

‘I want to share this video with you today.’ Children’s participation rights in childhood research.

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Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations [UN], 1948) encompasses the rights of every human, including children. However, children have additional, specific rights enshrined in the UN's (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); these acknowledge their vulnerable status. Results from the Australian Human Rights Commission's (2013) report on children's rights revealed that more than 60 per cent of the children and young people who participated in the survey were unaware of their rights. This finding calls for further action in educating children and young people about their rights as humans and citizens.

Children, like all other people, hold the right to education, including being educated about and in human rights, as articulated in Article 26, UDHR (UN, 1948) and in Article 29, CRC (UN, 1989). Research that involves children has made efforts to embed rights, inform children about their rights (mostly in reference to the CRC), and conceptualise them in children's rights-based research frameworks (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew, & Waterson, 2009; Lundy, 2007; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011). Such frameworks contribute to contemporary efforts to realise human rights, particularly children's rights, in research where adult researchers have traditionally had more powerful roles. While ethical frameworks acknowledge rights arising from the UDHR, such as human dignity, the CRC is 'the first and most complete international instrument to assert a full range of rights for children.' This has convinced more and more researchers that 'ethical research involving children

should recognise children's entitlement to fundamental human rights, alongside those particular rights relevant to their status as children' (Graham, Powell, & Truscott, 2016, p. 87). The study presented here is anchored in children's rights-based research and has relevance for Human Rights Education (HRE). The paper addresses the need for researcher reflexivity, if children's rights in the interactional research context are to be realised. The findings provide insights into to how children demonstrate their awareness of having rights when they participate in research. Rights awareness has been identified as one of 'six educational categories of teaching and learning children's human rights' and can be seen as a foundation for continuous HRE (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016, p. 6).

This paper presents results from my doctoral study, which explored 4/5-year-old children's perspectives on play (Huser, 2018). It focuses on results that generate new knowledge of children's participation in research. Involving children in research and researching children's perspectives makes high demands on ethical practice and requires the creation of 'ethical spaces for children' (Palaiologou, 2014, p. 692). Hence, in addition to ethical standards that conform to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (NHMRC, 2007) and ethical key domains (harms and benefits; informed consent; privacy and confidentiality; and payment and compensation) [Graham et al., 2016], one of the study's research questions asked: 'What characterises ethical spaces for researching with children?' (Huser, 2018, p. 114). The ways in which children participated provided departure points for considering their perspectives. Exploring how they experienced their participation in my study has contributed to the sparse amount of studies of how children express assent and dissent or choose to participate (Birbeck & Drummond, 2015; Dockett, Einarsdóttir & Perry, 2012).

Literature review and theoretical background

The epistemological pillars of my study are based in Childhood Studies: recognition of children's agency, competences and rights, and childhood as a social construction (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002). While these principles are challenging ones, they enable us to research children's perspectives (Christensen & James, 2008; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Childhood Studies combines concepts from the Sociology of Childhood (Corsaro, 1997; James & James, 2004) and children's rights; there is an acknowledgment of existing hierarchies where children have been positioned as subordinate to adults, with adults often in control of children's freedom (James, 2009). Childhood Studies has explicitly addressed children's right to express their views freely – stated in Article 12 of the CRC (UN, 1989). The UN Committee (2009) has paid great attention to Article 12 and recognised it, together with the right to non-discrimination, the right to life and development, and the primary consideration of the child's best interests, as one of the four general principles of the CRC. This recognition 'highlights the fact that this article establishes not only a right in itself, but should also be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights' (para. 2).

The right of freedom of expression with respect to children's choices prompts us to consider how to educate children about their rights and how we may enable children to realise these rights in research contexts. Children need to be informed and make decisions about their participation rights. The study aimed to provide children with participatory and agentic experiences. This aim is consonant with the

six educational categories of early childhood HRE; involvement, agency, awareness, citizenship, respect for rights, and social change (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016). There is a focus on the right to participation in children's rights-based research. Despite any understandings that might have been gained, there has been criticism of such studies of children below school-age. It has been pointed out that while children have been acknowledged as rights holders, educating them about their rights has been neglected (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Quennerstedt, 2016). Article 12 underlines that children's rights are not to be reduced to protection and provision rights based on their 'vulnerability' and 'dependency on adults' (UN Committee, 2009, para. 18). However, there has been much discussion around the implementation of Article 12 (Lundy et al., 2011); it remains a problematic, complex and delicate issue that has largely relied on adults' epistemological beliefs and views of the child.

