATING LOCAL RESEARCH AGENDAS
Reimagining Innovative Research Partnerships

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will.

– George Bernard Shaw

INTRODUCTION

Current discourses in education call for reimagining the ways educational research takes place. The rapid pace of technological advancement and global connectivity has prompted further calls mandating the revision of current education practices to meet and shift futurist predictions and ideals about how young people prepare for and engage with their futures. But what of this future? Relatively unknown in shape or form, yet positioned as dynamic, technologically grounded and constantly evolving, many would say the future holds opportunity and possibility for education if educators, learners and researchers are willing to embrace change. With regard to education, the words of Shaw above could emphasise a need for freedom, creativity and an imagining of new ways to support innovative practices that meet the rapidly evolving shape of what education looks like in order to create these new possibilities.

Such a focus touches on meeting a resounding demand for what could be described as an architecture of innovation, whereby new ways of thinking about research and the practices of teaching and learning are proposed and reconciled (or not) with existing education contexts and practices. Research is fundamental to these ideals and new ways of researching are needed to meet this call for innovation. The development of the kinds of research relationships that support innovation and change have become a priority. Within this context notions of partnership have been seen as paramount, and even central to the authenticity of research agendas, design and conduct, and to the relevance of outcomes.

Partnership is central to ensuring that universities develop a vision of public service, relevance and social responsibility that allows them to contribute to new and emerging challenges. In the scholarship exploring global perspectives on strengthening community-university research partnerships, Tandon, Hall, and Tremblay (2015) assert alternative forms and paradigms of knowledge need to be explored in response to current global issues. They note that researchers are increasingly moving to work with organisations and communities to co-generate knowledge which draws dynamically on multiple epistemologies and lifeworlds. They go on to state such co-creative acts of knowledge production are at the heart of the university’s contribution to deepening knowledge democracy and social
justice. They also point out it is important to develop strategies for communicating productively with those we hope will use our research—academic colleagues around the world, national and international policy communities, and practitioners. While there is a global trend to support the development of partnerships as a strategy to foster and resource innovation and improvement, there is ample evidence that those working in universities must take careful account of the local policy, political, cultural and material resource setting. As our colleague Michael Peters (2014) explains:

The principles of consultation, participation and informed consent are useful operating principles for partnership but the critical discourse of partnership in policy terms requires an understanding of the political context. (p. 4)

Recognising this, we next set out key aspects of New Zealand as a context for partnership in educational research and elaborate on what is unique about the education sector in New Zealand.

PARTNERSHIPS OF LOCAL ORIGIN: NEW ZEALAND AS A BICULTURAL NATION

There are a number of aspects of the New Zealand context that provide a particular tone and imperative to the notion of partnership. The Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi), considered to be New Zealand’s founding document, is the most important and enduring of these. In the mid 1800s, when an increasing number of settlers arrived in New Zealand, British Crown representatives and numerous Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand) Chiefs signed The Treaty, which sets out a broad statement of the principles on which the British and Māori would found a nation state and create a government. The purpose of the Treaty was to enable the British settlers and the Māori people to live together in New Zealand under a common understanding and partnership. This binding treaty document protected the rights of Māori to keep their land, forests, fisheries and treasures while handing over sovereignty to the British. The Treaty gave the Crown the right to govern and establish laws in the interests of all New Zealanders and to develop British settlement. It gave Māori the same rights and status as British citizens, but also importantly, recognised that Māori occupied New Zealand before British settlement and Māori culture and heritage must be protected. The principles of partnership, participation and protection form the core of the Treaty and it is in the spirit of these principles that the laws in New Zealand are shaped. The principle of partnership, which is used to describe the relationships between the Crown and Māori, deemed they must act reasonably, honourably and in good faith (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012).

Educational policy and practice is required to be responsive to the Treaty principles and to ensure they are actively addressed. Education policy makers, leaders, educators (teachers and lecturers at all levels of the system) as well as educational researchers have a responsibility to understand, recognise and surface the principles of partnership, protection, and participation within educational
research. The *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), which outlines the vision for learning for the schooling sector, states that the goal is for:

… young people who will work to create an Aotearoa New Zealand in which Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners, and in which all cultures are valued for the contributions they bring. (p. 8)

The principle of ‘community engagement’ in the *New Zealand Curriculum* calls for schools and teachers to deliver a curriculum that is meaningful, relevant, and connected to students’ lives. Community engagement is about establishing strong home-school partnerships where parents, whānau (family) and communities are involved in and support students’ learning. That is, educators need to harness the knowledge and expertise of the diversity of people who can contribute to students’ learning, including families, whānau, iwi (tribes), and other community members. Noticing and shifting power imbalances becomes an important aspect of engagement with regard to forming partnerships as Berryman, Egan, and Ford (2016) state, “It is the less powerful and less privileged who best understand how to transform the relationship” (p. 3). Partnership is realised as schools collaborate with Māori and non-Māori to develop, implement, and review policies, practices and procedures. By working collaboratively, schools learn to share power, control and decision making while validating the unique position of Māori as tangata whenua (host Māori) and recognising the contribution Māori make to education (see goo.gl/0KPikH for further information).

Within research, the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) fund has been influential in shaping understandings of possibilities, priorities and practices in educational research. This funding source, introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2003, prioritises research partnerships whereby practitioners and researchers work together to build knowledge about teaching and ways to improve learning outcomes for diverse learners, as well as how to build the research capability of teachers and researchers. The initiative is explicit that partnership is central to the research relationship. The implicit assumption is that all partners will have opportunities to develop and explore questions and ideas of interest to them. The notion of partnership can extend beyond researchers and practitioners within a formal and/or informal educational setting to include the wider community and organisations with a vested interest in expertise to contribute to the focus of a research project. The dissemination or transfer of learning is identified as important whereby this might include teachers using findings in their wider classroom practice, findings being shared and used by other teachers in the school and in other schools and by other researchers.

Most recently, the government initiative Investing in Educational Success (IES) includes the development of Communities of Learning/Kāhui Ako. These communities bring together centre, kura and school leaders, educators and professional development providers to help students achieve their full potential (http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/col/). Each Community of Learning group of schools and early childhood centres sets shared goals or achievement challenges and then works with students, parents, whānau, iwi and
communities to achieve these challenges. The idea is that by collaborating and sharing expertise students’ learning pathways will be well supported and their transition through the education system improved. The Teacher Led Innovation Fund, also part of the IES, supports schools to identify an area for inquiry and to work with ‘experts’ to pursue this.

Initiatives such as these attract significant financial and resource investment and illustrate the perceived value of collaborative research and the role partnership can have within an education improvement agenda. The ways these partnerships are enacted could be considered unique as, founded on principles of partnership, they take careful account of the community context and needs, research intentions and design and the associated ethics. Therefore, coming to understand the nature of partnerships within and across contexts, how they are initiated and how they are enacted is critical.

PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Research into the dynamics of partnerships and the mechanisms by which they foster educational change tends to focus on challenges, and provide less insight into successful partnerships or how partnership designs and strategies can address challenge (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Lillejord & Børte, 2016). Our book addresses this gap through its focus on successful partnerships without voiding the challenges involved.

Partnerships can be focused around a particular outcome or project or they can be more open-ended with the outcomes emergent rather than predetermined. They can be initiated by researchers, by practitioners and by funders. The chapters in our book represent each of these options. The authors describe educational research projects in which they were joint developers and owners of new knowledge and new practices. Students, teachers, schools, communities and organisations from around the world partnered with the authors as researchers. We conceptualise these various sets of relations as providing for different foci for partnership and units of change that in turn offer unique opportunities for understanding and innovation, and for reimagining possibilities for action. When we look deeply into the different units of change are all present in some form—more or less overtly and explicitly—in each of the projects; they do not exist in isolation but are nested one within the other, overlapping and interacting.

The five sections in the book foreground the implications of taking students, teachers, schools and their communities, community organisations and international networks as the units of partnership and change. By focusing on partnerships with students, teachers, organisations, communities and international networks, we aim to promote awareness of the breadth of possibilities for creating and supporting partnerships and mobilising knowledge for practitioner, community and policy action. We consider a distinctive feature of the book is that a number of the chapters are co-authored by practitioners, and most include teacher and or student voice. In emphasising this we note, as Elliot argues:
Educational research, as opposed to simply research on education, will involve teachers in its construction and execution and not simply in applying its findings. Teachers engage in educational research and not simply with it. (Elliott, 2001, p. 565, emphasis in original)

This comment by Elliot resonates with Stenhouse’s (1981) much earlier proposition that teachers are active agents who need to constantly engage with ambiguity as part of teaching. He argues that ultimately it is teachers who will change what happens in school by understanding them. Mitra, Lewis and Sanders (2013) would also position students as active agents highlighting they too can “serve as a catalyst for positive changes in schools, such as improvements in instruction, curriculum, teacher-student relationships and teacher preparation” (p. 172). The notion of enactment is critical and problematic in educational research because, as James (2013) pointed out, impact will not simply follow from the dissemination of research findings. In her words, “it is often not knowledge that we lack; it is implementation” (n.p.). Therefore, if sustained and embedded change is to occur, the actions within partnerships must extend into frameworks of activism which support the dissemination of research, a core function of this book.

