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YOUNG KNOCKNAHEENY



Circle-time, Selfies, Friends and Food:

Researching Children's Voices in Early Years Settings in the Young Knocknaheeny ABC Programme

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YOUNG KNOCKNAHEENY

Let's Grow Together...

Foreword

Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme (YK) is proud to launch **'Circle-time, Selfies, Friends and Food':** Researching Children's Voices in Early Years Settings in the Young Knocknaheeny ABC Programme. Led by Dr. Shirley Martin from the School of Applied Social Studies in UCC, in partnership with YK and the Barnardos Brighter Futures Early Years centre, this report captures the voices of children engaged in YK's Early Years Quality Improvement initiative.

YK is a community-based prevention and early intervention programme, working in the north west area of Cork city. YK aims to get every child's life off to the best possible start by:

- Respectfully enhancing skills and early childhood development knowledge of all parents, practitioners and services
- Strengthening and enhancing all relationships and environments that are important to every child's early development
- Embedding systems and community change to support early childhood development and address childhood poverty

In the context of children's lives and the community they explore and connect with, after home and family environments, Early Years Centres are the most important spaces in terms of influencing children's development. The adults within these spaces are equally important.

One of the four core YK strategies is to work with Early Years Centres in the area as a community, now numbering eleven centres, with over fifty staff and over 400 children per year, to build on their existing strengths and to support them in their own efforts to be the best practitioners they can be; to support all children's development and to get them off to the best start in life.

We have been so fortunate to work with such open, ambitious and brave Early Years practitioners and leaders who we have journeyed with since the start of this process in 2015. Over the last four years, these practitioners have used internationally validated measures to transform their practice to the highest quality for children - an incredible achievement in such a short space of time.

It was always part of YK objectives to include the voices of parents and children in our practice and research to inform our programme, and to influence policy at a wider level. Indeed, we have collected many parental voices in our evaluation and have developed a Parent's Forum which has a key role within the programme. Though we say parents are experts in their own children's lives, they do not replace the need for child-centric views and the need for young children's voices; verbal, pre-verbal or non-verbal. Their voices are at the heart of everything we do and what we are all about.

Thanks to Dr Shirley Martin from the School of Applied Social Studies in UCC, we were able to pilot the inclusion of children's voices to offer children's perspectives of the outcomes of the quality improvement strategy implemented in Early Years Centres. The research conducted used the Lundy Model of Child Participation to achieve this.

The model provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation and aims to help organisations ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence. The Lundy Model gave expression to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child informing policy and practice in Ireland, and was endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020).

The approach taken in this pilot means that YK staff members are now trained in the methods used and can work with others to include children's voices in their research, evaluation and practice. Furthermore, it is our intention going forward to bring the principle of including children's voices in our research, evaluation and practice to include even younger children. We are embarking on a consultation with the YK team and parents to consider the 'voices' of infants as part of the 0-3 years Home Visiting Programme and the various groups that we deliver in the community.

I hope you enjoy reading this report, and see within it, that through creative methods and a learning process, it is possible to include children in projects, processes and policies that are so very much about them.



Katherine Harford
Young Knocknaheeny ABC Programme Manager

Acknowledgements

Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme (YK) wish to thank Dr Shirley Martin and University College Cork's School of Applied Social Studies, for leading and resourcing this piece of research. YK would also like to thank members of the YK inter-disciplinary team, Suzanne Rigby and Tracie Lane, for their participation and skills development in this study.

YK are very grateful to Barnardos Brighter Futures in Knocknaheeny for use of their centre and for the cooperation of their staff during the process of the research. YK would like to say a very special thank you to the fantastic children involved in this study. Their experiences and views are so beautifully captured in this report.

Finally, YK would like to acknowledge the funding and support offered by its main funding bodies: TUSLA Child and Family Agency and the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), and to thank NICHE Health Project (Cork) CLG for their continued support as lead agency.

Introduction

This participatory research project aims to include the voices of young children involved with the Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme (YK). YK is a community-based prevention and early intervention programme which aims to measurably improve the lives of children and their caregivers living in the north Cork city areas of Knocknaheeny, Farranree, Churchfield, Gurranabraher, and residents of local regeneration areas also. Adopting a whole-community approach, YK aims to give every child the best possible start in life by: respectfully enhancing the skills and early childhood development knowledge of all parents, practitioners and services in the area; strengthening and enhancing all relationships and environments that are important to every child's early development; and, embedding systems and community change to support early childhood development and address childhood poverty. YK is delivered through inter-agency and partnership working and uses early intervention and evidence-based practices that are holistic in their approach to child development. YK uses a progressive, universal approach to intercept the cycle of poverty, and in so, to bring about lasting social change.

This research project will support YK's ongoing process and outcome evaluations and it will build on the existing data generated by the programme. In particular, it will contribute to the programme's Early Childhood Care and Education strategy, from which 700 children have benefitted to date, and the ongoing quality improvement measures implemented in this sector. This report will explore the use of visual participatory research methods with young children. These methods have been utilised to add young children's voices to research on the impact of the quality improvement strategy implemented in seven early years' (EY) settings involved in an early intervention project as part of YK.

