

Research Paper

Knock, Knock! Who's There? Gaining Access to Young Children as Researchers: A Critical Review

by Jane Murray (jane.murray@northampton.ac.uk)

Abstract: *Recently, research involving children has included enquiry on, about, with and by children. However, studies positioning children as co-researchers or researchers have tended to focus on children older than eight years. This paper critically reviews literature relating to aspects of an empirical study within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) field that conceptualises and explores research behaviours presented by children aged 4-8 years with no formal research methods training in three ECEC settings and five domestic settings in England. The enquiry - a critical ethnographic case study series located within a constructivist grounded approach was conducted according to the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (2004). Participants included children (n=150), practitioners (n=15), parents (n=10) and professional educational researchers (n=16). A rubric of professional researchers' perceived 'researcher behaviours' was developed early in the study then used to evaluate children's everyday activities. Throughout, challenges of gaining ethically appropriate access to data with young children were a significant concern. Challenges included: establishing an appropriate research instrument, gaining access to an ECEC setting, gaining acceptance from ECEC setting staff, securing informed consent from primary carers and gathering data on children's natural behaviours at home. This paper employs critical review of literature reflecting the multi-disciplinary nature of ECEC to discuss these challenges before making recommendations for future work.*

Contextualisation

Through critical review - an important feature of social sciences research (Randolph, 2009) - this paper addresses issues of access to empirical data encountered during a small-scale enquiry conceptualising and exploring research behaviours presented by children aged 4-8 years.

Located in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the full study is a critical ethnographic enquiry (Carspecken, 1996) located within a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Interwoven with reference to empirical elements of the study, this paper critically reviews the literature relating to five issues encountered when accessing the empirical data. Each issue raises its own question and the paper addresses them:

- What is an appropriate research instrument to conceptualise and explore research behaviours presented by children aged 4-8 years?
- How might a researcher gain access to ECEC settings?
- How might a researcher gain acceptance from ECEC setting staff?
- How might a researcher secure informed consent from primary carers of young children?
- How might a researcher gather data on children's natural behaviours at home?

Following an introduction, the paper provides a brief overview of the ECEC field, followed by critical discussion of the literature surrounding young children's participation in research. The

five access issues in question are then addressed and recommendations drawn from the literature.

Introduction

Randolph (2009) proposes that critical review is challenging and time consuming, yet important for a variety of academic writing. Therefore, critical review is a difficult skill that many academic writers must hone. To support such endeavour, Boote and Beile (2005) propose a rubric for successful critical review of literature, comprising justification of literature covered, synthesis of literature, coherent discussion and critique of research methods and the research topic's significance. Whilst attempting to address Boote and Beile's rubric, this paper provides a critical review of the literature surrounding five access issues that have arisen during empirical data collection for my doctoral study: a qualitative enquiry conceptualising and exploring research behaviours presented by children aged 4-8 years.

Gaining access to data for empirical enquiry is an important step in the research process (Creswell, 2008). In empirical enquiry concerned with young children, who are often perceived as 'vulnerable' (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), access to data is governed by stringent constraints focused on protecting children (Hill, 2005). The paper opens with critical focus on the literature from the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) then considers research involving children. This provides a basis for critical review of literature focused on the five access issues under consideration: establishing an appropriate research instrument, gaining access to an ECEC setting, gaining acceptance from ECEC setting staff, securing informed consent from primary carers and gathering data about children's natural behaviours at home. Recommendations follow which may be of use to those wishing to pursue qualitative research with young children aged 4-8 years.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): A Brief Overview

The field of ECEC focuses on children's first eight years (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2005). Whilst early ECEC publications were steeped in philosophy (Gammage, 2007), recently the field has broadened exponentially. It now draws on a range of disciplines, including education, sociology, psychology, philosophy, health, neuroscience, history and economics (Heckman, 1999; Gammage, 2002; Farrell, Tayler and Tennant, 2004; Goswami and Bryant, 2007) and there is strong evidence from these fields to suggest that early life experiences are strong indicators for lifetime outcomes (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000). Although research in the field is methodologically eclectic, policy-makers have tended to focus on narrowly defined positivistic studies (Penn and Lloyd, 2007); indeed, governments appear increasingly persuaded of the virtue of investment in ECEC (Allen 2011). However, funding remains insecure (Neuman, 2005), indicating the need for further evidence that might reflect its many complexities (Hatch, 2007), including authentic perspectives of its central players: children (Christensen and James, 2008).

