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## **A qualitative exploration of social media and adolescent subjective wellbeing: listening to the voices of young people**

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# Children's Research Digest

## Children Should be Seen AND Heard

### December 2020



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs



# Introduction

Welcome to the Children's Research Digest: Children Should be Seen AND Heard, published by the Children's Research Network in December 2020.

A sincere thank you to our guest editor, **Professor Imelda Coyne**, for her comprehensive guest editorial; our Editorial Panel members **Dr Leonor Rodriguez, Aoife Dare and Dr Grainne McKenna** for their time, thoroughness and commitment to the review process; and of course **all the authors** who so generously shared their research. Many thanks also to the **Children's Research Network / Trinity Research in Childhood Centre Research Administrator, Mary Kennedy**, the **CRN Advisory Committee**, and the **TRiCC Directors** for their ongoing support.

## Editor

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## Guest Editorial:

### Children Should be Seen AND Heard

**by Professor Imelda Coyne, co-Director  
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Hearing and attending to children's voices are core values that are supported by all members of the Children's Research Network and which are fundamental to the research and activities undertaken. So, it is with pleasure to present this issue of the Children's Research Network Research Digest on the theme of our 2019 conference "Children Should be Seen AND Heard". It is vitally important that children and young people have the right to express their views and opinions on all matters that affect their lives such as education, health, welfare and social care. Although these papers address a broad and diverse range of issues in children's lives, they all align with the core principles of *listening to* and *attending to* children's perspectives. I would like to thank the authors for sharing their research and the Editorial Panel, Dr Derina Johnson (editor), Dr Leonor Rodriguez, Dr Grainne McKenna, and Aoife Dare for their diligence and thoroughness in reviewing.

#### **Carrying out research with children**

It is important that research is carried out *with* rather than *on* children, so that children are recognised as active contributors rather than objects of research. Using creative participatory techniques can help facilitate and promote children's and young people's active engagement in research so that they can share their meanings and experiences of

their world. In Alison Stapleton and Louise McHugh's paper, they used qualitative methods to explore children's views of rule-following so that the nuances around compliance were revealed. Compliance occurs when an individual follows a rule to access arbitrary socially mediated consequences, such as social approval/ disapproval. Stapleton & McHugh note how simply asking a child about their rules and learning histories can capture some of the nuance potentially lost when quantitative self-report measures are used alone. Similarly, Karinda Tolland and colleagues illustrate how walking interviews combined with digital cameras gave voice to children's perspectives and revealed how a complex interplay of factors shaped children's physical activity, play and recreational activities. Drawing upon data in a larger study focused on children's experiences of play and recreation in their local neighbourhoods, they describe how children were active in negotiating with parents on issues surrounding their everyday mobility and that social aspects of play were closely intertwined with children's place-based experiences.

#### **Using research methods to maximise children's competencies**

It is important that methods and research tools are tailored to individual children's and young people's strengths, their particular situations, contexts and cultures as well as the focus of the research. Thus, researchers need to work closely with the children and young people to find the most appropriate means that will help them to communicate their perspectives. Rachel Hoare reports on a small-scale qualitative study that explores the intra-ethnic immigrant (IEI) friendship experiences of fifteen eleven- to twelve-year-olds with

non-Irish heritage in Ireland. Hoare describes how she used creative focus groups and journaling to gain rich insight into the nuances and complexities of early adolescent IEI friendships. It is very clear that expressive arts incorporating fun and playful elements enabled rich data on adolescents' immigrant identities and friendships in Ireland. In their paper, Deborah Webster and colleagues used focus group methods with young people in Northern Ireland to explore the relationship between social media and adolescent subjective wellbeing. They found that social media use can impact adolescent subjective wellbeing in both positive and negative ways. It has a positive impact in terms of connecting the young person with friends and increasing positive mood. Whilst the negative impacts include comparing their bodies and lives to celebrities and their peers, feeling left out, and experiencing sleep deprivation. The pervasive effect of social media on relationships and body image is an issue that continues to be of concern, especially now that children have phones which provide unfettered access to social media.

On a similar theme of social media use, Sheila Donovan, considers the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016) and argues that it fails to address the right of the child to be seen and heard regarding online safety. In a well-argued paper, she compares the provisions of the GDPR, aimed at protecting the safety and privacy of the child, with the rights of the child under Articles 5 (The evolving capacity of the child) and Article 12 (The right to be heard) of the UNCRC. Donovan makes the point that although Recital 38 of the GDPR represents a strong affirmation of the need to protect children's private data, Article 8

of the GDPR, by bestowing the right to consent exclusively on the holders of parental authority, denies children of the right to have their own voices heard in matters pertaining to the processing of their personal data online. Donovan drawing upon research notes that the online posting of children's personal data and images by parents with/without the consent of the child, is widespread. This is known as 'sharenting' which is very problematic as it exposes children to the world media stage and 'dataveillance' through parents casual sharing of photos and personal information about them on social media. Donovan points out that photographs of children may be altered and re-used without permission, and may be used on illegal websites, including those related to child pornography or child exploitation. Therefore, the GDPR would benefit from a more collaborative approach underpinned by Articles 5 and 12 of the UNCRC, which would allow children to take ownership and responsibility for online activities, and with the parental role being that of a facilitator and enabler, rather than gatekeeper.

### **Listening to seldom heard voices**

In the past, other family members such as siblings were seldom included, and their voices and perspectives remained unheard and under-reported. It is generally recognised, that children frequently encounter challenges to being included and to having their voices heard, particularly those children who have been marginalised in society. In Jennifer Pope's paper she points out that many children's voices from the past have never been heard or have been long forgotten and suggests that examining past events can give us some insights into the attitudes



towards children as well as the lives of some children, potentially helping us to hear their untold or forgotten stories. Pope is currently engaged in research focusing on the lives of children in an orphanage in Limerick, Ireland in the early 1900s. In her paper, she describes a particularly tragic event in November 1908, in the Mount St. Vincent orphanage in Limerick, where 10 girls died and over 70 became ill due to food poisoning from beef stew. She skilfully analyses the details of this tragic event through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's systems theory to illustrate the conditions the children lived in, the food they had to eat, and the low status accorded to children in society at the time. Pope's paper demonstrates the importance of historical research so that lessons may be learned and to ensure that, while the voices of these children may be lost, their stories and legacies are not.

On a similar theme, Anne-Marie McGovern claims that despite the significant role children play in influencing family life, their voices are frequently absent in parenting research, only becoming visible when parenting is considered to be failing. In McGovern's paper, she aims to privilege children's voices in marginalised communities, with particular emphasis on ensuring that 'seldom heard' children are included in parenting research. Children of parents who had completed Parent Plus Children's Programme in the past twenty-four months were approached for inclusion. Using an arts-based mosaic approach (completion of a concentric map of the important people in their lives), focus groups were held in with eight children in their schools. Reflecting influences primarily at microsystem and mesosystem levels of Bronfenbrenner's

ecological systems theory, all the children had a network of parents, grandparents, extended family, school staff, school friends and pets that they were able to draw upon for support. Grandparents, schools and pets played a key role of constant support in many of these children's lives. This research shows how taking an approach which critically analyses the 'standards of judgements' which normally focus on the community's problems, researchers can instead uncover potential family and community strengths, as perceived instead from the children's viewpoint. McGovern's makes a strong point that including children at the start of the process, a more appropriate parenting programme could then be developed that could be tailored to the realities for each family. When interventions are developed and designed with the involvement of key stakeholders i.e., children and families, the intervention is likely to be more acceptable and potentially more effective.

When a child has a chronic condition, the whole family is affected, yet the perspectives of siblings are often neglected. In Regitze Anne Saurbrey Pals and colleagues' paper, they report on the perspectives of siblings, drawing on findings from a wider study which explores the dynamics between pre-teens (aged 9-12 years) with type 1 diabetes and their families in Denmark. Using creative tools with families in workshop format, Pals provides interesting insights into the relationship between children with type 1 diabetes and their siblings. They found that siblings experienced frustration due to the disruption of diabetes to family life but at same time, they were very protective and caring towards their ill sibling.

Similarly, Rachel McDonnell Murray and colleagues point out that although child sexual abuse (CSA) is known to have a significant impact on individuals, limited research has been conducted on the impact of the abuse upon siblings. Therefore, they explored siblings' experiences of family relationships following disclosure of CSA. The found that siblings experienced a range of intense emotional reactions from shock, anger to guilt. The disclosure led to strain and/or closeness in sibling relationships and challenges with managing family dynamics. A unique finding of this study was the importance for sibling relationships of open communication about the CSA experiences.

Often concerns and disclosures in relation to child protection will be uncovered in the school environment because outside of the home, this is where children spend a considerable portion of their time and the children often form trusting relationships with teachers and school personnel. Due to recent changes in legislation in Ireland, all teachers now have mandatory responsibilities in reporting child abuse to the Child and Family Agency. In addition, each school's Board of Management must appoint a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and this person has overall responsibility for child protection for that school. The DLP is the resource person and first point of contact for any member of school staff who has a child protection concern, and they are the link person with all organisations in relation to child protection matters including the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Síochána. In Margaret Nohilly and Mia Tracey's paper, they survey the responsibilities of DLPs and teachers in reporting and managing child

protection concerns in Irish schools. The DLP's reported many challenges to their role such as: paperwork and administration, dealing with the Child and Family Agency, dealing with parents and families, lack of training for the role, making 'judgement calls' as DLP, inspections and the emotional toll and isolation of the role. Nohilly and Tracey recommend training for all teachers including DLPs to overcome the implicit (e.g. beliefs) and explicit (e.g. knowledge) barriers to reporting child protection concerns.

### **Including children as active participants and as co-researchers**

Internationally, it is widely recognised that children's voices must be heard and that they have a right to have their voices heard. Furthermore, that children should not be seen merely as objects of research but as active participants and as co-researchers. Using a rights-based approach to research with children, Maurice Harmon describes how he used participatory methodologies (photovoice and scrapbooking) to meaningfully capturing the voice of children in research while applying the Lundy Model of Participation in the Classroom. In his study with children as co-researchers in the exploration of religion, beliefs and values in their lives, Harmon demonstrates how voice can be articulated in a variety of ways and how it should not be restricted to the spoken word. This research illustrates how imperative it is to use creative participatory methods to explore children's multiple means of expression, as well as the silent voice in the setting,

Research in the past has shown that children's views were seldom sought in



relation to child welfare and protection. Edel Tierney, on behalf of the Child Research Study Working Group, Tusla Child and Family Agency makes the point that children often encounter challenges to being included in decisions because the child welfare and protection systems can be very formalised and bureaucratic. Ensuring children's participation in decisions about their care is a right and ensures that decisions are responsive to their needs, promotes positive psycho-social development, increases self-esteem and promotes their sense of agency in their lives. In Tierney's paper, she outlines how children and young people in the child protection and welfare services were consulted about the design of a research study so that the children's views influenced the study objectives.

On the same theme, in Claire Griffin's paper she points out that children with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN) voices were commonly associated with social exclusion, marginalisation and segregation. Although there have been efforts to address this shortfall on both national and international levels in recent years, due to a range of competing demands placed on schools and education staff, the voice of the child with disabilities and/or special educational needs may not be included in the individual education planning (IEP) process. Drawing upon an Empowerment Process Model, Griffin illustrates how a dual focus on pupil rights and empowerment may lead to increased inclusion of the child in the IEP process, in decisions that affect him/her leading to independence-development, emotional well-being and lifelong skill development.

**'Once upon a time and happily ever after'**

In the final paper of this issue, Catherine Gilliland transports us back in time as she illustrates the joy and fun of storytelling for children and how stories can help unlock children's imagination, opening them up to a lifetime of adventure and magic. She reminds us that stories are as essential as food for children. I was entranced to read how she created a whole new story about where the little mouse came from before he ended up as a main character in the Julia Donaldson's story 'The Gruffalo'. The central message is that we all need to unlock children's imaginations, to encourage their voice and make as many children as possible "a child of books"; help to *velcro* stories to their hearts and minds; to show them the world.

Children and young people are 'experts in their own lives' and we as researchers need to find ways to work with them to help co-discover their unique insights. It is important that we celebrate, share and learn from each other about what we are doing well in terms of engagement and inclusion of children and young people, as well as consider how we may continue to overlook, forget or ignore children's voices – and how we can address this.

## CARRYING OUT RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

### Just ask! Importance of Qualitative Explorations of Children's Rule- Following [Summary article]

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This article explores children's rule-following behaviour, as part of an ongoing study underway in the Contextual Behavioural Science lab at University College Dublin. It builds a critical case regarding the most suitable methodologies to approach this topic, emphasising the need to meaningfully capture children's voices and views regarding their own rule-following behaviours, with particular reference to the suitability of qualitative research methods. This will contribute to/inform research in the field and improve the level of understanding that is currently available of children's rule-following behaviour.

Rule-following affords us many adaptive advantages. For example, rules allow us to respond to abstract consequences and profit indirectly from others' experiences (McAuliffe, Hughes, & Barnes-Holmes, 2014). However, rule-following can overwhelm learning from direct experience which can render us insensitive to shifting environmental contingencies (Törneke, Luciano, & Valdivia-Salas, 2008). Simply put, when we rigidly follow rules, we may fail to notice when they are no longer working for us.

One pattern of rule-following that precipitates this contingency insensitivity when it dominates our behaviour is *pliance*. *Pliance* occurs when an individual follows a rule to access arbitrary socially mediated consequences, such as social approval/

disapproval (Törneke et al., 2008). For example, if a parent tells a child, "Clean your room – it's a pigsty", and the child cleans their room solely to receive the parent's praise, then the child is adhering to a *ply*.

Although *pliance* is useful in some contexts (e.g. following school rules), problems arise when it becomes our "go-to" pattern across all contexts, i.e. when it is generalised. With generalised *pliance*, the only consequences that matter are those controlled by others (Törneke et al., 2008). Consequently, part of our experience gets blocked, leading to a restricted life and limited contact with other potentially reinforcing consequences (Salazar, Ruiz, Flórez, & Suárez-Falcón, 2018). Essentially, overreliance on *arbitrary social* consequences can blind us to the *natural* consequences of our behaviour, meaning we are more likely to maintain rule-following even if it is no longer adaptive and despite hindrances it may cause. Given these associated problems, recognizing when a child is displaying generalised *pliance* (and the extent to which it causes them problems) is important.

In terms of assessing generalised *pliance*, recently Ruiz, Suárez-Falcón, Barbero-Rubio, and Flórez (2018) developed a quantitative self-report measure of generalised *pliance*. This measure has since been adapted for use with children and adolescents (Salazar et al., 2018) and employed in the Irish context (Stapleton & McHugh, 2020).

However, while this quantitative self-report measure is undoubtedly useful (particularly in clinical contexts), it may not always effectively identify generalised *pliance* (see Waldeck, Pancani, & Tyndall, 2019 for further discussion). To illustrate this point, take item seven of the eight-item quantitative self-report measure; "It is very important for me that others have a good impression of me" (see Salazar et al. (2018) for the full questionnaire). If a child responds "frequently true" to this item, then they are not necessarily reporting

generalised pliance. For example, the child could have a learning history where they previously experienced positive treatment when others had a good impression of them, leading the child to derive that “if others have a good impression of me, then I am treated kindly”. Therefore, in this instance, the child is tracking the non-arbitrary consequence of positive treatment arising from good impressions (learned via direct experience), rather than adhering to a ply.

This nuance is lost when the quantitative self-report measure of generalised pliance is used in isolation and could be revealed via qualitative exploration. Children's learning histories, interpretation of scale items, and derived self-rules can impact on the accuracy of this self-report measure. Nuances are likely lost when the quantitative self-report measure of generalised pliance is used in isolation, as is the case with the use of any other quantitative measure in isolation. Using quantitative Likert scales in isolation may provide a limited understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Recently, Villatte et al. (2015) outlined linguistic cues that are indicative of pliance. For example, if an individual states a rule without specifying the consequence, cannot state a consequence when prompted, and/or states a behavioural cause rather than a consequence when prompted, then pliance is likely occurring (Villatte et al., 2015). This type of qualitative investigation could also be applied to explore generalised pliance: if this pattern seems to dominate an individual's repertoire, then they are likely displaying generalised pliance.