Early Years Care and Education Quality Improvement Strategy

Children's early years are critical for development and a strong, responsive relationship between child and carer is important in facilitating children's communication development (Brebner, 2015). Strategy 3 of the YK programme, Early Childhood Care and Education, involved the implementation of a suite of quality improvement measures to a community of seven EY settings located in the YK catchment area. The chosen settings were diverse in their pedagogical approach and context, and included a Montessori centre, a primary school Early Start centre, a targeted early intervention centre, and a community preschool using a play-based approach. Co-ordinated by Barnardos Brighter Futures based in Knocknaheeny and guided by an Early Years Co-ordinators Group, the strategy was aligned to the National Early Years curriculum and quality frameworks of *Aistear* and *Siolta*.

Children's early years are critical for development, and a strong, responsive relationship between child and carer is important to facilitate children's communication development (Brebner, 2015). YK's suite of quality improvement measures included EY staff training (crèche and pre-school workers) in the form of the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It™ training and the Highscope Curriculum programme. In conjunction with the HighScope Curriculum training, the implementation of a mentoring programme saw a specialist onsite mentor available weekly to all seven centres throughout the course of the training in order to assist each centre in developing and implementing a tailored plan to enhance centre quality and child outcomes needs arising from the ERS assessments. Furthermore, as part of the environmental enhancement aspect of the strategy, YK provided funding to each of the participating centres to upgrade their environments and equipment in line with their needs arising from ERS assessments and required in order to effectively implement HighScope training strategies.

The evaluation of YK's EY quality improvement initiative utilised a mixed-methods approach. Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) assessments, ECERS-3 and ITERS-R, were conducted at each of the seven early years centres at baseline (2015) and post-intervention (2017). Focus groups and small groups interviews were also conducted with early years' practitioners and centre managers to inform the qualitative aspect of the research (see Buckley & Curtin, 2018, for evaluation results). Pre-ECERS-3 and ITERS-R assessments (2015) highlighted the aspects of each centre (space and furnishings, personal care routines, activities, listening and talking, interaction, programme structure) that required improvement prior to the implementation of the strategy's main activities: Hanen Learning Language and Loving It™; HighScope Curriculum Training; a mentoring programme; and, environmental enhancement funding. Post-intervention (2017) ECERS-3 and ITERS-R showed significant improvements in many areas, but in particular scores related to adult-child interactions. This paper will add the child's voices to these findings. Children's voices were included in the project evaluation through participatory research methods and this paper will focus on participatory research with twelve young children (aged 3-4 years) in one of the preschool settings. In adding children's voices to the programme evaluation the research can help us to understand children's experiences and produces better policy and better services.

Participatory Research with Children

The study was guided by a children's rights framework and is informed by Article 12 of the CRC. The methodology will draw on the "Mosaic approach'" which acknowledges adults and young children as co-constructors of meaning and combines traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with participatory methodologies (Clark & Moss, 2005). The study used visual participatory research methods and drew on the Mosaic approach which acknowledges adults and young children as co-constructors of meaning (Clark & Moss, 2005). This participatory research was guided by a children's rights framework and was informed by UNCRC Article 12 (Horgan et al, 2017). Participatory and visual methods which utilise visual and verbal research tools enable young children to document their experiences and to facilitate exchange with adults (Clark, 2011). These methods also contribute to 'researching with young children rather than on young children can redraw the boundaries between adults' and children's roles in the research process including the relationship with the research audience' (Clark, 2011, p115).

The study used visual, story and picture based materials and prompts to introduce the study to children in their preschool settings. Children will be offered the opportunity to share their views with the researcher through a variety of participatory rights-based approaches including drawing, photography, and conversations (Dockett et al 2012). The main method of data collection will be through photo supported interviews with the children. Children were supported to take their own photos within their preschool setting and these photos will be used as a motivation and basis for conversations with the researcher. The study builds on a growing body of research with children which utilises photographic research methods as an alternative or additional method to traditional verbal research methods (Einarsdottir, 2014). In a recent Canadian study Alaca (2017) found that PhotoVoice methodology is a very effective research tool in a study with children aged three to five years in preschool settings which supported and encouraged their expression. Photographic methods allow children to exercise power during data gathering as they choose and take the photographs themselves and the subsequent interviews and conversations with children will revolve around the images which they have photographed allowing them to direct the interview process.

Methodology

This is a participatory project and the research questions emerged from the photographs and subsequent narratives which the children produced. Children were offered the opportunity to share their views with the researchers through a variety of participatory rights-based approaches including drawing, photo-elicitation, photography, and conversations. The main method of data collection was through photo supported interviews with the children. Children were supported to take their own photos using digital cameras within their preschool setting and these photos were used as a motivation and basis for conversations with the researcher. Data collection took place over a 4-week period in the preschool setting and is further explained below.