Childhood Studies has promoted and partially realised children's rights, through participatory research that has considered the most suitable ways to design rights-based approaches where children can express their views (Beazley et al., 2009; Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015; Lansdown, 2010; Lundy et al., 2011). Approaches include the introduction of assent procedures for children (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011), as well as acknowledging children's diverse representations of their experiences and views (Lansdown, 2010).

Despite parental consent being the only legal requirement for children's participation in many countries (Dockett & Perry, 2010), researchers have stressed the necessity to also seek children's 'active agreement' (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998, p. 339, emphasis in original). Harcourt and Conroy (2011), conducting research with 3/5-year-old children on their childhood experiences in Australia, created an assent ritual: children signed with their name and wrote 'OK' on a piece of paper at the beginning of each interaction with the researcher. Procedures, including seeking assent orally or by using child assent forms which they can 'sign' in their preferred ways at the start of a study, are important. However, there is a 'provisional' aspect to children's assent (Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2013). Children might be challenged to estimate time periods between their first contact with researchers and the finalisation of a study. Hence, agreement at the start gives no indication of whether they want to be involved for the whole period (Dockett & Perry, 2010). The study's procedures acknowledged this through continuously reconfirming that children still wished to participate.

Some researchers have looked closely at the richness of children's communication, including bodily and facial expressions and play actions, to gain insight into their perspectives (Lansdown, 2010; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015). An Icelandic study explored the communication of 1/3-year-old children in their play, noticing how they engaged in meaning-making through bodily expressions (Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015). Whilst children have demonstrated their competence to express their understandings verbally, there can also be some challenges. For example, a boy in an Australian study struggled to find the words to describe his activity (Theobald et al., 2015), and children in a German study told the researcher that they did not know what to say about their play (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2010). In fact, they shared their perspectives about their play through playing a game of Pokémon cards. Such results raise questions about methodological decisions to include preverbal children or children who prefer nonverbal expression. Video-recording has provided technical benefits in collecting data, as the video-camera captures not only what children contribute verbally, but also records their actions.

Children's research participation has been approached either through adapting methods that are commonly used in research with adults, or through developing specific methods (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). The latter approach has brought a rapid development in 'child-friendly' methods, as well as discussion of methodological concerns (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Palaiologou, 2014). These methods have sometimes been criticised for their meaningless application, and oversimplification of complex ethical and methodological decision-making issues (Palaiologou, 2014).

Child-friendly methods have arisen from the perspective that children and adults have different expertises and competencies, and hence research methods need to be tailored for children. At best, these methods are designed to enable every child to participate in the recognition of their right to freedom of expression (Beazley et al., 2009); at worst, the methods stem from age- and development-based maturity models (Christensen & Prout, 2002) that deny children's competence. Drawing, painting and play have become prominent in research with children because of their familiarity and the diverse ways in which they promote expression. In addition, language and facial expressions are also considered as forms of expression that respond to the UN Committee's (2009) stated requirements for implementing Article 12. However, child-friendly techniques fail to address the argument that full recognition of the competent child implies that there is no need for special methods. Even more importantly, they ignore and fail to challenge power hierarchies based on children's marginal social status and their powerlessness in adult-led environments (Punch, 2002). Genuine rights-based participatory research applies appropriate methods for any participating person (Punch, 2002), responds to children's wishes for equal opportunities to be researched properly (Hill, 2006), and gives children the same respect as adults (Dockett, Einarsdóttir & Perry, 2011).