In response to this gap in the literature, and in line with the theme “Children Should be Seen AND Heard”, Alison Stapleton and Professor Louise McHugh from University College Dublin are currently conducting qualitative interviews with adolescents to explore generalised pliance. Via these interviews, the researchers will determine whether there is a link between

linguistic cues that are indicative of pliance and the existing self-report measure (i.e., the Generalised Pliance Questionnaire – Children). Simply asking a child about their rules and learning histories can capture some of the nuance potentially lost to quantitative self-report measures alone. If researchers want to better determine whether a child is displaying generalised pliance and determine the quality of our current measures, then listening and including children in the process is vital.

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- Louise McHugh, PhD is a Professor at University College Dublin, Ireland. Her research interests are centred on the process-level investigation of behavioural therapies including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and the experimental analysis of language and cognition from a behaviour analytic and Relational Frame Theory perspective. She has published over 90 papers on these topics. She is a Fellow of the Association for Contextual Behavioural Science (ACBS) and a peer-reviewed ACT Trainer. Professor McHugh has a wealth of experience conducting and publishing research with adolescents and is passionate about enhancing psychological flexibility.

## Exploring children's experiences of play and recreation in local neighbourhoods using walking interviews

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#### Introduction

This article draws from a larger ethnographic study that explores the physical activity play and play spaces in which children and young people (aged 8-16 years) growing up in the Republic of Ireland actively engage. The study uses a range of rights-based and child-centred participatory methods, one of which is walking interviews (Percy-Smith, 2002; Cele, 2006). This article reports on the findings from the children's walking interviews, whereby the child went with the researcher on a child-directed walk around their local neighbourhood. This method encourages children to provide their views and knowledge of the spaces and places in the neighbourhood that are important to them (Clark & Emmel, 2010). During the walk, children were asked about the spaces and places where their physical activity play and recreation occurs. They were given a digital camera to document visual images of the places that were a focus of conversation during the walk. The objective of the walking interview method was to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of children's play and recreation practices in local neighbourhoods and the wider built environment.

#### The findings from the walking interviews

In total, five child-led walking interviews were conducted (girls = 3; boys = 2). The children were aged between 11 and 13 years old. The walking interviews took place during the spring and summer months between July 2014 and

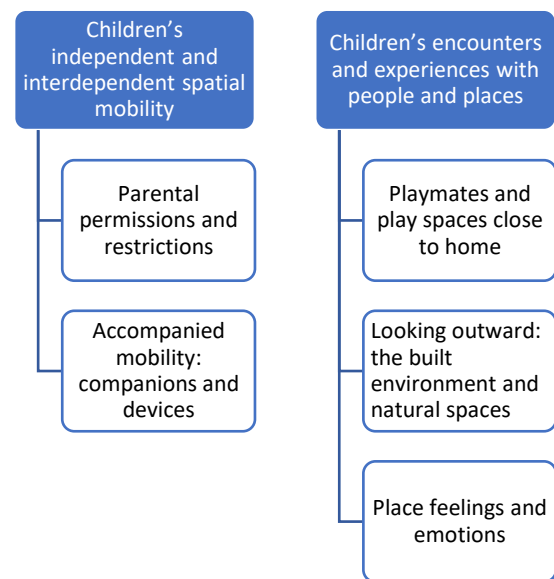
June 2015, in urban and rural neighbourhoods in the Republic of Ireland. The distance walked ranged from 2.54 to 4.35 kilometres, and the duration of the walks varied between 45 to 68 minutes. During the walking interviews children produced a total of 193 photographs (females = 145; males = 48), (spring = 78; summer = 115).

The walking interviews produced data in the form of interview transcripts, photographs, GPS maps, and field notes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to thematic analysis was used on most of the data (except for the GPS data which was used to produce a spatial representation of children's places for play and recreation in urban and rural neighbourhoods). Thematic analysis identified, analysed and reported patterns (themes and sub-themes) within the data.

The interpretation of the data revealed that children's personal experiences within specific sites are unique, yet there are similarities in how children utilise these places. The two dominant themes to emerge from the analysis of the data are (1) Children's independent and interdependent spatial mobility (sub-themes: parental permissions and restrictions; and, accompanied mobility: companions and devices), and (2) Children's encounters and experiences with people and places (sub-themes: playmates and play spaces close to home; looking outward: the built environment and natural spaces; place feelings and emotions). The final thematic map is presented in Figure 1.

### **Theme 1: Children's independent and interdependent spatial mobility**

Theme one presents children's perspectives on their independent and interdependent spatial mobility. Independent mobility is commonly defined as the freedom of children to travel or move about neighbourhoods without adult supervision (Shaw et al., 2013). Travelling independently using active transport, such as walking and cycling, is considered important for children's physical and mental health, as



**Figure 1. Final Thematic Map**

well their development as autonomous individuals (Carver et al., 2008; Garrard, 2009; Thompson, 2009). The children in this study played an active role in negotiating with parents on issues surrounding their everyday mobility. This dominant theme is therefore considered alongside some of the interdependencies that children's spatial mobility involves. The sub-themes include parental permissions and restrictions, and accompanied mobility, which involved, for example, the presence of peers and siblings, and children carrying smart/mobile phone devices while away from home. Children had a deep understanding and awareness of the places in their neighbourhood where they were permitted or restricted, and the facilitators that their everyday independent mobility required, as John (11) explains:

*When I ride my bike, I go to the top of the road and down to the end of the road numerous times. Sometimes when I'm allowed, I cycle down to the park. If I'm allowed.*

### **Theme 2: Children's encounters and experiences with people and places**

Theme two reports on children's encounters and experiences with the people and places in



their neighbourhood. Studies show that children mostly value places where they can play, meet and spend time with friends (see Blundell, 2016; Hayward, 2012). Therefore, this theme highlights the social aspects of play, which are closely intertwined with children's place-based experiences. Children's favourite places to play, on their own or with friends, and prominent peer gathering areas in the neighbourhood are identified. The sub-themes include: (1) playmates and play spaces close to home; (2) looking outward: the built environment and natural spaces; (3) place feelings and emotions. This dominant theme is strongly linked to the data and reveals rich insights from the children, as they walk through, and talk about, the various spaces and places in their neighbourhoods.

### Key Messages from the Findings

The findings presented here describe children's perspectives on individual, social and physical experiences of play and recreation in local neighbourhoods and the wider built environment. Theme one reports on children's independent and interdependent spatial mobility. The analysis of the data shows that children's everyday mobility involves parental negotiations that permit or restrict children's movement. Children had a deep understanding that age, road traffic and other parental concerns such as those surrounding child abduction and strangers, had significant effects on their mobility. For some, mobility was possible only when accompanied by friends or older siblings. Referring to a private field (Figure 2), where children spent time after school, Orla (11) comments:

*My friends don't go there. I don't think their parents let them or think it's safe... But I'm allowed because I'm with my [older] sister and her friends, and they like to hang out there.*



**Figure 2. Private field: “My friends don’t go there”**

Children also used the presence of friends at specific destinations in their negotiations with parents for greater independence. Friends not only provide companionship in mobility but also offer parents some reassurance and a sense of safety. Children also relied on smart/mobile phone devices to develop and support their spatial mobility. This involved sending a text message on arrival at a destination or communicating new arrangements with parents should the opportunity arise. For instance, Susan (13) spoke about going “up the town” with friends after school, instead of going straight home: “I would let me mum know [via text message]. As long as she knows where I am”. The children in this study valued being able to keep in contact with parents and negotiate with them in ways that support their developing mobility. The key message in theme one is that children frequently seek opportunities for greater independence and are acutely aware of the interdependencies concerning their everyday mobility.

Theme two describes children's encounters and experiences with the people and places in their neighbourhood. The findings indicate that the presence of a neighbourhood playmate may be more important than the actual physical play space, with children choosing to stay indoors if a friend was not available for outdoor activities. The type of play activities children engage in are also



strongly influenced by the presence of friends. Although John (10) acknowledges that he is “not that good at soccer”, he regularly participates in soccer on the cul-de-sac street where he lives because, “my friends, that live on the same street as me, always want to play”. Children shared their reasons for valuing specific play sites, and for regarding some as favourite places. Eoin (11) values the housing estate communal green where he lives because it was “a lot of fun” to be with a large number of neighbourhood playmates of mixed-age and gender. This facilitates competitive games of soccer, and traditional games like Rounders, British Bulldog and Tip the Can, as well as water fights in the summer. Orla (11) “loved” a secluded tree area on her friends property because it was “top secret” and valued for pretend play activities in an unsupervised place.

Theme two also reports on children's encounters and experiences as they look outward – beyond the play spaces situated close to home. The findings from this study indicate that public playgrounds are valuable places for pre-adolescents however this is dependent on numerous factors such as the availability of age-appropriate equipment, the provision of multi-purpose play areas, and the size of the play space. Local recreation parks are also considered a favoured place because of the social, physical and psychological benefits associated with such spaces. Children especially valued clustered seating structures within the park because this is where they could gather and spend time with each other away from immediate adult surveillance. Children frequently referred to the natural environment as they walked through local neighbourhoods. River systems and the natural spaces situated alongside riverbanks were of particular importance for seeking refuge and solace from busy lives, and for swimming (occasionally), catching fish and spotting a variety of wildlife. Lorna (13), referring to a nature-rich and semi-hidden area in the local park (Figure 3), remarks:

*We like it here because it's quiet and it feels like you're away from everyone. This is our place to come, because here we can just be ourselves.*



**Figure 3. Nature space: “This is our place to come”**

In the wider built environment, Main Street was a popular neighbourhood destination with coffee houses and fast food eateries identified as prominent youth spaces. A shopping centre complex was also identified as an appropriate place for specific recreational activities (e.g. hanging out, shopping or browsing, going to the cinema). This was especially valued for its convenience and for evading bad weather.

The spaces and places in children's neighbourhoods were mostly associated with positive emotions (e.g. feeling happy, having fun), however some also expressed mixed and negative feelings. This included dissatisfaction with the insufficient play space available or apprehension regarding the volume of cars and the traffic speed in immediate neighbourhoods. Although John (11) raised concerns regarding a “local gang of teenagers”, children generally felt safe to participate in physical activity play and recreational activities in their neighbourhoods, with the presence and familiarity of other children contributing toward this feeling of safety. Children also identified unauthorised places in their local community, which invoked feelings of intrigue and danger (e.g. “haunted” and dilapidated buildings). Such places were enticing, not only

for hanging out but also for the risky play opportunities they present.

### Conclusion

This study explored children's experiences of play and recreation in local neighbourhoods and the wider built environment using child-directed walking interviews. The findings revealed how children are active in negotiating with parents on issues surrounding their everyday mobility. The presence of peers and siblings, and carrying mobile phones while away from home, are used to develop and support children's independent mobility. The research shows that the social aspects of play are closely intertwined with children's place-based experiences. Children's favourite places are those where they can play, meet, and spend time with friends, often away from immediate adult surveillance. This research demonstrates the value of the giving voice to children's perspectives. The walking interviews drew attention to children's personal experiences and offered privileged insights into their lives and culture. There is a complex interplay of factors shaping children's physical activity play and recreational activities. It is crucial to understand where and how children play in local neighbourhoods and the wider built environment to inform national policy in this area, and on the needs and rights of children and young people.

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## USING RESEARCH METHODS TO MAXIMIZE CHILDREN'S COMPETENCIES

### Using expressive arts to explore multiple immigrant identities within intra-ethnic immigrant early adolescent friendships in Ireland

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#### Introduction

*I'm Rurish, that means Russian and Irish at the same time, and my best friend is Rurish too, and sometimes we speak Rurish (giggles) and only we understand it and it means that we're a bit different, but that's who we are and I'm proud of it.*

This quotation comes from a creative focus group (CFG) discussion session, where Anna (11)\* who was born in Ireland to Russian parents. Her self-construction as 'Rurish' and description of speaking 'Rurish', represents a blending of her Irish and Russian identities and languages, which incorporates different aspects of both cultures. Her words suggest that sharing the negotiation and construction of this identity with her 'best friend', also of Russian heritage, is an important aspect of her identity formation process.

This article reports on a small-scale qualitative study which explores the intra-ethnic immigrant (IEI) friendship experiences of fifteen eleven- to twelve-year-olds with non-Irish heritage in Ireland. The aim of this study was two-fold. Firstly, it sought to gain insights into the ways in which a small group of early adolescent children with diverse cultural and linguistic heritage in the relatively new migration destination of Ireland, use IEI friendships to make sense of and validate their identity negotiation and enactment

experiences. Secondly, the study aimed to demonstrate how the complementary child-centred methods of CFGs and journaling, using expressive arts psychotherapy practices, can provide different expressive pathways for the exploration of early adolescent lived experiences.

### **Context**

The economic boom of the mid-1990s attracted immigrant workers to Ireland and the number of non-Irish nationals increased by 143% between 2002 and 2011, transforming Ireland from a country traditionally associated with emigration to one of net immigration (Glynn, Kelly, & MacEinri, 2013). The 2016 census recorded over 200 different nationalities and showed that almost 24% of under 18-year-olds in Ireland have non-Irish nationality or a non-Irish mother (CSO, 2016). The participants in this study form part of this demographic.

### **IEI friendships**

Studies which have examined the friendship networks of native and immigrant young people in host nations, have frequently found that they have a preference for intra-ethnic over inter-ethnic friendships (Baerveldt, Van Duijn, Vermeij, & Van Hemert, 2004; Syed & Juan, 2012). Titzmann & Silbereisen, (2009) identify similarities in cultural background, a shared mother tongue and common acculturation issues as explanatory factors. Nguyen, Wong, & Park, (2015) argue that the sense of belonging experienced within intra-ethnic friendships can protect against the negative impact of race-related difficulties.

Although De Anstiss & Ziaian (2010) document the importance of close friendship networks for psychosocial support amongst refugee adolescents, they frame them as a barrier to mental health access, as those seeking support are more likely to confide in their intra-ethnic friends than look for professional help. Intra-ethnic friendships have also been blamed for preventing integration (Vedder & Phinney,

2014), which reinforces the importance in the current study of exploring the under-researched ways in which IEI friendships can serve valuable identity-related functions, thereby supporting the construction of a positive sense of self.

### **Methodology**

CFGs and journaling, incorporating activities with an evidence base in expressive arts psychotherapy literature and practice, were used in the spirit of facilitating a greater depth of expression through different sensory pathways. However, it is important to note that the research was not part of a therapeutic intervention and the researcher was not known to the participants in her capacity as a psychotherapist. Such a dual role would have been confusing for the participants and unethical as participants may have felt obliged to participate and confidentiality / anonymity may have been compromised.

A purposive sample of three groups of five non-Irish heritage 11- and 12-year olds (seven boys and eight girls) were self-selected from three primary schools situated in traditionally working class areas with ethnically diverse populations in Dublin. Discussion was facilitated in mixed gender groups given the high level of participant familiarity. The different stages of gaining informed consent involved the children, the school principal, Board of Management, class teachers and parents. Ethical approval was granted by Trinity College, Dublin. While the research topic choice was researcher-led, each stage was shaped to varying degrees by the children.

### **Creative Focus Groups**

CFGs provided a safe familiar peer group setting (Greene & Hill, 2005) and playful creative activities helped to minimise anxiety. After brief introductions, each child was asked to write down the most important characteristic of a best friend on a small piece of paper, which they inserted into a balloon. They were then encouraged to chase the

balloons around the room and when the author rang a bell they had to burst a balloon and read out the note. This activity opened up a broad discussion of friendship experiences whilst recognising the importance of physical activity in energising mind, brain and body—one of the central tenets of creative therapeutic work with children and adolescents (Prendiville & Howard, 2017; Van Der Kolk, 2012).

Participants were then shown how to use chalk to colour and layer salt in a jar. They were asked to: "Imagine that each coloured layer represents a different aspect of friendship: what different aspects can you think of and are these influenced by where your friends' parents come from?" This was designed to put the participants at ease by accessing the regulatory, expressive and social benefits of being playful with sensory materials (Jennings, 2011). The responses shaped the guiding questions used in the journaling phase, the impetus for which came from a female participant who expressed disappointment that the friendship discussion had to end. Her suggestion of writing down their thoughts in a journal was greeted enthusiastically by the other participants and the researcher organised to meet them again so that they could finalise the details.