The development of the ECEC field has emerged concurrently with international legislation focused on children's rights and participation (UNCRC, 1989; 2005). However, within the literature, a bifurcation has developed in recent years regarding how the young child is perceived. On the one hand, the young child is increasingly viewed as whole and competent (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007); conversely, the young child is perceived as increasingly losing competency and identity (Postman, 1994). This conflicted discourse is reflected in ECEC settings in England: provision for children aged 0-5 years recognises statutorily that '...every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured' (DCFS, 2008, p 9), yet it is oriented to children's achievement of externally driven 'early learning goals' by the age of five (DCFS, 2008). Similarly to the US, England's government proposes school readiness as its key rationale for ECEC (OECD, 2006).

Equally, although the statutory National Curriculum in England for children aged five to sixteen years articulates one of its key purposes as the 'well-being of the individual' (DfEE and QCA, 1999, p 10), it remains a prescribed, universal curriculum that all 'pupils should be taught' (p 44).

Alongside this landscape, children's participation in research in matters affecting them has become increasingly articulated (Christensen and James, 2008). This development aligns closely with Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989):

Article 12: 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.

Article 13: The child shall have the right to...freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

Notwithstanding this, children's research participation remains under-developed (Redmond, 2008). Although the children's rights agenda has gathered some momentum in England (Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), 2009), England has been slow to empower children or to see them as autonomous (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2008; DCSF, 2009).

ECEC Research, Researched, Researchers: Young Children Participating?

Despite these omissions, ECEC research presents as varied and dynamic. It includes 'scientific and positivistic' as well as 'naturalistic and interpretive' examples (New, 2008; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p 5), partly because of its multi-disciplinary nature. Within the scope of this paper some prominent examples are discussed.

Linking with the range of disciplines identified above, contemporary ECEC research ranges from large-scale longitudinal studies (Qvortrup, 1997) to small-scale studies (Arnold, 2009; Rak, 2002). It includes quantitative studies (Oliver and Plomin, 2007), mixed methods approaches (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2010) and qualitative enquiry (Hatch, 2007). The variety and dynamism of ECEC research are strengths, facilitating understanding of its users and contexts (Lubeck, 1995). Yet that variety and dynamism are also weaknesses, since they can give an impression to those craving 'what works' (Oancea and Pring, 2008) that ECEC research lacks fitness for purpose.

Division between research and practice is well documented in both ECEC and the field of education with which it aligns closely. This split is characterised by power held by professional researchers (PRs) and policy-makers (Hargreaves, 1996; Lubeck, 1985). Such hegemony has persisted despite attempts to develop practitioner research (Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 2007; Pollard, 2008) and, more recently to engage children as researchers (*inter alia*, Fielding, 2001; Alderson, 2008). Edwards, Sebba and Rickinson (2007) suggest that engagement with the users 'strengthens the warrants of research' (p 647) and in recent years, there has been a move towards '...research with children, rather than on them, about them or without them' (O'Kane, 2008, p 126). However, relatively little children's research is disseminated and even when it is, orthodox research methods training is generally imposed on participating children (Fielding, 2001; Kellett, 2009) enforcing adult agendas. The recognition of children younger than eight as researchers has been particularly poorly developed, although Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1998), Katz and Chard (2000) and Clark and Moss (2001) articulate approaches which can facilitate this. Furthermore, literature

within the fields of psychology and sociology indicates such possibilities. These are now considered.

Similarly to the field of education, psychology has played a major role in informing ECEC practice and research (Lubeck, 2000); psychology is itself informed by a range of other disciplines, for example, genetics and neuroscience (Rutter, 2002). Although some psychologists position the child as relatively powerful in research (Isaacs, 1930; 1933), much psychological research with children tends to objectivise children, sometimes even employing deceit (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008; British Psychological Society, 2011). It might be argued that there is a degree of mismatch between some psychologists' methods and their findings. Although it has been a contested area, some psychologists suggest that young children and even babies have potentially significant cognitive capabilities (Piaget, 1952; 1970; Davies and Stone, 1995). Recently, psychologists working with increasingly sophisticated technologies have made significant progress in demonstrating infants' potential cognitive capabilities (*inter alia*, Meltzoff, 2007; Hernik and Csibra, 2009).