Sound and just research uses methods that are appropriate and ethically and thoughtfully chosen. Christensen and Prout (2002) provide a 'collectively available set of ethical values' (p. 492) with the principle of 'ethical symmetry.' My study applied this principle; I asked the children if they wished to participate and fully informed them about their right to participation, even though they had not reached the age of legal consent (Dockett et al., 2013). This practice acknowledges the first steps towards HRE for children; through children experiencing agency (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016) and by being able to make decisions, exercise choice, and renegotiate their participation (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

There have been a number of efforts to create conditions for children's participation in research (Lansdown, 2010), as well as attempts to consider the ethical challenges specific to research involving children (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Graham et al., 2016). There have also been attempts to design methodologies that encourage active participation. However, in spite of all of this work, little is known about how children choose to participate (Beazley et al., 2009; Birbeck & Drummond, 2015; Dockett et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2016). Palaiologou (2014) proposes 'creating ethical spaces for children' (p. 692) in order to meet the requirements of ethical practice.

One aim of my study was to identify ethical spaces and describe what these can look like from children's perspectives. The findings show that the children made decisions and created their own conditions for assent, as well as initiating processes to express their ideas in creative, nonverbal ways, such as through play. These outcomes are important because they provide departure points for reflecting on and

realising children's participation rights in research. I conclude by making recommendations that might empower children and overcome power imbalances. This paper contributes to transdisciplinary debates on the rights of our youngest citizens; this has implications for the promotion of children's rights in research, but can also inform HRE.

Setting and sample

The study was undertaken with a group of 4/5-year-old children at a childcare centre in Australia. I opted for only one research site, basing this decision on my belief in the importance of establishing strong relationships with participants, particularly with young children. The sample was not pre-specified but rather grew during my time at the site. The intention was to undertake the study with some eight children; however, many of the other children in the room participated in a range of ways. Altogether, 17 children were involved, and a further nine were invited by their participating peers to join them. All participating children were four years old at the beginning of the study. I visited the centre 2-3 days per week over a period of eight months; this allowed sufficient time for familiarisation and relationship-building before gathering data.

Children's voluntary participation was a crucial ethical requirement. I sought their informed assent, rather than only obtaining parental permission. Giving informed assent had a formal procedure, and there was an ongoing process in seeking children's assent for each interaction. I read to them from a booklet I had designed for this study that explained the study content and methods. This step informed children about their right to join or to say 'no.' The children signed their own assent booklet by writing their names in it or drawing themselves. They could also indicate assent by circling an emoticon that portrayed what they felt about taking part. The time invested in relationship-building during familiarisation was very important for the ongoing assent procedures. It enabled me to put children's reactions into context, interpret them authentically and become attuned to them (Dockett et al., 2012). For example, even if children had given assent through circling the emoticon and said 'yes' when asked before I filmed their play, their body language might indicate that they did not really want to be filmed.

Data generation

The research was conducted using a qualitative constructivist grounded theory design for data generation and analysis. This allowed data to emerge in interaction between the researcher and the participants. Data were generated and analysed in a simultaneous, cyclical process, aiming to 'construct theories "grounded" in the data themselves' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). At the same time, research questions and relevant literature provided points of departure (Charmaz, 2006).

In my study, data were generated through group conversations with video stimuli. I took video-recordings of children in their play ('play-videos') and then showed them the play-videos. After a group of children had been video-recorded I invited them to watch their play-video and to participate in group conversations with me and their playmates. Explorations of children's perspectives on play, group discussions, video-recordings and video-stimulated reflections have provided opportunities for children to share their views (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2010; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015; Theobald, 2012). Videos can act 'as a catalyst for children to reflect' (James, Bearne, & Alexander, 2004, p. 117), and the play-videos

stimulated a small group of children to talk about their play experiences. On a few occasions, I took photographs instead of video-records. This was sometimes necessary in order to overcome technical challenges, or to respond flexibly to changes in the educators' daily routines.

Most children were eager to discuss the play-videos. However, there were several occasions where children declined – verbally or nonverbally. In addition to using the booklet explaining the research processes and asking for children's permission in the beginning, I continued to seek their assent and wait for their approval. Only with the children's agreement did I video-record their play, show their play-videos to groups of children and ask them questions about their play-videos. The provisional, ongoing assent procedures required me to reflect carefully. An unwillingness to participate might be expressed by silence, and not telling me to turn off the camera does not necessarily indicate assent (Broadhead & Burt, 2012).

