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Ways of seeing: using the Mosaic approach to listen to young children's perspectives

Alison Clark

Overview

How can young children's perspectives become the focus for an exchange of meanings between children, practitioners, parents and researchers? In this chapter, Alison Clark explores how the Mosaic approach provides a way of facilitating such exchanges. Starting from the viewpoint of young children as competent meaning makers and explorers of their environment, the Mosaic approach brings together a range of methods for listening to young children about their lives. The chapter explores this approach in the context of involving young children in changes to an outdoor play area. Wider questions are raised about adult-child power relations and the status of young children.

[...]

The Mosaic approach was developed during a research study to include the 'voice of the child' in an evaluation of a multiagency network of services for children and families. The process is explained in detail elsewhere (Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark, 2003). A second study, *Spaces to play*, adapted the Mosaic approach to listen to young children about their outdoor environment (Clark and Moss, 2005). This chapter will

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refer to case studies from this second study in order to illustrate the complex, multifaceted and sometimes surprising process of listening to young children.

The Mosaic approach was developed in the context of research. But subsequent discussions with practitioners through conferences and workshops have led to its use by early years practitioners. This illustrates how the distinctions between research and teaching can blur. The distinction is also questioned in Reggio Emilia¹. Discussing the roles of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia and a team of American researchers, one of the researchers comments that ‘the actions of instruction, assessment, documentation and research come to contain each other. They cannot be pulled apart in any practical sense; they are a piece. No dichotomy between teaching and research remains’ (Seidel, 2001, p. 333). While within the Reggio schools, they emphasise the teacher as researcher, engaged in a constant process of constructing knowledge about children and learning: ‘That is why [Rinaldi says] I have written so often about the teacher as a researcher ... [I]t’s not that we don’t recognise your [academic] research, but we want our research, as teachers, to be recognised. And to recognise research as a way of thinking, of approaching life, of negotiating, of documenting’ (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 192).

Starting points

Concepts of competence are a key feature of the theoretical perspectives that have influenced the development of the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2003). One source has been the active view of the child promoted through the sociology of (or for) childhood (Mayall, 2002). Children are seen not as passive objects in the research process or in society in general but as social actors who are ‘beings *not* becomings’ (Qvortrup et al, 1994, p. 2). This places an emphasis on exploring children’s perceptions of their lives, their interests, priorities and concerns (for example, Christensen and James, 2000).

A second influence has been theoretical perspectives about ‘voice’ as explored in the field of international development, and through Participatory Appraisal techniques in particular (for example, Hart, 1997; Johnson et al, 1998). These methodologies have been devised in order to make visible the voices of the least powerful adult members of communities, as a catalyst for change. This begins with an expectation of competency: local people are presumed to have a unique body of knowledge about living in their community. The techniques developed include visual and verbal tools. Despite some criticism about the genuine benefits to communities of these approaches (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), the ideas remain of interest to debates about listening.

Third, and most importantly, the theoretical perspectives explored in the municipal preschools² of Reggio Emilia have inspired the Mosaic approach. These have hinged around the notion of the competent child and of the pedagogy of listening and the pedagogy of relationships. Malaguzzi, the first pedagogical director of the preschools, focused his work around the view of a rich active child (Edwards et al, 1998) in contrast to viewing children as passive and in need. This change in expectation seems key

to understanding the critical thinking and creativity the children attending the schools have consistently demonstrated (for example, through 'The Hundred Languages of Children' touring exhibition).

These perspectives informed the framework for listening that led to the development of the Mosaic approach. The elements of this approach are:

- *multi-method*: recognises the different 'voices' or languages of children;
- *participatory*: treats children as experts and agents in their own lives;
- *reflexive*: includes children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on meanings, and addresses the question of interpretation;
- *adaptable*: can be applied in a variety of early childhood institutions;
- *focused on children's lived experiences*: can be used for a variety of purposes including looking at lives lived rather than knowledge gained or care received;
- *embedded into practice*: a framework for listening that has the potential to be both used as an evaluative tool and to become embedded into early years practice.