ECEC is also strongly influenced by sociology. Recently, an innovative paradigm has emerged (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005): the 'new sociology of childhood' (Corsaro, 2005, p xii) perceives childhood as 'a self-regulating, autonomous world which does not necessarily reflect early development of adult culture' (Hardman, 1973, p 87). Children are increasingly seen as: '...human beings, not only "human becomings" ' (Qvortrup, 1994, p 18), as 'social actors' (James and James, 2008) or even 'social agents' (Corsaro, 2005, p 3), with the power to enact change. However, it is recognised that this depends on their context (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2005): the 'here and now of children's lives' (Graue and Walsh, 1995, p 135). Children's participation and children's 'voices' have developed within the 'new paradigm' (James and James, 2008; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), segueing into discourse surrounding children as co-researchers or researchers, rather than *being researched* (Fielding, 2001; Christensen and James, 2008). However, moving beyond adults' research agendas (Redmond, 2008) towards recognising young children as researchers (Clark and Moss, 2001; Darbyshire, Schiller and MacDougall, 2005) is slow progress.

Synthesising educational, psychological and sociological discourses with the ECEC field, my doctoral study conceptualises and explores ways in which young children aged 4-8 years present research behaviours in their naturalistic settings. In the ECEC context, I am an 'outsider' (Griffiths, 1998): although I was once a young child and later worked as an ECEC teacher, I am currently neither. This presented challenges in regard to accessing empirical data, exacerbated by unprecedented focus on safeguarding in England (Parton, 2005), where data were collected, and my lack of familiarity with the individual participating children's cultures and meaning-making (Worthington, 2007; Fuchs and De Jaegher, 2009). These constraints were additional to those presented by the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Ethical Guidelines (2004) which were followed throughout. There now follows a critical review of the literature surrounding five access issues encountered during empirical enquiry conducted for my thesis: a critical ethnographic enquiry (Carspecken, 1996), conducted within a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Five Issues of Access in Empirical Enquiry

1) Establishing an Appropriate Research Instrument

Selecting an appropriate research instrument is important to successful enquiry (Creswell, 2008). In research with young children, this may be particularly challenging as young children's favoured modes of communication and methods of working are often different from adults' (Greig, Taylor and McKay, 2007). Through critical review this section provides a rationale for three methodological approaches that may be usefully synthesised to conduct

research *with* children and *about* children: interpretive enquiry, a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) and critical ethnographic enquiry (Carspecken, 1996). Each lends itself to participatory approaches, increasingly used in enquiry focused on children (O'Kane, 2008).

A strong tradition of interpretive enquiry persists within ECEC (Lubeck, 1985; Hatch, 2007), despite the appeal of positivistic studies for policy-makers (Penn and Lloyd, 2007). This may be because the limitations of experimental approaches for ECEC are clearly articulated (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Fenech, Sweller and Harrison, 2010) and have been for some time (Piaget, 1970). It can therefore be argued that interpretive enquiry is a culturally and methodologically appropriate choice for a study focused on young children's research behaviours.

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006) also appears to fit well with ECEC. Grounded Theory (GT) approaches have emerged strongly in feminist literature (*inter alia*, Shapiro, Rios and Stewart, 2010): feminist and ECEC discourses often align (Cannella, 2002; MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). GT approaches are not uncommon in enquiry with children (*inter alia*, Sartain, Clarke and Heyman, 2000; Thomas and James, 2006; Kangas, 2010). Furthermore, GT approaches are widespread across social science disciplines, reflecting ECEC's eclectic nature. GT's central premise - that 'theory emerges from the data' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010, p 32) – makes it an inductive process, empowering participants and mirroring ECEC's premise of 'starting from the child' (Fisher, 2007).