Group size, length of time and frequency of conversations varied in relation to the children's attention, assent and interest. The conversations were audio-recorded for voice quality, which made transcription easier, and video-recorded to capture children's nonverbal expressions. The latter consideration reflects my position on children as rights holders:

Implementation of Article 12 requires recognition of and respect for nonverbal forms of communication such as play, body language, facial expression, or drawing and painting, through which very young children make choices, express preferences and demonstrate understanding of their environment. (Lansdown, 2010, p. 12)

With regard to ethical principles of confidentiality and privacy and the right to privacy stated in Article 16 (UN, 1989), the visual data were transcribed for future dissemination.

Methodologically, it was recognised that children feel comfortable in small groups and when they are engaged with friends; these conditions provide a stage for sharing and extending ideas spontaneously (Corsaro, 1997). This setting created space for the children to co-construct meaning explicitly with their peers, and there was a balance to the generational dominance of the adult researcher (Heinzel, Kränzl-Nagl & Mierendorff, 2012). However, the presence of peers who were playing close by was challenging. Group conversations often took place in the same space as where other children and their educators operated. Sometimes the other children were curious and approached the group who were watching their play-videos. The group stayed in the sight of the educators, in order to protect participating children and myself, the researcher. However, this meant that my research activities occurred in the same location as the daily activities of the centre, and this interfered with the children's opportunity to enjoy privacy when engaging with their play-videos.

In seven conversations, a group of children watched a set of play-videos. These included videos in which they themselves appeared, as well as videos of their peers. The first showings functioned purely to gain children's assent to share the videos with others. However, sometimes discussions developed from these initial viewings. In addition, some boys asked to re-watch one of their play-videos, with the conversation being recorded, and some girls wanted to watch the video-record of their conversation. Two boys gave me permission to audio-record the evolving conversation about their reflections on their assent booklets. All conversations were

transcribed, including descriptions of children's nonverbal expressions. In sum, the data consisted of 32 group conversations, totaling approximately 360 minutes of recorded conversation time.

Data analysis

Analysis of data followed a two-phase grounded theory technique; this consisted of an initial coding phase and a subsequent focused coding phase (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout coding, constant comparative methods gave analytical comparisons of the whole data set to find similarities and differences in children's contributions. Focused coding required reciprocal examination of the data to ensure the codes were analytically strong. Themes emerged from the data - children's research participation choices; children's strategies of giving assent; children's awareness of and reflections about participation rights; the processes by which children chose to participate. Apart from the inductively emerging themes, another departure point and structural tool to interpret the data was the notion of ethical spaces (Palaiologou, 2014). Analysis stayed consistent with constructivist grounded theory methods, since interpretation was grounded in both data and in pre-existing knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). To assist in organising and conducting the data analysis, I used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10 (QSR International Pty. Ltd., 2012).

Findings

The children varied in the ways they responded to my invitations to be filmed or photographed, join conversations, and share their play-videos and perspectives on play. They often simply agreed – through responding with 'yes' or nodding. However, there were times when a conditional assent was given, dissent was expressed or a child-initiated interaction occurred. It was in these moments that the children demonstrated they were aware of their participation rights or that they were reflecting on them.

Children's chosen forms of participation demonstrated them exercising and considering their participation right – often through nonverbal expressions. Some processes reflected how children connected with their peers during the group conversations. Participation processes, such as performing, provided much insight into children's choices of participation and their expressive creativity. In the following, I present examples of children's choices that bring time and space, creativity and relationships to the forefront. I will discuss how these provide spaces for reflection and how they can potentially overcome barriers to realising children's rights in research.

Children's conditions to participating – time and space

There was a formal procedure for seeking children's informed assent at the beginning of data collection, and I invited children to indicate their decision in their individual child assent booklet. In some cases, children thought about how they felt about joining the study. They could record this by circling an emoticon. Two boys considered circling both emoticons, the 'thumbs up' and the 'thumbs down.' One of the boys, Louis, left his decision open (Figure 1) and did not indicate either emoticon – a sign of his continuing negotiation about his participation. Both boys also discussed the 'unsure' emoticon, stressing that their participation was subject to constant change and could be re-negotiated. One girl decided to circle the 'unsure'

emoticon (Figure 2). This emoticon was originally used as a symbol to show the children they could ask questions in case they had not understood anything about their involvement in the study. However, the children interpreted the emoticon as the one they should circle to demonstrate they had not yet decided.