Developing the Mosaic approach

The development of the Mosaic approach has taken place through two studies and an international review. The aim of the original study was to develop methodologies for including the voices of young children in the evaluation of early childhood services. The name, the Mosaic approach, was chosen to represent the bringing together of different pieces or perspectives in order to create an image of children's worlds, both individual and collective. The Mosaic approach combines the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with the introduction of participatory tools. Children use cameras to document 'what is important here'; they take the researcher on a tour and are in charge of how this is recorded, and make maps using their photographs and drawings. Each tool forms one piece of the mosaic. There were two stages in the original study. Stage One focused on gathering material using these varied methods. In Stage Two, these pieces of documentation were brought together with parents' and practitioners' comments to form the basis of dialogue, reflection and interpretation, a process involving children and adults.

An international review of listening to and consulting with young children (Clark et al, 2003), provided a wider perspective on current practice, policy and research developments. The review focused on young children's views and experiences of education and childcare. Young children's participation in the planning, designing and developing of indoor and outdoor spaces was one area identified for future research. The review ends with this remark: 'Young children will best be served by changes to policy and practice which remain alert to their differing perspectives and interests as well as their needs' (Clark et al, 2003, p. 48).

The review led to the outdoor environment being chosen as the focus for the second study, *Spaces to play* (see Clark and Moss, 2005 for a full account of this research). This set out to make young children's perspectives the starting point for change to

the physical environment. The study was a collaboration with Learning through Landscapes, a charity based in England that works to promote the use, development and maintenance of school playgrounds. This was part of a wider initiative by Learning through Landscapes to work with a local authority and 15 early years settings to develop accessible, replicable, 'low tech' and affordable solutions to developing their outdoor environment.

The study was based in a preschool for three- to four-year-olds. Twenty-eight children were involved, together with parents and practitioners. The preschool included a number of children with special physical or behavioural needs, including several with speech and language difficulties. It served a mixed locality including an area of social disadvantage.

The manager, practitioners and a group of parents wanted to take more advantage of the small outdoor space available to the preschool. This included a soft play surface, a small area of decking, a muddy bank and 'boggy' ground where there was an underground spring. The space was surrounded by a high-security fence, which separated the preschool from a park.

Table 1.1 shows the range of methods used when working with the Mosaic approach in this study. Starting with observation, the researcher worked with groups of children to find out their views and experiences of this existing play space in order to form the basis for any changes to the provision. Children took photographs of the space and made these into individual books. Others took the researcher on a tour of the site, recording the event with a camera and by making an audiotape. Working in pairs or small groups, the children made maps of the outdoors using their photographs and drawings.

The researcher interviewed children individually or in groups outside or on the move. Four practitioners and four parents were also interviewed for their perspectives on how the children used the outdoor space.

A new tool was added to the Mosaic approach for this study: the magic carpet. This was designed to open up new conversations with the children about their wider environment. What local spaces were the children aware of, what were their experiences of these places and what additional insights could these give to the current and future uses of their outdoor space? A slide show was made using images of the local town centre, local landmarks and the park (all taken from a child's height). The researcher added images of her local park as well as images

Table 1.1 Methodological 'pieces' of the Mosaic approach

Method	Comments
Observation	Qualitative observation accounts
Child interviewing	A short structured interview conducted one to one or in a group
Photography and book making	Children's photographs of 'important things' and books
Tours	Tours of the site directed and recorded by the children
Map making	2D representations of the site using children's own photographs and drawings
Interviews	Informal interviews with practitioners and parents
Magic carpet	Slide show of familiar and different places

taken during the study of the preschool's outdoor space. The home corner was converted into a darkened tent and children sat on a 'magic carpet' to watch the slides in groups. Christine Parker (2001) had tried this idea after her trip to Reggio Emilia as a way of talking to young children about different places.

There were two stages in the original study: first gathering material, then reflection and interpretation. The practical focus of: the *Spaces to play* study led to the articulation of a third stage to the Mosaic approach, in order to emphasise the decision-making element of the listening:

- Stage One: gathering children's and adults' perspectives;
- Stage Two: discussing (reviewing) the material;
- Stage Three: deciding on areas of continuity and change.

Although this describes the gathering and reviewing as two distinct phases, in reality these stages become to some [extent] blurred. For example, practitioners began to review the children's use of the outdoor space when the researcher placed photographs from the observation in the cloakroom area during the first weeks of the study. Reflecting on meanings and reassessing understandings is implicit throughout the whole approach, but this second stage allows a concentrated period of reflection.