Research Sample

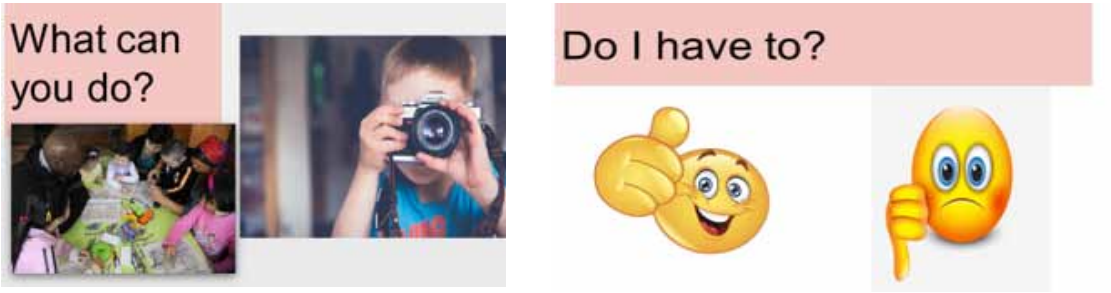
The participants for this study were 3 to 4-year-old children attending preschool. They were recruited through one preschool setting which is involved in the YK programme. The children in the research are aged under 5 years and the research process took into account their cognitive, language, emotional and social skills. The language used by the researcher and the research methods were appropriate for the children's developmental stage and the research was being conducted in a child-friendly environment which the children were familiar with. It was conducted with the support of the children's preschool teachers who work with the children on a daily basis and who have an on-going relationship with the children. These practitioners played a key role in assessing the ongoing assent and comfort of the child during the research project.

Informed Consent with the Children

Parental consent for their child's participation in the study was sought and all issues related to the study were explained to parents both through the study information sheet and verbally by the preschool staff in the Centre. The preschool staff assured the parents that there was no expectation that their child had to participate in the study and participation is voluntary. Informed consent was sought from the children through two steps; informing and consenting (Cook, 2006). Children can only provide their consent if they understand their role in the study and the purpose of the study. To inform the children about the study, the researcher developed a picture book about the research project and which introduces the researcher and the purpose of the study in a visual and child friendly way (See Picture 1: Extracts from the Picture book for informed consent with the children).



Picture 1: Picture book for Informed consent with the children



Picture 1: Picture book for Informed consent with the children

This follows the approach of 'narrative non-fiction' which has been established as a means of ethical informing where the researcher 'establishes the research context and purpose, rules of participation, and information in the form of a factual narrative, supported by photographs of real people, places, and events' (Mayne et al., 2016). The storybook was developed in conjunction with the preschool staff to make sure it is appropriate to the children's age and cultural understanding. Once the informing step was complete consent was sought from the children verbally and children could also answer yes or no or give a thumbs up and thumbs down sign. Additionally, children who did not want to participate were be offered an alternative activity by preschool staff and they could demonstrate their consent non-verbally by moving to a different part of the room and participating in another activity. The children's ongoing assent was monitored by the researchers and by the preschool staff who were very familiar with the children and work with them on a daily basis. Below is an outline of the research schedule for the project.

Research Ethics

The project methodology is guided by the 2011 DCYA National Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children. One of the key ethical issues arising through this research is ensuring that specific people, settings and families are not identified and that any sensitive issues arising, perhaps relating to individual children and family circumstances, are anonymised. A strict policy of confidentiality and anonymity was adhered to throughout the research process. The research adhered to child protection guidelines already in operation in the preschool settings. There is also support available from within the YK consortium including social work and psychological support should any child protection issues arise. The researcher has Garda Clearance which was obtained through UCC in December 2017.

Research Schedule and Sessions

Training on participatory research with YK Staff. Prior to data collection there was a research methods training session with YK staff to introduce them to child participatory research and to the methods being used in the research study. This session was led by Shirley Martin. At this session the staff were also invited to review and inform the research methods. This input from the staff acknowledges their expertise in working with the children on a daily basis and informed some minor changes in the data collection sessions outlined below.

Data collection with the children

All data collection took place in the children's preschool over a 4-week period.

Session 1 The researchers introduced the research to the children in their preschool setting and through this session informed consent was sought from the children. This was done through a picture book about the research project and which introduces the researcher and the purpose of the study in a visual and child friendly way (see Picture 1).

Session 2 The sessions started by reminding children of the story from Session 1. The researchers introduced the research themes with the children using Photo elicitation (stock photos of caregiver interactions and photos of their preschool taken by the preschool staff) (see Picture 2). This session will further familiarise the children with the researchers and with having the researcher in their preschool setting.



Picture 2: Photo Elicitation

Session 3 Talk and draw methods – the researchers conducted a talk and draw session with the children. The aim of the session was to elicit the views of the children on their everyday experiences and again to allow the children to become familiar and comfortable with the researcher in their preschool setting. The posters were used as a prompt for children. Children were given markers because they were using them for their work during that period and were enjoying using them in their preschool classroom so the preschool staff felt it would be an interesting material choice for the talk and draw as the children were excited about using markers. This was evident when the children were using them for the session and all of the children were enthusiastic about using them. Three groups of 4-5 children with their teacher came into the room and each group stayed for 20 minutes. After they finished colouring and drawing they were invited to stick their picture onto their favourite photos which were posted on the wall from the photo-elicitation session (see Picture 3). The children's discussions were recoded and transcribed from this session.