Each of the five sections in the book is introduced by a colleague. An international collaborator provides an overview commentary, distilling themes from the chapters in their section to highlight how the chapters reflect and refract trends of general (non-local) and New Zealand-based interest. We thank Dana Mitra for her insights into the value and implications of a focus on partnerships with students, Catherine Reichl for her analysis of the various roles teachers/lecturers and researchers can adopt within research partnerships, Coral Campbell for her reflection on the various tiers of partnership possibilities, Karen Edge for her exploration into the challenges and opportunities created through working in organisation-community partnerships, and Susan Bridges for her emphasis on the cultural dimension of partnering and relationship building across international borders.

CONCLUSION

Partnerships in educational research are foundational to most current educational reforms as early childhood centres, schools, kura and tertiary organisations seek to embrace the diverse strengths and needs of each and all the learners who walk through their gates. The chapters in this book set out important trends, challenges and approaches associated with how research partnerships are initiated, supported, and sustained, although sustaining partnerships beyond the initial questions and funding remains problematic. They examine the underlying principles that support the development of and engagement in collaborative partnerships in educational research settings. Indeed, collaborative frameworks form the core pillars of this book and are used to provoke: Why engage in partnerships for educational research? How has this happened in the past and what needs to happen for the future? What is unique about the New Zealand context and what could other countries learn from collaborative and culturally responsive research
methodologies? What could be some of the underlying principles that support the development of and engagement in collaborative research? How do we evaluate the effectiveness of research partnerships in education to shift the focus to the future? It is our hope that by drawing attention to the diversity in the ways educational research partnership can be enacted across contexts, new possibilities for research can be imagined to meet the unknown demands of the future.

In the second part of this introduction, Susan Groundwater-Smith, a University of Waikato Visiting Scholar in the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, provides an overview of the complexities and possibilities related to the practice of partnership. Susan was involved in the initial conception of this book, and in her actions as a visiting academic deliberately sought to create partnerships in her work. In the next part of this introduction, Susan examines and underscores the relational and moral aspects of partnership work, positioning partnership, networking and learning as contested practices. In doing so she encourages us to think about the role partnership can play in the personal and professional lives of educators.

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PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND LEARNING IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Contested Practices

In this chapter, I shall propose that our first and overarching question must relate to what may seem an unproblematic term, ‘practice’, as it is associated with practice theory and relates to the formation of partnerships in education for the purposes of research. Drawing on, from among a number of practice theorists, Nicolini (2013) I argue that practice as a central construct both in terms of knowledge and action, has historical antecedents and may be best apprehended through an understanding of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). Following on from this I shall consider the nature of partnerships between universities and the cognate field of practice, in this case education and schooling, and pose a series of problematics regarding the purposes of such partnerships and the ways in which they may be nurtured and sustained. Furthermore, I shall draw upon the ways in which networking as a social enterprise can contribute to partnership formation engaging a range of stakeholders leading to enhanced professionalism.

UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE

There are some terms that are so ubiquitous that they are employed unproblematically. ‘Practice’ is one such term. For practice theorists such as Nicolini (2013) practice is closely associated with social life of one kind or another. As such it embodies all those elements of social transactions: activity; performance; work; and, relationships and includes power, conflict and politics. Practice evolves in situ and is governed by the norms and regulations of given sites at both micro and macro levels with degrees of overlap as well as contradictions. For example, academic practices in universities may well vary from those in government offices or schools; with each of these, in turn, varying one from another depending upon their location and histories. A faculty of education in a small regional university may very well be rather different from one in a large metropolitan tertiary setting; a government department offering one kind of educational service will not be identical to one functioning for other purposes; a privileged, well resourced school will embody different practices to one that may be poor and isolated. It is in the face of this variation that drawing attention to the notion of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) can be so helpful in enabling us to ask: What does practice look like? Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged? How did it come to be this way? Should it change? What would be required to change it? and so on. This is especially so when negotiating partnership
arrangements between the academy and stakeholders in associated fields for the purposes of research.

In the view of Kemmis and his associates individual and collective practice shapes and is shaped by what they have named as ‘practice architectures’ that embody the saying, doings and relatings characteristic of a practice that hang together as arrangements by which practices of various kinds work. The concept of practice architectures owes much to the work of Theodore Schatzki that has been evolving for over a decade (2012). In short, the sayings relate to the cultural discursive arrangements, the doings are the material economic arrangements, while the relatings are those of a socio-political nature. All contain traces of past knowledge and actions of one kind or another. Through its sayings a practice will unfold using the language and discourses through which it is comprehensible. Through its doings the practice engages participants and artefacts in activities embedded in the site. Through its relatings the practice will connect people and objects in various relationships. All will ‘hang together’ in what Schatzki (2012) describes as ‘practice arrangement bundles’ (p. 16). Recognising the complexity of practice architectures enables us to navigate our way through the manner in which partnership work occurs as it relates to education both formal and informal and its investigation. Practice in educational terms embodies situational professionalism contributing to knowledge that is developed simultaneously both about practice and in practice (Groundwater-Smith, 2011). It is for this reason that a relationship between the academic world and the field of practice is critical to understanding how each can contribute to our fund of professional knowledge through forms of systematic inquiry.

PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Partnership form and function is underpinned by a number of determinants. Cook (2017, p. 86) sees these falling into four categories: bureaucratic, that is meeting a set of predetermined requirements; organisational, relating to logistics and the like; democratic, making transparent a range of options that may be discussed; and, participatory, where practice is evolving and based upon shared learning. She argues that it is the last of these that has the capacity to develop an authentic and purposeful critique that can inform present and future actions.

However, such an aspiration cannot occur by chance. A number of conditions are critical to the building of partnerships, including reciprocity, trust, dialogue and flexibility. More and more, we see practice in education tramelled by ever burgeoning regulatory frameworks. It is increasingly important to recognise that partnerships can be something of a Trojan Horse whereby problematic practices are imported by one partner into another’s setting, in effect contributing to what Rudduck and Hargreaves (1992) claimed were possible Liaisons Dangereuses. This may be particularly so when the culture of one partner is not understood, or is misunderstood by the other – that is to say, in terms of practice architectures, that the ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’ of one site, have not been fully apprehended. Take for example, the ways in which many, but not all, universities are accountable to their human research ethics committees that will seek to restrict opportunities for
its graduate students to engage in research in such places as schools and early childhood settings, while at the same time those self-same sites are encouraging a climate of enquiry.

More problematic at the macro-level is the development of partnerships that carry very large resource implications, namely the evolution of public private partnerships (PPPs) that function at a government to government level. Ball (2013), having investigated this phenomenon over a number of years, has made the case for these to potentially undermine consensual social values in the name of neo-liberalism. This may seem a far cry from the ways in which universities and schools may function in the interests of the kind of educational research whose purpose is to identify and clarify practices that may lead to improvement and reform. This, they would hope to do without the impediments of commercial agenda that may wish to develop materials that will be successful in the market place irrespective of the variations in local contexts and practices. The proliferation of testing regimes and teacher-proof textbooks that has arisen from a range of public private partnerships may satisfy government policies and contracts but fail to work effectively at the local level.

Even so, it is at the local level there is much that can be achieved through the creation and maintenance of networks that are designed to develop sustainable relations and that will enable the building of the trust and reciprocity that is required.

BUILDING LOCAL NETWORKS

This discussion is based upon the premise that networking embodies “the processes through which professional knowledge is received and transmitted by means of personal relationships … (It) is a social process which occurs both within and between the formal structures and boundaries of organisations” (Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 2006, p. 232). It allows professionals, in this instance in the field of education, to develop knowledge about knowledge formation, application and evaluation. It is seen to be achieved by a wide range of social processes and requires thoughtful and appropriate behaviour.

Networking is not merely an instrumental means of developing professional knowledge, but that it is a form of professional learning. It is an outcome of learning: how things work both within and between institutions, locally, nationally and globally; the discourses and habits of mind that are employed; and, the strategies that are used to engage with the field. For success, the practice should be explicit and planned and beyond all else, enjoyable. Productive networks are inevitably built around partnerships and are characterised by mutual cooperation and shared responsibility. They require a capacity of the members of the network to communicate, coordinate and collaborate.