### **Journaling: a window into lived experiences**

The use of expressive writing to explore and process feelings, ideas and memories, has long been found to cultivate a sense of ownership and control over self-expression as well as providing a safer and more private channel for disclosing thoughts and feelings (Baraitser, 2014; Bolton, 1999; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). The researcher facilitated a group meeting of the participants where they used creative materials to brainstorm the details of the journaling task. From this they decided to make daily entries about their friendship experiences during a two-week period. The researcher reassured them that the journals

would not be judged on content, grammar, spelling or vocabulary and would only be seen by the researcher, to encourage them to write freely without worrying about potential structural issues and to allay any anxiety that the material might be seen by their teachers.

### **Analysis**

The data was analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process. Pseudonyms were used throughout to protect participant identity. CFG transcripts and journal entries were read repeatedly for familiarisation with the complexity and scope of the data. Issues relevant to the research objectives were assigned codes, which were combined into the following five key themes related to IEI friendships according to similarity and prevalence:

- Loyalty and trust
- A safe space for the validation of identity
- Parental encouragement
- Deep relational intensity
- Separation, conflict and rupture

### **Results**

Participants reported feeling most secure within their IEI friendships, highlighting an increased ease of communication and a more profound mutual understanding. This enabled conversations around potentially sensitive cultural challenges such as the wearing of the headscarf:

*Soon we must decide whether we are going to wear the headscarf and we talk about that a lot, but I couldn't talk to anyone else about it cos I couldn't trust them. (Rania, 12, F, Algeria).*

IEI friendships also provided a safe space and enabling context in which participants could explore identity enactments related to both heritage and Irish reference groups, such as this exchange transacted through alliances with national football teams:



*Once I went with Karolina to watch Ireland play Poland at football with my dad. We took a Polish flag and an Irish flag and when Poland scored we got the Polish flag and went 'wooooo', and when Ireland scored we took the Irish flag and went 'wooooo', cos we knew we felt Polish and Irish at the same time. (Lena, 12, F, Poland)*

Lena's comments concerning the outcome of the match may be conceptualised as a metaphor for the identity negotiation process with both identities being validated within the safe IEI friendship space:

*We didn't really care who won, we just loved cheering for both teams together. It was funny that being with Karolina made me braver and wave the flag and shout loads. (Lena, 12, F, Poland)*

Another participant used her journal to evoke the IEI friendship space as a safe place in which to experience and positively affirm the coexistence of their two cultures through music and film:

*Today me and Sade listened to Nigerian hip hop music and Jay Z. Sometimes we watch different Nollywood films too (giggles). It's so fun with just the two of us. I couldn't do that with anyone else. (Dayo, 12, F, Nigeria)*

Rania reported her mother's use of positive affirmation to influence her friendship choices:

*My mum likes me being friends with other Muslim girls, cos we have the same beliefs and she's extra nice about my Muslim friends. (Rania, 12, F, Algeria).*

The deep relational intensity of IEI friendships was expressed by the female participants who were found to engage more readily than the males in the CFG discussions and were more open and reflective in the journaling activity:

*It's true that my best friend has the same background as me, and I just feel that I can only be properly myself when I'm with her (Maria, 12, F, Estonia)*

Three female participants expressed their traumatic experiences of friendship rupture and separation in their journals. Lena devotes a full page in her journal to writing about 'what breaks friends apart' in IEI friendships:

*Bullying happens a lot and your friend doesn't want to embarrass herself in front of the bully, so she acts like them. It happened to me with my best friend Hanna. Two girls were being mean about my mum's accent and Hanna started joining in and the friendship was broken, even though Hanna's mum is Polish too. (Lena, 12, F, Poland).*

Karolina's reaction to her best friend returning to Poland illustrates the intensity and visceral nature of experiencing this separation:

*When your best friend moves back to Poland and you only see her through the Internet, it's really sad. Although you still remember all the memories together, you feel alone and traumatised. I actually couldn't stop shaking because I felt so lonely. (Karolina, 12, F, Poland).*

For these female participants, the strong relational intensity of IEI friendships appeared to amplify feelings of loss and loneliness after friendship rupture and return migration. Overall, these results demonstrate how IEI friendships provide a safe space, or an emotional sanctuary, for these young adolescents, where identities can be safely experienced, explored, transacted and enacted in different creative ways.

## Discussion

By exploring the constructed meaning negotiated within the CFGs and the more personal insights disclosed in the journals, the researcher gained rich insight into the nuances



and complexities of early adolescent IEI friendships within a small self-selected group of 11-12 year olds in Dublin. The narratives demonstrated that the preferred IEI friendships of the participants were characterised by deeply-felt loyalty and trust, a profound sense of safety, and multifaceted linguistic and cultural mutual understandings, all of which have a positive impact on the validation and integration of multiple identity affiliations.

The combination of ethnic homophily and the identity-sensitive developmental stage of early adolescence appeared to amplify the relevance of loyalty and trust, echoing the findings of Kisfalusi (2016), who found higher levels of trust, closeness and intimacy in intra-ethnic than inter-ethnic friendships amongst Hungarian Roma adolescents. The opportunity for peer support and approval afforded by IEI friendships was particularly valuable for children constructing a dual or multiple ethnic identity given that this identity was likely to differ from that of their parents, who were often found to actively encourage IEI friendships for their children, a phenomenon also observed by (Kwak, 2003) in his review of intergenerational immigrant family relations.

The value of providing different expressive pathways and stimulating the articulation of multiple voices through child and researcher-led participation (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008), must be highlighted as an important feature of the study, whilst acknowledging that this was most conducive to female engagement. The well-intentioned choice of mixed-sex CFGs may also have discouraged male participation. The findings therefore reveal more about the lived friendship experiences of female participants.

In addition to providing rich insights into the nuances and complexities of early adolescent IEI friendships, this study also raises numerous questions which are worthy of further investigation including the psycho-social impact of friendship rupture, the potential of IEI friendships for enabling conversations

around sensitive cultural challenges, and the impact of an implicit friendship loyalty and trust hierarchy on acculturation processes.

### Conclusion

Overall, these findings identify early adolescent IEI friendships as supportive contexts for second generation identity exploration and validation and have important implications for all professionals who are interested in understanding and supporting the needs of young people with diverse cultural heritage.

\*All identifying information was removed from the transcripts and participants were provided with a pseudonym.

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## **A qualitative exploration of social media and adolescent subjective wellbeing: listening to the voices of young people**

[Summary Article]

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### **Introduction**

With the ongoing increase of adolescents' media use (Twenge, Martin and Spitzberg, 2018), social media is now intertwined with the daily life of adolescents (Weinstein, 2018). Indeed, half of all ten-year-olds now have a smartphone, and 74 per cent of 12-15-year-olds are allowed to take their phones to bed (Ofcom, 2020). The volume of research in this area has recently grown (Malvini Redden and Way, 2017) and the question of whether social media has a detrimental impact on adolescents has become controversial (Orben and Przybylski, 2019). While many studies have found social media use to have a negative association with wellbeing outcomes (Woods and Scott, 2016; Kelly et al., 2018), other studies have found that social media use can have a positive impact on subjective wellbeing (Kimball and Cohen, 2019; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Despite the growth in studies, there is a need for more qualitative work (Dubicka and Theodosiou, 2020), specifically listening to the voices of young people themselves.

This summary paper presents the findings of a qualitative study that sought to elicit the views and experiences of adolescents on social media use and subjective wellbeing. The study asks the research question: In what ways do young people think that using social media impacts their subjective wellbeing?

### **Methodology**

Three schools, representing three different types of co-educational post-primary schools

in Northern Ireland, participated in the study. Ethical approval was granted in advance of the study from Queen's University Belfast and individual pupil, and parental consent was secured from all participants. Six focus groups took place, separated by gender, across three schools. A total of forty pupils, all aged 13, participated.

The pupils were asked a range of questions about their social media use and if they thought it impacts their mood, body image, self-esteem, loneliness and sleep. A thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using Nvivo software—a programme used by qualitative researchers to help organise and analyse data. Five main themes were identified: comparison, connectedness, positive mood, feeling left out, and sleep deprivation.

### **Initial Results**

#### **Comparison**

The theme of comparison emerged most frequently across all the focus groups. The pupils talked about how they compared themselves to celebrities and their peers. They said this made them feel unhappy with their own bodies and lives. While they recognised that users manipulated their photographs to create a perfect image, this did not prevent them from feeling negative about themselves, "If I'm having a bad skin day then looking on Instagram makes me feel worse" (Pupil A, Female, School 2). Other studies suggest that an increase in social media use can lead to an increase in social comparison (Chou and Edge, 2012; Yang, 2016).

#### **Connectedness**

The pupils talked about feeling connected to their friends through social media by using platforms to make new friends or more commonly using social media to talk to their current friends from school, "on social medias like Discord you can just talk to people like lots of people like twenty people at a time for like

hours...so you're connected" (Pupil G, Male, School 2). This finding supports a recent Pew Review survey, which found the main benefit of social media, according to teens, was feeling connected to friends (Anderson and Jiang, 2018).

### Positive Mood

Pupils talked about how watching funny videos, and humorous content online increased their positive mood and made them smile, laugh and feel happy. This was brought about either by scrolling/browsing online or by videos sent to them by their friends, "I would like find funny things on Instagram then it would make me laugh and then I would feel better" (Pupil C, Female, School 2). Similarly, in a study with adolescents in China, gratifications received from social media were found to have a positive influence on adolescent's mood (Apaolaza, He and Hartmann, 2014).

### Feeling left out

Pupils talked about how not being tagged in a post made them feel left out, and the impact of not being tagged in a photograph was detrimental to their self-esteem:

*I do feel like it (social media) has made me feel a wee bit more lonely...if you don't get tagged in a picture...you kinda get put down by it. (Pupil C, Female, School 2).*

This feeling of being left out, or a fear of missing out, has been associated with increased use of Facebook in a study with High School students (Beyens, Frison and Eggermont, 2016).

### Sleep Deprivation

The pupils talked about later bedtimes and disturbed sleep as a result of using social media. "Without social media, I would be in bed quite a lot earlier so I would" (Pupil B, Male, School 1). A study with adolescents in Scotland, similarly found social media use to be

related to poor sleep, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem in adolescents (Woods and Scott, 2016).

### Conclusion

Social media is ubiquitous in the lives of adolescents and will remain so for the foreseeable future. While much research has investigated its impact on subjective wellbeing, often the voice of young people is ignored. As explained in the introduction, there is a need for more adolescent-centred approaches, which seek to find out how children and young people themselves, as consumers of social media, think their subjective wellbeing is impacted by its use. This study addresses this need by exploring the impact of social media on subjective wellbeing from the perspective of adolescents. While the study is ongoing, this summary reported on the method and early findings of the research. So far, the message is that social media use can impact adolescent subjective wellbeing in both positive and negative ways. It has a positive impacts in terms of connecting the young person with friends and increasing positive mood. However, its negative impacts include comparing their bodies and lives to celebrities and their peers, feeling left out, and experiencing sleep deprivation.

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## **The Voice of the Child under the General Data Protection Regulation, 2016**

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### **Introduction**

“Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I learn” (Benjamin Franklin)

Over the last 30 years, there has been progress in the promotion of the rights of the child, in particular the right to be heard. Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 considerable effort has been made at all levels to develop legislation, policies and methodologies to implement Article 12: the right of every child to freely express their views in matters pertaining to them. This paper considers the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016) and argues that it fails to address the right of the child to be seen and heard regarding online safety. The relevant provisions of the GDPR, aimed at protecting the safety and privacy of the child, are compared with the rights of the child under Articles 5 (The evolving capacity of the child) and Article 12 (The right to be heard) of the UNCRC.

### **General Data Protection Regulation (2016)**

The GDPR was intended to harmonise European data protection laws designed to give more protection to personal data. Recital 38 of the GDPR specifically recognised for the first time children's need for additional protection to safeguard their privacy and private identity. With this provision in place, the advent of the GDPR and, in particular, Recital 38 were welcomed as a holistic effort to regulate data, which in consideration of its

value, is regarded as the “new oil” of this age (Livingstone, 2018).

Recitals, as is commonplace, provide additional information and supporting context to Articles; the Articles being the requisite legal requirements to guarantee compliance. Article 8 establishes the legal basis for parents to consent to the processing of their children's personal data. Recital 38, in supplementing this, specifies that “children merit specific protection with regard to their personal data, as they may be less aware of the risks, consequences and safeguards concerning their rights in relation to the processing of personal data”. The controller is obliged to make reasonable efforts (taking into consideration available technology) to verify that consent is “given or authorised” by the “holder of parental responsibility”. Although Recital 38 of the GDPR represents a strong affirmation of the need to protect children's private data, Article 8 of the GDPR, by bestowing the right to consent exclusively on the holders of parental authority, denies children of the right to have their own voices heard in matters pertaining to the processing of their personal data online.

Furthermore, the GDPR does not define what they mean by “child”, and Member States are obliged to set the age of consent anywhere between 13 and 16 years. Under the permitted age of consent, the holders of parental responsibility are required to consent to the processing of the child's personal data. While the GDPR supports the view that the holders of parental authority provide a holistic protection of children's personal data, this is subjective and does not allow for any oversight as to the extent to which parents are acting in the child's best interest. Each Member State is furthermore obliged to set its own digital competency age. This has the potential to result in variability, as minors in neighbouring jurisdictions have different “digital competency” ages. It also has the potential to create difficulties for information service providers by, for example, increasing the potential for them to make mistakes when



dealing with the data of those who are under the age of 16 from different jurisdictions.

Recital 18 of the GDPR exempts personal and household activities (social networking and online activities) from the constraints and protection offered by the GDPR. "Sharenting", defined as the online posting of children's personal data and images by parents with/without the consent of the child, is widespread (Steinberg, 2017, p.842). Sharenting places children on the "world's media stage" (Donovan, 2020, p.49). Arguably "surveillance appears to be woven into every element of an online and digital society", and parents, unwittingly, are subjecting their children to exposure and "dataveillance" through their casual sharing of photos and personal information on social media (Leaver, 2017, p.3). Even in the absence of personal information, the metadata behind photographs and technologies which facilitate user tagging, automated facial recognition and the accumulation of discrete pieces of information provides significant amounts of personal information. All photographs of children have the potential to be fodder for bullying and ridicule (Bessant, 2017). Photographs may be altered and re-used without permission, and may be used on illegal websites, including those related to child pornography or child exploitation.

The GDPR refers to the relationship between individuals and organisations, whereas, interpersonal relationships, including familial and household activities are excluded from the constraints of the GDPR by virtue of Recital 18. Furthermore, given that the European Commission Working Party 29 (an independent advisory group on protection and data privacy) (2007) advocated a broad application to the concept of personal data, this has resulted in a broad range of data being excluded from the constraints of the GDPR.

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**

The right of all children to be heard and their view taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the UNCRC. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) identified Article 12 as one of the core principles of the Convention, the other core principles being the right to non-discrimination, the right to life and development and the primary consideration of the child's best interests. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates that:

*"State 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, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".*

Despite Article 12 emphasising children's right and capacity to express their views, Article 8 of the GDPR stipulates that children requesting permission to use online services are required to seek the prior agreement from those who hold "parental authority". There is no reference to the "voice of the child" or their "evolving capacities". Is Article 8 effectively turning the clock back and perpetuating an image of a vulnerable child whose choices, preferences and decisions cannot be trusted?

Article 12 of the UNCRC implies that all children capable of expressing a view are entitled to do so. Although, it makes no explicit provision for the right to information, it could be argued that information is necessary to "assure...the right to express...views freely". In other words, Article 12 asserts the child's right to participate in all matters affecting him or her, but adults retain responsibility for the final decision. However, Article 8 of the GDPR does not provide any opportunity for minors' input, the right to consent to the processing of the child's personal data remains the responsibility of the holder of parental responsibility if the child is under the age of 16.