CGT (Charmaz, 2006) seems a particularly appropriate strand of GT for ECEC enquiry. ECEC itself engages strongly with constructivist theory (Piaget, 1952; Montessori, 1914): Piaget redeveloped his basic constructivist theory in his later work on 'genetic epistemology' (1970), proposing that through active, inductive, scientific processes in variable contexts and conditions, even very young children transform constructions of scientific knowledge to develop new scientific knowledge. Furthermore, Isaacs (1930) demonstrated that children as young as three years are capable of formal, theoretical and hypothetical constructions and applications of knowledge, as well as analogous thinking; recently neuro-scientific advances have triangulated this finding (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999).

Lubeck (1985) suggests that: 'The great gift of ethnography is that it humbles us, and, once humbled, we are in a position to learn something' (p 149). In an undemocratic context that excludes young children from being recognised as researchers in matters affecting them (UNCRC, 1989), critical ethnography offers a platform to rebalance power relationships (Carspecken, 1996). Whilst the synthesis of critical ethnographic enquiry with a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) is unusual, their shared dependency on participants' authentic voices (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) provides a coherent argument for such a model.

2) Gaining Access to an ECEC Setting

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) observe that: 'Investigators cannot expect access to a nursery, school, college or university as a matter of right' (p 55). Although ethnographic researchers locate themselves at the research site (Creswell, 2008), for them, access is about developing greater understanding of people and their ideas, behaviours and cultures (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). It involves both ethical and practical issues often predicated on each other.

Critical ethnographic researchers' concern with issues of 'social power and control' (Creswell, 2008, p 478) means that their work includes significant ethical consideration of

power relations (Carspecken, 1996). More generally, within a context of heightened awareness of litigation, safeguarding and rights issues and tracing back to the Nuremburg Code (United States Government, 1949), institutions maintain increasingly tight ethical control on researchers (Morrow, 2008). Ethical codes usually require participants' voluntary informed consent before an enquiry begins (Homan, 1991).

Inasmuch as young children are denied access to recognition as researchers (Redmond, 2008), ethical codes can result in professional researchers being denied access to the worlds of young children. In enquiry with children, researchers are generally required to secure the written, voluntary, informed consent of adults who advocate for participating children ahead of fieldwork commencing (BERA, 2004). However, in regard to children some propose that assent, rather than informed consent may suffice (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005; Gibson and Twycross, 2007). Assent may be defined as proactive 'affirmative agreement' (Rossi, Reynolds and Nelson, 2003, p 132), while informed consent may be defined as the 'approval of the legal representative of the child or of the competent child' (De Lourdes Levy, Larcher and Kurz, 2003, p 629). This suggests a perception that there is little to distinguish between assent and informed consent, although in fact the latter embodies greater legal compulsion (Coyne, 2010). However, denying the child what is the adult's denies the child full participation.

ECEC setting leaders (SLs) often act as 'gatekeepers' for their settings, controlling who enters. They are powerful because without their consent, researchers cannot access settings; they 'safeguard the interests of others and...give formal or informal permission for research to proceed' (Greig, Taylor and McKay, 2007, p 177). SLs often give or withhold informed consent on behalf of children (Homan, 2001) so children are denied a right to make decisions about matters that affect them (Lewis and Porter, 2004). This could be avoided if setting leaders included children in decisions about whether or not they would like to be involved in research.

Gaining access to children for research has not always been the ethical concern that it is now (Creswell, 2008) because until relatively recently children were often regarded as property (Slee, 2002); moreover, children have only recently been deemed worthy of academic interest (Postman, 1994). One difficulty for contemporary researchers in multi-disciplinary ECEC is variance between disciplines of acceptable ethical practices (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008). Issues of access relating to children in research refer increasingly to children's roles in research about themselves (Morrow, 2008), aligning with the children's rights legislation, psychological capacities and 'new sociology of childhood' outlined above.

3. Gaining Acceptance from ECEC Setting Staff

Having gained access to an ECEC setting, new challenges await the ethnographic researcher. A key issue is gaining acceptance from children and staff within the setting. If rapport cannot be achieved, the quality and quantity of data is likely to be adversely affected (*inter alia*, Bennett, 2004).