Reviews were held with children, practitioners and with Learning through Landscapes. The aim was to make the review as focused as possible on the children's perspectives. The researcher made a book of the children's comments and photographs to centre the review on the children. This was designed in story form with Barney the dog as the main character together with a cartoon caterpillar. Barney, a toy dog, had been introduced by the researcher and was used as an intermediary in many of the conversations with the children. Children discussed the book with the researcher and this piece of documentation became the focus of two sessions to review the material with practitioners during staff meetings.

The researcher and Learning through Landscapes' Development Officer reviewed the visual and verbal material. Each of the tools was discussed in turn in order to reveal emerging themes. Discussions centred around two main questions:

- Which places do children see as important in this outdoor space?
- How do the children use these places?

The results of these discussions were mapped out on a large plan. Similar ideas were linked and conflicting meanings noted. This led to Stage Three: deciding areas of continuity and change.

Four categories of place in the outdoor space were identified through the review process.

Places to keep: the caterpillar

A large plastic caterpillar tunnel was regularly placed outside. It had been apparent from the first visit that the children enjoyed this strange shape. However, the use of

the different research tools had emphasised just how important this piece of equipment was for the children. This was a play space not to try to change.

Places to expand: the house

Observing the children revealed the house to be a key resource for them. The children confirmed this through their photographs, the tour and their interviews. Parents also mentioned the house as an important space in the preschool. However, the interviews with practitioners showed that the house was a source of tension. They felt it was too small. The review with children, practitioners and Learning through Landscapes recognised these opposing views and raised some possible solutions. The preschool has now turfed a new area for children to use to build their own temporary structures.

Places to change: the fence

The children's photographs and maps emphasised how the security fence dominated the outdoor space. Close observation revealed another dimension. The gaps in the security fence were wide enough for the children to see through. Solutions needed to bear in mind the importance of leaving these gaps, so the people spotting and dog watching could continue. The parents have designed and made paint and chalking boards in the shapes of caterpillars and butterflies to attach to the fence. This distracts from the steel but still gives room for children to spy through.

Places to add: new seating and digging areas

The research process identified places that could be added to the outdoor space to enhance the children's enjoyment. The first was more places for adults and children to sit together. Parents have added seating so children and adults can now sit together by a fountain or on a brightly painted bench.

The second was places to dig. Observation had shown the popularity of the inside sandpit: one child included a photograph of the inside sand tray in his book of important outdoor spaces! The preschool has now added an outdoor sandpit.

The pedagogy of listening and the Mosaic approach

[...] Rinaldi [2005] describes the multifaceted nature of the pedagogy of listening, which has been one of the cornerstones of practice in Reggio Emilia. The elements include:

- internal listening or self-reflection;
- multiple listening or openness to other 'voices';
- visible listening, which includes documentation and interpretation.

Each of these features relate to the listening processes, which have emerged from working with the Mosaic approach. The following section will examine these elements in turn with the help of case studies taken from the *Spaces to play* study.

Internal listening

Internal listening acknowledges the importance of listening as a strategy for children to make sense of their world. Listening is, therefore, not just an avenue for other people receiving information but a reflective process for children to consider meanings, make discoveries and new connections and express understandings. [...] Rinaldi [2005] describes one of the first questions the educators in Reggio ask themselves: 'How can we help children find the meaning of what they do, what they encounter, what they experience?'

The question at the centre of the Mosaic approach has been: 'What does it mean to be in this place?'. The question can be interpreted in many ways but at one level it is asking children: 'What does it mean *to be you* in this place now in this present moment, in the past and in the future?'. There is a physical dimension to this question. It has directed children to reflect on the specific environment of their early childhood institution, whether inside or outside. However, the place could be a city, a park or a bedroom. [...] The important ingredient here is that children are given the opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences rather than an abstract concept. This is in keeping with constructivist models of learning in which the environment is a key factor in children's search for meanings (MacNaughton, 2003).