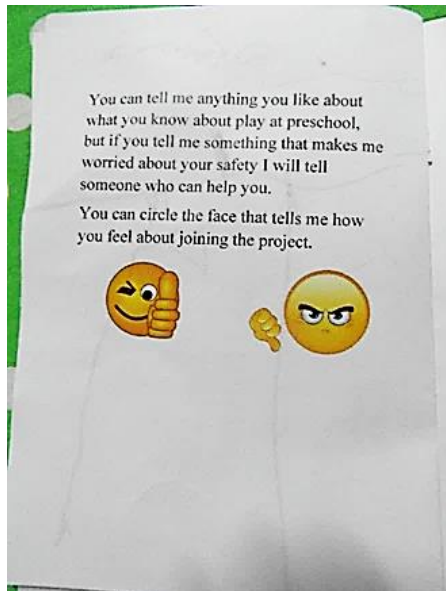


Figure 1: Louis's provisional consent.

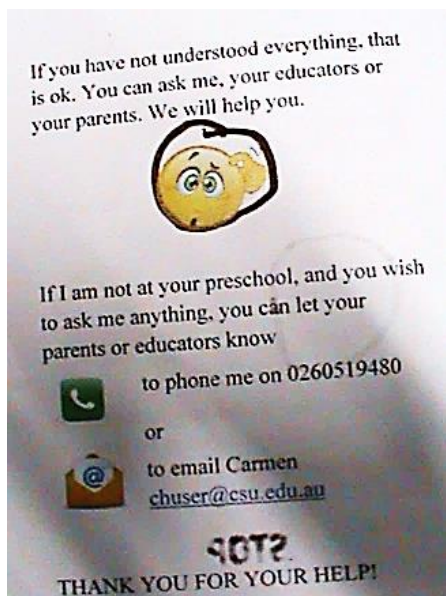


Figure 2: Sienna's assent: being unsure.

Seeking children's assent and ensuring they could make active, aware choices were basic aspirations of my ethical practice. When children linked their assent to a condition it was clear that they were exercising and reflecting on their participation right. Some children expressed their assent by responding with 'yes' when I invited

them to participate, while some nodded. Others went further and took the initiative, asking to ‘have another chat’ or to ‘tell everybody about my photo now,’ as two girls wished. Another example demonstrated a child’s decisions. Ethan’s reactions were situational, and this shows that children can change their opinion.

I: *Would you like to share some of your videos with other children?*
Ethan ((stands up)): *You can share all of the videos. Thank you.*

In this situation, Ethan told me that I could share all of the videos. On another day he clarified: ‘I want to share this video with you today.’ Ethan understands that he determines the conditions, that he has control and is able to limit his assent. Assenting does not mean giving me unrestricted, universal access. It is provisional for that day and for that particular video. Other children set different conditions, such as firstly telling peers about the play before showing a video.

Just like Ethan’s decision to time-limit his assent without withdrawing completely, other children decided to opt in and out after joining a group conversation. They sometimes decided to leave the conversation, while at other times they returned and re-engaged. Half of those children who left a situation asked or at least notified me about their wish to withdraw. Sometimes children asked for my permission to leave, despite my having explained that they could withdraw at any time. However, some children demonstrated their agency, such as Elsa who announced ‘I want to go outside now. I go outside,’ leaving without waiting for my response. Some children did not leave the space, but disengaged from the conversation for periods of time. For example, Scarlett and Sophia started a game of chase. They stayed close to the group, and eventually went back to chatting with the other children.