Picture 3 & 4: Talk and Draw Sessions

Session 4 Children were given the digital cameras and given some basic instruction on how to use them. They were asked to take photos in their preschool of things which they find interesting over a two-day period. The preschool staff supported them in this activity with any technical issues they had.

Session 5 & 6 During these sessions the children were shown the printed copies of the photos which they took and these photos formed the basis of a discussion with the children using the PhotoVoice methods. These sessions produced the main source of data for the research study. Children were given stickers to identify their favourite 3 to 4 photos during the session and sad faces to identify photos they did not like. This allowed the children to select their favourites and gave additional opportunities for non-verbal children to contribute their ideas. One child was interviewed at a time by one adult researcher while there may have been another adult-child pair working in another part of the room. The sessions were conducted in the parent's room of the centre. Children were asked questions such as:

- Why did you take that photo?
- What's happening in the photo?
- What is the teacher doing in the photo?
- What are you doing in the photo?
- Where are you when you took the photo?
- Did you like having the camera?



Picture 5: PhotoVoice Session

Each session took 5 to 12 minutes depending on how much time the child felt they wanted to participate. Some of the children were more discursive than others and some children are more photos than others but most had 15 to 20. Two of the children were non-verbal and one of these did not want to participate in the session by himself and was accompanied by his teacher at his request.

Data Analysis

The data was subject to visual and textual analysis. The conversations with the children were recoded and transcribed and the subsequent data was coded and organised thematically. The photographs were subject to visual analysis and were also analysed in the context of the conversations with the children. The children's selection of their favourite photographs also offered another form of coding for the data.

Findings

Themes from the Children's Data

The children's voices emerged through the different participatory methods and key themes which emerged from the children's visual and verbal data included peer friendships, staff helping children, transitions and language and activities connected to socio-emotional regulation and centrality of food in the preschool setting. These themes were similar to those which emerged in the adult data such as the emphasis on socio-emotional language and support during the daily routine of the preschool (see Buckley & Curtin, 2018). There were some differences also between the emphasis of the adults and children, such as few of the children took pictures of or referred to the outdoor area which had been the focus of quality improvements. This section will further explore these issues and explore how the children's visual and verbal data and participatory approaches allow us to more critically understand the quality improvements strategies employed in the programme from the children's perspectives and how these methods ensure that the research is conducted with children as co-constructors of knowledge.

Most Frequent Themes in Children's Data

Peers and Friends

In the PhotoVoice sessions all of the children took photographs of their friends. Photos of friends were consistently one of their favourite type pf photos when children were asked to select their favourite photograph and usually the first favourite photo which they selected. They usually had multiple pictures of a small friend group (1-2 children) which were often of the same gender as themselves. Play with friends was an important part of the day for the children and a common theme in their photos and discussions. The theme of peers and friends was less common the Talk and Draw sessions and the Photo-elicitation sessions.

Positive View of Staff and Staff Helping Children

Children drew pictures of the preschool staff in the talk and draw sessions and this allowed the researchers to capture conversation on the children's view of staff during these conversations. In the Talk and Draw sessions children predominately drew staff with happy faces. Similarly, in the Photo-elicitation session children were drawn to the images of staff where the staff were displaying happy faces. Several children said that the staff were always happy. Other children were drawn to pictures of staff being happy in the photo elicitation session. One child picked picture of adult helping child as their favourite in this session.

During PhotoVoice sessions all of the children took photos of the staff engaged in activities with the children and many of the children feature their key worker in their photographs. They also commonly selected these photos when asked to select favourite photos. Children took many pictures of staff engaged in helping children so as staff sitting at tables with children or on the floor and staff setting up activities for the children. There were a small number of pictures of staff holding or hugging the children.

Children often picked pictures of the staff as their favourite pictures. Children tended to take more pictures of their key worker than the other preschool workers which may emphasises the centrality of this relationship for the child in their daily routine. For example, one child who has English as a second language and was non-verbal during the PhotoVoice activities took 17 pictures of her teacher and she selected three photos of her Keyworker working with children as her favourite photos. She took photos of her key worker helping other children get dressed, and playing with other children and a number of close-up pictures of her keyworkers face.

Socio-Emotional Language and Regulation

In all of the sessions the theme of socio-emotional language and regulation was commonly referenced by the children. Many of the children pointed to the pictures of circle time in the Photo-elicitation session as something familiar to them which they were happy to discuss and two children picked circle time mat as their favourite place in the Photo-Elicitation session. For example, one child discussed picture of a child doing 'turtle' with his teacher because he had made a 'bad choice'. The preschool teacher in the session explained that the 'turtle' posture is a calming technique which is taught to the children to use when they are feeling sad or angry. A number of children also took photos of children doing the 'turtle' and this was mentioned by 4 of the 10 children in their PhotoVoice interviews. Many of the children referenced the turtle and the language of good and bad choices in their conversations with the researchers and this language was used by the children to discuss both their reactions and other children's reactions to various situations which arose during their preschool day and sometimes at home indicating a continuity in how they children experience this socio-emotional regulation. One child spoke about good choices in makes in relation to food at his grandmother's house, using language to describe events outside of the setting. For example:

Child 2: He is probably making a bad choice (boy is talking to the teacher)

Researcher: Why is he making a bad choice?