It is a question with no 'wrong' answer. Children can explore their understandings without the fear that they have to second-guess the intended response. This helps to make the internal listening a creative process in which there is the freedom to express an idea for the first time or in a new way. This dimension of listening is in contrast to the understanding of listening as 'extracting the truth', a viewpoint encountered during the development phase of the Mosaic approach when discussions with some children's rights officers implied that children should be enabled to say what they thought, without the interference of adult interpretation. The Mosaic approach is more in keeping with the view that 'it's not so much a matter of eliciting children's preformed ideas and opinions, it's much more a question of enabling them to explore the ways in which they perceive the world and communicate their ideas in a way that is meaningful to them' (Tolfree and Woodhead, 1999, p. 21).

Developing a multimethod framework has helped the Mosaic approach to promote internal listening. This was one of the reasons for including more than one research tool. The greater the diversity of methods with different learning styles used then the more opportunity children will have to find new ways of thinking, of looking at the same question in a variety of ways. Taking photographs, leading a tour or watching slides provide different mirrors for reflecting on the central question: 'What does it mean to be in this place?'

Some young children would be barred from answering this question if they were only offered one traditional research tool, such as interviewing. This might include

children with limited verbal skills. The multimethod approach is necessary if as many children as possible are to be allowed opportunities for internal listening.

So using different methods is designed to be beneficial to the children who participate. It has another advantage for adults by enabling different understandings to be compared and for common themes and areas of disagreement to emerge. This theme of multiple listening will be examined later.

The following case study will illustrate different dimensions of internal listening through the use of the Mosaic approach in the *Spaces to play* study.



CASE STUDY

Internal listening and inclusive practice

Rees was four years old, and about to start school. He was an affectionate child who appeared to be thoroughly enjoying preschool.

However, his verbal language skills seemed limited, in the context of the preschool. He was, however, fascinated with cameras. He took great interest in the researcher's camera and was keen to volunteer to take his own photographs. He was delighted with the results and concentrated for an extended period on making a book of his images (see Table 1.2). Rees insisted on 'writing' his own captions. The practitioners were surprised when they saw his book as he had shown little interest in experimenting with writing in the preschool.

Rees's photographs were taken in a great hurry. They covered a range of subjects including other children and members of staff, but there was only one shot of just one other child. Rees did not appear to have a particular friend at the preschool.

He chose a photograph of the playhouse for the cover. The house was not the obvious focus of the photograph but Rees's naming of the photograph clarified its subject. This prioritising of the house tallied with the responses of many of the children who indicated the significance of this play space.

His choice of the pram was interesting. He filled the pram with pebbles from the edge of the play space before taking his photograph. This indicated his awareness of detail and interest in natural objects. Observation had revealed that Rees was one of the boys who enjoyed playing with the pram and pushchairs.

Rees was invited to take part in the child interview. This was designed to be as flexible as possible with some children choosing to answer the questions on the move. However, when the researcher started the interview Rees copied the questions but made no other response.

Table 1.2 Description of the photograph book compiled by Rees

Rees's photographs	Captions	Researcher's description
Cover	The house	Close-up of girl by the side of the climbing frame (house to the side)
Page One	The pram	Close-up of pram with pebbles
Page Two		Small barrier with cartoon figures
Page Three	[name of staff member]	Two members of staff on the edge of the play surface
Page Four		Close-up of girl, fence in background
Page Five		Close-up of inside of the house, boy in the corner

	Book making	
Cameras	Rees (four years old)	Magic carpet
	Review	

Figure 1.1 Diagram to show Rees's participation in the study

Rees enjoyed taking part in the magic carpet slide show. He was captivated by the mechanics of the slide projector and expressed his delight at learning how to operate the buttons to produce a new image: 'I've got that one', he explained. When a slide appeared showing Barney, he picked up the toy dog and matched him to the image on the screen.

Rees chose to hold Barney as he took part in the review of the study and listened attentively as the researcher read the book of the children's words.

Rees had been able to convey important features of his experience at the preschool. These included the pleasure of being with other children but with no particular friend, his liking for the playhouse and the pram and an interest in mechanical objects. Rees had conveyed these 'ways of seeing' through the Mosaic approach, using a range of languages and learning styles (see Figure 1.1). This in turn led to Rees displaying an interest in communicating through developing graphic skills as well as entering into more conversations with the researcher.

However, had the study relied solely on the interview he would have been another invisible child and Rees would not have had the opportunity to engage with the question 'what does it mean to be in this place?' and perhaps more importantly 'what does it mean to be me here?'. One concern is that Rees will not be offered the same range of languages and learning styles in order for him to make sense of the transition to school.