The child's best interests is one of the core principles of the UNCRC, and should be

considered in the interpretation and implementation of other rights and protection. The constraint imposed by Article 8 of the GDPR raises questions about the measures, if any, that are in place to enable children to develop into responsible digital citizens who are capable of critical thinking and independent online action. The best interests of the child depends on the enjoyment of human rights such as the right to express one's view and the right to participate, these rights are no different to those of the adult except for the fact that they are now overseen and monitored by parents/guardians under the GDPR to guarantee the child's protection. Member States have been given without any guiding principles, apart from ad hoc measures, the 'green light' to determine age capacity of minors' ability to engage with online activities. This represents a disregard for the evolving capacities of minors, particularly those established by the UNCRC.

The GDPR, although creating a legal basis for the online posting of personal data of identifiable children, does not fully protect the child's best interests as it does not allow for instances where it is inappropriate to delegate the power of consent to particular parents. This results in the continued vulnerability of children in situations where their interests may be outweighed by their parents' desire to reap the benefits of sharing or in instances of parental lack of awareness of the associated risks. The regulation of consent under Article 8 of the GDPR gives holders of parental responsibility the exclusive right to consent to the processing of children's data. The best interest of the child appears to be tied into welfare concerns.

### Conclusion

The GDPR, in its imposition of the parental obligation under Article 8 to consent to the processing of data of children under the age of 16, may, by doing so, restrict the child's right to privacy and, freedom of expression. Article 12 of the UNCRC supports the child, who is

capable of forming his or her own views, the right to "express those views freely" in matters pertaining to them. Article 5 of the UNCRC acknowledges the evolving capacities of the child, and the right of the duties of parents to appropriately guide children in the exercise of their rights. Parents may need education and instruction to provide them with the tools and skills to enable them to incorporate the views of their children into their decision making. In recognition of these provisions, the implementation of Article 12 has been accompanied by "participation", which is described as information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape outcomes.

The GDPR, despite its well-intentioned efforts to safeguard minors, represents a challenge to children's participation. Therefore, the GDPR would benefit from a more collaborative approach underpinned by Articles 5 and 12 of the UNCRC, which would allow children to take ownership and responsibility for online activities, and with the parental role being that of a facilitator and enabler, rather than gatekeeper.

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## LISTENING TO SELDOM HEARD VOICES

### Sharing Unheard or Forgotten Children's Stories from Our Past: Adopting a Bioecological Framework to a Tragedy in an Orphanage

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#### Introduction

Many children's voices from the past have never been heard or have been long forgotten, particularly those children who have been marginalised in society. While we may not be able to access the voice of the child from the past in the traditional sense, examining past events can give us some insights into the attitudes towards children as well as the lives of some children, potentially helping us to hear their untold or forgotten stories. This paper highlights how, through the examination of historical sources, (such as newspaper reports of events at the time, annals of religious orders, census records and medical journals) information about the experience of children within a particular time can be pieced together to share some elements of their experience that may otherwise be lost. It also gives an opportunity to compare it with children's health and wellbeing in our current context.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) provides a framework from which to consider historical events from a multisystem perspective with the child central to the study. While Bronfenbrenner puts the child at the centre of his model, in terms of Irish history however, the voice of the child has not been central to our historical narrative. The author is currently engaged in research focusing on the lives of children in an orphanage in Limerick, Ireland in the early 1900s. This paper describes a

particularly tragic event in November 1908, in the Mount St. Vincent orphanage in Limerick, where 10 girls died and over 70 became ill due to food poisoning from beef stew. Juxtaposing the past and the present, the Mount St. Vincent building is now the John Henry Newman Building, part of the Mary Immaculate College campus where this research is being conducted.

### **Considering Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework**

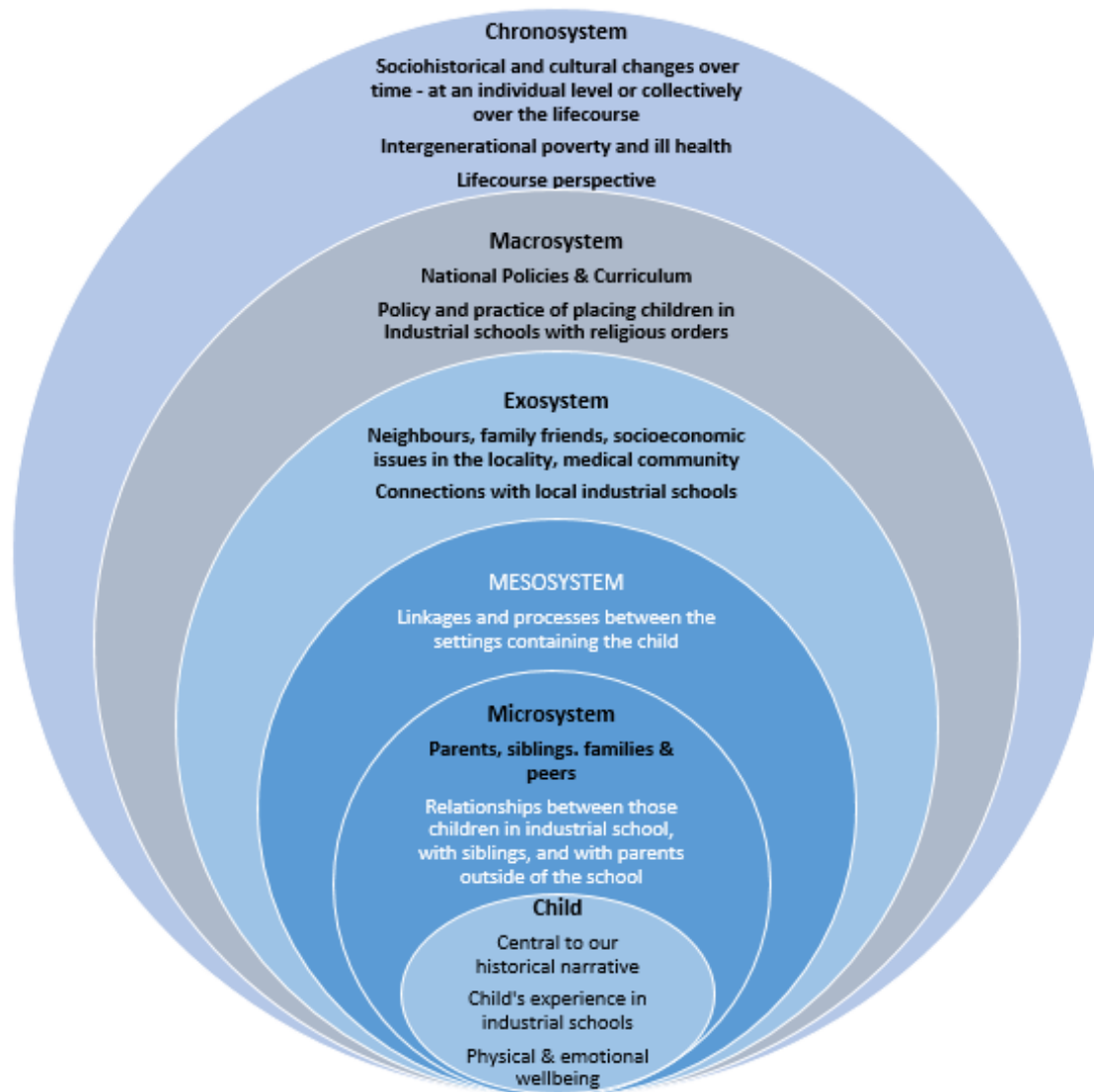
Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological systems theory stresses that in order to understand children's development, it is necessary to consider the interactions between the child's individual (biological) dispositions and their (ecological) environments. Bronfenbrenner (2005) represented this model through a series of systems or nested structures. Through this lens, this paper briefly considers the relationship of children's experiences in the past and current research on the health and well-being of children in contemporary society. Figure 1 gives an overview of Bronfenbrenner's model applied to this historical research.

The 'chronosystem' refers to time, both in the short and long term, across the life course, and considers how children's development is influenced by historical events and sociocultural factors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). From the perspective of the 'chronosystem', this research is tracing the short lives of some of the girls who lived and died in Mount St. Vincent orphanage, and the lives of others that survived. This paper gives a very brief overview of the timeline of the tragedy at the Limerick orphanage, considering the context beforehand, the epidemic itself and the aftermath. Many of the parents of these girls died in the workhouse, usually from Tuberculosis (Phthisis), and in some cases, generations of the family died within a short space of time, including siblings and grandparents. (This spread of infection through an extended family might have

resonance for us at present, in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) refers to the 'macrosystem' as the culture in which the child lives, including policies and accepted norms and beliefs. The Mount St. Vincent orphanage in Limerick was opened in 1852 by the Sisters of Mercy and was considered a safe refuge for young girls from the workhouse at the time. "Poor female orphans" were viewed as particularly vulnerable, given the conditions at the workhouse (Freeman's Journal, 1853). Fundraising campaigns for Mount St. Vincent were successful and over the next fifty years, according to the Sisters of Mercy annals, the institution provided a "happy scene of childish life and merriment". Through the annual inspection reports, the conditions in industrial schools were documented and league tables were generated based on several criteria including children's physical and general well-being. Mount St. Vincent ranked highly in these league tables and in general, the girls' schools rated much better than the boys' schools, particularly when the domestic science curriculum was introduced in the early 1900s. The aim of the domestic science curriculum was not only to secure future employment but also so that the girls could "live in a manner that will promote their own health, and contribute to the health and happiness of others" (47th Annual Report, 1909). This image of the orphanage or industrial school as a place of respite, to promote the well-being of children and others in future employment may challenge the narrative that has subsequently emerged, but reflects the macrosystem of these children at the time.

The census records of 1901 and 1911 list the girls who lived in Mount St. Vincent at the time and where they were from. The majority were from Limerick but there were also girls there from other surrounding counties. Not all of the girls were orphans, some had complex family circumstances, compounded by poverty and



**Figure 1: Overview of Bronfenbrenner's Biological Framework applied to the current historical research**

overcrowded living arrangements (also evidenced through the 1901 census records).

### A Tragic Event

Based on the subsequent inquest and medical notes, in 1908, there were 197 girls living in the orphanage at the time of the tragedy. As highlighted, domestic science was a core component of the industrial school day, however, it was on foot of a technical cookery class that led to a disastrous outbreak of food poisoning. On Monday, 2nd November 1908 during this class, the older girls prepared a stew with leftover meat from previous meals. On Tuesday, this stew was reheated and served for lunch at noon. Some offcuts of cold

meat were also served to some children, but the stew was mainly eaten by the older girls. The youngest age group ('the babies' aged 3-7) had a broth made of the boiled bones. By 6pm that same day, several girls were sick, some violently so, and by 7am on Wednesday 3rd November, the first victim, Sarah King, had died. Over the next few days, ten girls died and over seventy were ill. None of the youngest class were ill and the epidemiological investigation rapidly identified the meat as the source of infection (both the stew and also a cold cut of meat that had been left in the larder). The epidemiological notes tracing the spread of the infection indicated that some of the girls in the middle class had been given



some meat by the older girls, some had swapped food and one girl had sat at the table with the older girls with tragic consequences. Despite being documented in a very clinical way in terms of specifically identifying the spread of infection through the different classes and age groups, this account of the cookery class and mealtime provide some insights into life and relationships within the orphanage at this time in terms of Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the 'microsystem' refers to the child's immediate environment in which the child has the most interactions. During the mealtime experience we could consider if the older girls were perhaps looking after younger girls (possibly sisters) within this microsystem, sharing their meat and swapping food for example? Within this community, there were sets of sisters and this research is documenting, where possible, the family trees of some of the girls. In some instances, the girls' brothers have also been traced to industrial schools for boys.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) noted that the 'mesosystem' "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person". (Bronfenbrenner, 2005 p.148). This is demonstrated within the Sisters of Mercy annals as they describe how the nuns were "crushed with grief" and how they observed the "scenes of grief and wailing outside" as parents and relatives enquired after their children. The linkages between the institution and the home environment are represented in this description and the power and process involved are highlighted as the nuns decided whether to allow the parents of the sick and deceased into the building. However, it would appear that the clergy were automatically allowed in to anoint children without any question.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) refers to the 'exosystem' as the system incorporating social settings that affect, but do not directly include, the child. Although child mortality rates were

higher in general at the time (and as the annual inspection reports indicate, mortality rates were higher again within institutions), similar to today, death from food poisoning was not a common occurrence in childhood. Hence, this tragic event received widespread attention from the media and from a medical audience at a local, national and international level. In terms of the exosystem, for example, this event had a significant impact on the local community. The Mayor of Limerick described the event as "the most lamentable calamity which occurred in the city for a long period of years" (Limerick Chronicle, 1908) and thousands lined the streets of Limerick to pay respects to the funeral cortege of the young girls. There was also widespread sympathy for the nuns and the Bishop of Limerick. This widespread and extensive mourning has come as a surprise to some people when this story has been shared with different audiences. For many years afterwards, this outbreak was noted as a highly significant case of food poisoning from meat. From a medical perspective, the seriousness of this case of meat poisoning attracted significant attention both at home and abroad. Professor McWeeney (1909) deliberately published his conclusions in the British Medical Journal as a learning opportunity to reach a wider audience, rather than a more specific bacteriology journal. However, in any writing of the incident, the girls themselves were generally referred to as 'inmates' or in similar generic terms, which gives an insight into the low status of children in society at the time.

### Conclusion

Examining events from the past with a focus on childhood experiences can give us new insights and possibly challenge preconceived ideas or a narrative of a different time, space and perspective. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems framework (2005) is a particularly useful lens to adopt as it places the child at the centre and considers the relationships between the different systems that impact on children's lives. The focus on the voice of the



child and the importance of children's views and the right to be heard, as well as seen, is a relatively recent approach to childhood. However, the findings of this research so far have shown that examining historical documents and a range of sources can provide some insight into childhood experiences of the past, to allow lessons to be learned and to ensure that, while the voices of these children may be lost, their stories and legacies are not.

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## Children as Policy Makers: How the Inclusion of Children's Voices in Research can Improve Parenting Supports in Marginalised Communities

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#### Introduction

Universal delivery of parenting programmes has increasingly been seen by policy makers as a way of addressing larger social issues in marginalised communities, as research has shown that there is a high correlation between poverty and 'inadequate' parenting (Gillies, 2009; Katz et al., 2007). In attempting to ensure conformity, James et al. (1998) argue that, "standards of judgement relative to our world view" (p.27), as decided largely by middle-class stakeholders, are universally applied to and/or imposed on all, irrespective of whether they clash with the norms and customs of community members (Jordan, 2001). Furthermore, much of the focus in traditional parenting research is the relationship between parent (primarily the mother) and the child. Although a bi-directional relationship does exist between the child and the parent (Granic et al., 2007), little consideration is often given to how others within the family unit and/ or child's sphere also influence their lives. This can lead to one-sided results, despite research showing that, for example, children primarily cared for by grandparents follow a similar developmental trajectory to those cared for by their parents (Dunn et al, 2006).

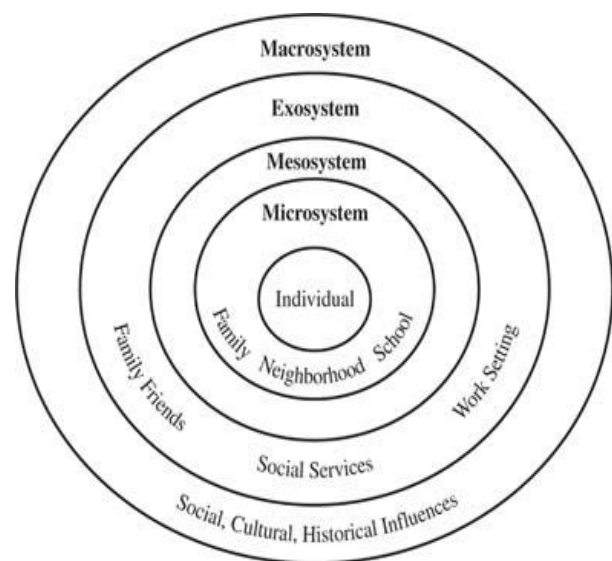
Despite the significant role children play in influencing family life, their voices are frequently, and noticeably, absent in parenting research, only emerging when parenting is considered to be failing (James, 2003). Their influence is often only measured in terms of

behaviour outcomes in parenting programmes (Enebrink et al., 2015), thereby positioning the child as a passive 'recipient' of parenting behaviour, rather than an active agent in the process. Research contradicts this positioning; children do actively influence and shape parenting practices, as well as understanding what is happening in their own lives (Williams et al., 2014; Greene & Hogan, 2005, p.9). In line with Article 12 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are considered 'experts' in their own lives, with research showing that they can articulate their views accurately and clearly, when freely allowed to do so in an enabling environment (Greene & Hogan, 2005; DCYA, 2012; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). Therefore, their influence in shaping parenting practices cannot be underestimated and their voices should be treated as an essential and integral part of the discourse, alongside all other voices (Lundy, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Children should be considered as an important contributor to our understanding of society, have the right to be listened to, and to have what they say acted upon, where appropriate (Lundy, 2007; UN, 2009, Article 20).

