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‘Polish or Irish? Exploring the voice, subjectivity and participation of young second generation migrant children in research’

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An Overview

My study – the aim and an overview

Ethical and methodological challenges
- Who are the participants?
- Young children’s subjectivity
- Young children’s voice in research
- Young children’s participation in research
- Who is the researcher?
The aim of my study

Unveiling the unique perspectives of young children of Polish heritage growing up in Ireland today

Exploring the process of negotiating their identity and belonging in the context of multilayered social, cultural and linguistic dynamics constantly occurring between the family, preschool and the wider community environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979)
Polish or Irish?
Research methodology

Interpretivist (Cohen et al. 2007)

Research paradigm

Qualitative case study (Creswell 2007)

Approach

Adults (parents and teachers)

Participants

In-depth semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al. 2007)

Data collection method

Children

Participants

Data collection method
What informed my methodological choices

The lens of adult knowledge and ‘adult theoretical categories that serve adult agendas’ (Grover 2004)

Limited interest in the children’s perspectives (Ni Laoire 2011)

Lack of authentic engagement with migrant children (Devine 2011)

Generalisations and misconceptions – migrant children seen as a unified category (Kitching 2011)

Inconsistent image of a young child (Baumgart and Farr 2011)

Children as ‘deemed to have minority status’ and ‘discriminated against on the grounds of their ‘immaturity’ and perceived ‘irrationality’” (Devine 2011)

Children as extensions or ‘appendages’ of their parents (Pugh and Selleck 1996)

Value/ing rather than truly valueing children (Devine 2013)

Children as unfinished products that exist in constant suspension of ‘becoming’ future adults (James and Prout 1997)
1. Is a very young child a person in her or his own right? (subjectivity)

Active and able learner (NCCA 2009)

Child’s agency (Alderson 2001)

Child’s choices, needs and preferences (UN 1989)

Children as social actors (Christensen and Prout 2002)

Children as central players in linking migrant communities with the majority groups (Devine 2011)

Children construct perceptions of cultural groups at an early stage of their socialisation (Gash and Murphy-Lejeune 2004)
‘Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today’
Janusz Korczak (1878/9 – 1942)
2. Can a very young child become a research participant? (participation)

Depends on a vision of research

Power struggle and child’s participation (Devine 2011)

Shift towards recognising children as subjects rather than objects of research

From seeing research as about children, to approaching it as research with or alongside children (Harwood 2010) and for children or even by children (Alderson 2001)

Creating ‘a space for meaningful engagement where children are encouraged to express their views through a variety of mediums ... and these views are listened to and taken seriously’ (Harwood 2010)
3. Does a 4 year old have a story to tell? (voice)

The ‘hundred languages of children’ (Malaguzzi, in Edwards et al. 1998)

Children use imagination and fantasy to express themselves and learn (Paley 1990)

Drawing as one of the natural languages of a child, way of constructing and conveying meaning (Einarsdottir et al. 2009) and telling their story (White et al. 2010)

Play as one of the most important ways in which children communicate, express themselves and learn (Moyles 2010)
Does a 4 year old have a story to tell?
Does a 4 year old have a story to tell?
Does a 4 year old have a story to tell?
Children

Participant observation
(Cohen et al. 2007)

Data collection method

Draw and talk
(Einarsdottir et al. 2009)

Play and talk
(Harwood 2010)

Subjectivity ✓
Participation ✓
Voice ✓

3 x Yes!
The researcher’s role and ethical considerations

Shifting the power towards the participants (adult – child, researcher – participant, minority – majority)

Unique perspective as a representative of the Polish minority, an early years’ teacher and a researcher

Pre-assumptions made explicit

Use of Polish language

Participant-centred methods

Informed consent as an ongoing process (Harwood 2010)

Reflexivity (Harwood 2010)
To summarise...

‘What is needed is research that helps to raise the silenced voices of young children and families on what matters most to them in their everyday lives’

(Deegan 2002)


Bibliography


Thank you!