This section has focused on the links between the Mosaic approach and internal listening. The emphasis will now move to examine the role of multiple listening in the Mosaic approach.

Multiple listening

[...] Rinaldi [2005] describes multiple listening as the opportunities for practitioners, groups of children and individual children to listen to each other and to themselves. This conveys the multifaceted nature of listening: it is not limited to one exchange between two individuals but is a complex web of interactions, continually moving from

the micro to the macro level. This is in keeping with an interpretivist model of learning (Carr, 2000; MacNaughton, 2003), which acknowledges the importance of multiple perspectives.

Multiple listening recognises the need to make space for the 'other', emphasising listening as an ethical issue. Researchers and practitioners who promote multiple listening acknowledge the importance of time and resources to enable children to reflect on their ideas and experiences with their peers and with adults. The Mosaic approach creates opportunities for multiple listening:

- with practitioners and parents;
- with the researcher and other professionals;
- through individual, paired, small and large group interaction.

The Mosaic approach acknowledges the importance of a framework for listening, which does not exclude the perspectives of practitioners and parents; a culture of listening should extend to all involved with an early childhood institution (Clark et al, 2003). There are opportunities in the Mosaic approach for listening to practitioners and parents through interviews and through the second-stage review process. Listening to practitioners' perspectives in the *Spaces to play* study focused on their general perceptions of children's interests and priorities outdoors, rather than focusing on individual children. It was important to interview the manager as well as a range of new and more experienced practitioners. This acknowledged that there was not a hierarchy of listening that privileged senior practitioners at the expense of the views of younger members of the team. The review process provided other opportunities for multiple listening with practitioners. The staff meetings led by the researcher to review the children's material provided a formal opportunity for reflecting on different perspectives (see the case study below).

Many parents have an in-depth understanding about the details of their children's lives that represent their current concerns, passions and interests. [...] Interviewing parents, in the Mosaic approach, is a formal way of acknowledging the different 'ways of seeing' parents can offer. One of the disadvantages of working within the confines of a research study is the limited time available for such listening. While the numbers of opportunities to listen to parents' perspectives have been small, the insights have added an important element to the overall picture of 'what does it mean to be in this place?'. Several parents, for example, mentioned that their children enjoyed having opportunities at home to dig and this reinforced the practitioners' desire to expand the outside digging spaces at the preschool.

What is the researcher's role in the Mosaic approach in relation to multiple listening? The researcher is at times 'architect': a creator of spaces and opportunities where multiple listening can take place and at other times more of an intermediary relaying different perspectives between different groups and individuals. An example of the 'architect's' role is the book-making activity. The children in the *Spaces to play* study worked on their books of their own photographs. This opened up discussions with other children who gathered round the table, watched with interest and discussed the images. Practitioners were interested in what was happening and talked to the children about the images they had taken.

The intermediary role relates to the researcher facilitating listening between the children and other professionals with an interest in children's perspectives. This is a way of extending the process of listening beyond the bounds of adults who are in daily contact with young children. This may involve professionals working in a range of disciplines, for example social workers (see Clark and Statham, 2005). However, in the *Spaces to play* study these conversations have been with professionals concerned with redesigning play spaces. The researcher led the review with the Development Officer from Learning through Landscapes, which focused on the documentation of the children's perspectives. Reflection on the role of documentation or visible listening will be discussed later.

The following case study will illustrate the opportunities for multiple listening for adults and children by focusing on the playhouse in the *Spaces to play* study.



CASE STUDY

Multiple listening – the playhouse

The playhouse was a small wooden shed given to the preschool by a local business. It had a door, which opened out onto decking, and two windows, which had clear views of the play surface, the decking and muddy ground. There was a plastic barbecue set, table and chair in the house. Four children or more could squeeze inside. Observation showed that the house was in use most of the time. It was regularly used for group role play and at different times of day for a 'time out' space.