This article aims to privilege children's voices in marginalised communities, with particular emphasis on ensuring that 'seldom heard' children are included in parenting research (Kelleher et al., 2014). The inclusion of the voices of children from marginalised communities in this way is quite a departure from traditional rigid assumptions in parenting research. By asking a range of children about the relationships they have in their lives, we seek to gain valuable insights into family life and to use this learning to improve parenting supports to families. Furthermore, by critically analysing the 'standards of judgements' which normally focus on the community's problems, and as perceived by researchers, we can instead uncover potential family and community strengths, as perceived instead from the children's viewpoint (Kaufman et al., 2007).

## Methodology

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) argues that the environment surrounding the child comprises many levels, all of which interact reciprocally with the child in different ways. The theory is illustrated by a model involving concentric circles, see Figure 1. A child's engagement with their worlds starts with their immediate environment (e.g. relationships and interactions with family, neighbourhood and school, which make up their microsystems and mesosystems) and moves outwards incrementally to society more generally (e.g. links with social services, community and culture, which make up their exosystems and macrosystems), with each level influencing their development at varying degrees. By applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) lens, therefore, this study seeks to explore the different relationships children have in their lives and how this learning can be used to improve parenting supports to families.



**Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory Diagram**

## Participants

Children of parents who had completed Parent Plus Children's Programme in the past twenty-four months were approached for inclusion. All the children lived in the same Dublin suburb. The average Absolute Deprivation Index for the area places it in the disadvantaged category,

with a number of its district electoral divisions amongst the most deprived in the Dublin region (CSO, 2016). All children attended local Designated Equality of Opportunity of Schools (DEIS) Band 1 primary schools.

The children ranged in age from seven to ten years. Three of the children had four or more siblings, and two children had no siblings. Five of the eight children were living with both parents and two of the children lived with their mother and grandparents.

**Table 1: Child Participants**

<b>Child Code (names changed to protect anonymity)</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Lisa	White Irish
Martin	White Irish Traveller
Cara	White Irish Traveller
Cian	White Irish
Jack	White Irish
David	White Irish
Farrah	White Irish
Mandy	White Irish Traveller

### **Ethical Issues**

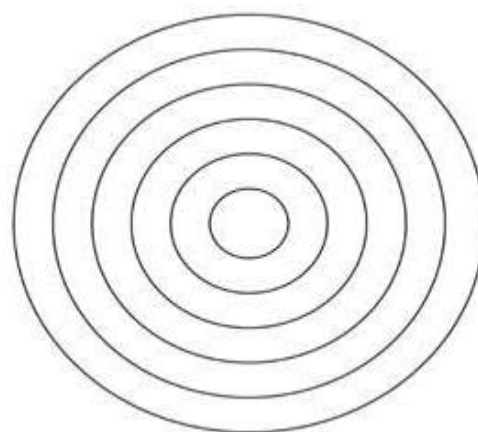
Further details about each child (e.g. their age) and the area they lived in have been withheld to protect the children's anonymity.

Informed consent was sought from the parents for the child participants. The children were given a child-friendly information sheet and they signed an assent form too. Before commencing the interviews, each child was given a disc, coloured red on one side and green on the other. If they were happy to take part, they turned the disc to green. If at any

time they were not, they could turn the disc to red.

### **Arts-based Mosaic Approach**

An arts-based mosaic approach was used as it allowed children to express their views visually and orally, in a way that is appropriate to their age and level of understanding (Christensen & James, 2000; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). Two children focus groups were held in the children's school. The focus groups lasted for approximately forty minutes with four children in each group. Each child was asked to complete a concentric map (Figure 2) of the important people in their lives, placing themselves at the centre and then adding people who were important to them, with the most important people closest to them. Prompt questions were based on an adaption of the 'Flower map of people who support children' (Save the Children, 2008, p.26) as it complemented the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Examples of the children's completed concentric maps are provided in the Findings section to illustrate how the children engaged with the method (Note: the maps include researchers' notes and were coloured by the researchers at the time of analysis).

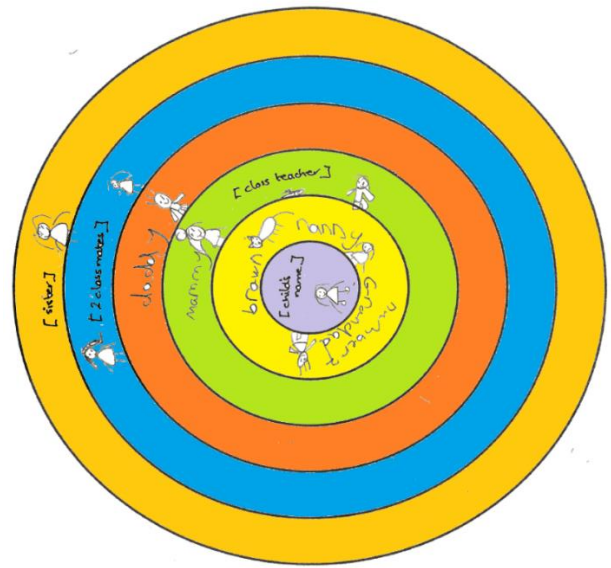


**Figure 2: Concentric Map template provided to the children**

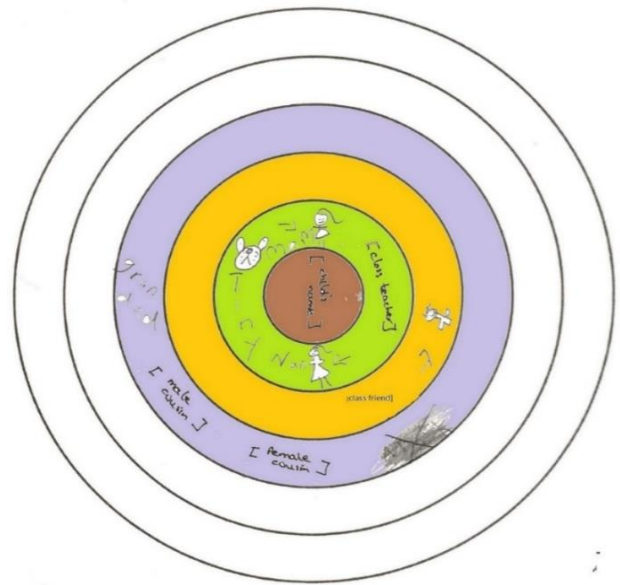
## Findings

While traditional research has assumed that change occurs within the traditional parent-child family unit itself, this research identified influences at play through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) levels. In this study, when asked to list the people who were important to them, the children's networks comprised of people who cared for and were good to them. Within their immediate family, all the children identified at least one of their parents as being very important to them and placed them, in most cases closest to them. Many spoke about how their parents look after them. Jack said they, "help me with my homework... make all my food", and they are "amazing". For Farrah, when it comes to getting support, she says her father is "a bit tough" and she prefers asking for help from her mother: "I used to say I'd ask my dad for help but not, he just says, he's a bit busy and I'd be calling him and he has his earphones in".

Grandparents were a key feature for all the children's support networks. Grandparents, in many cases, were positioned as being as important as their own parents, especially for the Traveller children. Cara said her grandfather, "gives you everything you want. He's like my daddy". For Jack and Lisa, they placed their grandparent(s) ahead of their own parents because, as Jack said, his grandmother "took care of me", a sentiment echoed by Cian (Figure 4). He lives in a household of nine people. His grandmother is always in the home and "my nanny does everything".



**Figure 3: Lisa's Concentric Map**



**Figure 4: Cian's Concentric Map**

Beyond the wider family, school staff, such as teachers, Special Needs Assistants and Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators, were listed by many of the children as important to them. Mandy felt comfortable turning to her teacher for help as she sees her as a calm person. However, a noticeable absence from the children's social networks were friends. When listed, they only named friends from their class. No



neighbourhood friends were identified. However, for the Traveller children, their cousins who lived in the same halting site appeared to take on the role of friends. For many of the children, particularly those facing adversity, their pet dog or cat featured predominately and in three cases were in the first circle, closest to the child. Cian sees his dog as a “guard dog”. Living in overcrowded conditions with high levels of tension, the importance of the dog to Cian appears to be reflective of the difficulties he has at home with his cousin and uncle who also live in the same house. Martin, a Traveller child with a chronic health condition, placed his dog in the same circle as his parents and two siblings. When he had no-one else around him to play, the dog was, “all I would ever play with”.

### Conclusion

The findings of this research, supported by the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, challenge the often-held preconception that marginalised communities are ‘failing’ in their parenting skills and how they are raising their families (Gillies, 2009; Katz et al., 2007). Reflecting influences primarily at the microsystem and mesosystem levels, all the children had a network of parents, grandparents, extended family, school staff, school friends and pets that they were able to draw on for support. They had positive relationships with either one or both parents, which they negotiated in individualised, dynamic and open-ended ways, reflective of their own experience. This was particularly evident for the children who perceived their fathers in a more passive role. In these cases, children were more likely to approach their mother for support, rather than their father. A key community strength identified is the role grandparents play in supporting their family. Grandparents are viewed as essential caregivers and a constant support in many of these children's lives. It becomes clear that the traditional assumption of the family unit within this community extends beyond parent(s) and child to include

grandparents. Grandparents appeared to play a similar role to parents in many cases, carrying out day-to-day parenting of their grandchildren, sometimes in the place of the child's father.

This research highlights the importance of the inclusion of children's voices from marginalised communities in informing service delivery of parenting supports within those communities. Parenting programmes largely focus on the parent-child relationship, often treating both parents as one unit. However, the findings here suggest that children may not view their parents in this way, but instead clearly differentiate the relationship they have with their parents. Furthermore, the findings contest the little consideration given to others present in the family unit, namely grandparents.

The insights from this research provoke the question: How often are children involved in the planning process when parenting programmes are being rolled out? A key recommendation of this research, therefore, is to speak to children about their family before any intervention is designed and implemented. By including them at the start of the process, a more appropriate parenting programme could then be developed that reflects a better understanding of the realities for each family. This could include a greater focus on, for example, grandparents' role in their family and on building on the relationships children have with one or both parents.

Furthermore, children clearly articulated the supportive role of school in their lives. Therefore, when developing and offering parenting supports in DEIS schools, particularly through the HSCL scheme, and to minimise schools imposing their standards of judgement on families, a key recommendation of this study would be for school staff to work with the children of the parents prior to the commencement of any parenting intervention. In doing so, school staff can ensure that children's voices are included and privileged



and that the realities of their family lives are understood in any intervention that will directly impact on their lives. By applying such a bottom-up approach, this also challenges the assumption that families must conform to the 'standards of judgement' often imposed by policy makers (James et al., 1998). Rather than thinking about how families should be, this approach would instead require parenting programmes being tailored to more specifically meet the needs of people they are aimed at and empower them to make decisions in keeping with their own realities. In this way and by making children policy makers, especially the 'seldom heard', parenting supports in marginalised communities can more truly reflect and respond to the strengths and needs of the families.

This research found that children seldom, if at all, included neighbourhood friends. This is a worrying finding as it may suggest social isolation. The author recommends that communities develop and expand on opportunities to bring children together through, for example, after-schools clubs. In deciding on what activities should be developed for children and families, it is again imperative that their voices are privileged and given weight as credible stakeholders in their community. Finally, an unexpected finding was the important role family pets had in their lives. For children who were facing adversity, the presence of a pet was significantly more important to them than to other children. In the absence of others, including protective figures, it appears a pet can help mitigate against isolation and help to reduce stress caused by exposure to tense living conditions (Mc Connell., 2011; Wagner, 2011). Therefore, it would be recommended to explore with families how best pet ownership can be supported and expanded within the family or indeed the community, through for example, an after-school activity or access to pet-care facilities.

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## **“I don't feel that I can complain about my brother's diabetes”: Siblings' participation in diabetes care**

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### **Introduction**

Clinical guidance emphasises the importance of considering the whole family when caring for a child with a chronic condition, however, the perspectives of siblings are often neglected (Deavin et al., 2018). The purpose of this article is to shed light on the perspectives of siblings, drawing on findings from a wider study which explores the dynamics between pre-teens (aged 9-12 years) with type 1 diabetes and their families. The overall study's focus on pre-adolescence is due to its importance in the transition from childhood to adolescence, where family relationships change as children seek more independence (Newbould et al., 2008). In families with type 1 diabetes, these changes play an essential role in diabetes management (Rankin et al., 2018).

### **Chronic illness disrupts family structures**

When a child is diagnosed with a chronic condition, changes occur in family structure and roles. These changes profoundly affect siblings of chronically ill children, and much of family life may revolve around the health of the ill child (Bluebond-Langner, 1996; Havill et al., 2019). Siblings may know little about the condition and are likely to worry about the future health of their ill sibling (Havill et al., 2019). Likewise, studies show that siblings of children with diabetes can feel increased levels

of responsibility for their ill sibling (Wennick & Huus, 2012; Loos & Kelly, 2006). At the same time, siblings may experience loss of parental attention, which can result in feelings of jealousy and anger (Havill et al., 2019; Loos & Kelly, 2006). In one study, children with diabetes reported that diabetes had brought them closer to their sibling, but they also indicated that diabetes had complicated their relationship with their sibling (Loos & Kelly, 2006). Thus, relationships between children with diabetes and their families are strongly affected by the condition. However, little is known about the experiences of siblings and relational dynamics and most interventions overlook the value of targeting all key family members.

### **Methodology**

The study employed an exploratory design and makes use of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and workshops. This article reports findings from four workshops with pre-teens with type 1 diabetes (n=17), their parents (n=26) and their siblings (n=14) across four hospital settings in Denmark. The study was approved by the Danish Data Protection Agency and the Regional Committee on Health Research Ethics.

The workshops were facilitated by members of the research team, with each session following the same structure (Table 1). As part of the workshop, participants were divided into three groups: (1) pre-teens with diabetes, (2) siblings and (3) parents to facilitate peer-to-peer communication across families. Each workshop lasted 2.5 hours and was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analysed using principles of abductive analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) in four phases: (1) detailed reading of transcripts and write-ups for each workshop; (2) coding and categorising the data; (3) synthesis of categories into key themes; and (4) transcripts were re-read to identify differences pertaining to the analytical concepts and the data. The concepts of

**Table 1: Workshop format**

Phases	Activity	Purpose	Participants
1	Introduction	To explain the focus of the workshop	Pre-teens (n=17) Siblings (n=14) Parents (n=26)
	Participants shared stories about the diagnosis	To encourage open sharing of experiences	Separate groups of parents, pre-teens and siblings
2	Participants placed themselves on either side of the room according to how much space diabetes took up in their lives	To encourage reflection about diabetes in the participants' lives and to understand why they chose this side	All participants
3	Participants used quotes and picture cards to describe what it was like to have diabetes in the family	To identify and encourage reflection about issues of importance to the families when managing diabetes	Group 1: parents
	Participants selected picture cards to share experiences with support	To identify and encourage reflection about sources of support	Group 2: pre-teens
	Participants drew what it was like to have a sibling with type 1 diabetes	To encourage reflection about and describe experiences of having a sibling with type 1 diabetes	Group 3: siblings
	Participants were invited to ask questions about the workshop	To encourage reflection about the workshop and get suggestions for improvement	All participants

biographical disruption (Bury, 1982) and biographical contingency (Monaghan & Gabe, 2015) were used as guidance in the data analysis. According to Bury (1982), biographical disruption describes how a chronic condition disrupts the normal structure of family life and requires individuals to reappraise their biography and mobilise resources in response to the situation. While acknowledging this perspective on chronic conditions, Monaghan and Gabe (2015) have introduced the notion of biographical contingency which refers to how meanings and

consequences of a chronic condition vary depending on aspects of self, social location and medication. Together, these perspectives can shed light on how pre-teens and their families adapt to life with type 1 diabetes.

