The Voice of the child in Early Years: 
Listen to or just heard?

Rosemarie Lowe 
Deputy Course Director 
BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education Studies 
rosemarie.lowe@bcu.ac.uk
Key Questions

• Why should we involve children in evaluating our practice?
• How can we enable children to evaluate our practice?
• What are the challenges and barriers of involving children in evaluating our practice?
• How can we know children are listen to?
Why?

• UNCRC (1989) Article 12 Right to Participation
• Children are competent and capable (Christiansen & James 2000)
• Childhood as socially constructed (James & Prout 1990)
• Children as ‘beings’ rather than ‘becomings’ (Qvortup 1994)
• Process supports both emotional development, and experience and understanding of democratic values
How?

• Awareness of age and cognitive ability
• Practitioner skills – relationships, tuning-in, emotional support, knowledge of individual children
• Visual strategies
  – Puppets
  – Voting tools
  – Pots & Beans
  – Drawing projects/Maps
  – Videos/photos
  – Technology
Pots and Beans
O’Kane (2008)
The Mosaic Approach
Clark (2005)

Fleet & Britt (2011)
Who gets to decide?
I think I should be able to do whatever I like.
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There are some things only teachers can decide.
I think I should be able to do whatever I like.

I think only Mum & Dad should be able to decide what’s best for me.

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I don’t know what to think...
I think only Mum & Dad should be able to decide what’s best for me.

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I don’t know what to think...

I think I should be able to do whatever I like.

What do you think?
Challenges

• Ethical approach
  Consent & Assent – adult, parent and child
  Open and honest
  Not harmful, do good
  Visual data – photographs, drawings,

• Adult perceptions of children - competency

• Adult perceptions of themselves- roles and responsibilities

• Analysis of data – adultist (Lowe 2012)

• Issues of power in relationships – (Waller & Bitou 2011)

• Tools fit for purpose – Methodology (Gallacher & Gallagher 2008)
Observation

• Tuning into children
• Individual awareness
• Participant observer
• Importance of relationships and emotional support
• Valuing children and seeing practitioner role in terms of their well being and development
Listened to or Heard?

• Children’s attitudes to participatory research
• Involve children in analysis – on-going, cyclical
• Feedback to children – age and development appropriate
• Following up findings – outcomes, being seen to make changes
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References