Interviewing children about the playhouse revealed more details about the imaginative play that took place in this space, but also the noise level. The following are excerpts from child interviews:

- Researcher: 'Tell Barney about the house.'
- Henry: 'This is where we play and talk and cook.'
- Bob: '... and sit on the chair. Henry and I can whistle.'
- Milly, Alice and Bill: 'He can play doctors ... There is a seat to sit on, and a table to sit on but you're not all allowed to sit on the tables.'
- Julie: 'Play. We play doctors, we play vets. See this you put the chair there and you lay down on it [then Jessica stops to play vets with the 'dogs'].'
- Jim: 'When it's night-time it gets dark. Bats are hanging on the window-sills. I love staying there, all there.'
- Robert: 'I don't like playing doggies in here – it's too noisy too many in here some of the teachers gets one of them out.'

Children's photographs emphasised the importance of the house by the number of images, which showed close-ups of the inside of the house or games happening outside. Children took the researcher to the house on their tours and chose photographs and drawings of the house for the maps.

Listening to practitioners' views highlighted some differences of opinion between the children and the adults. The practitioners were aware of how popular the house was but they each had reservations about its current use:

- Heather: 'Children use the house; they tend to use it as a buffer. Some think it's a wonderful activity in there ... then it can become a fight, [they] lob things

(Continued)

*(Continued)***Table 1.3** Multiple listening using the Mosaic approach to focus on the playhouse

Research tool	Playhouse
Observation	Children used the house as a social place. It is a space for being noisy, talking together and for imaginative play.
Cameras and book making	The house was in 12 of the 60 photographs taken by the children and chosen for inclusion in their books. These included inside and outside shots. This was a place in which to hide, talk to friends and watch what was happening outside.
Tours and map making	Children took inside and out photographs on their tours and included these photographs on their maps.
Practitioners' interviews	Practitioners recognised the children used the house for multiple purposes. Three out of the four practitioners interviewed named the house as the item they would like to give away.
Parents' interviews	One parent identified the house as somewhere she thought her child enjoyed [playing] outside at the preschool: 'Role play is a key thing here'. Another parent described how her child had a playhouse at home.
Child interviews	The children gave detailed descriptions of what happens in the house. Several identified the house as their favourite place while others recognised that it could get too noisy.

out of the window or shout. But I don't think it's used successfully, even if three [children are there]. They like taking toys in but ... the main problem is it's too small.'

Louise [the manager]: 'The house originally faced the shed. It was absolutely hopeless. They belted from one side to the other so we moved it round so it is part of the quiet area. It's all right for two children but it isn't big enough to put things in. We are trying to make use of it ... I wish it was twice as large.'

While practitioners were aware of the popularity of the house, they were concerned that it had become overcrowded, encouraged aggressive play and as a result needed constant supervision.

Parents indicated the importance of role play in the house and how one child had his own playhouse at home, which acted as a retreat: 'He loves his little house. He puts pictures up in his house of trains' (Jim's mother).

As noted earlier, the multiple listening made the differences of opinion about the house visible (as summarised in Table 1.3). These different ways of seeing formed the basis for discussions, which led to the creation of a newly turfed outdoor space for the children to build temporary structures where they can 'sit, talk and cook'.

Visible listening

Moving on from examining the links between internal listening and multiple listening and the Mosaic approach, this next section will examine the role of documentation or

visible listening. Rinaldi [2005] describes the process of documentation as visible listening through the construction of traces. She describes how these traces, through note taking, photographs, slides and other means, not only record the learning process but make the learning possible by bringing it into being – making it visible. There is a connection here with multiple listening because documentation allows listening to take place at different levels and with a range of individuals and groups. [...] This section will focus on the role of documentation within the Mosaic approach, led by a researcher.

The Mosaic approach creates opportunities for visible listening by promoting platforms for communication at an individual, group, organisational and wider community level. Children's book making is one example of visible listening at an individual level. The process of map making is visible listening at a group level, which opens out into listening at an organisational level by displaying the maps for practitioners, parents, other children and visitors to engage with.

Further opportunities for promoting visible listening were added in the *Spaces to play* study during the review and evaluation phase. The review focused on a book made by the researcher, which was a collective record of the children's responses and photographs (in contrast to the children's own individual book making). This *Spaces to play* book provided a platform for communication at an organisational level with practitioners and children. These discussions led to the subsequent changes to the outdoor environment.

Documentation was a key part of the discussions with Learning through Landscapes. The chart assembled by the researcher provided the focus for discussions about the children's use of the play space, drawing on the researcher's notes, the children's photographs and maps and the interviews. This illustrates how the Mosaic approach provided a platform for communication with the wider community, in this instance with an external organisation interested in working with the preschool but not engaged with the children on a daily basis.