Child 2: He probably hit Jay, and Mary (teacher) would say that was a bad choice. I make good choices every day like when I am eating in my nana's.



A lot of references to circle time and the puppets during PhotoVoice sessions and this was a dominant theme in the photos taken by the children. The puppets used for circle time were also frequently photographed by the children and children liked to talking about the puppets with the researchers. These represent concrete objects which it may have been easier for the children to discuss than the more conceptual aspects of socio-emotional regulation. For example, one child who was non-verbal during the PhotoVoice activities took a 11 of photos of his feet while sitting at the circle during circle time and a number of his photos focused on activates related to socio-emotional regulation such as circle time activities.

One child took a picture of himself making a 'bad choice' and this child was also focus of some other children's photos of a child making a 'bad choice'. In another photo he says he is angry because he misses his mum.

Indoor Play

Indoor play and activities and materials connected to indoor play affordances were common themes in all the conversations and photos with the children. During the photo-elicitation session six children picked indoor spaces in their own setting and in particular they picked the sand, dress-up and play kitchen areas as their favourite photos.

In PhotoVoice session children took majority of photos inside their classroom and spoke about indoor play during the interviews. This is linked to their discussions on the materials which they used for indoor play, which they often placed a 'favourite' sticker on.

Indoor Activities in the Setting

A number of children took pictures of activities taking place in their setting during the week of the photo collection. For example, there were multiple examples of photos of a musical chair activity and of staff setting up this activity. In addition, the musical chairs activity was often picked as one of their favourite photos. Children also took pictures of the teacher reading to them as a group and these photos were used to discuss the book with the researcher. One child took picture of an obstacle course and described the activity for the researchers.



Indoor Spaces in the Setting

A number of children took pictures of the stairs leading to the upstairs playhouse. This is a private children's space but there were no pictures of children in this setting and none of the children took their camera to this space. There was little discussion in the conversations with the researchers about what children play in this space. One child refers to the 'girls sneaking upstairs' in a photo, even though this space is free for the children to use during free play-time but it is a less observed space in their classroom. Children seemed to restrict themselves to taking pictures in their classroom and the kitchen space, and it appears they did feel free to move between the different spaces in the setting with their cameras. Only one child took a picture of the receptionist and her desk space near the entrance to the setting, and there are very few photographs of the hallway/reception area or other areas. There are no pictures of the toilets or the offices.



Materiality of Setting

In the PhotoVoice sessions, children frequently took pictures of materials they liked playing with such as blocks and the art materials for mask-making. Children also took pictures of the dress-up materials. In the PhotoVoice conversations, these pictures gave the researchers an opportunity to point to the materials and ask the children what they did with these materials and discuss them with the children. For example, one child pointed to cars in his photo and said that the children share them. Also children spoke of the teacher playing with them and using such materials, for example one child pointed to a picture of her keyworker and said 'she's playing blocks'. All of the children took photos of materials that were available for them to play with and these materials were accessible to the children when they took the photos, and many of the photos were of the materials being actively played with by multiple children. Almost all of the children took pictures of materials available to them during table-top activities.



Food and Kitchen Space

The theme of food the kitchen space emerged in data collection with the children. In the photo-elicitation session, one child said snacking was her favourite activity. A number of children took pictures of the kitchen and the chef. This is the only area outside of the classroom which was commonly photographed by the children, perhaps indicating they saw it as a space they were comfortable in or an extension of their classroom. They referred to helping the chef to make cupcakes and crispy cakes and discussed the food they ate in the kitchen such as shepard's pie and fruit. One child predominately talked about food and the kitchen as his favourite space in the setting, and he particularly liked breakfast. The kitchen space was identified as a space with strict rules enforced by the chef. Two children used their pictures of the kitchen space to discuss the rules in the kitchen and what they perceived as being allowed and not allowed in this space, for example children ae not allowed to go behind the counter where the cooker is located.

Selfies

The majority of the children took selfies with the camera and some made different faces for the camera and took multiple photos of themselves. One girl took 41 selfies. Many of the children took a selfie of themselves and their friends and three children took selfies with their keyworkers.

Less Common Themes in Children's Data



Transitions and Structure in the Daily Routine

Some of the children discussed issues related to transitions and structures in their daily routine during their conversations with the researchers. For example, one child pointed to pictures of children getting ready in Photo-elicitation. One child took a picture of the 'chid of the day' and explained to the researcher that the child was collecting spoons as part of his responsibilities as 'child of the day'. Some children took pictures during PhotoVoice of activities connected to transitions, and also one child used the language connected to socio-emotional regulation to explain something that was happening in a photo he took during a transition.

Child 1: That is our school where the library is, that is Sean trying to get some Lego. He was making bad choices

Researcher: Why?

Child 2: Because it was cleanup time.

While not identified as dominant themes, transitions and structures were present in some of the children's data.

