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Listening to young children: experts in their own lives

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Abstract

Most existing literature on children's participation has focused on their involvement in service planning, delivery and evaluation rather than on children's views of their own world, starting from their interests and concerns. Few studies have considered the views and experiences of young children (under five years-old.) One of the barriers to this work has been uncertainty about 'how to listen' to children at this age.

This article explores a methodology for listening to young children, the Mosaic approach, which brings together verbal and visual tools to reveal young children's perspectives. The material produced by the children provides a platform for communication between adults and children. Examples are given from two research studies which took place in early childhood institutions in the UK. These illustrate how young children used cameras and participatory activities such as tours and map making to highlight important people, places and events and to share these views with adults.

The discussion focuses on the possible applications of this approach for young children who experience fostering and adoption, including the potential for young children to document and to communicate the important details of their present as well as past lives.

Key words: young children, listening, fostering, adoption, consultation, participation

Introduction

There is currently considerable interest in the subject of children's participation and listening to children's views. In 2001, the government published 'core principles' for the involvement of children and young people (CYPU 2001), and all the main government departments have subsequently produced action plans setting out how they plan to take these forward (e.g. DfES . A wealth of practical guides to consulting with children and young people has been produced, by both government and voluntary bodies (e.g. Thomas et al. 1999, Fajerman and Treseder 2003, Lancaster and Broadbent 2003). Assessment materials, such as the Looking After Children forms, Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and now the Integrated Children's System, all contain sections for recording children's views and emphasise the importance of doing this (Department of Health et al. 2000). Researchers are increasingly expected to seek the views of children and young people as part of their investigations.

But there are important gaps. The first is that most research has focused on the views of older children and young people, often those aged eight or ten and older (e.g. Thomas and Beckford 1999, Tunstill and Aldgate 2001). Very little information is available documenting the views of young children, especially those under school age (Clark et al 2003). Not surprisingly, researchers have tended to focus on those who are most able to articulate their views through traditional techniques such as interviews and focus groups. This often excludes children and young people who are most disadvantaged or hard to reach. It has

also excluded those who are disabled, although researchers are now developing methodologies for enabling disabled children and young people to make their views known (Ward 1997, Stone 2001, Marchant and Jones, 2003). Innovative techniques are also being used with disabled adults, such as a photovoice project with mothers with learning difficulties, that enable them to document their own lives (Booth and Booth, 2003).

In the case of very young children, one reason for their voice being largely absent from research and professional practice has been uncertainty about 'how to listen' to children at such a young age. An overview of research studies on the implementation of the Children Act 1989 found that professionals were generally better at communicating with older children, but that 'the process of children's participation is sometimes not as child-centred as it should be. What the studies reveal is that the skills of facilitating children to express their wishes and feelings are variable' (Aldgate and Statham 2001:142). However, the lack of attention given to the young child's voice also reflects how early childhood is commonly understood as a time when children are not yet able or mature enough to make their views known and have them acted upon. In the words of one Danish researcher, 'children [are] often denied the right to speak for themselves either because they are held incompetent in making judgements or because they are thought of as unreliable witnesses about their own lives' (Quortrup, 1994:2).

A second characteristic of most existing literature on children's participation is that it has focused on their involvement in service planning, delivery and evaluation; either at an individual case level (young people's views on the services they receive) or at the more general level of service design and delivery. Whilst this is a laudable activity, it does reflect to a large extent the agenda of adults, who need to ensure that the services provided are appropriate and effective. There has been little research that has started from the child's view of their own world now– what is important to them in the present as well as feelings about the past and the future, what makes them feel happy and secure, what meanings do they attach to the physical spaces they inhabit and to the people and activities in their lives?