### Results

Three themes characterised the relationship between children with type 1 diabetes and their siblings: 1) diabetes takes up 'a lot of space', 2) concealed frustrations, and 3) contradictory wishes for support.

According to all participants, diabetes took up a lot of family space. In line with the concept of 'biographical disruption' (Bury, 1982), parents often described diabetes as a critical situation that disrupted the normal rules of family life. They were worried about their child with diabetes and suggested that the family adapted their daily routines to the child. This is indicated by one father:

*It's important that the family understands that it [sweets] is not just a 'help yourself'-table. The family has to adapt to [name of pre-teen].*

All family members, however, did not want diabetes to take up too much space.

Pre-teens and parents were aware that diabetes received a great deal of attention in the family at the expense of giving the sibling attention. One mother described that:

*Diabetes can easily split a family apart. In one way or another. Because you [parent] feel that the other children are set aside.*

In addition, siblings were sometimes annoyed that diabetes affected their daily life. They reported often waking up at night because of the alarm on the insulin pump, a medical device to administer insulin for the treatment of diabetes.

Despite these issues, siblings concealed their frustrations from their siblings and parents as they felt sorry for their sibling with diabetes. A brother expressed this situation:

*I feel sorry for him [brother]. It's like a delicate balance between what I feel and what I can say about it.*

One sister reported not saying anything about the needles that were everywhere in their home although she was annoyed by them:

*Well in a way I feel that I can't allow myself to be very angry about it right... because he [brother] lives with it every day.*

Pre-teens with diabetes reported that their siblings had limited knowledge about diabetes. However, they did not want diabetes to interfere with their relationship with their sibling and preferred them not to worry about diabetes. Accordingly, a pre-teen mentioned that his brother was not part of his 'diabetes life':

*He's not that involved in, what should I call it, my diabetes life. He's more a part of my normal life [...] we do a lot of stuff together.*

Furthermore, pre-teens resented waking up their parents and siblings at night because of the alarms on the insulin pump.

As suggested by Bury (1982), diabetes changed family relationships and required pre-teens as well as their family members to mobilise resources in response to the situation. Although pre-teens did not want to attract attention to diabetes, they appreciated help from their parents and siblings. Siblings expressed a wish to support their sibling with diabetes but were unsure how. As one brother reported:

*I don't know how to help her [sister]. And that's one of the reasons I don't interfere with her diabetes.*

They were sometimes afraid of doing something wrong when they were home alone with their sibling. At the same time, they did not perceive diabetes care as their responsibility. Accordingly, parents found it very difficult to balance the involvement of siblings in diabetes as indicated by one mother:

*It's a balancing act that's very difficult, I think, but important.*

Despite the challenges that the families reported in relation to managing the burden of type 1 diabetes, they constructed a sense of normality by accepting the variability of the condition and remaining optimistic. In particular, this seemed to be the case for pre-teens. This finding is related to the concept of



'biographical contingency' which emphasises the contingencies of the illness experience rather than the single shocking event of receiving a diagnosis (Monaghan & Gabe, 2015).

### Discussion

It is clear that managing diabetes within the family while negotiating relationships is challenging for many families. Although research is lacking on families with children with type 1 diabetes, the findings can be related to work on families living with other chronic conditions. Bluebond-Langner (1996) has shown how families living with cystic fibrosis cope with the intrusion of the condition. She identified different strategies used by parents to contain the intrusion e.g. redefining normal and reassessing priorities. These strategies reflect how parents in this study adjusted to life with diabetes. However, they did not want diabetes to dominate family life and struggled to balance this with the comprehensive daily treatment that diabetes entails. Furthermore, Bluebond-Langner (1996) described that siblings often live 'in the shadow' of their ill sibling which corresponds to our finding that siblings resented the attention their parents gave the child with diabetes. However, they also felt sorry for their sibling with diabetes and wanted to provide support. Other studies have reported that siblings often experience strong and contradictory feelings about their ill sibling (Deavin et al., 2018; Loos & Kelly, 2006). This includes feelings of anger and sadness, as well as feelings of protection and pride (Havill et al., 2019; Deavin et al., 2018). Furthermore, we found that siblings often concealed their emotions from the family. A study by Wennick and Huus (2012) demonstrated that siblings were often silent about their own feelings, because they thought their parents had enough to worry about. In addition, research has revealed that parents did not talk to the siblings about the illness, to protect them from difficult aspects of it (Malcolm et al., 2014). Likewise, parents and pre-teens in our study

did not want siblings to become too involved in diabetes. Accordingly, research has demonstrated that pre-teens wanted to alleviate the burden diabetes placed on their families (Rankin et al., 2018).

However, these systems that family members set up to protect each other may reduce communication and cause them to suppress their own needs (Deavin et al., 2018). Although siblings understood why parents gave more time and attention to their ill siblings, they felt left out. We found that siblings requested knowledge about how to best support their ill sibling. This did not only pertain to practical contributions, but also to how they could emotionally support their sibling which has also been reported by Loos and Kelly (2006). However, our study indicates that older siblings were more likely to feel protective towards their ill sibling compared to younger siblings. Accordingly, some studies suggest that siblings' involvement in the illness may differ according to age (Havill et al., 2019).

### Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

Diabetes received a lot of attention in the families which could be frustrating for siblings. However, siblings were very supportive toward their ill sibling. Nevertheless, they were unsure how to support and concealed their frustrations from family members. Pre-teens valued support from family members, but did not want to attract attention to their diabetes. To address siblings' needs, we suggest that parents and professionals encourage open communication in families, seek siblings' perspectives and tailor information and support accordingly. Peer-to-peer support is important so providing a forum where siblings can meet and share experiences may also be helpful. Clearly, siblings should always be 'seen and heard' and their needs taken into account in development of future interventions for diabetes care of pre-teens. Promoting family-centred care is essential in the care of children with chronic conditions.

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## The ripple effect of child sexual abuse: Impact on sibling relationships

[Summary article]

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### Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been shown to have a significant impact on individuals. However, limited research has been conducted on the impact of the abuse on siblings, other family members and family relationships following the disclosure of CSA (McElvaney, 2015). As the disclosure of CSA often does not occur until adulthood, this can cause significant disruption to family dynamics (McElvaney, 2015). Following disclosure, siblings may experience intense emotional and behavioural responses, which can result in either increased support and contribution towards the victim's recovery or the breakdown of sibling relationships (Schreier et al., 2016). Although this has been acknowledged by mental health practitioners, who recognise the importance of supporting siblings as part of the recovery process for the victim (Han & Kim, 2016), it has been a neglected area in the literature (Crabtree et al., 2018; Katz & Hamama, 2018). This study sought to investigate adult sibling responses to disclosures of CSA, and the changes, if any, in sibling and family relationships following disclosure of CSA.

### Methodology

This article draws on findings from an ongoing study employing a population-based survey design to explore siblings' experiences of family relationships following disclosure of CSA. Specifically, the article discusses the responses of participants to two open-ended questions about potential changes in the

sibling relationship. The sample consists of 45 participants (36 women and nine men). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

### Results

Three main themes were identified: intense sibling emotional reactions; strain and closeness in sibling relationships; and managing family dynamics. Participants described experiencing overwhelming emotions when hearing about the CSA. This ranged from complete shock and disbelief to intense sadness, feelings of anger or guilt about not having known sooner about the abuse or not having been a victim themselves, "I was hurt, disappointed and then very angry, in that order" (Participant 15).

Participants also described a change in the sibling relationship, with some participants reporting that they felt much closer to their sibling following disclosure, particularly where conversations were held about the abuse:

*We are closer, and there is no pretence as we can discuss the CSA and the impact on her and to me (Participant 20).*

Others, however, experienced a greater tension in the relationship:

*She has distanced herself from family, does not speak openly about it to us, does not attend family occasions/ it has made our relationship more strained as she does not feel supported and believed (Participant 27).*

Several siblings reflected on the importance of being there for their sibling, to listen to them and to believe them. Some participants highlighted experiences of having to negotiate and liaise between different family members, sometimes taking on a caretaker role with regards to their sibling. For some siblings, the disclosure led to major irrevocable divides occurring within the family:

*[It] resulted in the breakdown of the family unit of the abused child... it has changed the whole family dynamic, and I now feel this will never change (Participant 14).*

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of siblings following the disclosure of CSA and to identify changes, if any, on sibling relationships and family dynamics. Research to date has highlighted not only the significant role that siblings play in the recovery process of the adult survivor but also the therapeutic and support needs of family members (Crabtree et al., 2018).

A unique finding of this study was the importance for sibling relationships of open communication about the CSA experiences. Participants noted that knowing what happened helped them feel close to their sibling following a CSA disclosure. In contrast, not knowing the details of what happened and feeling afraid to mention the abuse were features of more distant sibling relationships. Sibling relationships can serve as a protective factor for those who have experienced CSA (Katz & Tener, 2020). These findings build on previous, albeit limited research, and add to the evidence base for developing services to support siblings of children who experience CSA.

This research sheds light on a neglected area within the literature, providing important insight into the experiences of siblings following disclosure of a sibling's CSA. However, there are also several limitations which must be acknowledged. As the survey was online, this may have limited the accessibility for individuals without access to the internet. Additionally, the open-ended questions did not allow siblings to go into further depth of their experiences or allow for any further exploration by the researcher. Finally, the research was cross-sectional, captured at one moment in time; therefore, it is unknown how the sibling relationship

changed over time. Nonetheless, the study adds to the limited research base regarding this topic. It confirms the need for empirically-based approaches that incorporate a person-centred, lifespan perspective to therapeutic responses, with careful consideration of the family and community context of survivors of CSA (Alaggia et al., 2017).

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## Designated Liaison Persons in Irish Primary Schools: Representing the Voice of Children that may not be Seen or Heard

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### Introduction

Outside of the home, children and young people spend the majority of the time in school. While many children leave and return to safe and protective home environments, for other children, their childhood is significantly damaged by abusive behaviour; be it sexual, physical, emotional or neglect, or in more serious cases a combination of many or all abuse types. While abuse happens both within and outside of the family home, generally the perpetrator is known to the child. Given the amount of time that children spend in school, and the trusting relationships that are built with teachers and school personnel, it is understandable that concerns and disclosures in relation to child protection will be uncovered in the school environment (McKee & Dillenberger, 2009). Given recent changes in legislation in Ireland, all teachers now have mandatory responsibilities in reporting child abuse to the Child and Family Agency (Government of Ireland, 2015). The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is appointed by the Board of Management of each school and has overall responsibility for child protection for that school. Indeed, both the DLP and school staff are often the only voice for a vulnerable child whose abuse and suffering may not be seen or heard (Nohilly, 2019). This paper reviews the responsibilities of DLPs and teachers in reporting and managing child protection concerns. Findings of a survey completed with primary school DLPs are presented, illustrating that while there are supports available to them in their role, the challenges are numerous.



## Teachers' Responsibilities in Child Protection Work

Since the implementation of all sections of the Children First Act in 2015, all teachers registered with the Teaching Council are mandated persons for child protection. Mandated persons have two main legal responsibilities under the Act; to report the harm of children above a defined threshold to the Child and Family Agency and to assist the agency, if requested, in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report (Government of Ireland, 2015). While the responsibilities of teachers are very clear, historically teachers have been reluctant to engage with the child protection system (Nohilly, 2019). Buckley and McGarry (2010) highlight that the small amount of research evidence that exists in the Irish context indicates teachers' commitments to fulfil their child protection obligations is fragile. A number of factors can impact on a teacher's ability to identify and report abuse, including; the category of abuse presenting by the child, teachers' lack of ability to identify symptoms of abuse, their concerns and fears about the negative consequences of reporting, and their feelings of anger and helplessness when they do report and a child continues to remain in difficult circumstances (Kenny, 2004; Walsh et al., 2006; O' Dowd, 2008). The role of the Designated Liaison Person in supporting teachers and all school staff to meet their responsibilities regarding the identification and reporting of child abuse is therefore paramount.

### The role of the Designated Liaison Person

"Both public and private organisations that are providing services to children should consider appointing a designated liaison person in keeping with best practice in child safeguarding" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017, p. 35). Given that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Child Protection Procedures are based on the Children First national guidance, the

appointment of a DLP for each school is a key responsibility of each Board of Management. Essentially, the DLP is the resource person and first point of contact for any member of school staff who has a child protection concern. Furthermore, they are the 'liaison' person with all organisations in relation to child protection matters including the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Síochána. The DES Procedures recommend that the role is undertaken by the school principal (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). This is a hugely demanding and responsible role and, of all of the tasks charged to the principal, possibly the one that causes them the most concern and challenge, as suggested by a study by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO, 2008). Indeed, the role has likely become more demanding since all sections of the Children First Act were implemented in 2017. As teachers now have mandatory reporting responsibilities, this requires more from DLPs in terms of supporting staff and ensuring that the legislation and the requirements of the DES Procedures are adhered to. Amongst all of these administrative tasks is the compulsion to ensure that signs and symptoms of child abuse do not go unnoticed so that the most vulnerable children in the school are heard and are seen.

### The Current Study

The current study sought to ascertain the experiences of DLPs in Irish primary schools, following the changes in legislation in 2017 and, in particular, the introduction of mandatory reporting of child protection for teachers. Ethical approval for the research was sought and granted by Mary Immaculate College of Education. The email addresses of all primary schools in Ireland for 2017/8 were sourced from the publicly available school database on the DES website. The survey was emailed to approximately 3,248 schools in March 2019. An information note accompanied the survey, outlining the purpose of the research and requesting that the survey be shared with the DLP of the school. Of the

3,248 emails, 27 were not delivered as the email addresses were incorrect or obsolete, resulting in 3,221 being delivered. Responses from 387 DLPs were received, reflecting a response rate of 12.01%. The respondents served in a variety of types of primary school and had varying years of experience in the role; from less than one year to over twenty. Not all of the questions were addressed by all respondents. The question which received the lowest response rate asked the respondents to identify any supports in carrying out DLP duties.

A fixed mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011) using a concurrent embedded approach (Creswell, 2010) was employed for this research in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The quantitative approach was the primary method (e.g. closed, fixed questions, rating scales, etc.) and the qualitative approach (e.g. open-ended questions inviting elaboration and explanation of meaning/experience) was the secondary method which was embedded within the quantitative approach. Hence, both closed and open questions formed part of the survey.

This paper focuses on questions related to supports and challenges for DLPs namely: 'Identify anything that supports you in carrying out your duties as DLP' and 'Identify any challenges you encounter in carrying out your duties as DLP'. Both questions allowed for an open-ended response where DLPs could elaborate on the particular supports and challenges encountered. Analysis of the qualitative data typically echoed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis where data was initially coded with sample data extracts, codes were sorted into potential themes, themes were reviewed using data extracts, and a thematic map was generated. The findings section presents a brief commentary of the supports identified in the role, and the challenges as noted by the respondents.

### Findings: Supports and Challenges in the Role of DLP

Analysis of the responses in relation to the supports available to DLPs highlighted that the main supports available included; the 'Children First' national guidelines and Department of Education and Skills 'Child Protection procedures', support from staff members (the Deputy DLP was specifically referenced in a number of responses), training courses attended by the DLPs, support from other Principals and also from Networks including the Irish Primary Principal's Network and the Catholic Primary School's Management Association. Tusla social workers were also identified as supports to DLPs in their role and responses also indicated that experience in the role, coupled with knowledge of families were supportive factors. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the responses received from those who addressed the question and representative of the total number of survey participants.

**Table 1: Supports available to the DLP in carrying out their duties**

	% of 309	% of total respondents
Deputy DLP	14.6	11.7
Tusla	27.8	22.4
Staff	21	16.9
Training	15.2	12.2
Guidelines	12.9	10.4
IPPN	8.4	6.8
BOM	10	8.1
Child protection guidelines and procedures	11	8.9
Knowledge/experience	3.5	2.8
CPSMA	6.1	4.9
Other- examples included advice from other DLPs, knowledge of families and the Home School Community Liaison Teacher (in DEIS schools)	20	16.1

A number of challenges to the role of DLP were identified, including; paperwork and administration, preparing the Child Protection Oversight Report, the time involved in undertaking the role, dealing with the Child and Family Agency, dealing with parents and families, lack of training for the role, making 'judgement calls' as DLP, the emotional toll and isolation of the role, the Board of Management and Department of Education and Skills inspections.

