

Emerald Studies in
Child Centred Practice

Establishing Child Centred Practice in a Changing World



Part B

edited by

Sam Frankel

Establishing Child Centred Practice in a Changing World, Part B

Emerald Studies in Child Centred Practice

Series Editor: Sam Frankel, King's University College, Western University, Canada; EquippingKids.org

Emerald Studies in Child Centred Practice: Voice, Collaboration and Change seeks to reposition the place of childhood studies as a discipline, highlighting its social value. This series explores the application of theories from childhood studies in practice. It highlights the place, purpose and power of these theories to inform practice and seeks to shape a child centred approach across the settings within which children live and experience their everyday lives – schools, families the legal and care system. Uniquely, books in the series will not only draw on academic insight but also include the perspectives of both practitioners and children. The series makes the case for the need for a shared dialogue as a foundation for re-imagining practice.

This series offers a new and valuable dimension to childhood studies with relevance for how wider society comes to engage with it. Indeed, it offers a chance for childhood studies to increase its presence in society – to demonstrate how an awareness of children's agency and the constructed nature of society can positively influence discourse and debate – with the hope that this can increasingly shape policy and practice and add value to children's everyday experiences. Proposals are welcome for the series that align to this goal and help us to develop and grow childhood studies. The series is particularly keen to explore multi-faceted aspects of children's lives, such as schooling, home lives, children's rights, child protection, activism, and more.

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EDITED BY

SAM FRANKEL

King's University College, Western University, Canada



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To those children and young people who are inspiring how we do research.

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It is exciting to see how methods of research increasingly reflect the value of children's voice, and it is through a participative process that the data that support many of these chapters are produced. It is therefore, with regard to all those who took part in the research on which these chapters are based that we share our thanks, and hope this forms part of an ongoing ambition for children, practitioners and academics to be part of conversations focused on advancing child-centred practice.

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Chapter 1

Extending the Conversation

Sam Frankel

This series, of which this book forms the second introductory volume, was inspired by ideas that emerged in a commemorative edition of the well-respected and cited journal *Childhood*, in which editors past and present shared their thoughts as they explored where the discipline has come from and where it is going (Cook et al., 2018). Virginia Morrow highlighted that part of the ongoing journey must be to challenge the discipline to recognise its value to practice. Citing the success of Michael Freeman's research (in relation to his engagement with children and the law), she asked why childhood studies had not established a greater applied presence. A key part of such a 'step' would require academics to work more closely with practitioners and children to trial, evaluate and share effective practice. It is with this in mind that these introductory collections are framed around a focus on voice, collaboration and change, as a basis to establish a stronger foundation to connect research and practice, and to further a needed dialogue about the applied relevance of key principles that have emerged as part of the journey that childhood studies is on.

A notable theme in this series of papers is the extent to which they showcase not only the multidisciplinary nature that is informing thinking in this area but also the extent to which we are increasingly hearing from a wider variety of stakeholders, including the practitioner-academic, the student and of course young people. As discussion in the coming chapters reiterate, it is only by enabling that dialogue across these interests groups that we can advance our shared understandings, which at its centre demands that children are invited to be part of conversations that matter. The chapters below show the range of possibilities and opportunities to build these conversations and the methods and strategies to enable them throughout a range of different social spaces and in a variety of cultural settings. What follows shows the exciting outcomes from such partnerships and should encourage us to keep on learning together as we explore how a focus on child-centred practice can enable a shared vision for our communities in a changing world.

The Chapters

The potential of a child-centred mindset underpins this opening chapter. Nadine Correia and Cecília Aguiar offer an examination of children's voice in early childhood education and care settings in Europe. They show the progression of thinking and the extent to which documents like the UNCRC are being 'updated' in ways that allow rights to have stronger practical application in day-to-day settings. The analysis of voice allows for a deeper assessment of participation and what this looks like in the context of practice. Drawing on Laura Lundy's approach to participation, the authors concentrate our focus around how we, as adults, might respond to the need to enable the voice of younger children. To advance this, Chapter 2 highlights the means of assessment and evaluation that are increasingly emerging that offer scope to, at the least, start a dialogue, and at the best, offer clear evidence to support strategic decision-making. That said, the fundamental question around adult attitudes towards children remains a barrier to notions of voice. The authors, therefore, highlight the need for us as a society to continue to address this, as we look to make sense of children's participation. The detailed focus here on voice allows the reader to extend the way in which they perceive voice in practice, as we are encouraged to reflect on the nuances of voice, as well as the need for collaborative engagement if the voice of an individual child is to be responded to in a meaningful way. It is, notably, through this partnership (children and adults) that the authors suggest a foundation is created to support positive and effective change within early childhood education and care settings.