This paper begins to address both these gaps in the existing literature by describing a methodology (the Mosaic approach) to enable the voices of very young children to be heard, and which starts from the child's perspective on their present world. The approach has been developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss, academics working within the field of Early Childhood. The Mosaic approach uses a multi-method framework to help young children gather material about the important details of their daily lives and to share these with adults. It views young children as competent, social actors who are experts in their own lives (Langstead, 1994). This notion of competency is in line with the emerging sociology of childhood (James and Prout 1997), which sees children as 'beings not becomings' and recognizes that children have 'their own activities and their

own time and their own space' (Quortrup, 1994:4). This emphasis on children's perceptions is not intended to undermine the role of adults with particular professional expertise, but to acknowledge that to answer questions around children's experiences, the primary source of knowledge should be the child his or herself (Morrow and Richards 1996). What matters to children may differ from what is seen as important by adults. For example, a recent study of adults' and children's perceptions of the causes and consequences of child poverty in rural Vietnam illustrated different understandings of what makes a child 'poor'. Children's accounts (obtained through a variety of participatory techniques) showed greater awareness of environmental threats such as rubbish and of children needing to work, but rarely mentioned health issues such as water and sanitation which concerned adults (Harpham et al. 2005).

The Mosaic approach draws on the pedagogical frameworks developed by Loris Malaguzzi and early childhood educators working in the preschools of Reggio Emilia, a region in Northern Italy (Edwards et al. 1998); and on methodologies such as Participatory Appraisal developed in Majority World countries to give voice to those who are disempowered. The early childhood institutions in Reggio Emilia view the child as a 'rich child' who is strong, competent and active, and able to express herself through the 'hundred languages of children'. Learning is seen as a collaborative process in which adults and children search for meanings together. This understanding of childhood is perhaps at odds with the image of the 'poor' child in need of protection and care that is reflected in the concept of a

'child in need' in the Children Act 1989 (Moss et al., 2000). A second influence on the development of the Mosaic approach was the often imaginative methods developed in an International Development context to enable adults, who may be illiterate, to communicate their local knowledge, for example by leading a tour or 'transect walk' of their neighbourhood (Hart, 1997). These Participatory Appraisal methods also take as their starting point an assumption of competence and a belief that local people are the ones best equipped to know about and explain their lives.

In the rest of this paper, we describe how the Mosaic approach was developed and used in two research studies, which were both undertaken by Alison Clark in early childhood settings in England. Selected findings from the research studies are then presented to illustrate how the techniques can help young children to articulate what is important in their world. The approach has not, as far as we know, been used specifically with young children who are fostered or adopted, but it offers considerable potential for enabling adults (such as foster carers, adoptive parents and professionals) to communicate with and understand the experiences of children who need to be cared for away from their birth families. The relevance of this approach for understanding the lives and needs of young looked-after children is considered, and suggestions are made for the kind of circumstances in which the Mosaic approach might be used. The paper concludes by highlighting the challenge, but also the importance, of finding new

ways of engaging with the diverse ways in which young children communicate their feelings and experiences.

The studies

The original study, 'Listening to young children', took place in a nursery which was part of a multi-agency childcare network or community campus (Wigfall and Moss, 2001). The study focused on two key groups: children age three to four years in the kindergarten and children under two in the nursery. The examples in this article are taken from work with a group of eight children between three and four years old. The second study, 'Spaces to Play', adapted the Mosaic approach to involve young children in the redesign of an outdoor play space (Clark and Moss, 2005). This study was based in a pre-school for three and four year-olds. The sample of twenty eight children included those with speech and language delay. The Spaces to Play study included a process evaluation (see Clark and Moss, 2005: 66-72). An Early Years Development officer who had first hand experience of the approach in action commented:

> 'Because details and ideas were revisited through several techniques-that is , the photos taken by children were made into books and discussed with the original child as well as with a wider audience-children had a chance to reflect and elaborate upon their ideas.' (2005: 69)

Following the development of the Mosaic approach in a research context the methodology is featured in a number of Undergraduate level courses and textbooks in early childhood and childhood studies (for example Clark, 2004;

Kirby and Woodhead, 2003). The methodology has been cited in work relating to the participation of older children (for example, Hill, Davis, Prout, and Tisdall (2004)). This paper will focus on its use in its original context with young children.