Outdoor Play and Affordances

The topic of outdoor play and affordances was more common during the Photo-elicitation sessions and the Talk and Draw session than the PhotoVoice sessions where the children discussed their photos. In Photo-elicitation four children picked out door play settings (not their own settings) as their favourite places or places to put their picture. Also a number of their drawings were of outside play. Only one child discussed the outdoors in their PhotoVoice session and there were few photos. The child who did discuss it talked about the mud kitchen and planting flowers. She referred to the slide

outside and pointed out the absence of swings. It is unclear if the children had the opportunity to take pictures outside and this may have influenced the lack of focus on the outdoors in the PhotoVoice conversations with the children.

Parents and Guardians

The subject of parents or guardians was infrequently mentioned by the children during their conversation with the researchers. In the Talk and Draw session one child drew picture of their mother and another child spoke of activities she did with her mother outside of the preschool. In the Photo-elicitation session one child pointed to a picture of a teacher talking to a child's mother in her preschool setting and when the researcher asked her about it the child said the teachers also talk to Daddies everyday (we had not included pictures of fathers in the Photo-elicitation session). In the PhotoVoice session only three children mentioned their parents or guardians. One child took a picture if his mother in the reception of the preschool and another child mentioned his grandmother. The child who took the picture of his mother identified as his favourite picture and the preschool staff member explained to the researcher that his mother had been in the centre playing cards with the child on the day he took the photo.

Negative View of Staff

In the conversations with children there very few references or indication of negative views of the staff being held by the children. In the Talk and Draw session, one child drew a sad face on his teacher and said that the teacher was sad because the children were being bold. Another child put his own drawing of his teacher on the poster elicitation image of an angry looking teacher. The researcher asked him if the teacher he drew was in trouble and the child responded, "Yeah because she was being bold". She then went onto draw another picture of her teacher. Overall the data collected from the children indicated that they held very positive views of their relationship with the preschool staff.

Merging the Child and Adult Data

The following section will explore how the findings from the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R and the qualitative interviews with staff can be merged with the findings in the children's data. The section will examine some of the key themes from the children's data in light of the findings from the overall project evaluation (see Buckley & Curtin, 2018 for full report on the YK Process Evaluation).

Peers and Friendship

According to YK Process Evaluation findings, stemming from post quality improvement intervention ERS assessments (ECERS-3: preschool, and ITERS-R: crèche), 'children's peer interactions are supported and staff encourage them to play together and to be considerate towards others'. This was reflected in the participatory research with the children, and the issue of peers and friendship was the most common theme in the children's data and frequently the subject of their photographs. Children were very positive about their relationship with their peers and most identified a close group of friends in the setting which were frequently the subject of their favourite photographs. Also in the interviews with staff one staff member mentioned that the introduction of HighScope had increased conflict resolution and considerate play among the children and this finding appears to be reflected in the children's data as few of the children mentioned issues of conflict with their peers in their conversations with the researchers.

Evidence of Positive Adult-Child Interactions in Staff and Child Data

The ECERS-3 and ITERS-R post evaluation findings reported the staff as 'calm, kind, warm, fully involved, children were encouraged, accepted, valued and respected' and in relation to Listening and Talking the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R findings reported that staff 'talk very easily to children, both conversationally and as part of their learning'. These findings are reflected in the children's data and the children had an overwhelmingly positive view of the staff in the setting and in particular held very positive views of their key workers. Children took a large number of photographs of the staff and many of these showed the staff interacting with the children in a very positive and child centred way such as playing with children on the ground, table top activities with staff and children or hugging the children. Children also took pictures of the staff reading to them, demonstrating positive socio-emotional regulation though the use of the puppets and engaging in circle time activity with them. In staff interviews and focus groups, staff noted the visible the improvements on child learning, development and behaviour, noting children's increased sense of independence through a more child-led approach to learning. Frequent examples offered by EY staff included children's increased responsibility in cleaning up after themselves and placing objects in their correct places. Children also took a number of pictures of the circle time mat and activities related to socio-emotional regulation and very comfortable articulating the language and techniques which the staff had been using connect the positive behaviour reflecting improvements in this area as noted by the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R.

Evidence of Improved Programme Structure in Staff and Child Data

In the post intervention evaluation, the staff reported improved programme structure and while the children were not explicitly asked about this there is evidence from the children's data that they were aware of key activities and transition times such as tidying-up and moving from one activity to another. These events appeared in their photos and a number of children spoke about these transitions in their PhotoVoice interviews indicating they could articulate what was happening during these periods. This reflects the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R findings that 'Transitions and routines are explained visually and verbally by interactive use of the timeline of the session. Children area actively engaged in the use of this'. An increased sense of responsibility and independence in children also emerged as a visible outcome seen by EY staff post-intervention and some of the children did discuss their responsibilities such as tidying and the child of the day jobs which they undertook in their conversations with the researchers.

Also in relation to programme structure, the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R reports that 'children spent most of their time in free play and there are plenty of materials to use' and this is reflected in the large number of photos which children took of the materials which were freely available to them to use and the different play spaces where they had plentiful access to materials in their setting. Children frequently took pictures of materials they liked playing with such as mask making materials, paint and Lego and the children's pictures demonstrated good provision of materials for fine motor development. The children's data did reflect the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R findings that there was 'many interesting materials for children to choose in all rooms'. The post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R reported that 'Musical instruments are freely accessible' to the children which was not evident in the PhotoVoice data generated by the children.