The particular challenges DLPs are dealing with can be illustrated by a sample of the qualitative responses:

*Paperwork. When you are dreading a Child Protection case more because of the paperwork that will ensue as opposed to the actual harm being done to the child, it says a lot. I know that comes across badly but the paperwork is stupid and takes time away from dealing with the issue.*

*Ensuring all other support personal have skill set necessary to carry out their duties if needed- no formal support from DES received in this regard for staff to negotiate, contextualise and to engage in a sense-making process (all training for staff was ad hoc on a system level basis- only as good as any individual school put in place).*

*I'm not sure if they would all stick to the procedures if a disclosure was made. I do worry about this and confidentiality.*

*Speed of Tusla responses.*

*Knowledge of a family can cloud judgment i.e. over familiar with circumstances.*

*Small rural school/familiarity with all families/ reporter easily identifiable/ DLP lives locally.*

*Emotional weight of managing a difficult situation; making a judgement on whether something is a CP issue (e.g. child walking home to an empty house?).*

*Having the strength to tackle the difficult issues at a local level. Knowing when to intervene.*

*Loneliness of the role; not having a team of others to confer with (even confidentially); the gravity and seriousness of child protection e.g. getting it wrong - the consequences for the child and/or the consequences for a family or the person reporting.*

The quantitative responses coupled with the qualitative data presents a broad and wide-ranging summary of the scale of the supports, but particularly the challenges of the role.

## Discussion

While the study indicates that there are supports available to DLPs in their role, the challenges that are presented are significant. These include practical aspects, such as the requirements of oversight reporting and preparing for child protection inspections. The qualitative responses highlight the solitary and emotionally challenging nature of the role.

While the Department of Education and Skills have prepared templates available on the child protection section of their website, it is clear that training for DLPs and indeed all school staff is a compelling requirement that must be addressed. Training should address both the 'implicit' and 'explicit' barriers to reporting. Explicit barriers refer to building knowledge in relation to the child protection procedures and knowing the steps to follow so abuse can be detected or reported. This training is available, but presently the DES only sanction DLPs and Deputy DLPs to attend. Implicit barriers are far more complex to address as they relate to an individual's belief system and wider cultural views of children, including their rights and

child protection and this requires a deeper level of consideration (Bourke & Maunsell, 2016).

A range of training supports—from regular face-to-face training, on-line refresher courses and reporting templates—could go a long way to address both 'implicit' and 'explicit' barriers to reporting.

Training and space for reflection needs to be made available, not only for DLPs but for all school staff who are the eyes and ears for children who otherwise may 'slip' though the net unnoticed, all the while abuse prevails across their childhood. A structured support system for DLPs who navigate this complex and challenging role on a daily basis would also ensure greater supports for vulnerable children.

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## INCLUDING CHILDREN AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS AND AS CO-RESEARCHERS

### Meaningfully capturing the voice of children in research: Applying the Lundy Model of Participation in the Classroom

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#### Introduction

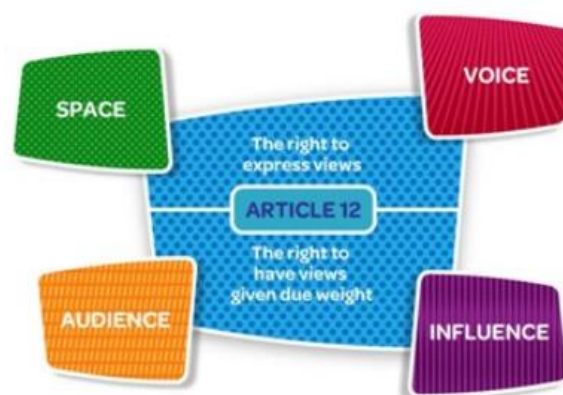
The importance of the voice of the child in research has become a significant educational issue in Europe and in the wider international context. While much of the research is focused on adults' interpretations of what the child says, it raises the question: where and how is the voice of the child explored and represented in their own right?

Internationally, it is widely recognised that children not only have their own views (de Sousa, 2019; Harmon, 2018; Ring & O'Sullivan, 2018; Dillen, 2014) but that their voices must be heard and respected (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, 1989). Arguing that children should not be seen merely as objects of research but as active participants and as co-researchers, this article offers a rights-based approach to research with children, emanating from Article 12 of the UNCRC. It explores Lundy's (2007) framework for research with children, ensuring all children's views are valued and respected. The article includes some practical examples drawn from a research study in the Irish context, conducted by the author (Harmon, 2018), in which children became co-researchers in the exploration of religion, beliefs and values in their lives. The article highlights the importance of ensuring that the

child's voice is heard and not just an adult interpretation of that voice.

#### The Importance of the Child's Voice

The importance of the child's voice in education and prioritising their "participation" in decision making is core to developing a democratic education (Martin & Forde et al., 2015; Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012; Rinaldi, 2012). This is also true when engaging children in research. Participation enhances children's self-esteem and confidence, promotes their overall development and enhances their sense of autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience (Dewey, 1916). Professor Laura Lundy at the School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast, offers a rights-based model of participation ensuring that the democratic environment is appreciated and nurtured in educational and research settings with children. Lundy's model focuses on ensuring that all children's views are valued and respected (Lundy, 2007).



**Figure 1: The Lundy Model of Participation**  
(Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2015, p. 21)

#### The Lundy Model of Participation in Action

The Lundy Model of Participation (Figure 1), highlights four components that are necessary to ensure that Article 12 of the UNCRC is achieved. The components are space, voice, audience and influence.

**Space:** The Lundy Model of Participation begins with creating a safe and inclusive space



for children to express their views. This space is a pre-requisite for children to express their authentic views, without fear of rebuke and reprisal (Lundy, 2007). This is not just a physical space, but a space for voice to be heard and appreciated and not just in a tokenistic way.

*Voice:* Developing opportunities for conversations with young people in education has increased as a result of the interest in the study of young people's social practices, and the impact of their engagement with their culture on their relationships with themselves and the world (Lundy, 2007). Nobody expresses themselves in the same way as anyone else and so, once a safe space has been created (Lundy, 2007), the researcher must give due consideration to how each child's voice can be heard. Voice can be articulated in a variety of ways and it is not just restricted to the spoken word. It is imperative that thought be given to multiple means of expression, as well as the silent voice in the setting, as demonstrated by the study by the author (Harmon, 2018). In that study, the methods of photovoice and scrapbooking, were used to access the voice of the child, and are presented here.

### **Photovoice**

The taking of photographs by children as a data gathering exercise has been recommended by many (Rasmussen, 2014; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010a; Clark & Moss, 2001). Photovoice has been described as "a powerful participatory action research method where individuals are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively, and use them to create opportunities for personal and/or community change" (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010b). "Voice", in the context of photovoice, clearly has political connotations and refers to both "the expression of feeling or opinion" and "having the right or opportunity to express an opinion" (Young & Barratt, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1997). Wang and Burris (1997) outline three goals of photovoice: to enable people to record and reflect on their community; to

promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues; and to bring about change.

The author's study involved engagement with thirty-five children between the ages of 11 and 13 years in an Irish Primary school exploring their views on religion and beliefs. The school was co-educational with a variety of religious and belief views, as well as a diverse ethnic population (Harmon, 2018). The study did not separate children according to their religious or belief views, as has been done in other studies (O'Farrell, 2016; Kitching & Shanneik, 2015; Lodge, 2004), but kept the children together in keeping the natural school environment. The taking of pictures was used as a data gathering exercise. The children were first invited to participate in a workshop which focused on the ethics of photographing other people. Training on basic photography skills with digital or disposable cameras was also given. In class, having explored the UNCRC, the children were invited to take photographs in response to the following: *Embracing your right under Article 14 (respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the UNCRC, take pictures that show your religious views or beliefs, as well as the religion and beliefs of others in your world.* The children had one week in which to take the photographs, allowing them the time to explore their communities outside of their school. The photographs were then printed, and the children kept one copy of their photographs, while the researcher retained a second. The photographs were used to support discussion in the subsequent semi-structured group interview, and in the creation of posters telling the story of religious views or beliefs among their group. The children had to decide in their group which pictures were to be used, and to ensure that all views were respected. This opened up a conversation about diversity within their classroom and wider community. The photos also were used during the semi-structured group interview to support conversation.

When reflecting on voice, the tendency is to focus on the spoken word, as highlighted by Alderson, Hawthorne and Killen (2005). However, this of course is not the only form of dialogue, as was evident from the following contribution of a Muslim child, Arya, who is selectively mute.

As a group of children from Christian traditions articulated their belief in Jesus as found in the Bible, Arya, slowly pushed a picture of the Qur'an into the middle of the table and bowed her head. The children all stopped talking and looked at the photograph. The children did not have the name of the book but knew it was the special book for the Muslim people. The girl did not articulate any information to the group. However, through the pictures, she shared her tradition with her fellow pupils and ignited in them a sense of curiosity about her belief tradition. In this one non-verbal articulation of her belief system, she had her voice heard.

The above situation emphasises the importance of voice within the Lundy Model of Participation (Lundy, 2007). It shows the importance of taking the time to select appropriate methodologies when accessing the voice of children and, as a researcher, to always look at the needs of all the children in the group, which of course is a challenge when you have not worked with the children before.

### **Scrapbooking**

The second participatory method used in the study was scrapbooking. Media educators and researchers have begun to use scrapbooks, sometimes called media diaries, as pedagogical and methodological tools to engage young people in generating and extending their knowledge of culture (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010b). More recently, teachers of physical education and researchers have harnessed the potential of scrapbooking as a pedagogical and methodological tool to help researchers and teachers to better understand, extend and challenge students' existing knowledge of, and critical engagement with, popular physical culture for example

dance. This is evident in Enright and O'Sullivan (2010b), who explored with teenage girls how they were physically active. The girls were asked to scrapbook their physical activity and that of their peers. The girls used sporting images, hip-hop dance and one girl took a picture of her friend on a dance machine in a fast food restaurant.

According to Walling-Wefelmeyer (2020), scrapbooking offers more than simply using scrapbooks as a tool or method of data collection, but a process of saving, sharing, and making sense of the everyday. Scrapbooking thereby highlights the contingency and partiality of the scraps themselves and of its own activity in giving them form. This performance is both practical and conceptual. The author in his study used it as an approach to knowing, the children were asked to design a poster that they would use to teach a topic in religious education. The aim of this was to allow them to highlight what was important to them and to give the researcher an insight into their world and priorities with regards to religion and beliefs. Photographs taken by the children, school documentation, text from books, magazines and newspapers, screen prints from internet sites, drawings, stickers, and children's writing were all included in their scrapbooks. The scrapbooks constituted a valuable data source for the study, as did audio recordings of the participants' focus group discussions around their own and other children's interpretations of the various scrapbook entries. This method again offered children multiple means of expressing their voice within the space created, once again underlining the importance of having multiple means for children to express their views as outlined by Lundy (2007) in her model under Voice.

*Audience:* Returning to The Lundy Model of Participation, a principal reason for the development of the Lundy Model was to emphasise that voice is not enough and that children have a right to an audience and that those hearing their voice should have some

ability to effect change (Lundy, 2007). This can happen in a variety of ways, sometimes those who hear the voice can directly make changes, other times they open channels of communication to ensure that the voice is heard in the appropriate forum. At the beginning of the process the children must know who that audience is and how their information will be used, for this clear and open communication is fundamental.

*Influence:* For Lundy, participation requires moving beyond just listening, to what the author calls 'listening with purpose' (Harmon, 2018). A major challenge to applying a child's rights approach to voice is ensuring that the adults move to a place of purposeful listening. Purposeful listening allows the adult to be open to what is articulated and, where appropriate, to act for the benefit of the children. The challenge is to be open to be influenced by what children have to say and to ensure children feel they can influence the world around them. This notion of influence captures the phrase 'due weight' in Article 12 of the UNCRC. For Lundy (2007), influence is key: children must feel they have influence and so when inviting children to share their views, they must be informed about who the audience is and subsequently receive information on how that audience received their view. If the children feel that their voice has influence and is respected, it will promote a culture where their voice is appreciated, in accordance with their age and maturity (Harmon, 2018).

In the author's study, the children knew who the audience would be from the beginning and that they would be offered an opportunity to share their views with that audience and offer suggestions for consideration for the betterment of their lives.

The involvement of children and young people in decisions which affect their lives is a developing field and the Lundy Model of Participation (2007) offers an excellent way to approach this. However, it is not without its

challenges. The creation of a safe space, which is a prerequisite for the engagement with the children to take place can be difficult, as in the case of many studies, this is a new physical space that they are entering (Lundy 2007). The author found that by using the children's classroom, this was overcome, but struggled to get the children to move beyond classroom rules and structure when talking and engaging with their peers and him; so it was a challenge to create the emotional space for the children to speak freely in. This highlights that it is not just physical space but emotional space that must be created for authentic dialogue.

Giving due weight to the children's views according to their maturity is key with the UNCRC and this needs to be communicated to the children in a very clear way. Thus to protect, and monitor, their expectations of at the end of the study, the author built in feedback time with the children between each session and relayed what he had heard (Harmon, 2018). This was of benefit when it came to the influence part of the Lundy Model of Participation (2007). The Lundy Model offers a framework but it needs to be adapted to each setting and the ability of the children. A key consideration must be the variety of ways employed to access the voice in the setting and that the children do not just become data gatherers, but are seen as active participants in generating new knowledge.

### Conclusion

This article has presented The Lundy Model of Participation (Lundy, 2007) and demonstrated how it was used in a study by the author (Harmon, 2018) to allow each child's voice to be heard. It demonstrates, through using a rights-based approach ground in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) and appropriate participatory methodologies, that children can be active participants in the decision-making processes on topics that are relevant to their lives and so enrich the lives of all. Employing the Lundy Model of Participation is a process, comprising a series of steps that are developed

overtime, as trust is built with the children. At its core is an invitation to the children to express their rights as outlined in the UNCRC.

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## Listening to the Seldom Heard: Hearing the Voice of Children and Young People in Child Protection and Welfare Services [Summary Article]

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### Background

#### Legal and Policy context

Participation is fundamental to a child-centred, rights-based approach to service delivery for children and their families. Such an approach is aligned to Article 42a of the Irish Constitution, Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is also a requirement of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020 (Department of Child and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2015) and the national policy framework for children and young people (DCYA, 2014).

Tusla's founding legislation, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, placed strong emphasis on partnership and co-operation with children and families in the delivery of services. Supported by the Child and Youth Participation Strategy (Tusla Child and Family Agency 2019) and the Research Strategy (Tusla Child and Family Agency 2015), the Agency must ensure that the views of the individual child are given due weight in decisions regarding his/her care, having regard to the age and maturity of the child. Tusla is also required to seek the views of young service users as a collective in relation to service planning and review (Tusla Child and Family Agency, 2019; Tusla Child and Family Agency, 2017).



## Participation in Child Protection and Welfare Services

Research in Ireland and internationally has shown that children and young people (CYP) often feel that their voices are not heard in the context of very formalised and bureaucratic child welfare and protection systems (Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Daly, 2014; Lucas, 2017). Children's participation in the context of child protection and welfare is not only a right but also offers a range of benefits for CYP. These include: ensuring that decisions taken are responsive to their needs, promoting positive psycho-social development, increasing self-esteem and promoting a greater sense of agency in their lives (Cashmore, 2002; Heimer et al., 2018; Kiely, 2005; Kilkelly, 2015; Mason, 2008; Pölkki et al., 2012; Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2012).

Tusla are working to transform child protection and welfare services and ensure that children and families actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives. In 2017, Tusla launched its first five-year Child Protection and Welfare Strategy (2017-2022). Signs of Safety (SofS) is the national approach to practice under this Strategy. SofS is an innovative, strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection and welfare casework grounded in partnership and collaboration with children, families and their wider networks of support and other professionals (Turnell & Edwards, 2017). This approach reflects best practice underpinned by the principles of 'Children First', Ireland's national guidance for the protection and welfare of children (DCYA, 2017).