Tools for listening: developing the Mosaic Approach

There are two possible starting points for gathering young children's perspectives: adapting tools which appear to work with adults and older children, or finding tools which play to young children's particular strengths rather than their weaknesses. We were interested in investigating this second option to find ways of harnessing young children's creativity and physical engagement with their world.

The approach uses a wide range of methods in order to allow children with different abilities and interests to take part (Table 1). This multi-method approach also enables traditional tools of observation and interviewing to contribute to the overall picture or 'mosaic'., and provides an opportunity to triangulate findings across the different methodologies. The name 'mosaic' was chosen to reflect the bringing together of different pieces of information or material to make a picture from children's viewpoint.

[insert Table 1 around here]

Child observation

Observation provides an important starting place for listening to children, whatever their age. It is of particular value with younger or less articulate children. We chose to use narrative accounts, which are a qualitative type of observation based on written descriptions of episodes of children's play. The observations were structured around two questions from the child's standpoint: 'do you listen to me?' and 'what is it like for me to be here?' .Although observation is an important part of listening, it still relies on an adult perspective on children's lives. The following tools draw more directly on young children's views and experiences.

Child interviews

Child interviewing provides a space for including formal conversations with children about their present lives. Questions focus on important people, places and activities. There is the opportunity for children to add other information they think the interviewer should know about their institution. In the first study, a group of children in the nursery were interviewed twice over a four month period using this schedule. The children were able to listen to their previous responses, reflect on any changes and add new comments. However, not all the children were interested in talking in this formal way. The child interviewing was therefore adapted so it could be conducted 'on the move', with children taking the researcher to places as they spoke. The child interviews in the second study all

took place in this flexible way, sometimes being conducted sitting in a favourite place or following a child around the play space.

Photography

Cameras provide a participatory tool through which young children can communicate their perspectives and reflect on their experiences. Walker refers to the 'silent voice of the camera' (1993). This idea of agency through the camera has particular resonance for young children who may have limited verbal communication skills but also for disempowered children of different ages. This builds on participatory studies with older children which have also incorporated the use of cameras (for example, Smith and Barker, 1999). We asked children in the first study to take photographs about what was important in the nursery. Single-use cameras proved a useful tool for this age group, as the children could be given freedom to use the cameras without causing adult anxieties about expensive equipment. (Digital cameras have been used in subsequent studies with positive results). The children were given their own set of the photographs. The second set was used by the children to select photographs to make their own individual books about the nursery. These individual records of 'what is important here' provided a visual record of the different priorities and interests within the group.

Tours and map-making

Tours and map making harness young children's energy and provided an active approach to listening. Tours are a participatory technique which have been used in several contexts including in International Development programmes (Hart, 1997) and in environmental planning (Adams and Ingham, 1998).

We asked children in the first study to take the researcher on a tour of their nursery. The three and four year-olds were in charge of the tour and how it was recorded. This involved the children taking photographs of important places and people, making sound recordings of the tours using a small taperecorder, and drawing important features. Tours in the second study focused on the outdoor play space.

Map making was developed as a way of the children bringing together the material they had gathered from the tours. Hart (1997) describes the use of child-made maps:

> 'The method can provide valuable insight for others into children's everyday environment because it is based on the features they consider important, and hence can lead to good discussion about aspects of their lives that might not so easily emerge in words.' (Hart, 1997:165).

Children used their photographs and drawings made on the tours to make into individual or group maps. The audience for the maps was extended in the second study to include parents and practitioners by displaying the maps in the cloakroom of the preschool.

The 'Magic Carpet'

A further tool, the Magic Carpet, was added in the second study, based on a idea by Parker (2001). This activity takes young children on an imaginary journey to familiar and unfamiliar places by showing a slide show of images. These included photographs of their play space, their local town and park as well as spaces not known to the children. The focus of the activity was to give young children another opportunity to reflect on their current environment and discuss this in relation to other spaces.