Outside Space and Affordances

The the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R reported that there was staff recognition of the outside area as being an equally important part of classroom as inside but this was not reflected in the children's PhotoVoice data. While four children picked out door play spaces as their favourite places in the Photo-elicitation session and there was some discussion of outdoor space in the Talk and Draw session there was almost no discussion or photos of outdoor space in the PhotoVoice sessions. Children seemed to restrict themselves to taking pictures in their classroom and the kitchen and did not use the photos to take pictures of the outdoor spaces. The conversations in the PhotoVoice sessions tended to focus on the concrete objects or areas which the children photographed and this meant there was very little discussion of outdoor spaces as these were absent from the children photos. The PhotoVoice data did not verify the staff data that the outdoor space was an integral part of the classroom space.

Parental and Family Engagement

The issue of parents and parental involvement was an infrequent theme in the children's data. While the post-intervention ECERS-3 and ITERS-R reported the children's 'departure is well organised with time to speak to parents' and the HighScope Curriculum and YK Programme have a particular focus on parental and family involvement in children's early education this issue was less central to the children's data. As discussed in the previous section on the children's data the subject of parents or guardians was infrequently mentioned by the children during their conversation with the researchers and only one child took a parental picture as part of the PhotoVoice activity. This may indicate that children do not view the parent as part of their classroom setting or they were not given the opportunity to take photos of their parents during the PhotoVoice activity. Similar to the lack of outdoor photos this restricted the conversations with children as the children tended to focus on issues that were concretely photographed.

Discussion

Friendship and peer relations was a key theme for the children in the data which they generated and this emphasis the centrality of relations with peers for the children involved. The findings in the children's data also indicate that the children had a very positive view of the staff in the early years setting and in particular they held very positive views of their key workers. Children took a large number of photographs of the staff and many of these showed the staff interacting with the children in a very positive and child centred way such as playing with children on the ground, table top activities with staff and children or hugging the children. Children also took pictures of the staff reading to them, demonstrating positive socio-emotional regulation though the use of the puppets and engaging in circle time activity with them. Children's early years are critical for development and a strong, responsive relationship between children and their careers is important in facilitating children's communication development (Brebner, 2015). Evidence from the study indicates responsive child-adult relationships in this early years setting.

As well as the dominant themes in the children's data it is important to consider some the themes which were not dominant and how they might be used to influence future practice in the YK programme. The importance of parent involvement in children's development and learning is well established in the research literature (Hilado, Kallemeyn and Phillips, 2013; Martin, 2006) and is a core part of the work of the YK programme. However, the absence of parents from the data generated by the children's in their photos and conversations with the research may indicate that the children do not see their parents as being part of or present in the early years centre and there may need to be some additional work on addressing how children experience and view family-centre partnerships. Also the focus on outdoor space in the Environment Enhancement aspect of the Early Years Care and Education strategy of the YK programme is not reflected in the children's data and this finding will help the early year's staff to reflect on their own practice and the use and design of the outdoor space to ensure that from the children's perspectives and experiences it is a core part of their everyday experiences in the setting.

Reflections on the Child-centred Participatory Research Methodology

The participatory research methods presented opportunities and challenges while doing this research project. The methods allowed children to generate their own visual data which the researcher used for conversational prompts and child-interviews. In cases where the children were non-verbal it was particularly important to allow children the opportunity to generate their own visual data and allowing them to select their favourite images contributed to their voice opportunities. The majority of the children said that they liked the camera activity and most very happy to see their photos printed. Some children found it difficult to pick their favourite photos because they liked them all and most children found it difficult to pick photos they did not like. The exercise was not useful in supporting children to talk about issues they did not like in their preschool and this may be due to the fact that children were not asked to specifically take pictures of objects or activities they did not like and in some ways were asking them to criticise their own work by asking them to select photos they did not like.

Different themes emerged in the various sessions and the different methodologies seemed to influence the types of conversations between the researchers and children. Some of the conversations in the Talk and Draw sessions were fantasy-based and imaginary which was also evident in some of the conversations based around the Photo-elicitation session. In contrast the PhotoVoice sessions were based on the images the children generated themselves and these conversations were very concrete and revolved around the objects and spaces the children had photographed the themselves. Also the images in the Photo-elicitation were picked by researchers and some were pictures taken by the preschool staff and this led to children identify slightly different areas as their favourites for example there were more outdoor photos.
A further limitation of the research is that the fieldwork research was only conducted in one the preschools school in the YK programme and it is important to replicate the opportunities for child-participatory research in each of the seven participating centres and embed it into on-going programme evaluation.

Conclusion

The inclusion of child-centred participatory research in the ongoing evaluation work of the YK programme is an opportunity to allow children's voices to contribute to the YK evaluation and also to challenge adult-centric data which may emerge from standardised tests and predetermined measures. O'Connell (2011) also writes about the role of visual data generated as a way of confirming, complementing, elaborating or contradicting data generated by other mixed methods in research. It also allows opportunities for children's voices to shape how practice in the programme can move forward and ensures that children remain centre to the process, for example the issues of parental involvement and the use of outdoor space in the setting need to be re-examined from the children's perspectives and in light of the children's data.