Networks can vary in complexity and may the product of an array of strategies ranging from those requiring a high degree of planning in relation to particular tasks and policies to those that slowly evolve over time (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2012). Much will depend on what is at stake and the nature of the practice architecture that has given rise to the network development.
Nonetheless, it is important to understand that networking has political connotations: who has the power? where are the secrets? what is the language-in-use? The effective networker not only employs the many skills of networking, but also has a kind of political antenna that can identify the answers to these important questions. As well the process can be seen as a means of navigating risk, enabling individuals to work their way through loose affiliations, often temporary arrangements and informal connections (Lee, 2011). For example, many small-scale research studies may be based upon opportunistic sampling where the requirements are those of flexibility and trust but the sample could be argued to be reasonably representative of a larger population. A university educational research centre may have an interest in establishing the ways in which recently arrived immigrant/refugee children are coping with local schooling conditions. Before embarking on a large-scale study the centre decides to develop a pilot study that will enable the researchers to identify the critical issues. Among the schools that work with the university there is a school that has a large number of such students and members of staff who have worked successfully and closely with the university researchers in the past. The relationship between the partners would be one that can be seen to be based on sound networking principles; were it otherwise entry into the school would be difficult and even resisted. Or, consider working in early childhood settings – necessarily such settings are cautious regarding bringing unfamiliar people into their space. But where there is such a centre that has an association with a university, the possibility of establishing a generative research agenda as a networked enterprise may be greatly enhanced.

Essentially it can be seen that networking is a moral practice. It is not a practice that treats others as a means to an end, but rather builds in a reciprocity that will bring benefits to those with whom a networker engages. It requires consummate skill and sensitivity. The literature has identified many attributes—among them: enthusiasm, generosity, trustworthiness, commitment, approachability and sincerity. Also, as in the hypothetical cases cited above, a sense of responsibility that will enable each party to share and interrogate information.

CONCLUSION: SO WHERE IS THE LEARNING?

A number of observers of educational practice, that includes educational research, have pointed to the essential nature of ‘critical professionalism’ based upon a knowledge of self and of practice as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It has been argued that the critical professional is in a constant process of recreation building upon a careful and substantiated examination of what is taking place in research environments, whether in the field or the university, that are increasingly complex and populated by many players with their varying agenda and experiences (Nygaard, 2014). That recreation is based upon an ongoing cycle of professional learning that occurs when those players have a means of communication that is agentic and continuously capable of reform and reconstruction.

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that the careful and judicious development of partnerships, in particular those that are sustained by networks (such as discussed in Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2012) has much to commend
it as a practice. Nonetheless, there is no easy formula, for the successful creation of partnerships which arise from and nurture networks will be influenced by a range of variables such as the alignment, or fit, between the activities and aspirations of the various members and the ways in which the apposite practice architectures (sayings, doings and relatings) have evolved. While much depends on the sharing of information between the constituent parts a more important and critical outcomes will be the extent to which the participants are able and willing to learn from each other.

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SECTION I

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS WITH STUDENTS
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INTRODUCTION
Partnerships with Students

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this section are positioned to draw attention to the core business of education—the students. Sharing examples of educational research which illustrate elements of youth-adult partnerships in various contexts, the enduring theme of research relationships is commented upon. Attention is drawn to the complex nature of these partnerships and contextual influences that ultimately shape what might be possible in partnership work with young people. This commentary sets the scene by foreshadowing the significant role student voice has in the formation and development of youth-adult partnerships, illuminating the high level of complexity and the key ideas that emerge from within and across each of the four chapters in this section.

Four very diverse contexts and approaches make up the work that these chapters draw on. All located in New Zealand, the work of Emily Nelson shares action research from an intermediate school where students and teachers worked in partnership to co-construct responsive pedagogical approaches. This work positioned students in key decision-making roles in areas of the school that influenced their learning and highlights the value and complexity of this in action. Elements of inclusion are foundational in the second chapter by Maria Kecskemeti, Carol Hamilton and Ashley Brink. In their work with pre-service teachers in a university setting, they deliberately employed relational and interactional pedagogies to disrupt deficit discourses with regard to students with disabilities. In the third chapter, Kathryn Hawkes examines the ethical and methodological complexities of completing research with young children in early years settings. Using a ‘Mosaic’ approach to explore and disturb ‘unexplored silences’, she demonstrates the richness of research that can be drawn from this context, while at the same time, highlighting the fragility of the research relationship. The final chapter in this section by Vishalache Balakrishnan and Lise Claiborne examines the concept of diversity in the classroom. The nature of partnership within and across multi-ethnic and multi-cultural classrooms is shared, highlighting the need for multiple and evolving ways for engaging students.
RECONCEPTUALISING YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE TEACHING AND RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP

At a time when the rapid pace of change in education demands innovation, flexibility and authenticity, many argue it is young people themselves who must be central to the decision-making processes and implementation approaches of new pedagogies and curriculum design. The underpinning rationale is that the outcomes generated will be more relevant and meaningful to the contexts in which young people learn, work and live.

It is clear from the authors’ contributions in this section that each research project reflects core tenets of student engagement and contribution, ultimately raising the challenge that shifts in pedagogy and decision-making frameworks are required if young people’s potential is to be fully realised and actualised. Focusing attention in youth-adult partnerships and the importance of student voice is therefore critical.

For this to happen, the literature calls for educators and researchers to be cognisant of how the historical, cultural and social influences play a role in the ways educators conceive the notion of what it means to be a young person in today’s society. Scoping youth development literature and consequently understandings of ‘what youth is’, it becomes apparent that what it means to be a young person is neither clear-cut, nor well defined. However, what is obvious is that dominant representations of youth are based on themes that aim to set young people apart from children and adults—antithetical to the nature of educational partnerships and collaboration between young people and adults.

Over the last 40 years, young people in the developed world have been the subject of an enormous amount of investigation and more recently, educational research specifically aimed at decision-making and partnerships in various education settings. Subsequently, there is a growing body of literature exploring the notion of young people and decision making with much of it based on and referring to one of two United Nations Initiatives: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes in 1998 (the Lisbon Declaration). In New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi is also relevant as Māori draw on cultural processes to engage and establish new ways in which rangatahi [youth] can best participate in decision making. Despite these evolving research agendas and the implementation of an increasingly diverse range of initiatives, outlining explicit approaches and processes of involving young people in decision making in schools could be best described as still in its infancy as evidenced by those calling for further action in this area (for example, Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Campbell, 2000; McNae, 2011).

Furthermore, changing social structures and the development of new ways in which young people interact with their various communities (physical and virtual) have created greater levels of complexity and new uncertainties in education, which are both local and global in their origins. Although on the one hand young adults seem to have more choices, for example in leisure and employment, traditionally they are choices that have been socially prescribed and frequently lead by adults. The education context positions young people to incrementally
PARTNERSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

relinquish the dependent roles they play in the stages of childhood, yet they are not to be as independent as their adult counterparts who are tasked with making decisions and choices (Wong, 2004). As Stanton-Rogers, Stanton-Rogers, Vyrost, and Lovas (2004) state:

... if we [school staff] have a concern for what current life is like for today’s generation of young people, or what may help them in their futures, we cannot use our own experiences of being young or the aspirations we then held as much of a guide. If we want to promote the life opportunities of young people, if we want to help them to prepare for their futures and make well-informed choices about them, then we need to find out about this ‘new world’ in which they are growing up. (p. 117)

Each chapter in this section highlights that relationships are central to youth-adult partnerships. What is refreshing is that the broad and varied application of the student centred approaches to learning have inspired renewed attention to the practical side of how these approaches might be initiated. Emerging themes evidenced across these chapters included establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard, legitimising student presence within the partnership, establishing expectations about the purpose of the work and noticing, hearing and heeding the student voice and, of course, the silences. This encourages us to re-examine the relationships we work in and reshape these to evidence student voice at their core.

RESHAPING THE TEACHING AND RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENT VOICE

With relationships at the core of Bishop and Glynn’s (1999) research, they espouse the value of interactions which support young people to develop an authoritative voice in education. This can happen when students are involved in activities (such as the themes mentioned above), which position themselves to negotiate and are involved in decision making. It is unfortunate, however, that on the most part, the voices of young people are not utilised and are rarely heard in educational settings, even though they are paramount to education directly effecting it and are directly affected by it (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999). Smith, Taylor, and Gollop (2000) argue this may be because young people are often the passive recipients of adult protection and knowledge and are therefore not seen as competent people who have a point of view. The work in these chapters positions young people as valuable sources of knowledge, whose contributions are valued and acted upon.