Children’s creative participation choices

The children contributed to the data in a number of ways, such as through gesture, bodily performance and play. For example, a group of boys talked about play that involved construction material. The boys had made Mobilo Transformers. While Louis explained each step, he showed me the actual transformations with his self-constructed toy:

Louis: *I’ll show you. You put the arms up ((changes the Mobilo)), you put the legs up ((changes the Mobilo)), and then it can transform into a bird. ((Changes the Mobilo, then holds up his figure in front of his eyes))*

Louis’s verbal explanations were repetitive but he varied the nonverbal information he gave through ‘showing and telling.’ Louis not only described the steps that it took to create a bird. He also used ‘building for an audience’ as a participation strategy, engaging with his audience – in this case, his peers and me. Louis also used his body to demonstrate the transformation, synchronising his actions with verbal descriptions:

Louis: *We put the legs on ((stands up)), we put the arms on ((stretches his arms)), and the heads on ((puts his hands on the head)), and the legs on ((gliding his hands down his legs)).*

This example shows that Louis made sense of his participation by using his body.

The importance of bodily performance was also apparent when two boys discussed a game they had invented. Their performance had the purpose of explaining play actions to me. Ethan and Leo chose to show me how to play the game, rather than clarifying its rules and actions.

Ethan: *Skidding. This was the skid one.*

I: *Skid one?*

Ethan: *Yeah, I'll show you.*

Leo: *Watch this, Ethan. Ethan.*

Ethan: *I take my shoes off, ok?*

((The boys both stand up. They run a few steps and fall sideways on the floor, while their legs slide in the direction of movement, and skid forwards.))

Leo: *This is how you do the skids. I'll show you. You do the skid. We just run –*

Ethan: *We run.*

Leo: *We run.* ((running))

Ethan: *So you do this. You do this.*

I: *Can I take the video to record this?*

Ethan: *Yeah, so you can see.* ((pause)) *Double super skid.* ((leans forward with one fist pointing in the direction of movement, then runs and skids))

((They laugh.))

Leo: *Like this, like this. You do this.* ((Runs, lets himself fall and rolls on the floor))

It seemed that it was easier to show their actions and just play, instead of describing the game to me. The children were able to demonstrate their play expertise, and it was very likely that playing made their participation more enjoyable. This also raised questions of whether such actions had created a space where they felt confident to engage with me and the study.

Children's participation choices and relationships

The children's engagement with the study occurred in a social space, not only with me as the researcher but with their peers. These relationships were crucial when it came to making decisions about participation, such as who had the right to watch a play-video, and whose right it was to refuse to share videos. In one example, Ethan noticed that he had already seen the play-video, and had agreed to share it with others. Chloe had not seen the video. I agreed with Ethan, explaining that they had watched the video with a different group of children – those he had been playing with. Chloe and Sophia started to reflect not only on the assent procedure but on everyone's right to participation: every child who was in the video had the right to watch it.

Chloe: *Haven't seen it, have I?*

Ethan: *I'm telling you, we already saw it in this room.* ((pointing to the floor))

I: *That's true, Ethan.*

Chloe: *There are other children who need to see it, Ethan.*

Sophia: *Yeah, we try to find Ro. Rose needs to be in this one.* ((points at the screen)) *Rose does. I can see Rose here.*

In the following months, the children demonstrated their growing awareness of giving assent through watching a video first before sharing with others. Sophia, in particular, showed interest in this. At one time she spotted Chloe in a play-video and told me to 'pause this [video] and I go and get Chloe.'

In contrast to the above example, the children used their right to exclude others. A child who had not been recorded could be sent away by those who had been. Ethan made use of his right to watch his video first before sharing it, and referred to an ownership that Louis could not claim: 'This is not your video. Louis. Is it alright if you go away?' Another right, the right to privacy, is closely linked to this example.

Having ownership and the right to privacy was a positive, empowering experience for the participating children, but there were moments where this power could be used to exclude others. While privacy issues made this completely legitimate, we need to think about the emotional impact of such exclusion. In one scenario, I later reflected whether I had contributed to Olinda's exclusion.

Olinda: Is there another one? With Sophia and Jessi?

I: Yeah, there is another one of Sophia and Jessica. You won't be in that video.

Jessica: And it depends if we want her to be in it, isn't it?

Sophia: Yeah.

((Sophia and Jessica lean over the audio recorder, heads together))

Jessica: And we don't want her to be in it.

Sophia: Yeah we don't want to be in it. OK?

Jessica: Yeah.