Traces of the study were drawn together for the evaluation. This collection of photographs acted as a platform for children to discuss together what they remembered and had enjoyed about participating in the study.

One question arises from this process: who is the documenter? The Mosaic approach enables both researcher and children to be co-documenters. The participatory methods have emphasised the children's role as documenters of their experiences of 'being in this place'. The researcher has in turn documented her observations and reflections on the process, which include both a visual and verbal contribution to the process. One possibility would be to extend the documenting role to the practitioners, thus strengthening the platform for communication and encouraging future visible listening.

The following case study illustrates how one of the tools, map making, provided several opportunities for visible listening at a number of levels, from the individual to the community.



CASE STUDY

Visible listening – map making

Ruth and Jim (both three-year-olds) met with the researcher to make a map of the outdoor space. This was based on the photographs they had taken on a tour of the site and copies of photographs chosen for their books. The children added their own drawings to these images. The map became both an individual and a joint record.

Both children were keen to see themselves depicted on the map and Ruth added her name. Jim ensured that there were traces of his love of trains on the map, with close-ups of his mobilo train and of the shed 'where the toys sleep' Ruth chose the photograph she had asked Jim to take of the close-up of the pebbles, and Jim and Ruth added drawings of the trees, which surround the play space, beyond the fence.

During the map-making session, Gina, a visitor from Learning through Landscapes, came to see the study in action. The map provided the basis for 'visible listening' and one in which the children played a central role.

Ruth: 'This is a very pretty map.'

Researcher: 'It's a very pretty map. You know, it tells me such a lot about outside. Shall we see what Gina can see on our map? Gina, what do you think about our outside ...'

Gina: 'I can see that Ruth and Jim have very special things outside. I can see that you chose the prams and the buggies, and I can even see you in the picture so I know you like playing with those things, maybe. And, Jim, your favourite thing ... I think your favourite thing outside might be the train. Yes? And can we have a picture of you outside with the train?'

Ruth: 'What do I like?'

Gina: 'You tell me what you like. Do you like Heather [member of staff] with the climbing frame?'

Child: 'No, I like going on.'

Gina: 'Oh, you like going on the climbing frame'.

This extract illustrates how the map making enabled Ruth to take control of the meaning making. Ruth asked the visitor to interpret her priorities and then enjoyed contradicting this interpretation.

Practitioners, parents and other children became part of this meaning making and exchange through the display of the maps in the cloakroom area. Display space was at a premium in the crowded building but the cloakroom provided one space where parents and children visited daily. Visitors to the preschool were another group to interpret meanings.

This section has illustrated different aspects of listening facilitated through using the Mosaic approach. However, there is a considerable time commitment involved in such a way of working. While efforts were made to include every child in the sample in more than one of the tools, this was not always possible. A detailed impression was gained of some of the children's understandings of being 'in this place', but for others their part-time attendance or the limits imposed by the preschool's or the researcher's timetable meant that a more cursory impression was gained.

Discussion

This final section will raise three questions emerging from the development of the Mosaic approach in relation to listening to young children. These questions have arisen after many discussions with practitioners, researchers and policy makers arising from training days and conference talks:

- the question of power;
- the question of ‘the hundred languages’;
- the question of visibility.

A question of power

Communicating with young children involves questions of power: whether this is adults imparting ‘knowledge’ to children or children communicating their ideas to adults. Whichever way round the exchanges happen, there are differences in status, which are difficult to address. These differences are, perhaps, most noticeable when adults are working with young children. Many factors contribute to this imbalance, but expectations are one element. Adults’ expectations of young children influence how they communicate with children and how they enable children to communicate with them. Viewing young children as weak, powerless and vulnerable may lead to high expectations of the adults’ role in terms of protection and nurture but low expectations of children in terms of how they can express their perspectives, priorities and interests.

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

An early years trainer who had been using the Mosaic approach in a research study discussed the following example of these shifting relationships. The trainer was talking to a practitioner about a child. The practitioner commented: ‘She listens if she thinks she is getting what she wants. She would like to reverse roles’. The trainer remarked that this was exactly what the Mosaic approach allowed this child to do. The roles were reversed and she was able to lead the process. She particularly enjoyed giving her commentary to the visiting adult on the tour.