Importantly, as the voices and experiences of youth are embedded not only in their own families, schools and neighbourhoods contexts, those working in educational settings must keep in mind the contexts of the wider society (Ministry of Education, 2007; Smith & Taylor, 2000). The growing complexity of New Zealand society forces us to look for new paradigms in studies of young people, as the old theoretical models that we once used fail to capture the reality that they seek to describe. It is important to recognise the impact that the multiple and diverse contexts in which young people operate have a significant impact on the
ways they may wish to engage and feel comfortable contributing to different opportunities and initiatives. Developing contexts where young people feel comfortable to share and critique their personal values is an important part of shifting cultural changes with regard to discourses about youth partnerships. Such partnerships are frequently positioned as a useful way to [re]design and [re]form school curriculum and even [re]create governance structures. Student voice becomes an important part of this arrangement (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

Within youth-adult partnerships, student voice is increasingly identified as critical to the successful design and implementation of school curriculum (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004), and numerous benefits for involving young people in the planning and decision-making processes within educational contexts are espoused. Young people bring with them their perspectives which can positively influence outcomes in unexpected ways and create greater levels of commitment. Curricular innovations are more likely to be specifically tailored and more responsive to young people’s needs when young people are consulted on their own social and cultural conditions and adults can gain further insights into how to enrich and enhance the educative experiences (Mitra, 2009).

Collaboration becomes an essential, and Camino (2005) warns it is simply not a case of ‘getting out of the way’. Partnerships with young people require deliberate care and consideration with some educators believing that it is the responsibility of educators to provide a “constellation of activities that empower adolescents to take part in and influence decision-making that affects their lives and to take action on issues they care about (O’Donoghue, Krisner, & McLaughlin, 2002, p. 5). However, when engaging young people in opportunities to share their voices, it is important that these partnerships are seen as dynamic and constantly evolving as members of the partnership develop new knowledge. This will mean for each kind of student voice encounter, the role of the student may conceptualise differently depending on who is involved and the context in which the encounter takes place.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this introduction has been to foster a deeper, more cohesive, research-based understanding of the core elements of student-centred approaches to learning—specifically examining the practices associated with generating youth-adult partnerships within a research framework. Central to this notion is the concept of student voice, whereby students can actively engage in research and learning activities, negotiating and developing curriculum content and taking key leadership roles in their learning. The perceptions and voices of young people about their lives and experiences of their own personal development provide educators with a much needed source of knowledge and play a key role in creating better conditions for them in the future (Cook-Sather, 2002).

By engaging in youth-adult partnerships and including student voice in the teaching, research and learning encounters, educators can contribute to showing that students’ voices and their ideas are valued, useful and worthwhile (Rudduck, 2007). Teachers and researchers can re-examine their own schools and research methodologies through shifting their views of youth from problems to powerful
individuals. Through changing the way that young people are viewed, schools can further address the changing needs of young people in their care.

Finally, by reshaping existing and creating new spaces for youth to redefine and express themselves in ways in which they feel are useful, relevant and responsive, we can observe them greet and contribute to the rapidly changing contexts in which they exist, aligning them more closely to what they desire within the changing culture of youth. As foreshadowed by Pittman, Diversi, and Ferber (2002),

… the future holds perils and possibilities. To be paralyzed by the scope and speed of change in an increasingly diverse world is to silently contribute to a desolate scenario in which youth without ready access to preparation are left behind. (p. 156)

In this introduction, I have provided the rationale for reconceptualising the way that researchers and educators position young people in the research, teaching and learning relationship in order for productive and student-centred partnerships to flourish in educational settings. Researchers and teachers cannot remain insensitive to the changing realities for young people and must ensure that youth are involved in the planning and implementation of curriculum and research that will make a difference in their lives now and in the future. The chapters that follow rise to this challenge, carving space in the research landscape for students’ perspectives and rich engagement in decision making, which has the potential to impact on their future.

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Enacting Student Voice through Classroom Governance Partnerships

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary orientations to student voice emphasise the importance of partnership between students and teachers and between students themselves. This chapter presents a class action research project where students and teachers worked together within a governance partnership structure to maximise student influence within classroom pedagogy and curriculum design. The classroom example highlights both the value and the complexity of enacting student voice as partnership and the importance of attending to student capacity to lead as well as ongoing reflexive critique of identities, pedagogical strategies and notions of power as core aspects of such work.

FROM CONSULTATION TO STUDENT/TEACHER GOVERNANCE PARTNERSHIPS

Before the emergence of the student voice movement students were rarely consulted or involved in educational design, debate and decision-making. They were positioned passively in the student/teacher relationship, with education as something ‘done to’ them; their own perspectives, agendas and aspirations remained largely marginalised or silenced. Excluding students and their perspectives from the educational decision-making equation was underpinned by a pervasive view of children as incapable of full rationality, needing the protection and advocacy of adults to act in their best interests. Student voice emerged as a foil to this passive student positioning and as advocacy for the potential of students to contribute valuable and unique perspectives to educational decision-making around their own, and others’, learning and best interests.

Essentially, student voice activity explores the central question: ‘What would happen if we treated students as those whose opinions matter?’ (Fullan, 1991, p. 170) in practice. It is tempting to paint a coherent picture of the student voice movement, but in reality how student voice is conceptualised and practised to explore this seminal question is both diverse and contested. In this chapter I introduce major orientations to student voice that have emerged and shifted over time, beginning with early consultation efforts, encompassing the shift into more active participatory approaches, and culminating with a contemporary focus on enacting student voice through student/teacher partnerships. I illustrate a student/
teacher governance partnership conducted within this contemporary partnership orientation with the example of one classroom action research project where the locus of pedagogical decision-making was shifted from the teacher to students so that students were making decisions at a classroom governance level usually reserved for teachers. This example foregrounds the value, as well as some of the complexities, of teachers partnering with students to co-construct responsive curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms as a contemporary student voice practice.

**ORIENTATION TO STUDENT VOICE**

Three broad orientations to student voice have emerged over time as their potential has been explored and their limitations addressed: (1) consultation, (2) participation, and (3) partnership. Although a simplistic analytic frame, each of the three orientations captures a dominant focus of student voice practice and how students are positioned within the process of enacting, or practising, student voice. In this section I discuss each orientation in turn briefly, ending with a contemporary partnership orientation to student voice that I argue offers the most potential for elevating students’ status and ongoing influence in educational design, debate and decision-making.

**Consultation**

Initially student voice was viewed largely as a search for a unified student perspective or worldview that could be used to better inform educational decisions and include students in the educational conversation with adult educators. The term ‘voice’ itself appears to suggest a homogenous and unified view for the broad social group known as students (Thomson, 2011). However, taking such a view into consultation activities renders invisible the differences between and within student social groupings (Silva & Rubin, 2003). The key challenge of this consultation orientation was how to access and elicit student experiences of schooling and learning. Consultation orientations to student voice opened up conversations between students and teachers focused on student experiences mainly through discussion activity in classrooms and through surveys and interviews in educational research. Although the consultation orientation proved a valuable starting point for inviting students into the educational conversation, it has been challenged as a minimal enactment of student voice (Bahou, 2011) because whilst student perspectives were heard, students themselves were rarely involved beyond initial consultation activities, perpetuating their passive positioning (Rudduck, 2007).

**Participation**

An active participation orientation to student voice emerged to position students as ‘actors’, not ‘acted upon’ in decisions that followed consultation activities. This key shift increasingly positioned students as change agents, elevating their status
and sometimes their influence (Cook-Sather, 2010). Students’ involvement in educational decisions and change projects attended to the need to create spaces and audiences for student voice and as vital elements of student voice (Lundy, 2007). On this basis students became increasingly included in school-wide curriculum design projects, pre-service teacher development and as co-researchers in school-based research projects as part of the Students as Researchers (SARS) movement (Thomson & Gunter, 2006).

Within the participation orientation, the definition of student voice evolved beyond a conflation of student voice with student views, to become a practice and joint conversation constructed through interaction within social relationships in specific contexts and in response to specific questions (Flutter, 2007). Whilst the action focus of this orientation did involve students more actively in educational decisions, some scholars argued the need for critical and ongoing attention to the agenda boundaries for student voice, that is, the types of decisions in which students are encouraged to participate and the types from which their exclusion persists. Numerous examples demonstrate how the parameters for student decision-making involvement are delimited by adults even when their participation is promoted and formalised through mechanisms such as school councils. In one such example, Lodge (2008) reported students on a school council wanting to have input into the school uniform but being constrained by the head teacher to relatively safe matters such as addressing levels of litter in their school.

Within a participation orientation, definitions of student voice expanded to include how to “consult students and include them as active participants in critical analyses and reform of schools, and to give students greater agency in researching educational issues and contexts” (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007, p. 579). Definitions of this nature once again shifted the focus of student voice scholarship to ways in which students could be accorded ongoing influence within school systems in a way that challenged the deeper patterns of student/teacher positioning. An orientation towards positioning students as ‘partners’ rather than ‘participants’ emerged and frames contemporary student voice practice.

**Partnership**

A partnership orientation to student voice is conceptualised as dialogic. Dialogic student voice foregrounds ongoing and mutual teacher and student exploration of matters of learning, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to generate insights that would not be possible without the participation of either party. In a partnership orientation, student voice becomes a joint enterprise (Mitra, 2008), within student/teacher or youth/adult partnerships where youth and adults learn from each other and decide together. Such student/teacher partnerships recognise that change in status and role for students generates corresponding impacts for teachers, so teacher voice and implications for pedagogy become an important aspect of student voice. Partnering with students requires teachers to work out what it means in practice to decide with students in dialogic ways whilst simultaneously addressing
other curriculum and policy demands on their practice, such as school and national student assessment and reporting requirements.