The three girls had just watched a video of their shared play experience, and Olinda wanted to know if there were more videos to come. I wanted to simply explain that the next video would only include Sophia and Jessica, but possibly gave these two girls a feeling of power. Jessica noticed that Olinda's participation was now dependent on her and Sophia's decision.

Discussion

This paper only gives snapshots of the overall study and the ways in which the children participated. However, it gives insight into how children exercise rights, from their perspective. The belief that children are competent rights holders was central to the research design. The findings show how children champion their right to participation, given that respect and consideration are given to their conditions and expressive forms of participating. The study also highlights the crucial role that relationships play. There is much to learn from ethical and methodological reflections about children's engagement.

Assent is a concept that needs to be understood within the situational limits of time and place. While researchers have emphasised voluntariness as an ethical principle for participation, practices for seeking children's assent also need to be provisional and renegotiable (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Dockett et al., 2012). Children might wish to take part at the time they are asked, but this is no indication that they want to be involved in the whole project (Dockett & Perry, 2010). There is also the option of being unsure (Dockett et al., 2012), which needs to be continuously borne in mind. And attention must be paid to children's signals about assent and the situation they find themselves in, such as Ethan's comments about the video I had taken.

Other children might use nonverbal expressions rather than express themselves verbally. Body language gives important information about children's decisions (Pálmadóttir & Einaradóttir, 2015). On some occasions, the children opted in and out of group conversations, walked around, played or had side conversations with a peer.

While some children often opted out and left conversations autonomously, making use of their right to withdraw, others asked for permission. Was this because they felt an obligation towards me or were they used to a degree of adult control of their activities (Mayall, 2002)? I noticed that the children waited for their educators to give permission to leave an activity. Power relationships are not uncommon in educational contexts. The importance of trust and an awareness of power imbalances remain continuing issues in research with children (Dockett et al., 2012).

Actions such as walking away or starting a game of chase require physical locations that are 'easily accessible spaces, where children can engage for a little or long time' (Dockett, Einaradóttir & Perry, 2009, p. 294). Such spaces accommodate children's need to have the freedom of opting in and out and if such physical freedom is provided, it is possible to enable withdrawal, which includes 'a right and one that they need not exercise if they had better things to do' (Hill, 2006, p. 78). On some occasions, playing could be interpreted as a strategy that children used to opt out. At other times, children played in order to share ideas.

While some children opted out of the group conversation by starting to play, others used play in order to participate and contribute to the conversation. Children's bodies are central to many of their strategies for creating meaning and sharing understandings (Pálmadóttir & Einaradóttir, 2015). Playing a game for an audience provided data about children's experiences - potentially more than what children tell in words (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2010). Ethan and Leo's choice of demonstrating the skidding game was testimony to their agency as much as their expertise about the game. This showed two things: firstly, the children were using their right to freedom of expression; secondly, they were capable of making decisions about how they wanted to participate. However, such bodily performances also highlight the importance of the adult responsibility to take all of the children's creative expressions into account. CRC's Article 12 emphasizes that we must consider research activities that respond to children's diverse expressive forms (Lansdown, 2010; Lundy, 2007). Louis's use of his whole body to underline his verbal explanation of building his transformer is another example of children's bodies being a medium for expressing meaning (Pálmadóttir & Einaradóttir, 2015).

Ethical research practice must carefully balance the right to privacy and the right to protection (Dockett & Perry, 2015). Children's right to privacy is a fundamental component of the CRC (UN, 1989). The children in this study acted on their right to privacy in a number of ways, such as when they made choices about with whom they shared their play-videos, or when they told or showed me, nonverbally, that I was not allowed to video-record their play.

Sharing was an issue of privacy, but also of power. The literature on ethics has addressed power mainly in relation to adult-child power imbalances (Alderson, 2008). However, children are not always powerless (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015), and power imbalances within a group of children can lead to some being silenced by their dominant peers. Holland, Renold, Ross, and Hillman (2010) 'conceptualize "power" as dynamic and relational, shifting away from the dichotomous view of power where the researcher always already embodies "power"'

and the research participant always already embodies “powerlessness” (p. 363). When this issue came up it was often in the context of children’s privacy rights; exclusion was about protecting their data. On some occasions, however, I wondered if children used this right to place themselves in a powerful position. I decided to trust that the children respected each other’s rights, as much as I respected their right to make decisions about with whom they shared their videos. Privacy can also raise ethical dilemmas for the researcher when intruding on the children’s private spaces or ‘secrets’ (Beazley et al., 2009; Palaiologou, 2014).