Equalising research relationships may be particularly important in accessing data for ECEC enquiry (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988). Both young children and early childhood workers are subject to low status (Owen and Haynes, 2010) so the critical ethnographer focused on rebalancing power relationships should consider how to access and gather data from these participants. Locating research in children's naturalistic settings has been identified as beneficial to securing authentic data (Donaldson, 1978; Pellegrini, 2004). The ethnographer accesses data in the field by living 'closely with the host people' (Lubeck, 1985) in order to build a 'thick description' and deep-level understanding of every action and its nuances (Geertz, 1973). This may be more successful if the researcher is accepted as a member of

the community (Griffiths, 1998). Whilst Griffiths points out that the researcher may develop increased bias in favour of the participants in this case, she also notes that remaining too detached from participants may result in significant bias *against* them. The key seems to be to manage the bias by accepting and acknowledging it (Griffiths, 1998). Strong relationships are likely to increase participants' trust in the researcher, leading to rich reciprocity and reflexivity, enabling participants' authentic voices to be heard and understood (Baumbusch, 2011).

Researchers may wish to consider their own profile in relation to participants' (Gordon, 2005; Ensign, 2006). Relationships may be more easily equalised where there are shared characteristics between researcher and participant (Hart and Risley, 1995; Pollard and Filer, 1996), but this cannot always be the case. In gaining understanding of young children, the adult researcher may be advantaged in having been a child, but disadvantaged by prevailing assumptions from personal experience and inter-generational differences. The adult researcher may find accessing young children's behaviours and cultures unexpectedly challenging (Punch, 2002). However, Hardman suggests that: '...children's thoughts and social behaviour may not be totally incomprehensible to adults, so long as we do not try to interpret them in adult terms' (1973, p 95). Adult researchers may therefore gain from engaging children as research partners (MacNaughton, Smith and Davis, 2007). Characteristics of participatory approaches, such as respect, reciprocity and reflexivity may support processes of research with young children (Clark and Moss, 2001; Christensen and James, 2008) by facilitating understanding of children's worlds.

Participatory approaches may also be successful in research with ECEC workers (Beamish and Bryer, 1998; Abbott and Gillen, 1999). Corsaro and Molinari (2008) are clear of the importance to 'outsider' researchers that they are accepted by ECEC workers; however, practitioners may react to the 'outsider' by changing their behaviour with the children. also suggest that the researcher may assuage practitioners' anxieties by participating in the life of the setting over some time. They also advocate that outsider researchers share their field notes with practitioners and include their comments. During their fieldwork, Corsaro and Molinari (2008) found that once the children accepted them, so did the practitioners: the children acted as gatekeepers.

4. Securing Informed Consent from Primary Carers

Within a context of heightened awareness of safeguarding (Parton, 2005), researchers must protect children (Hill, 2005). To this end, most research ethical codes require researchers to secure primary carers' written, informed consent prior to contacting a child (*inter alia*, National Children's Bureau (NCB), 2003; BERA, 2004) but Coyne (2010) identifies a number of tensions in this requirement. It assumes that children cannot make informed decisions; it also denies children autonomous decision-making to consent to participate. Furthermore, it assumes that primary carers can make an informed decision about research.

Children are conceptualised as already competent within 'new paradigm' literature (James and Prout, 1997), which suggests the importance of the terms 'agency', 'capability' and 'capacity' in enquiry with children (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Hart, 2009; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). However, approaches reifying these terms may conflict with ethical requirements intended to protect by giving decision-making preference to primary carers (Alderson, 2010).

Sen defines 'capability' as: 'The alternative functionings the person can achieve and from which he or she can choose one collection' (1993, p 31). However, to be able to choose, one requires options which do not exist if they are denied by others. Royal College of Nursing (RCN) (2009) claims that children '... may be less able [than adults] to make an informed or

reasoned decision about their participation' (p 6); furthermore, RCN advocates that researchers should 'limit guarantees of confidentiality to children taking part in a research study'. In these ways, RCN frames adult capability as greater than children's in decision-making regarding research involvement.