With the classroom a key site of teachers’ professional energy, increasing student involvement and influence in classroom decisions has emerged as a contemporary student voice focus (Rudduck, 2007). Within this classroom-based student voice focus, the challenge has become how to include students in governance level decisions around pedagogy (Thomson & Gunter, 2007), that is, decisions related to the collective learning of students rather than solely related to individual students and their own learning. While student participation in governance-level student voice activity has increased in schools generally, their participation in governance-level decisions around pedagogy remains rare (Thomson, 2011).

Each of these three orientations to student voice positions students differently, with different effects in relation to their status and influence in educational design, debate and decision-making. The consultation orientation elicited student views on educational topics but did little to address students’ passive positioning and status in the process, with students largely excluded from change resulting from consultation. The participation orientation actively involved students in educational decision-making but not necessarily in ways that contested the agendas in which they were invited to contribute. The partnership orientation attends to agenda boundaries and shifts students into ongoing student/teacher alliances to co-construct educational practice whilst acknowledging the constraints teachers themselves operate within. My own work in student voice is located in the classroom and within the student/teacher pedagogical relationship as part of my focus on elevating student status where it is most central to student experience and likely to influence teachers’ work—in the construction of pedagogy through student/teacher governance partnerships.

A CONTEXT FOR EXPLORING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH CO-GOVERNANCE

The collaborative action research project that informs this chapter was located in one North Island New Zealand decile 8\(^1\) intermediate\(^2\) school and involved three teachers and students from their Years 7 and 8 classes (ages 11–13). The purpose of the research was to find out more about student perceptions of effective pedagogy as a starting point for the students and teachers to co-construct responsive pedagogy in partnership. The students and teachers worked together as co-researchers on pedagogy that would be responsive to the preferences of their particular class. In Action Cycle One, a small volunteer student research group (SRG) of 12 students (four from each of the three classes), generated perceptions of effective teaching and engagement utilising visual data generation methods. The students completed a photography and drawing assignment that represented their perceptions of effective teaching and conditions for engagement in learning at school, and explored these images through individual interviews and collective focus group meetings. The SRG met for four focus group discussions over Action Cycles Two and Three to reflect on aspects of their particular classroom action research projects as these were enacted.
The SRG visual data and accompanying interview transcripts were analysed by the three teachers. The key themes that emerged informed the teachers’ initial understanding of student perceptions of effective teaching and conditions for engagement. Teachers shared their initial student voice data analysis in Action Cycle Two with their own classes to inform and broaden the class dialogue on effective teaching and conditions for engagement. Learning from Action Cycles One and Two informed the focus of Action Cycle Three student/teacher joint classroom action research projects. These ten-week projects aimed to align classroom pedagogy and curriculum with student pedagogical preferences and to engage all students in governance-level decision-making in partnership with their teachers.

Students in the three classes participated in the Action Cycle Three projects primarily as their class programme, and the pedagogical decisions co-constructed with their teachers became their curriculum. However, students were able to opt out of having their perspectives and work samples collected and from being video-recorded and photographed as part of the research. Two to three students in each class took the opportunity to do this. They were not photographed, sat out of shot during video-recording of classroom sessions and data inadvertently gathered as part of recording classroom sessions was not used.

In this chapter I focus only on one class action research project (Lincoln’s) in the interests of space but also because it offers an example of a radical student/teacher governance partnership in that the locus of decision-making was shifted completely to students with the teacher playing a consulting role. I draw on the perspectives and reflections of Lincoln, the four student research group members and other students in the class (referred to by their selected pseudonyms) to illustrate the value and complexities of partnering with students in the process of co-constructing pedagogy and curriculum.

CO-GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

The design of the class action research project had to find ways to elevate student status and influence—positioning students as key decision-making partners in relationship to pedagogy. The project also needed to account for realities and pressures on Lincoln’s classroom practice, acknowledging the class as part of the larger school community.

Lincoln initiated a dialogic starting point for his class action research project by sharing with his class his learning from the initial student voice data from Action Cycle One, negotiating the classroom curriculum and pedagogy this suggested. Lincoln had learnt from the initial student voice data that his students preferred an integrated and coherent class curriculum, that is, curriculum centred on a unifying theme rather than one fragmented into separate subject areas. They also expressed a preference for a curriculum relevant to their lives and interests, with links to real-world purposes beyond the classroom and expressed a desire to participate in deciding the direction of the class curriculum. In response to the students’ ideas, Lincoln suggested a film-making inquiry that would bring together the students’ interest in movies and technology as well as Lincoln’s expertise in this area. In
selecting a co-governance focus important to students and to Lincoln, the student/teacher partnership was initiated from a starting point of ‘mutual resonance’. Lincoln said he viewed this as student voice:

It was a little bit of student voice I think. It was getting the students to take a little bit more ownership of what they were doing and how they could, I guess, feed into what was happening in class. So that it wasn’t just teacher-directed. (Lincoln)

Lincoln enacted his student/teacher curriculum design partnership in an inquiry framework. The curriculum emerged from student questions and wonderings and developed through a process of research and investigation. This enabled Lincoln to shift the locus of pedagogical decision-making to his students through a familiar pedagogical structure that was utilised school-wide. For the movie making project, individual students researched their own questions about film-making and shared this information with each other to build distributed learning across the class. At the end of the initial three-week inquiry, the class came up with a collective ‘So what? Now what?’ focus. They decided to make a horror movie over the remaining seven weeks of the school term.

It has kind of gone from … finding out a little bit about a movie to [making a movie]. One of the comments from a boy in class—Jerry—this morning was, “imagine if our movie made $50,000!” They have kind of gone from, “You know it would be cool to make a movie” to “This movie that we are going to be making is going to be amazing”. (Lincoln)

Lincoln facilitated students to step into an unfamiliar governance level decision-making role guided by familiar inquiry processes. The students led the inquiry and Lincoln took a back seat. In this way student familiarity with inquiry supported Lincoln to turn his student voice goals into responsive pedagogy and concrete classroom action that attended to their mutual interests and preferences.

Enacting Partnership through Identity Work and Re-positioning

Making a movie necessitated a shift in teacher and student identities and positioning in order to successfully support student/teacher co-governance. Lincoln attended to identity design explicitly, that is, he thought through how he would engage with the students in a role that was qualitatively different from his teacher role and how they would engage with him and with each other through qualitatively different identities also. The classroom was transformed into a film studio, where students participated as ‘film workers’ to make the movie and Lincoln ‘contracted’ to the film studio as a ‘consultant’.

He ‘clocked on and off’ when shifting between a ‘teacher’ and a ‘consultant’ identity throughout the day to maintain the coherence and integrity of the film studio experience for the students in a way that allowed him also to manage the demands of the school-wide curriculum and support his students as needed.
When schoolwork unrelated to the movie intruded on the movie-making project, the students were encouraged to engage with this work as ‘child actors’. Child actors routinely complete school requirements through Correspondence School (distance learning) when they are on a movie job. Lincoln introduced this protocol to the class by reading the students a story about child actors completing school work on set by distance learning. This also linked the curriculum work of the movie project to real-world practice beyond school, further addressing the students’ pedagogical preferences for coherence and real-world relevance of classroom curriculum.

Lincoln set up an additional student/student partnership structure to further facilitate student decision-making. He instituted a film industry decision-making hierarchy that the students had learnt about during their initial inquiry. A production team of five students was elected by the class and assumed overall decision-making authority for the movie and leadership of their classmates to make the movie, Lincoln recognised his new role and stated: “At the moment I am just working as a facilitator. So there are students who are above me in class and they get to make the final decisions.”

Lincoln consulted to this student production team as and when they invited him. He was clear he would be bound by their decisions. Lincoln observed that when he stepped out of an active decision-making role students stepped up to lead and to suggest process ideas of how to make the movie and some of the roles that would be needed. “I have tried to take myself completely out of the process and already having done that this morning you can see that a number of students have actually stepped up to say, ‘I will take a lead on some different parts’”.

Negotiating success criteria within and for the movie making provided a nexus for co-governance that enacted student ownership of the project and Lincoln observed: “The students were coming up with success criteria and ideas for other students for parts of the project and that was giving them quite a lot of ownership for it”.

Lincoln’s intention to share decision-making with students at a governance level was pivotal. This intention focused students’ decisions on the collective learning of all students in the class. It provided an aspirational reference point for adapting familiar pedagogical practices such as inquiry learning processes and for focusing the parameters of the student/teacher partnership.