Remaining with early childhood education, Chapter 3 offers a focus for professional development by highlighting the benefits of a reflective approach to practice. Within the context of an ambition to create a learning community which is characterised by the desire to 'learn together' this chapter highlights clearly the extent to which such an environment requires the need for adults (with children) to be continuously 'thinking' as they go through this process of knowledge creation. Indeed, it is through adults actively pursuing reflective strategies that a foundation is set to align practice with child-centred principles. Through providing examples of change-oriented approaches, the chapter highlights, the simple, yet effective ways in which adults can be encouraged to observe their practice. The transition from an adult-centric learning environment to one in which the adults valued children in terms of their capacity as social agents and were motivated by pedagogical approaches that enhance and further their capabilities was clearly documented. As such the authors show the extent to which the 'intentional' actions of the educator can provide an important basis for learning experiences. Through establishing strong, trust-based relationships these critical conversations are enabled and support practical learning strategies, for example, around creativity and problem-solving. At its heart this chapter yet again shows the value in having conversations with children, recognising the extent to which it informs professional reflexivity and as a result enhances the learning experience for all.

Chapter 4 keeps our focus on education, as we are invited to look through the eyes of a teacher and again explore the potential that is created through starting

conversations that enable effective adult–child engagement. In this chapter Kirstin Mulholland is able to highlight a strategy for making visible how we go about our learning. Noting those assumptions that have reduced children to passive objects within the learning process, this chapter offers a contrast by noting the possibilities that lie with seeing children as ‘experts’ of their own learning experiences in the context of being part of a community of learners. Through looking at the use of Pupil Voice Templates (PVT) we are encouraged to note the opportunities this creates for conversation. As part of reviewing practice the adult is encouraged to consider the importance of building trust and creating partnerships, which it is argued are reinforced through the notion of the adult as a ‘role model’. The chapter notes the value for this type of approach beyond education, suggesting that through a process of dialogue children’s voice can be increasingly amplified in meaningful and impactful ways.

Chapter 5 keeps us thinking about voice. Here David Littlefair offers a case study into the way in which a focus on voice within the context of a particular curriculum area offered a means to change practices and improve outcomes. A focus on Physical Education provides the basis for a wider consideration of the way in which we consider voice in schools as a means to address practice-based limitations. The themes of pupil choice, feelings, inclusivity and power provide the backdrop for this discussion. It provides a clear reminder of the importance of reflecting on the place of voice within our engagement with children at school or beyond, and offers a basis for structuring some of that thinking. The case study invites us to consider what might be uncovered through enabling children’s voices in relation to other subject areas.

How can we subvert existing adult-centric practices in education reinforced by the weight of policy after policy? In Chapter 6, Joanna Hume invites us to think about the impact of simply changing the context within which learning happens, noting the implications this has for the nature of relationships, and learning identities (both for adults and children). Acknowledging the current policy demands of a focus on performance, in which the child is simply a vessel of adult instruction, the chapter looks at how Forest School can provide a more holistic model for engaging children in their learning. Through valuable reflections on the evaluative process used and the need to position this more strongly within the context of children’s experiences with regard to (1) more equitable conversations (2) language enhancement (3) shared ownership and belonging (4) problem-solving, the chapter highlights the individual learning journeys that are taking place, driven and directed by the children themselves. Reflecting on the Emilio Reggio approach, this is condensed into an argument for a pedagogy of listening, which amongst other things demands not only a focus on language but also on the role that the adult plays in facilitating such interactions. The chapter not only highlights the opportunities of a pedagogy of listening in schools but also its place in other social institutions as it adds to the way we might consider child-centred practice by emphasising both the role of adults as ‘co-researchers’ and children as ‘first responders’ within their learning experiences.

Chapter 7 invites a further context for thinking about learning experiences as Fengling Teng offers a creative piece of research constructed within the confines

of her own home during lockdown. As such this chapter reflects on families' experiences of lockdown through an assessment of agentic opportunities. Through building this evaluation around that significant step from school to homeschool, the chapter is able to show both the challenges and the possibilities for agency that emerged during this time through a reflection on fun, connecting with nature and managing friendships. Indeed, what this chapter highlights is the extent to which home is a space for agentic engagement and that 'learning', in both a formal and informal sense, is a part of that. Yet again we see the use of 'reflection' as a means to offer insight into these experiences, which further adds to our assessment of children's social competence but also, as many chapters in this volume stress, their potential as research partners. The lockdowns caused by COVID-19 created significant challenges, but as this chapter shows there is also a lot we can reflect on through the lens of child-centred practice, particularly in relation to home as a space for learning.