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Appendix

Young Knocknaheeny ABC Programme

Young Knocknaheeny Area Based Childhood Programme (YKABC) is a community-based Prevention, Promotion and Early Intervention Programme, based in the Northwest sector of Cork City supporting parents and families, practitioners and services from the pre-birth period into infancy and early childhood.
YKABC brings the science, evidence and policy of infancy and early childhood development into best practice through partnership and collaboration to get every child's life off to the best possible start by:

- Respectfully enhancing skills and early childhood development knowledge of all parents, practitioners and services
- Strengthening and supporting all relationships and environments that are important to every child's early development
- Embedding systems and community change to support early childhood development and address childhood poverty
- Participatory learning and evaluation, documenting and policy development

The YKABC Programme is delivered through 4 locally designed, interconnected strategies, underpinned by an Infant Mental Health (IMH) Framework:

1. Infant Mental Health and Well-being Strategy
2. Early Years Care and Education on-going Quality Improvement Strategy
3. Speech, language and literacy Strategy
4. Prosocial Behaviour and Self-Regulation Strategy

All YKABC programmes and approaches are evidenced-based, and are implemented to be culturally appropriate, child-centred, and needs-led. They are respectful and strengths-based. Programmes are offered at a universal service level through self-referral, community referrals, and through to a more targeted approach in consultation with interagency partner organisations. Multi-disciplinary workforce capacity building; through training, mentoring, coaching and peer support; is a key feature of all 4 strategies.

YKABC is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It is aligned to Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. It is part of the national Area Based Childhood Programme, which has now transferred into the TUSLA Prevention Partnership and Family Support Strategy.

Approximately 50 services and agencies are partnered with YKABC. In the first 3 years of the programme, over 5,500 children and parents engaged with YKABC programmes: 1:1 home-visiting, groups and programmes in preschools and in primary schools. Over 500 practitioners across health, education, and family support, engaged in training and ongoing professional development and reflective practice.

Further Information

Young Knocknaheeny Consortium Members

YKABC is overseen by an inter-agency Consortium Group of 19 representatives including:

• Senator Colette Kelleher	YK Consortium Chairperson
• Dr Margaret Curtin	UCC School of Nursing and Midwifery
• Dr Pat Corbett	YK Chairperson 2011-17
• Dr Louise Gibson	UCC Dept. of Medicine and Child Health/ KidScope
• Ms. Anne Horgan	HSE Cork North Speech and Language Dept.
• Ms. Eileen Kearney	HSE North Cork Sector 4 Public Health Nursing Dept.
• Ms. June Hamil	Before 5 Family Centre, Gurranabraher
• Ms. Ingrid O' Riordan	Le Cheile School Completion Programme
• Ms. Angela Kalaitzake	Hollyhill-Knocknaheeny Family Centre, Knocknaheeny
• Ms. Denise Cahill	Cork Healthy Cities
• Ms. Sandra O'Meara	Cork City Council / Cork Northwest Regeneration
• Ms. Liz Horgan	Sundays Well Girls National School
• Mr. Dave Cashman	Sundays Well Boys National School
• Mr. Ger Donovan	St. Mary on the Hill National School, Knocknaheeny
• Ms. Janet Dennehy	Cork City Childcare / YK Strategy 3 Lead
• Ms. Sarah O'Gorman	Barnardos Brighter Futures, Knocknaheeny
• Mr. John O'Mahony	Foroige
• Dr. Shirley Martin	UCC School of Applied Social Studies
• Ms. Lynda Monahan	TUSLA PPFS

Current YK Team

• Katherine Harford	Programme Manager
• Emily Harrington	Programme Administrator
• Lynn Buckley	Programme Officer
• Catherine Maguire (s)	Infant Mental Health Specialist IMH-E® / YK Strategy 1 Lead
• Grace Walsh (s)	Senior Oral Language Development Officer / YK Strategy 2 Lead
• Sally O'Sullivan	Oral Language Development Officer
• Aileen O'Brien	Oral Language Development Officer (maternity leave cover)
• Susan Lehane (s)	Child Health Development Worker / PHN
• Tracie Lane	Infant Parent Support Worker
• Maeve Donegan	Infant Parent Support Worker
• Roisin Bradley	Infant Parent Support Worker
• Suzanne Rigby	Infant Parent Support Worker
• Mary Tobin	Infant Parent Support Worker
• Sinead Donovan	Infant Parent Support Worker / YK Incredible Years Facilitator
• Ingrid O' Riordan (c)	Consortium Member / YK Strategy 4 Lead
• Johanna Forde (c)	Early Years Quality Improvement Mentor
• Mairead Carolan (c)	IMH Masterclass Trainer
• Archways (c)	Incredible Years Training and Mentoring

(s) Secondment
(c) Contractor

Young Knocknaheeny is part of the Area Based Childhood Programme funded by TUSLA and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. NICHE Health Project (Cork) CLG is the lead agency.

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Area Based Childhood Programme

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Department of Children and Youth Affairs

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

NICHE
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