Co-governance Partnerships: Challenges of Investing Decision-making Power in a Few

Nuanced challenges relating to investing decision-making power with a few students as a way to enact co-governance emerged. Initially, the students in the main class enjoyed the student/student decision-making hierarchy—enacted through the production team—until it evolved to resemble the existing student/teacher power relationship it replaced. Secondly, the production team increasingly found themselves challenged to lead the class, the movie and their own internal team dynamics.
In relation to the first challenge, the main authority for student-student decision-making was invested in the production team, an authentic decision-making hierarchy that suited the context of film making. The production team negotiated the structure of the film studio with their classmates through a class meeting decision-making forum which they led. This structure facilitated all students within the class to participate, at least initially, in devising the departments and departmental responsibilities of the movie and the roles for which they wanted to audition.

[The teacher] wasn’t taking part in it so it was cool that us kids got to hand over, then we would have like producers and directors and that like in charge of us … it’s cool, people your same age being in charge of you. (Lulabelle)

They appeared to see making the movie as a substantial project that offered them real responsibility.

However, while the influence the production team exercised largely sustained their team’s engagement throughout the project, the engagement of the broader class waned beyond the initial co-construction of the movie departments and responsibilities. For example, Captain Underpants, who was positioned as the director with overall responsibility for the movie, found the whole experience highly engaging: “I think I’m probably at the peak for responsibility and stuff since I’m the Director … because I get to choose what happens”. However, some students without overt responsibility for ‘departments’ in the movie project became increasingly disenchanted with being left out of decisions; for example, writing the script.

The script, well if you put your hand up it wouldn’t get changed and so yeah … ‘cause some people put their hand up and said different ideas and the producers are just like ‘yep’ and just kept going and like you had a good idea and then you’d tell them and they would just keep going and wouldn’t really listen … so there was really no point. (Hityu)

In fact, the first decision the production team made was to exclude the class from electing the movie director. They took an ‘executive decision’ to appoint Captain Underpants based on his past experience with movie projects. It appears those students without positional authority in the movie felt less powerful and engaged, and the way in which the production team operated isolated the majority of the class from real ownership of the project.

In the end, despite a strong start, the movie making stalled due to growing student disillusionment with the pace of production and their largely passive role within the pre-production process. Jerry, one of the executive producers, reflected on this state of affairs noting, “I would probably have started filming things earlier and then since we’re [quite late into it and] we still haven’t started filming, and I probably would get more people involved”.

The differing views of students based on whether or not they perceived a sense of responsibility and investment in the movie project raises a dilemma about how strategies to enact student influence may also clash with student voice goals of co-
PEOPLE YOUR SAME AGE BEING IN CHARGE

governance in practice. The hierarchical film studio structure was authentic to real world film operations, but limited the base of student influence in the project to the production team. Decision-making through the film studio structure came to resemble the traditional student/teacher power relationship it replaced.

In relation to the second challenge, it was not long, before issues around the production team’s capacity to lead the class movie emerged. Mid-way through the movie project this struggle came to a head when Captain Underpants, the movie director, asked Lincoln for more help during a consultant/production team meeting stating, “Another thing we decided was we think you should help us a little bit more ’cos we’re not being really productive”. He reflected on this request for help: “[Lincoln] had quite a lot of involvement at the start by like putting all his ideas in and, but he kind of stepped out a bit but it was a bit too much so we haven’t made much progress since he did step out”.

One production team student reflected that active teacher assistance was needed to guide student leadership, even noting an ideal proportion for teacher and student levels of ownership in the partnership. Dahlia suggested “About 25/35 like the kids should do most of the work but the teacher has to be there to help them and guide them sorta, and yeah make sure they’re doing the right thing”.

Lincoln also reflected on the capacity to govern required of the production team to lead the class to make the movie, and how this showed up in the social dynamics within their team. The production team invoked disciplinary practices with each other as they struggled with their internal team dynamics:

The kids are saying in the production video before, “this is your third warning, we have had enough of you”. And this is to Mark! Mark is a cool kid but he is just distracting them all the time. (Lincoln)

It was not until the production team hit the limits of their capacity to lead that they stepped up to ask for what they needed and their voice came through. Lincoln valued this direction from the production team noting how it enabled him to contribute responsively to their needs.

Probably the big thing for me would have been the kids coming out at the end, telling me what they wanted from me, in terms of my support … it was quite cool, having them actually say to me, “hey can you help us with this?”, or “what would you do at this stage?” Then it is nice to actually feel appreciated, like hey, I have just taught you something. (Lincoln)

It was these emergent issues that provided the opportunity for the students, and Lincoln in his consultant identity, to generate what was needed to enact their reconfigured partnership supporting students to lead where this was needed.

VALUE AND COMPLEXITIES OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

Planning the partnership and how an intervention will be supported is a vital aspect of successful youth-adult partnerships (Camino, 2005), and I would argue for classroom-based student/teacher partnerships focused on student voice also. In the
Lincoln class case presented in this chapter, student/teacher and student/student partnership structures were explicitly planned but with an emphasis on the product of the partnership—the movie—rather than sufficiently on the ongoing negotiation of what each partner needed to be able to do to successfully embody their expanded role. These challenges, coupled with the ten-week timeframe for the class inquiry, meant that at the end of the ten-week school term only a trailer for ‘Murderhouse’ had been made.

The example highlights the complexity of enacting student voice as governance partnerships between teachers and students and between students themselves. These partnerships require explicit attention to identity work to carve out the new roles both teachers and students will take on. However, explicit attention to identity by itself is not enough; attention to ongoing capacity building to enable both teachers and students to take up these new identities is needed also. As Camino (2005) notes, it is unreasonable to expect youth to move into leadership and organisational roles without explicit attention to their capacity to lead and organise. But this is not as simple as it sounds.

The Lincoln class example demonstrates how pedagogical structures devised to support student voice partnerships, whilst appearing helpful on the surface, may in practice hinder these same goals. The film studio structure contributed the curriculum coherence the students said they preferred but replaced a traditional student/teacher top-down decision-making hierarchy with a top-down student hierarchy which resulted in the production team acting as a de facto teacher. They made ‘executive decisions’ that excluded their peers from decision-making instead of building a more horizontal system of influence with their classmates.

Concomitantly, partnership work with educators also requires explicit focus on how to engage and interact with youth in new ways that afford them influence and elevate their status. This planning should not be limited to how partnerships are initially conceptualised. Lincoln deliberately attended to such capacity building at the project’s outset through explicit identity and positioning work and by locating the student/teacher and student/student partnership structure within the familiar context of inquiry and film-making. However, his concept of sharing power with students, based around ‘handing over’ power, led him to step out of an active teacher decision-making role and, in the process, unwittingly withdrawing his organisational and leadership resources from students. Ongoing reflexive critique of professional beliefs and available pedagogies emerges as vital to partnership orientations of student voice, readily espoused but difficult to enact in practice.

Despite these issues the production team students and students within the student research group experienced an attempt at reciprocity and governance-level influence beyond rhetoric in their relationship with their teacher. The curriculum for ten weeks was organised around their pedagogical preferences and their interest in film-making. Together they constructed meaningful curriculum and pedagogy responsive to their espoused collective needs, interests and aspirations, though not fully and not without significant challenges. In many ways the movie project represents an example of student/teacher co-governance that was ambitious, authentic and that engaged the students’ imagination. At the same time it suggests that enacting student voice through a contemporary partnership orientation remains
problematic, foregrounding the need for capacity building and ongoing reflexive critique of the identities, pedagogical strategies and notions of power available for the challenge.

NOTES

1 New Zealand schools are assigned a decile rating that describes the socio-economic community they draw students from. A decile rating of 1 indicates a school is one of 10 percent with the highest proportion of students drawn from the lowest socio-economic communities. A decile rating of 10 indicates a school is one of 10 percent that have the lowest proportion of students drawn from low socio-economic communities. A school’s decile rating is reviewed every five years based on national census data.

2 Two-year school type catering for the schooling of Years Seven and Eight students (ages 11–13).

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2. RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

An Example from Early Childhood Education/Early Years Settings

INTRODUCTION

It is said that research is an opportunity to extend knowledge, solve problems, answer questions, illuminate situations and disturb the silence (Mutch, 2005). Researching with young children can provide a small window from which the adult can potentially see, feel and hear the child’s perspective. In order for the child to share their views with the adult, time and a relationship based on trust are required to open the window. When explored and then revealed through research, the child’s perspectives can indeed illuminate situations and disturb what was unexplored silence.

This chapter draws on data from a MEd Leadership thesis “Where have all the children gone? Experiences of children, parents and teachers in a changing early childhood education (ECE) service” (Hawkes, 2014), to examine the creation of partnerships when researching with children, their families and the ECE teachers. To begin, the chapter questions the inclusion of children within research with reference to rights of the child discourse. The above study is then briefly explained and the creation and enactment of partnerships with the children, their families and the ECE teachers is discussed. The focus of the chapter then examines the ethical and methodological aspects of the processes used to generate data with the research participants, in particular children. Highlighted within the chapter are aspects and examples for researchers’ consideration prior to designing research and generating data with young children.