As we move away from a focus on 'school', Daniel Nester's chapter provides a bridge to exploring child-centred practice in other settings through the focus on social pedagogy. Introducing these theories alongside participative research from childhood studies shows the potential for crossover and the extent to which such ideas offer clinical application, for example in social work, youth work or counselling. Indeed, in many ways Chapter 8 provides practitioners with a self-reflective framework to regulate and direct their thinking within one-to-one engagements (and beyond). The relevance of empowerment as well as wellbeing shows the focus on the individual and the extent to which the effectiveness of these ideas is reliant on the invitation to an active and engaged participant. The four key sections of this chapter focus on the value social pedagogy offers in relation to (1) empowerment and rights (2) supportive relationships (3) holistic learning and individual potential (4) wellbeing. The chapter makes clear how a commitment to each of these has the potential to reinforce the child-centred nature of a professional engagement with children and young people.

Chapter 9 offers us a different focus for exploring child-centred practice, as it provides insight into a participative research project, that was rooted in an enquiry around children's response to separation and divorce. Sue Kay-Flowers uses Lundy's participative model to offer a framework for analysing the design and creation of the research activities. The chapter highlights some of the limitations of our understanding on the issue of separation and divorce from the perspective of the child, and offers a creative means through which it might be possible to engage children's reflections, thoughts and feelings. The methods apply a bricolage approach that offers a basis for a collaborative exercise in creating research tools. These tools offer a means for young adults to use their knowledge to help design relevant narratives and to guide a process of content creation for engaging younger participants. An interesting feature of this chapter is the way in which publicly accessible platforms such as YouTube and SurveyMonkey are used to support reaching the research audience. The chapter weaves a focus on expanding knowledge around separation and divorce with advancing research methodologies in a way that adds to the place of child-centred practice as a foundation for enquiry.

Chapter 10 sets out with the aim of contributing to a gap in the literature around children's participation and understandings of voice within the home. Combining literature on both children's agency, participation and the home, Rossana Perez-del-Aguila, Patricia Aguirre and Jimena Blanco research with Bolivian Families in Madrid, highlight the constancy (the ongoing everyday place) of participative activities in the home, despite children's limited sense of what participation actually 'is'. The chapter raises some interesting methodologies and some practical ways to engage children in conversations, which reflect strong co-participatory themes. The chapter highlights the relational nature of not just the research engagement but also the way in which participation, as a product of agency, comes to be understood. Through contrasting the culture of the Global South (Bolivian parents) with the realities of living in the Global North, the authors highlight further the particularities of childhoods and the differing opportunities for participation in family units. Notably, the chapter highlights that participation becomes part of 'doing family', as children enact their agency in the mundaneness of everyday life, 'participating' to reinforce and further those core relationships within the home.

Chapter 11 from Ewajesu Okeewumi and Olayinka Akanale takes us back into the home, as we look at the way in which a focus on child-centred practice is adding to research on family life. Chapter 11 looks at this through the cultural context of the Yoruba people, which offers an interesting setting to contrast changing perceptions of the child and the way these impact on practice. The chapter draws on research with children and their parents and uses this to explore how children see rules, how they negotiate them and what this then means in relation to a child-centred approach to parenting. In many ways this chapter highlights an important area for further discussion around the tension between cultural understandings of the child and child-centred practice. The authors' response is to find a balance, one that is found through effective communication and ongoing conversations.

It with this continuing focus on innovative research that Joanna Louca shows the way in which childhood studies offers a particular lens that not only helps to provide insight, but, when applied, can have transformative results. Drawing on foundational texts within the field, Chapter 12 illuminates the role children can be play in community transformation. Reflecting on themes from the geography of childhood, the chapter explores children's relationship with space and the extent to which a space comes to carry meaning, and notably the way that meaning might change. A collaborative project that involved artists, schools and the wider community saw children engaging with the opportunity to re-consider the neighbourhood in ways they had not done before. This invitation led to the chance for children to explore their connections both to the space and to people in it. A powerful dimension of this chapter is the extent to which this journey to review a community space has for ways we think about learning. Acknowledging a context within which learning is challenging for students in some Portuguese schools, this paper presented a series of learning experiences that had a significant impact on both the adults and children who were involved. As such, the chapter is able to offer a range of reflections that include (1) addressing power relations, (2)

recognising the broader context within which children's learning happens and (3) the nature of co-created research. This chapter highlights the potential of inviting children and adults to reconsider the spaces that they share, with real opportunities for meaningful transformation that benefits communities as a whole.

