

Children's Research Digest

Children Should be Seen AND Heard
December 2020

'Digest-At-A-Glance' (Summary version)



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



Introduction

Welcome to the summary version of our Children's Research Digest: Children Should be Seen AND Heard, published in December 2020. In this 'Digest-At-A-Glance', we provide the Guest Editorial by Professor Imelda Coyne, followed by tasters of each of the articles. Please go to www.childrensresearchnetwork.org to read and download the full articles.

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.

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Guest Editorial

Children Should be Seen AND Heard

**by Professor Imelda Coyne, co-Director Trinity Research in Childhood Centre,
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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. They 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.

Summaries of Articles

CARRYING OUT RESEARCH *WITH CHILDREN*

Just ask! Importance of Qualitative Explorations of Children's Rule-Following by Alison Stapleton and Louise McHugh

Often when we want to understand children, we turn to quantitative self-report measures. While this method is undoubtedly useful, we lose a lot of nuances when we only look at numbers, limiting our understanding. This is a big issue for research on children's rule-following behaviours. This article discusses an ongoing study involving qualitative interviews with young people, in order to meaningfully capture their voices and views regarding their own rule-following. This work will improve our understanding of children's rule-following behaviour, and places the child's perspective at the heart of the research.

Exploring children's experiences of play and recreation in local neighbourhoods using walking interviews by Karinda Tolland, Carol Barron and Yvonne Corcoran

This paper reports on research using child-directed walking interviews to explore children's perspectives on individual, social and physical experiences of play and recreation in their local neighbourhoods and the wider built environment. Findings reveal that children are active in negotiating with parents on issues surrounding their everyday mobility. Peers, siblings, and mobile phones all contribute to develop and support children's independent mobility. Furthermore, 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.

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 by Rachel Hoare

This article reports on a small-scale qualitative study using creative focus groups and journaling to explore the friendships of young adolescents with non-Irish heritage in Ireland. Overall, the findings show that friendships with young adolescents with the same heritage language and culture, provide key supportive contexts for second generation identity exploration and validation. Within deeply-felt trusting friendships, the participants found a safe and enabling

space to explore and celebrate their complex identities related to both heritage and Irish reference groups. The creative methods used facilitated these rich insights into the nuances and complexities of their friendships.

A qualitative exploration of social media and adolescent subjective wellbeing: listening to the voices of young people by Deborah Webster, Laura Dunne and Ruth Hunter

Social media use is ubiquitous to the lives of adolescents. Although research has investigated its impact on their subjective wellbeing, often the voice of young people is ignored. This qualitative research explores the impact of social media use on subjective wellbeing from the perspective of adolescents. Three schools in Northern Ireland participated in the study with 13-year olds. The study found that social media use can impact their subjective wellbeing positively by connectedness and positive mood and that social media use can have a detrimental impact on subjective wellbeing through comparison, feeling left out and sleep deprivation.

The Voice of the Child under the General Data Protection Regulation, 2016 by Sheila Donovan

Following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), considerable effort has been made within legislation, policies and methodologies to acknowledge the evolving capacities of minors and to incorporate the voice of the child into decisions in all matters pertaining to the rights of the child. This paper considers the General Data Protection Regulation (2016) and argues that it fails to recognise the evolving capacities of the child and to incorporate the voice the child into the decisions introduced regarding children's online safety.

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 by Jennifer Pope

Irish historical accounts have tended not to focus on the experiences of marginalised children, resulting in their stories being forgotten and unheard. This article describes a tragic historical event in Ireland's past when ten young girls died of food poisoning in the Mount St. Vincent Orphanage in Limerick in 1908. Even though mortality rates for young children were higher then, children very rarely died from food poisoning and so the tragedy received widespread attention and sympathy. This paper adopts Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework to gain

insight into children's lives in the past, and ensure that, while the voices of these children may be lost, their stories and legacies are not.

Children as Policy Makers: How the Inclusion of Children's Voices in Research can Improve Parenting Supports in Marginalised Communities by Anne-Marie McGovern

While children are the focal element of parenting, to-date parenting research has rarely included the voices of children, particularly those from marginalised communities. This is a critical oversight considering that universal delivery of parenting programmes has increasingly been seen by policy makers as a way of addressing larger social issues within these communities. This article discusses research which privileges the voices of such 'seldom heard' children, elicited through an arts-based mosaic approach. The study's findings challenge an often-held assumption that marginalised communities are 'failing' in their parenting skills. Instead children's perspectives can both enhance parenting programmes through better understanding of individual realities for families, as well as by identifying networks and community strengths to support them.