WHY RESEARCH WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

Over the past years of teaching within ECE services, I have observed many changes. These changes have been driven by government policy, society, community and family need; they form the base to my study (for more detail please refer to Hawkes, 2014). In addition to hearing adult’s views and their assumed perspective on behalf of the child, I wanted to hear the child’s perspective, directly from the child. Researching with young children provided me with a privileged opportunity to hear their perspectives.

Central to the decision to include children within the study as active contributors are my beliefs and values of childhood and the position of the child within society. I hold firm to the view of children as active citizens within their social
communities and as citizens of the world with associated rights and a people who have perspectives on all matters affecting them (Mitchell, 2013). This research position respects the child’s rights as stated within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and with particular reference to Article 12 that states:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations, 1989, p. 3)

Honouring the rights of the child and considering the child as the expert in their own life required that I, the researcher, took the time to listen to the child’s perspective and acknowledge both their right to express themselves and their right to be silent (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). Within the research I created a space to listen to the child and therefore honour the child’s rights.

In acknowledging the child’s rights discourse and the important place this discourse has in improving the lives of children, I agree with Kjørholt, Moss, and Clark (2005) who identify the need to understand both the world and the child’s relationship to the world. The foundation to this understanding and relationship is listening; listening to the hundreds and thousands of codes and symbols each child uses to communicate and express him or herself, and listening to the child with sensitivity and openness. As Rinaldi (2006) states, this level of listening requires not just our ears but all of our senses. Research that seeks to understand the child’s relationship to the world firstly requires a relationship with the child and the formulation of a partnership. This partnership creates the opportunity to research with the child rather than research on the child and can therefore provide time to listen deeply to the child. Within this time assumptions can dissipate, multiple truths can be revealed and the child’s rights can be upheld.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Following respectful, sensitive and ethical practice is essential within all aspects of educational research, particularly when researching with young children. As Finch (2005) states, children can be vulnerable within research; therefore a great deal of care is required.

Ethical considerations were to the fore from the inception of my study. Rigorous justification of the research topic, procedures for recruiting participants and obtaining their informed consent to participate within the study were all required as part of the formal ethical approval process. Detailed consent forms were developed to ensure children understood the research and the research process. Confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants and the ECE service required the safe guarding of their identities with the use of pseudonyms. Issues of potential harm to the participants meant I needed to explain participant rights to decline to participate or withdraw from the study and to honour and respect this possibility throughout the study. Arrangements for participants to receive information were addressed by constantly keeping them updated of the research progress. Conflicts of interest
surrounding my relationship with the participants and the ECE service were considered as were social and cultural matters. I continuously consulted with the head teacher to ensure all matters were being considered and sought the advice of a culture advisor. Underpinning all these ethical matters were my personal morals and values that hold central the wellbeing of children.

THE STUDY

I am a fully qualified ECE teacher with over 25 years experience. My study took place in 2014 in an independent, community based, not for profit ECE service in Aotearoa New Zealand. The service is managed by a voluntary parent board, has a part time administrator and a fully trained and registered teaching staff of one full time head teacher and four part time teachers. The service is licensed for 30 children and those attending come from a range of ethnicities (80 percent identify as New Zealand European, 19 percent as Māori or Pasifika and 1 percent identify as other). The children can attend for a minimum of two 4.25-hour sessions per week, a maximum of 6.5 hours per day and up to a maximum 28 hours per week.

The participants within the study included the head teacher, four parents and their four children. The head teacher was a European Pākehā female between the age of 40 to 49. The four participating parents were all female New Zealand European/Pākehā between the age of 30 and 45. Two held occupations in the medical profession, one was a student and one was an artist. The participating children were three female and one male. The youngest was three years and seven months and the oldest was four years and nine months at the time of data generation. All participants, adults and children, selected pseudonyms for the purpose of the study.

The research was grounded in social constructionist theory that values meaning making processes as co-constructed through dialogue, experience, seeing, interpretation and understanding (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2005). The hermeneutic nature of the study and the need to gain understanding by interpreting the multiple lived truths of the participants meant that within one small yet complex social group there was the potential for multiple perspectives and multiple understandings of one topic. The methodology I used to gain these perspectives was based on Clark and Moss’s (2011) Mosaic approach. This is a participatory approach specifically designed for listening and responding to children’s perspectives. It is an approach that acknowledges both children and adults as research partners and co-constructors of meaning.

Next, I discuss the research partnerships I formed, and then I examine the Mosaic approach. Particular attention is given to each piece of the mosaic with examples to demonstrate reflexivity, adaptability and multiple methods of communicating with the children.

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS AS PART OF GAINING INFORMED CONSENT

Gaining informed consent from all participants was the first formal aspect of creating a partnership, in doing so I completed the following process.
Following the preliminary informal discussion of the study with the head teacher, I set up a formal meeting to explore the possibility of completing my study within service. I prepared an information sheet explaining the purpose, process and ethical responsibilities of myself, as the researcher. After gaining the head teacher’s formal consent, I was introduced to the governing parent committee and their president. The committee president formally consented to the study. The head teacher and her colleagues then selected four families that met the selection criteria I had created. For example, the child is aged three or four years, the child is able to communicate verbally, the child is likely to be willing to positively take part in the research, and their parent is likely to be willing to positively take part in the research.

The selected parents were initially approached by the head teacher to seek their potential expression of interest in the research. I was then informed of the parent’s interest and introduced directly to each of them and their children. An individual formal meeting with all involved parents was scheduled to explain the detail in the information sheet and gain the required consent. Interview times for the adults were confirmed and diarised.

In respect of families and caregivers who were not selected to be involved, an open information session was held at the ECE service to explain the purpose, process and ethics of the study and to answer any questions. I wanted to be inclusive and open with everyone who attended the ECE service. For example, I notified everyone of the proposed time frame of the research, assured them that no photographs of people would be published, informed them that a poster would be placed on the notice board on the days that the children were generating the photographic data, and that I would make the research accessible to the ECE service when complete.

Gaining the consent of each participating child required a much longer time frame than the consent of the adults. I wanted to ensure that consent was gained in a manner that was respectful of the children’s age and understanding. Firstly, I endeavoured to build a relationship with the children. On my first day at the ECE service I was introduced to all the attending children at the first mat time. I explained that while I was at their ECE service I would be gathering information for a big book I was writing about some of the children, their mums and dads and the teachers at their ECE service and that I would be asking some of them to assist me. In consultation with the head teacher, I was introduced as a visiting teacher rather than a researcher; we simply felt this would be easier to explain.

After my introduction I spent time within the daily programme at the ECE service in the hope I would become familiar to everyone. I attended the ECE service on most days over a month; the first two weeks I planned as time to become familiar with the four children that had been identified as potential co-researchers. I considered these children needed to trust and feel comfortable with me in order to agree to a research partnership. The second two weeks I had planned as data generation. However, I quickly became aware that spending time only with the four children would not be beneficial to any of us. The situation felt too intense. I had a strong sense of the fragility of my research position and the research
relationship required when working with children. I was aware how easily the selected children could say no to the pending ethical consent. I noted in my journal:

[There is] value in spending time with the other children as potential research children are very aware of me and my interest in them. They are watching me, they seem to be checking me out. Asking if I am a real teacher. I have a strong feeling of being vetted. (Hawkes, 2014, personal research journal)

The children were observing me as much as I was observing them. With this in mind I quickly changed strategy and shifted into a position that felt more respectful of all the children at the ECE service. I relaxed and spent more time with all the children, engaging in regular teaching interactions with them.

On my seventh day of attendance at the ECE service I felt that each of the four identified children’s confidence in me had been gained. I shared the child’s consent form with them individually. The consent form consisted of a simple explanation of the study and a request to mark the boxes linked with how they agreed to generate data. These boxes had both sentence explanations and pictures to assist the child’s comprehension. The form had a request for a pseudonym and a statement of how they could remove themselves from the study. In addition to the form, it was my intent to be constantly mindful of how comfortable the child was with any aspect of the data generation. With consent agreed to, the research partnership could begin.

METHODS OF DATA GENERATION FOR WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

With the partnership established with the participating children, parents and teacher, we were ready to begin data generation. As stated earlier the data generation approach I selected for the study was the multi-method Mosaic approach. The Mosaic approach brings together a range of methods for listening that acknowledges children and adults as co-constructors of meaning. It combines the visual with the verbal to create both an individual and collective perspective (Clark & Moss, 2011). Tisdall (2015) state the Mosaic approach is in tune with children, accommodating their preferences in communication so that if one method does not work for a child another method might. The tools I utilised within the Mosaic were semi-structured interviews with the children, parents and the head teacher, children’s photography, a walking interview with each child and interviews with the children based on their learning journals. These tools are discussed in detail next.