World Bank uses the phrase 'fully operational' in defining 'capacity' (2010). Although UNCRC (1989) articulates the right of children from birth to 'express their view' in matters affecting them (Alderson and Montgomery, 1996), it does not view children as 'fully operational' because it retains the caveat that adults make decisions for children until they reach sufficient 'age and maturity'. This view of 'evolving capacities' (Lansdown, 2005) limits acceptance of children's participation in decision-making and contradicts 'new sociology' literature perceiving children as competent (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Nevertheless, UK legislation (Her Majesty's Government (HMG), 2005) articulates that in defining a person's capacity '...determinations should not merely be made on the basis of a person's age' (Section 2), suggesting a policy view that children's capacities are not necessarily inferior to those of adults.

James and James perceive 'agency' as predicated on: 'The *capacity* of individuals to act independently' (2008, p 9), whereas Euwena, De Graffe, De Jager and Kalksma-van Lith (2008) frame 'agency' as: '...the ability to shape one's own life and to influence the lives of others' (p 202). Children's 'agency' is viewed as dynamic: James and Prout illuminate children's ability to '...locate themselves flexibly and strategically within particular social contexts' (1995, p 78). This may contribute to a view that children's agency appears more powerful at micro-level, for example, in their everyday activities (Kallio, 2008; Markström and Halldén, 2009) than at macro-level political contexts (Bosco, 2010).

Safeguarding concerns coupled with the dynamic nature of children's agency present challenges for those developing ethical guidelines promoting children's agency in research involving children (Hill, 2005). Such concerns present tensions: '...between autonomy and dependency: this characterises the factual and legal position of minors' (Scheiwe, 2004), although policy-makers tend to err towards protection (UNCRC, 1989; Lansdown, 2005).

5. Gathering Data on Children's Natural Behaviours at Home

Pellegrini (2004) suggests there may be value in enquiry with children in their own homes. Furthermore, Donaldson's critique (1978) of Piaget's decision to observe his own children in the laboratory (1954) suggests value in researching with children in their familiar domestic setting.

Homes are diverse places, used in diverse ways (Mallett, 2004) yet 'home' is recognised as the site where humans develop trust (Miczo, 2008): an intimate place (Gabb, 2010). Therefore, gaining access ethically to children's homes brings 'messy...difficult' issues (Wellington, 2001, p 239). This section explores a limited range of studies conducted in children's own homes and considers challenges regarding how data were accessed.

Researchers must adopt ethical principles when selecting participants (Creswell, 2008); as has been established, particular challenges are presented when participants are children (Greig, Taylor and McKay, 2007). Primary carers acting as gatekeepers (Balén *et al*, 2006) may be unwilling to welcome 'cold-calling' researchers into their homes. Therefore, researchers often use children's ECEC settings as the gateway to their homes (Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Moss, 2001). ECEC setting staff may convey a sense of endorsement likely to encourage primary carers to accept the researcher into their homes. Indeed, in the more neutral environment of a health centre, where primary carers would usually have less

frequent connections with staff, Hood, Kelley and Mayall (1996) found it difficult to make contact with families to secure consent.

Tizard and Hughes (1984) is one of several studies that have gathered data about children in their homes. Tizard and Hughes (1984) found that the behaviours of children in their study often differed between domestic and ECEC settings. Moreover cultural mores prevailing in 1980s England dictated that they used women observers exclusively for home observations '...a male observer might add to the mother's awkwardness, as well as possibly causing talk in the neighbourhood' (1984, p 31). Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Hart and Risley (1995) avoided using video cameras in children's homes because of concerns they may obstruct data collection. When Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (2004) collected data on the home learning experiences of children aged three to five years they avoided potentially problematic 'home' access issues (Wellington, 2001) by relying on parent report of children's home activity.

On the other hand, Wells (1986) and his team adopted both observation and audio recording to gather data about young children's language acquisition at home and at school, embedded in a richly triangulated research design. Wells describes the cooperation of the children, parents and teachers as 'complete and freely given' (p vii) and does not allude to any methodological challenges.