'I don't feel that I can complain about my brother's diabetes': Siblings' participation in diabetes care by Regitze Anne Saubrey Pals, Imelda Coyne and Dan Grabowski

It is important to consider the whole family when caring for a child with a chronic condition, yet siblings' perspectives are often neglected. This article describes siblings' perspectives, drawing upon a larger Danish study about the dynamics between pre-teens (aged 9-12 years) with type 1 diabetes and their families. Data from interactive workshops with pre-teens, their parents and their siblings revealed that siblings experienced contradictory feelings about their ill sibling and concealed their frustrations from family members. The findings indicate the importance of encouraging open communication in families, seeking siblings' perspectives and tailoring information and support for them accordingly.

The ripple effect of child sexual abuse: Impact on sibling relationships by Rachael McDonnell Murray, Rosaleen McElvaney and Simon Dunne

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 sibling and other family members and family relationships following the disclosure of CSA. This study explored sibling responses to disclosures of CSA, and changes, if any, in sibling and family relationships following

disclosure of CSA. Three main themes were identified: intense sibling emotional reactions, strain and closeness in sibling relationships, and managing family dynamics. This study confirms the need for studies on CSA to incorporate a lifespan perspective, and the need to include family members in therapeutic responses to CSA.

Designated Liaison Persons in Irish Primary Schools: Representing the Voice of Children that may not be Seen or Heard by Margaret Nohilly and Mia Tracey

While all teachers in primary schools have mandatory responsibilities in the area of child protection, the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) has overall responsibility in the school for all child protection matters. This paper provides an overview of the role of the DLP and teachers' legal responsibilities in the area of child protection work. It discusses findings of research with DLPs which highlight a number of challenges in the area of child protection work, from practical issues related to the reporting process, to the emotional nature of the role. Recommendations are suggested for addressing these challenges, and promoting even greater supports for the protection of the most vulnerable children in our schools.

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 by Maurice Harmon

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 research is focused on adults' interpretations of what the child says, this article argues that children should be brought in as active participants and as co-researchers. The Lundy Model of Participation (2007) is presented as a way of ensure all voices are heard and respected; together with some practical examples of ways to elicit child voice drawn from a research study in the Irish context.

Listening to the Seldom Heard: Hearing the Voice of Children and Young People in Child Protection and Welfare Services by Edel Tierney

Participation is the basis of a rights-based approach to service delivery for children and their families and is enshrined in national and international law. Research in Ireland and elsewhere has shown that children and young people (CYP) often feel that their voices are not heard in child welfare and protection systems. Tusla have hired researchers to conduct a research study

which seeks to understand the experiences of CYP in receipt of child protection and welfare services. CYP were consulted about the research design of the study. The study will focus on what is working well and what might need to change. In this way, CYP and their families are active partners in this work.

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 by Claire Griffin

The voices of children with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN) have traditionally been associated with exclusion, marginalisation and segregation. However, in recent years, the importance of listening to and involving all children in decisions that affect their lives has been emphasised, with due regard for children's rights and their overall development. This summary article focuses on the Individual Education Planning process within schools for children with disabilities and/or SEN, and highlights the importance of eliciting and including such children's voices in that process. In particular, this argument is presented in relation to principles of pupil empowerment and with reference to the Empowerment Process Model (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

“ONCE UPON A TIME AND HAPPILY EVER AFTER”

‘Once upon a time and happily ever after’: A case of bibliotherapy in action by Catherine Gilliland

This article is focused on 'bibliotherapy in action', and framed by Berthoud and Elderkin's reflections on the power of books to facilitate what could be termed 'a story vaccine'. The case study highlights a unique kind of classroom storytelling which, by using classic stories as catalyst, brings them directly into pupils' lives. Thus, the misadventures of the mouse from "The Gruffalo" are re-imagined within the Murphy household and the pupils' engaged response is showcased via one pupil's complementary collage of cartoon drawings. Some concluding thoughts focus on the power of books to provide a rich imaginative resource throughout life.