THE PIECES OF THE MOSAIC

Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews provided an opportunity for me to gain a deeper insight into the lived experiences of the people within the study, to document their stories and seek out their unspoken ‘voice’. I was aware within the interview process and throughout the study of respecting participant ideas and mitigating my
potential dominance, thereby allowing space for the co-construction of shared understanding.

In the interview with the head teacher, I asked questions relating to the recent changes in operation of the service and the head teacher’s values, beliefs and perspectives surrounding the changes. Additionally, I asked about the opportunities and experiences that the children have for accessing the wider community while attending the ECE service. In the interviews with the parents, I asked questions about their choice of ECE for their child, the changes that occurred at the ECE service and the effect these changes had on themselves and their child. I also asked the parents about their perspective on their child’s experiences in the wider community while at the ECE service. The third set of interviews were with the children in conjunction with other pieces of the mosaic.

The interviews with the adults took place in a range of locations that were decided upon between each participant and me. These venues included a quiet room at the ECE service that was easily separated from the main children’s play area, the participant’s own home and a local coffee shop that had a very quiet outdoor space. At the completion of the interview, I gave each parent a small token of my gratitude and a book for their participating child.

The head teacher offered the teachers’ office as a quiet space for the children’s interviews. However, as this area was not part of the children’s regular play area, I felt the children could be too easily distracted in this location. I wanted to ensure the children felt comfortable and at ease within the interview. I therefore proposed the interviews took place in a room that was familiar to them and part of the main play area. This room had a glass door we could close to reduce the nearby sounds yet still feel connected to the external environment. Within the room there was a small child-sized table with child-sized seats that the child or children and I sat at while talking. With one interview the child insisted on bringing the four pieces of Lego she was playing with prior to the interview. Cameron (2005) states that children can find it comforting to do something with their hands while they talk within interview situations; this kinaesthetic distraction seemed to relax the child within the interview. Within another interview the two children wanted to be in the room together; in listening to and agreeing with the children’s request, we continued with the interview together. The interview questions are provided in the following section on the child’s photography.

Children’s Photography and Photographs

Photography was utilised by the children to capture their experiences at the ECE service. Einarsdóttir (2007) states that when the child is the photographer they are seen as strong, competent and in charge of their learning. Within the study digital cameras were given to each of the four participating children. These cameras were shock and waterproof. Time was required to familiarise the children with the cameras, as they did not have experience with this technology; a minimum of two practice sessions were provided. Lanyards were attached to the cameras to give children the free use of their hands when they were not taking photographs. On the
day photography data generation took place, the children were encouraged to take photographs of “What you see at pre-school”. The photographs were then printed into two A4 size booklets with nine photographs evenly sized and spaced on each page, so as not to give preference to any photographs. One copy of the child’s photography booklet was utilised within the interview process and the other booklet was given to the child to keep. A short interview then took place with the children using the following questions as a guide: Can you show me your five favourite photographs? Can you tell me about these photographs? Why did you choose these photographs? What were you thinking when you took these?

The four children collectively took 203 photographs. The photographs included 115 of people, including children, friends, teachers and visitors to the ECE service during the time of data collection. For example, Batman (pseudonym) selected a series of seven photographs rather than five as his favourites. All seven photographs were of a visiting father with his racing motorbike (see Figure 1). He stated, “All [of my photographs] are my favourite. I want to take them all home and show my mum”. Forty-three photographs were of places; for example, the art area, resource cupboard, the wall display area, swings, climbing frame area, sand pit, cubby house and play dough area and 45 were of things such as jigsaw puzzles, ball, books, boat and Lego.

The use of the cameras was very popular with the children. Additionally, the children at the ECE service who were not participating in the study displayed great interest in using the cameras. I therefore ensured the cameras were available to the other children while they were not being used by the four participating children within the study.

The Children Sharing Their Learning Journals

The children’s personal learning journals were examined with the children to provide another perspective. I asked the children to show me their favourite learning story and then used the following three questions as a guide while looking at their selected story: Can you please tell me about this story? What was happening here? What were you thinking in this picture?

All four children were very eager to engage with this piece of the mosaic. They were all incredibly quick to show me their favourite entry, turning to it immediately. It was obvious to me that each child knew the exact entry that was
their favourite prior to me asking. For example, Jess (pseudonym) instantly selected her favourite learning story. It was of herself, as a three day old baby, visiting her brother’s ECE service (her current service) for the first time. This learning story was a direct copy of her brother’s learning story from three and a half years prior. Jess’s mother had returned a copy of this learning story for the teachers to insert in Jess’s learning journal as Jess loved it so much (Research field notes). This story is the first one in Jess’s learning journal.

Walking Interviews with the Children

Walking interviews with me being led by the child were carried out around the ECE service in what felt like the most relaxed and comfortable data generating method for the children. I used the following interview questions as a guide in the walking interview: Can you please take me to the place you like the best at [the ECE service]? Can you tell me why you like this place the best? Is there any place you don’t like at [the ECE service]? Can you take me there? Why don’t you like this place? Can you tell me why you come to [the ECE service]? How long do you spend at [the ECE service]?

The walking interviews allowed each child a freedom to talk verbally and non-verbally about their experiences at the ECE service. They provided me with an opportunity to listen to the child as they expressed their feelings with their words, their eyes and their bodies. Each of the children seemed relaxed as they freely led me to various places around the ECE service. Once again it was evident to me that each child knew the exact place at the ECE service that they liked the best and the place they did not like. The data from the walking interviews was illuminating to both the parents and the teachers at the ECE service.

For example, in one walking interview, Princess led me around the outdoor play area and pointed to the cubby house as being the place she did not like at the ECE setting. Princess did not verbally tell me why she did not like the cubby house. However, she screwed up her nose, scrunched up her face in dislike, lowered her eyes, dropped her chin to her chest and physically twisted her body in the opposite direction, away from the cubby house. I received a strong feeling of her dislike for the cubby house and valued her silent non-verbal communication with me.

At the presentation that I shared with the teachers, they were surprised about Princess’s revelation. However, after a moment of reflection, one of the teachers shared her knowledge of the cubby house. The teacher stated,

This could be because children shut the door and she [Princess] may not have been able to get out, some children take charge when playing in the cubby house and shut children in or out. (Research field notes)

Princess’s mother, Jane (pseudonym), had no idea that this was an area that Princess did not like. Jane explained that she did not know that Princess disliked any area at the ECE service. At the parent and children’s presentation of my research findings, I mentioned the cubby house and Princess once again did not verbalise her dislike but silently embodied this feeling for all attendees to see. She
screwed up her face and physically turned away from the photograph of the cubby house that her fellow participant, Georgia (pseudonym), had taken. Princess shook her head, reconfirming that she did not like this area.

Figure 2. Georgia’s (child pseudonym) photograph of the cubby house

REFLECTION ON AN UNEXPECTED ETHICAL ISSUE

Although ethical procedures were followed, an ethical issue arose after the data generation was complete. When I was establishing a relationship with the children participating within the research, there was one child who was very wary of me, preferring to regard me from afar. As the days went by, she slowly began to sit closer to me at mat times, find me in the playground and invite me to be part of what she was doing. Her trust in me was growing. This became particularly evident in week two when I attended an excursion with a small group of children. The child either sat next to me or held my hand for the entire trip. After the excursion I gained her consent to participate within the research. She took hundreds of practise photos prior to the day of data gathering. Her enthusiasm was contagious, as she then proceeded to teach the other children at the ECE service how to use the camera. It felt as if she was truly my research partner. Her trust in me felt very high. This was confirmed by her parents who said she spoke about me frequently at home and the photography she was doing with me at her ECE service.

After attending the ECE service for a month and collecting the data, it was time for me to leave. I said goodbye to all the children on my last day at mat time and gave them a book as a token of my gratitude, the same book I had given to the child research participants. I returned two weeks later at the end of a session and saw the child who had become so attached to me. She looked at me, she did not smile and then turned away. She would not engage in any conversation with me. I felt as though I had deceived her. She had trusted me, and perhaps believed that I would be there for the long term, and then I had left. I asked myself if I had caused her harm and questioned if I had broken the trust of how she understood and interpreted our relationship. Although I knew it was essential that researchers exercise great caution to minimise harm and protect research participants, I had not predicted this aspect of potential emotional harm to children as partners in my research.
HAWKES

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a small overview of my research. I have included examples of the value in taking time to create research partnerships with children. I have explored the mixed method Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) that is respectful and sensitive of the varying communication modes of children. I demonstrated the use of mixed methods assists in gaining rich insights from children, allowing the opportunity for new knowledge to be developed and shared and situations to be illuminated. I also discussed the fragility of the research relationship and the challenges that can present themselves within the field. It is my hope that some of the experiences I have shared will assist others as they seek to acknowledge that children have perspectives on all matters affecting them by forming respectful research partnerships with them.

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