Hart and Risley (1995) *do* refer to numerous challenges they addressed while accessing data in young children's homes. Firstly, they quickly realised they had insufficient staff to observe in the 120 children's homes they had originally planned to visit, so included fewer families. Secondly, they had concerns regarding the effect of the observer so focused on habituating the families to their presence (Houser, 2008). Furthermore, when selecting participants, Hart and Risley scrutinised the 'city directory' to target households showing 'signs of permanence' such as homeownership and landline telephone accounts; their retention of 42 families over two and a half years suggests this may have been an effective strategy. Hart and Risley found their data had to be gathered at times to suit parents' work patterns, which often meant conducting fieldwork during evenings and weekends. The honest nature of Hart and Risley's reflection, focused on the challenges they encountered and the resolutions they effected, provides valuable guidance for other researchers wishing to access data in children's homes. However, whilst they focused on building rapport with parents and gathered data about children at home, Hart and Risley's observers did not interact with the children, borne of an attempt to capture naturalistic behaviour. Whilst we can never know the extent to which their child participants' captured behaviours were authentically naturalistic (Mayo, 1933), it is evident that Hart and Risley's study positioned children as objects to access data about them at home.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed critically the literature surrounding five access issues that were negotiated during a qualitative ECEC study focused on identifying research behaviours in children aged 4-8 years. The process has elicited a series of recommendations from the literature that may be of use to others undertaking qualitative research with young children and these recommendations are now presented, ahead of a brief summary to end the paper.

Establishing an appropriate research instrument is an important initial step: without this, the data cannot be gathered successfully. Within a context of interpretive enquiry (Hatch, 2007), a synthesis of constructivist grounded theory and critical ethnographic enquiry is likely to be a useful instrument for participatory research *with* children and *about* children. This is because empowerment of participants is a strand that is common to each (Carspecken 1996; Charmaz, 2006).

Ethnographic researchers need access to the research site; in ECEC, this may be ECEC settings. Access must be negotiated with 'gatekeepers', such as setting leaders who control access into settings. If gatekeepers deny access to researchers without consulting the children in the setting, young children are denied agency to choose to work with the researchers.

Having gained access, ethnographic researchers seek acceptance from ECEC setting staff in research locations to enable them to gather high quality data (Corsaro and Molinari, 2008). For ethnographers embarking on projects as 'outsiders' (Griffiths, 1998), the literature suggests that trust, mutuality, participatory approaches and positive, equalised relationships, through sensitive communications and actions over time are likely to lead to 'insider' status (Griffiths, 1998).

Researchers working with children are usually required to secure informed consent from primary carers (Coyne, 2010); a measure intended to protect. However, balancing children's rights to protection with their rights to agency remains a conflicted area that professional researchers working with children are left to mediate through negotiation with primary carers (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005; Coyne, 2010).

Relatively little research involves children in their own homes; this may have much to do with the ethical and practical challenges such engagement presents and researchers sometimes opt to accept parent report rather than negotiating such challenges. Where researchers do pursue enquiry with children at home, an introduction made by a mediator whom primary carers trust seems beneficial during the initial stages. Researchers' acknowledgement of challenges encountered in accessing primary data in children's home may provide valuable guidance for other researchers.

It is useful to summarise the challenges that ethnographic ECEC researchers working in the field must negotiate. In pursuit of methodologically sound research process and outcomes, empirical researchers need to access data in the field (Creswell, 2008). Researchers are also required to work in ways that are ethically appropriate (Morrow, 2008). However, addressing both requirements can result in tensions: primacy is given to ethically appropriate working practices (BERA, 2004) but these may hinder access to data. In research with young children such tensions may be heightened. Despite much discourse surrounding the capability and capacity of young children (Alderson, 2008), young children's agency in research is often denied by the application of ethical practices because of a perception that they are vulnerable and therefore need greater protection than others (Hill, 2005). Discourse surrounding young children's participation and protection rights continues in policy, research and practice spaces; the present study is intended to make a small contribution to that discourse.

Finally, consideration returns to Boote and Beile's rubric for successful critical review (2005), outlined in the introduction. This paper justifies the literature selected in terms of the ECEC and allied fields and the present study. Furthermore, the literature is synthesised in the context of coherent discussion which critiques selected research methods and the research topic's significance. It is proposed, therefore, that this paper fulfils its remit to provide a critical review of the literature surrounding five access issues that have arisen during empirical data collection for a qualitative enquiry conceptualising and exploring research behaviours presented by children aged 4-8 years.

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