This example perhaps highlights the contrast between the role that children are enabled to play in using the Mosaic approach and the day-to-day position that many young children experience where adults expect to take the lead, whether in delivering a curriculum or creating an appropriate environment. One of the challenges in allowing a shift in relationships is accepting the place of the unexpected. In research terms, this may mean being relaxed about the focus of the study and not

worrying if children lead the study into unplanned areas. This occurred in the *Spaces to play* study where children sensibly blurred the distinction between indoor and outdoor play. One child, for example, took photographs of the toilets and the indoor sandpit and included them in his book about the outdoor space. The advantages of accepting a shifting in power are a release from the need for adults to 'know all the answers'. Listening in the ways discussed in this chapter releases adults from this burden.

A question of 'the hundred languages'

Language has an important part to play in debates about power. If exchanges between adults and young children are focused on the written and spoken word, then it is difficult for young children to have the 'upper hand'. The case studies have illustrated how children of different abilities can be supported in sharing their perspectives if they are given a range of multisensory means to communicate. These visual, spatial and physical tools should not be seen as a 'creative extra' but offer a challenge to the dominant learning styles that value verbal/linguistic skills at the expense of other means of communication. It is interesting to note that the verbal/linguistic skills are often the languages adults feel most secure in using. The Mosaic approach requires adults to relearn other languages they may be unfamiliar with using in an educational context or to acquire new skills.

Digital technology offers many possibilities for developing new shared languages between adults and children. Future studies using the Mosaic approach will incorporate young children's use of digital cameras. There was an initial reluctance on the part of the researcher to include digital cameras partly due to the cost, but also due to a lack of personal competency with the technology. It is a good example of how adults may need to take the leap to be co-learners with children in order to listen more effectively.

A question of visibility

Documentation is a powerful advocate for the competencies of young children. This was illustrated in 'The Hundred Languages of Children' exhibition, which was on tour in England in 2004. One of the opening panels showed photographs of two sculptures made from ready-made objects. One was by a two-year-old and one was by Picasso. This was not a glib gesture but a serious contribution to debates about the artistic process. The sculpture could have remained a personal delight for the child but not reached a wider audience. The documentation enabled this individual child's achievement to help a wider audience possibly rethink their views and expectations of young children.

The *Spaces to play* study has raised the possibility of using the Mosaic approach to create a platform for communication between young children, early years practitioners, architects and designers. The Focus in this study has been on outdoor spaces but this same approach could facilitate exchanges between adults

and children concerning the built environment. A three-year study beginning in July 2004, called Living Space³, uses the Mosaic approach in the planning, designing and changing of indoor and outdoor provision. Starting with a case study of a project to build a new early childhood centre, the researcher will work with three- and four-year-olds to document their experiences of their existing space in order to inform future spaces. The young children's photographs and maps will form a visible hub for conversations involving the whole school community about 'what we want it to mean to be in this place'. This platform for communication will then extend to architects who will feed these insights into the final building.

This is one example where visible listening could have wide applications not only within a learning environment but also in altering the expectations and the role that young children can play in the wider community.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined a particular framework for listening to young children, which plays to children's strengths rather than to adults'. Listening using the Mosaic approach has been shown to encourage listening at different levels and in different contexts, whether this is children 'listening' to their own reflections, enabling multiple listening to take place between children, their peers and adults or creating possibilities for visible listening. This is an important endeavour to continue because 'unless adults are alert to children's own ways of seeing and understanding and representing the world to themselves, it is unlikely that the child will ever manage to identify with the school's and teacher's ways of seeing' (Brooker, 2002, p. 171).

Notes

1. Since 1981, the Reggio exhibition – 'The Hundred Languages of Children' – has travelled the world, accompanied by speakers from Reggio: in this time, it has had well over a hundred showings in more than 20 countries.
2. 'Preschools' (previously called 'playgroups') are a widespread form of early childhood service in the UK, mostly attended by three- and four-year-olds on a part-time basis (that is, most children attend three to five morning or afternoon sessions per week during term time). Community groups or other non-profit organisations mostly run them, and many today are funded by government, to deliver early education, following the Foundation Stage curriculum.
[...]
3. Funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.
[...]

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