The implementation of the Child Protection and Welfare Strategy is underpinned by a whole system learning approach (Senge, 1994), which includes a research portfolio. The Tusla National Research Office has oversight and responsibility under this strategy for three research projects to seek to understand the experiences of 1. Tusla staff working on the ground, 2. Parents in receipt of child protection

and welfare services, and 3. CYP in receipt of child protection and welfare services. This third strand is the focus of a new innovative research study about to commence in Tusla. There has been little evidence of the direct voice of CYP in relation to the child protection and welfare system in the Irish context, although there have been attempts internationally to do so (Baginsky, 2017).

### The Child Research Study

This study, which seeks to understand the experiences of CYP in receipt of child protection and welfare services was put out to tender in early 2020. During the development of the tender, two groups of CYP were consulted about the research design of the study.

Submissions were invited from suitably qualified researcher(s) to carry out primary research on children and young people's experiences of child protection and welfare services.

The focus of this small-scale research project, as outlined in the tender, was:

- To attain a point-in-time capture of young people's experiences of CPW services.
- To involve a cohort of young people (10 years and over) who have experienced either initial assessment and/or Child Protection Conference (CPC) or open to Child Protection Welfare (CPW) in last 12 months.
- To focus on the young people's experience of services, participation in decision-making and participation in safety planning.
- To explore if the young people understand the need for a Tusla worker to be involved with them (Do they know or understand what Tusla is worried about and why they are involved with the family?).

- To reflect on the young people's experience of the Signs of Safety (SOS) tools used by practitioners.

The focus is on gaining an understanding of CYP's experiences of child protection and welfare services, but it will also go beyond this to seek to understand CYP's perspectives on what contributed to these experiences. In this way, the research will provide a way to identify what is working well and what might need to change. This is in keeping with the concept that CYP and their families are active participants in this work. Learning from this study will inform further strategies for getting feedback from children and young people.

The study will commence in the coming months (i.e. late 2020). The findings will contribute much needed knowledge to an under researched area in the Irish context and will make recommendations for Tusla practitioners and managers on how to improve practice at the front line when involving CYP in child protection and welfare services, as well as supporting an identified implementation gap for Senior Managers for the further development of the Agency's reform of child protection and welfare services.

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and to identify how their experiences can be improved. Edel's research experience and scholarship crosses the fields of family support and child protection, implementation science, patient and public involvement, participatory research methods and disability and is coupled with a long history of and contribution to voluntary service delivery.

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## **The Voice of the Child with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs and the Individual Education Planning process: A dual focus on pupil rights and empowerment** [Summary Article]

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### **Introduction**

This summary article focuses on the rights of the child with disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs (SEN), with due regard for the Individual Education Planning process. Such rights are discussed in relation to the voice of the child, and in particular, pupil empowerment.

Recent years have witnessed a seismic shift towards recognising the importance of the voice of the child in society. In particular, national policy documents have highlighted the need to listen to the views of children and young people, to value their contribution within society and to recognise their role as citizens (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, 2015; Government of Ireland, 2000). The inclusion of the voice of the child can be viewed from a rights-based perspective, aligning strongly with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1989). In addition, solid links have been recognised between voice and overall child development. Specifically, 'listening to and involving children and young people' has been recognised by the DCYA (2014, p. vi) as one of the key transformational goals in supporting children "...to realise their maximum potential now and in the future".

Concerning children with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN), research highlights that their voices have traditionally

been associated with social exclusion, marginalisation and segregation (Finnvold, 2018; Koller, Le Pouesard, & Rummens, 2018). In recent years there have been efforts to address this shortfall on both national and international levels. In particular, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNGA, 2006) highlights the rights of such children to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right. Despite Ireland's ratification of this convention in March 2018, it remains questionable the degree to which the Convention and its predecessors (e.g. UNGA, 1989) have positively impacted on school-wide practices to date. On one hand, research shows some positive practices in relation to the inclusion of the voices of children with disabilities/SEN within schools, such as pupil attendance at individual education plan (IEP) meetings (Prunty, 2011). Other findings reveal more negative educational practices, including pupil exclusion from IEP meetings and adult-dominated decision-making (Griffin, 2018; Rose, Shevlin, Winter et al., 2015). Although a range of national policies recommend the importance of including the voice of the child in the IEP process (e.g. National Council for Special Education, 2006), the lack of guidance for schools remains a significant barrier. This is further magnified by the range of competing demands placed on schools and education staff, where the child-centred rhetoric of the primary school curriculum does not always play out in practice (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2010).

### **The Empowerment Process Model**

Reflecting on such issues, this paper argues that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the links that exist between pupil voice and overall child development. Rather than viewing the inclusion of pupil voice as yet another mandate on schools, this process needs to be framed as a significant learning opportunity for the child with disabilities/SEN;

a process that can bestow greater levels of personal control on the child and move him/her towards higher levels of empowerment. In this regard, *The Empowerment Process Model* requires review. This model, presented by Bennett, Cattaneo and Chapman (2010), builds on prior work in the field, including concepts such as mastery, agency, self-efficacy, self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-regulation. In particular, the model articulates the process of empowerment across six key components, enabling its application across both research and practice. Specifically, the model defines empowerment as:

An iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal oriented toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal. Social context influences all six process components and the links among them (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010, p. 647).

An analysis of the model by the author highlights strong alignment between its six key elements and a range of aspects within the IEP process. These aspects include setting personally meaningful goals with the child, ensuring all goals are SMART (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed [National Council for Special Education, 2006]) , and that the monitoring of IEP outcomes is part of a dynamic process of identification, target-setting, intervention and review (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; National Council for Special Education, 2006). It is argued that if pupil empowerment is to be fully realised within the IEP process, greater attention is needed in relation to the interaction between internal child factors (i.e. self-efficacy, knowledge and competence) and the social context of the school, as proposed within the model (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

## Conclusion

Including the voice of the child in the IEP process is not only a right but is also a key means of supporting a child's development and moving him/her towards increased empowerment in the education process. Such development extends beyond the formal curriculum to encompass many elements of the informal curriculum, including independence-development, emotional well-being and lifelong skill development (Douglas et al., 2012). Notably, the development of such life skills has been recognised as vitally important for people with disabilities to ensure that they are appropriately prepared for life after school (National Disability Authority & National Council for Special Education, 2017). Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that including the voice of the child with disabilities/SEN is a complex process that requires greater attention within education, including increased training and guidance for educators. Ultimately, including the voice of the child in decisions that affect him/her must be done in a meaningful, considered manner if it is to truly realise the child's fundamental human rights whilst concurrently, empowering him/her in the process.

***This article presents a summary of a larger paper which explores pupil voice and the alignment of the Empowerment Process Model with the child's position in the IEP process. This paper is due to be published by the author over the coming year.***

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## **“ONCE UPON A TIME AND HAPPILY EVER AFTER”**

### **‘Once upon a time and happily ever after’: A case of bibliotherapy in action**

[Summary Article]

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#### **Introduction**

The introduction of the book 'The Story Cure: An A-Z of Books to Keep Kids Happy, Healthy and Wise', by Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin (2016), begins "Between once upon a time and happily ever after is a land we've all been to. Strange and marvellous things happen there." That land is where life-long readers are created, minds are enlightened and storywriters are formed. It involves a journey we must bring children to from the moment they are born. For me, story is how we make sense of our world; it is evolutionary. It is also essential nourishment for healthy language development (Peck, 1989). When speaking to parents, I remind them that none of them would dream of collecting children from school on a Friday and not feeding them again to Monday. Similarly, children need daily engagement with story for optimum language development. The author of a pioneering study of the special qualities of picture books, Nodelman (1989) describes the usefulness of stories perfectly when he noted, "the combination of words and pictures is an ideal way to learn a lot in a relatively painless way" (p.284).

The authors of The Story Cure, Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin, describe themselves, alongside parents, teachers, librarians and booksellers, as bibliotherapists. Their previous book 'The Novel Cure' (2013), introduced the healing properties of reading, where novels are

prescribed based on the ailment. For a teacher of young children, what a wonderful ability it is to be fully trained to administer, what could be termed, a "story vaccine" on a daily basis! Pehrsson (2005) discusses also how bibliotherapy can help children after experiencing trauma and hurt, facilitating the release of "emotional pressures" and supporting new ways of thinking and talking about their concerns and problems, in a shared, trusting space. Berthoud and Elderkin (2016) describe the journey that readers are taken on noting that,

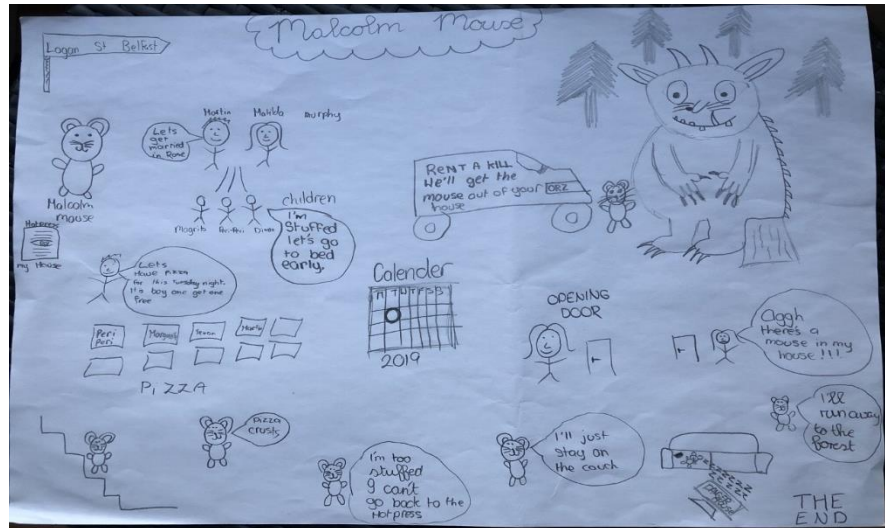
"By the time we come back, brushing the dust off our hats, a new worldly look in our eye, we know alone what we've seen, experienced, endured. And we've discovered something else, too, that whatever is going on in our actual lives, and whatever we're feeling about it, someone else has felt that way too. We're not alone after all." (Berthoud & Elderkin, 2016, p. ix)

#### **Bibliotherapy in action**

The case study below demonstrates how I take children's fondness for a particular story and use it to create another story, rich in natural language and localised to their learning context. Children of all ages are easily engaged when the story revolves around where they live, a person they know and the adventures that happen within. As anyone who interacts with children well knows, they love to hear stories of the antics of a new puppy, a silly thing that happened, or a real life story. In the below case, my point of departure is Julia Donaldson's acclaimed story 'The Gruffalo'. This much-loved story brings children into an imaginary world, rich in rhyme, rhythm and repetition. Mallet (2012) discusses how stories and picture books meet children's need for the repetition that they also find in songs and rhymes. The playful storyteller, through their liveliness, spontaneity, imagination, humour and down-to-earth silliness, makes the characters real in voice, movement and anticipation, exploiting – and developing – the

children's addiction to the story of 'The Gruffalo'.

In the below case, I explore where the mouse lived before he went to live in the forest with the Gruffalo. I begin in a near-whisper, as if I don't want anyone else to know; these children are the only ones who are going to hear this breaking news:



*Figure 1 The remembered detail of the story by a 10-year-old pupil*

Children – do you want to know something that no one else knows about the mouse?...

### *Malcolm Mouse and the Odd Numbered House*

Malcolm Mouse lived in an odd numbered house in a street close to their school with the Murphy family, whose favourite food was pizza.

*Mr and Mrs Murphy had gone to Rome for their honeymoon and that was the first time they ever ate pizza and after that they just adored it. Such was their love of this Italian-inspired dish that all their children were called after varieties of pizza. The eldest was Margherita, the youngest was Pepperoni and the middle child's name was Romana. While Malcolm Mouse had been living with the Murphys for five years, not one of the Murphy family knew he was a resident in their odd numbered house. Malcolm only came out of his cosy spot in the laundry cupboard when he could hear snoring from all the bedrooms. Then he knew he was safe to go and search for some left over pizza crusts. But he always remembered to return to his cosy spot before anyone got up and before Mrs Matilda Murphy came back from nightshift in the local hospital.*

*It was a fateful Tuesday night in February that was to be Malcolm Mouse's last night in the*

house. It was 'buy one, get one free' at the local pizza house so, instead of the normal four 12 inch pizzas, eight pizzas arrived. They ate all the pizzas but left all the crusts and Malcolm could think of nothing as tasty. He ate all the crusts from the eight pizzas and the sheer volume of the food made him very, very sleepy.

*Disaster was to strike.*

*He forgot to go to his usual hiding place in the laundry cupboard. Matilda came back from nightshift in the local hospital, looking forward to climbing into her warm bed and having a very well-deserved rest after cleaning all the wards on the seventh floor. As she walked into the living room, she was horrified to find Malcolm, with the remote control in his paw, watching his favourite cartoon – Tom and Jerry. Matilda Murphy jumped on the sofa screaming, ‘There’s a mouse in the house!’ Malcolm knew it was time to find alternative accommodation when he saw the pest extermination van arrive outside the odd numbered house in the local street...*

Figure 1 demonstrates the vivid detail of the story remembered by a 10-year-old pupil after this type of oral storytelling. The task was introduced, and modelled, before the story began: the class were informed that they would get a point for every detail remembered. The resulting level of attention

in the room was so high as to be almost palpable.

### Conclusion

Bibliotherapy is good for us all because when we tell a story we are free and can learn so much about the world we live in and the feelings we experience as we navigate our way through it. A cherished book of mine is "A Child of Books" by Oliver Jeffers – an extraordinary picture book offering forty classic works of children's literature and lullabies, through the story of a little girl as she sails her raft across a sea of words, arriving at the house of a small boy who invites her to join him on a "literary adventure". It brought me back to the many texts that influenced my life and I was transported back in time, through forests of fairy tales and mountains of make believe. The two travel together on a fantastical journey that unlocks the children's imagination, opening them up to a lifetime of adventure and magic.

This is our task too: we need to unlock children's imaginations, to encourage their voice. The next inventions have yet to be imagined! Grab the opportunity and make as many children as possible "a child of books"; help to *velcro* stories to their hearts and minds; show them the world.

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**Collaborate** with fellow professionals in your area of interest through our **Special Interest Groups**.

Find or offer support through our **structured Research Mentoring Programme**.

Take advantage of CRN members' access to **events and networking opportunities** available at CRN's host organisation, **Trinity Research in Childhood Centre**.

Receive our **electronic newsletter**, containing announcements of **CRN news and events**, as well as relevant external notices, such as key resources, events, calls for papers and job offers.

## Join the Network

Annual membership fees  
Student / unwaged €15/~£13\*  
Part-time employed / retired €25/~£23\*  
Full-time employed €30/~£28\*  
\* approximate GBP conversion

[www.childrensresearchnetwork.org](http://www.childrensresearchnetwork.org)  
[ChildrensResearchNetwork@tcd.ie](mailto:ChildrensResearchNetwork@tcd.ie)

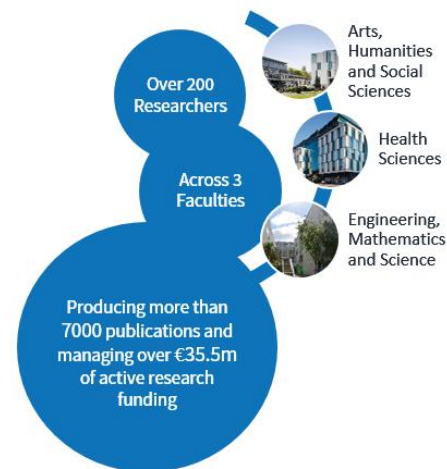


### Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin

## Trinity Research in Childhood Centre: Home of the Children's Research Network

The Children's Research Network is hosted by the Trinity Research in Childhood Centre (TRiCC)



Established in 2017, TRiCC acts as a research hub for cutting-edge research collaborations on children's health, wellbeing, development and learning across Trinity College Dublin.

*"With similar aims to the Children's Research Network, TRiCC brings together researchers working in different disciplines to promote a common endeavour: the production and dissemination of research designed to improve the lives of children on this island and internationally."*

Professor Trevor Spratt, TRiCC co-Director

[www.tcd.ie/tricc](http://www.tcd.ie/tricc)