Conclusion

Young children’s demonstrations of how they act on and wish to exercise their right to express their views freely can contribute immensely to children’s HRE. Following the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, Article 2.2 (UN, 2011), HRE incorporates three components: education about, through and for human rights (Osler & Solhaug, 2018). In my study, I informed the children that they had the right to be heard and the right to privacy when sharing their play-videos. The ethical and methodological practices of the study centred on respecting this. I aimed to listen carefully and provide safe spaces for the children to choose how to participate. The children’s participatory experiences were interpreted and analysed by using Palaiologou’s (2014) notion of ethical spaces. I conclude by presenting three identified spaces which can conceptualise ways of promoting children’s right to participation. This right plays a crucial role in enabling the further exercise of human rights ‘because participation rights enable students to claim other rights and speak out when these rights are being infringed’ (Osler & Solhaug, 2018, p. 287).

Researchers need to pay very careful attention in implementing a child-rights approach; they must create spaces where children feel safe to express their views (Lundy et al., 2011). Safe spaces that allow children to feel comfortable about presenting their perspectives challenge dominant adult understandings (Waller, 2006). My analysis concludes that children are capable of exercising their rights when suitable contexts of time and location are provided, and that this needs to be considered when research is conducted. This is why I identified physical space as an aspect of ethical research practice. Children’s diverse range of ways of participating affords a creative space. Children interact with adult researchers, but also with their peers. These relationships convey emotional and social meaning to children (Waller, 2006) and the social-emotional space takes this into consideration.

The three ethical spaces (Huser, 2018) – physical, creative, and social-emotional – provide an extension to Lundy’s (2007) rights-based model of children’s participation that includes ‘space’ and ‘voice’ among the four key principles through which to approach Article 12 (UN, 1989). Theoretically, the three spaces can be viewed separately, but in practice they overlap. Each space contributes to strengthening children’s rights in every interaction. The physical space includes the context of a situation; time and location. Children demonstrated throughout this study that they made decisions physically, for example on how close they wanted to be to me. They also considered timeframes as a condition of assent. In line with Lundy’s (2007) model, a safe, inclusive space enables children to express their views through using their preferred ways of expression. Children’s diverse forms of participation also needed to be considered. They shared their views on play creatively. The creative space respects children’s diverse assent and dissent practices and their capabilities in participating in their chosen modes (Lansdown, 2010). The

social-emotional space acknowledges relationships, the emotional impact of trust within social interactions, and power relations.

Questions to be posed about the physical space can include:

- What possibilities do children have to give assent within a time-frame they set for themselves? Can children decide when and where to participate?
- How can procedures to seek children's assent ensure that children can give permission to the researcher for each interaction?
- How can children physically self-regulate their proximity to the researcher?
- How can children dissent physically? Does the space allow children to opt in and out? Can they wander off? Is space for play available? Can they leave the room by themselves?

Questions about the creative space pay attention to:

- What enables children to make decisions about how to participate?
- How can children express their views? Are nonverbal expressions recognized?
- Do children use expressive forms unfamiliar to the researcher, and how can these be respected and encouraged?
- Do we recognize and respect children's ways of positioning themselves as powerful partners in the generation of knowledge, for example through their enactments?

The social-emotional space raises the following questions:

- How are children's positions as rights holders ensured so they can act on their right to participation?
- What power imbalances are in place, and how can they be addressed, and challenged?
- What efforts are made to develop, continue and maintain relationships and reciprocal trust?
- How can peers support each other while respecting the privacy of individuals?

Although this set of reflective questions is far from exhaustive, they might help to provide recommendations to existing ethical frameworks and guidelines (e.g. Graham et al., 2016), and contribute to ongoing ethical considerations in research, and HRE with young children.

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