Themes of transformation continue to ring out, as we turn to this powerful piece that combines youth voices with a critique of an international legal event. Walt Buckard, with Alexandra-Maria Dan, Macholi Chris Bernard, Iliana Pujols and Anas Darouichi, raises issues that clearly form the basis of a treatise for sharing with all adult-organised events that deal with issues relating to children and young people. Chapter 13 offers insight into youth experiences of such encounters and through this signposts how and where changes in practice can be made. The team highlights just why it is important for young people to be involved in conversations. Not only do they make this point in relation to youth justice but also connect this to wider themes such as poverty, climate change and education. Throughout, the chapter challenges the traditional hegemony of adult-led organisations that are set up to work 'for' children. Indeed, the theme of power underpins so much of this chapter, which is illustrated through a discussion around giving young people a 'seat at the table', one that is not simply about letting them into the room, but acknowledging their value as decision-makers. As such the team shows the need for adults to redress hierarchical approaches to power through embracing the potential of intergenerational engagement and the extent to which that offers a broader set of relevant experiences on which decisions can be based.

Chapter 14 moves us to Canada and to another youth-centred research initiative this time looking at voting age. Gabrielle Gooch in this chapter makes some really important contributions to a wider conversation around youth engagement and what is 'meaningful' through a focus on four key themes: (1) value of opportunity, (2) political efficacy, (3) voice and vote and (4) political identity. Through these themes the author shows the importance of a childhood studies perspective in seeking to challenge notions of tokenism within practice. Through engaging with a 'live' topic, the chapter highlights the practical way in which the political system seeks to engage children and young people, and the limitations within that. In noting these pathways created by the system for young people to engage, the chapter records the importance to these young people of being able to take part and get involved and the value they feel in being able to make that contribution. This raises an interesting tension between young people being involved and actually needing to see the change. The chapter notes that not all children and young people will want to be involved in such dialogue, but maybe a broader conversation needs to be had about the way in which we view our political identities and what that means to us as individuals and to our sense of citizenship.

That focus on youth continues as we move to Chile and Paulina Jara-Osorio's assessment of recent political protests which young people were a part. Chapter 15 thus provides a deep dive into a political moment of upheaval in Chile and offers the backdrop for this analysis of the changing way in which children and young people are establishing a political voice. The chapter reflects on demonstrations in

2019 that paved the way for constitutional change. In considering the role of young people in this unrest, the author is able to look at the context that informed the part young people came to play. As such it highlighted the extent to which a lack of participative opportunities, particularly for more marginalised groups, led to a growing lack of trust. At a moment of real opportunity for all citizens, including children and young people, the author highlights the extent to which a recognition of children's participative potential must be acknowledged. The notion of protagonism is suggested as providing possibilities. Not only does it start from the place of acknowledging the value of the individual, but it does this in a wider context of their place in society (note links to Chapter 14). As such it offers a banner under which children and young people might gather, to demand that adults take seriously the contribution they are willing to make. Notably, this ambition to change attitudes towards children is seen in the context of a wider fight against discrimination, segregation and subordination!

Advancing the Conversation...

Indeed, as we look across both Part 1 and 2 of this introduction to the Series, the value of 'starting conversations' between adults and children is clear. Through these 26 contributions from around the world, we have started to establish a sense of why those conversations are so important. At the outset in Chapter 1 of Part 1 ([Frankel, 2022](#)), I raised some questions ...

- (1) Why are adults being encouraged to have conversations with children?
- (2) What should adults and children be talking about?
- (3) What help do adults need to be able to converse effectively with children?

The responses to these questions throughout these two collections, has highlighted:

- (1) Children are active and capable social agents, and their input adds a perspective that enriches our shared understandings of both the mundaneness of everyday life and the challenges we collectively face. It is a critical foundation from which to shape practice and improve outcomes.
- (2) For too long adults have set the agenda limiting children to particular topics at particular ages – the value of conversations is that adults and children can increasingly build partnerships that allow for new agendas where topics are unlimited and are shaped through dialogue that reflects a relevance within the context of that specific community.
- (3) Raising awareness and encouraging reflective professional/personal growth enables adults to increasingly engage with co-productive methodologies and strategies that re-form relationships and advance child-centred practice through meaningful participative opportunities.

These questions were asked within the context of recognising that our world is in a state of flux, which demands a level of response. Acknowledging the challenges of a changing world, it is critical that all are enabled to be part of those conversations. It has been exciting to reflect on the way in which ‘voice’ has been unpacked throughout these chapters, and presented in practical and meaningful ways within a broader context of participative engagement. However, there is also a need for caution. Each of these papers has represented areas where children’s voices have been limited, cutting across home, school and our communities. An important next step is to find ways to expand the conversation beyond the islands of research as represented in Part 1 and Part 2 of these introductory collections. To remain constrained by past thinking that sees children solely in terms of their future value removes a vital force that is needed if we are to respond to the challenges that the world is facing – this needs to be acknowledged and acted upon more widely. On a local, national and international level children’s input has to be part of exploring possibilities and finding solutions that lead to improved outcomes. To enable that we must continue the conversation!

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