Adult interviews

A final strand in the Mosaic approach involved interviews with practitioners and parents, whose views are also important in understanding young children's lives. The interview schedule included similar questions to the child interviews, but with an emphasis on adults' perceptions of everyday experience rather than first-hand accounts from the children.

Stages of listening

There are three stages to the Mosaic approach (Table 2).

[Insert: Table 2 around here]

The first is gathering information, led by children using the tools described above. An adult could gain useful insights from information gathered using one or two of these tools. However, the studies conducted to date suggest that adults gain a much more detailed impression of children's worlds by drawing together information from different tools, through a process of discussion. Stage Two of the approach focuses on this review of the material, where adults and parents can listen to the children's own perspectives and exchange meanings. This use of documentation has drawn on the process of 'visible listening' developed in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi 2001). .

A third stage in the listening process was added to the second study, to recognise the importance of not only listening to young children, but of also acting upon the understandings gained. The focus in this second study was on involving children in planning their physical environment, including deciding which features should stay the same and which needed to change. This highlighted differences between adults and children's views. For example, a play house in the outdoor space was shown by the listening process to be a source of tension between adults and children. Adults identified it as the piece of play equipment they would most like to give away, yet many children identified it as their favourite space: 'this is where we play and talk and cook', as one four-year-old commented. These discussions led to the preschool identifying a new play area where children could have access to materials to build their own structures,

thus taking pressure away from the overcrowded play house but respecting the children's interests.

Using the Mosaic approach in practice: constructing meanings about place

We have argued earlier that listening to young children can help to provide a clearer understanding of the important details of their lives: the people, places and objects which are significant to them and the feelings which these contain. The next section of this paper provides brief examples, taken from the two research studies, of the insights young children were able to share about their priorities, concerns and interests, based around their sense of place.

The young children in both studies defined the spaces they inhabited according to their associations with people and past events, with objects and routines, and according to whether or not they were permitted access.

People and events

The children stop at a door and look in.

Researcher : What's this room?

Clare: It's the Parent's Room-where people have their leaving parties.

Researcher: Can we go in here?

Clare: Yep, we can go in there.

[Excerpt from child-led tour, first study]

Clare in this account demonstrates how the meaning she gave to the Parents' room was closely linked to her memories of past uses of the room for farewells. Other rooms were associated with the adults whom children regularly saw working in those spaces. The office, for example, was linked to the worker who was there when the children arrived in the morning and who was the first adult they met in the nursery each day. Two of the children had younger siblings in the nursery. The tours of important places and subsequent map making revealed the spaces where siblings 'lived' as significant parts of the nursery for them.

Objects

Children also associated rooms with certain objects or toys which they could play with in those spaces.

Gary: There are some toys over there and books. Where are the toys gone? Here they are. Lets get them down. Can you get down the truck with the hook?

[Excerpt from child-led tour, first study]

In this example, a layer of meaning was given to this room by the particular toy Gary liked playing with there. Observations had earlier shown that another inside

space in the nursery was associated with the large soft toy dog which had been named by the children and lived in the carpeted area of the classroom.

This association between objects or activities and spaces was echoed in the second study. Two of the four-year-olds who led a tour of the outdoor space, identified the play surface as a favourite place: ‘This is where we play on the bikes’ they said as they mimed riding around the space. The bikes were not visible on the day of the tour, but this did not stop the boys conveying the importance of these objects.

Access

Spaces also acquired significance according to whether the children had access to the space or not. Children in the first study identified the staff room as a place they could not enter, and they were keen to photograph it on their tours. The kitchen was another space known to be out of bounds, but signaled as important. Access was also controlled by adults according to age. ‘Orange room’ was a place where four-year-olds went to have their lunch. Gaby, being three, had lunch in the conservatory, and described on the tour how much she wanted to be old enough to go to the Orange room : ‘I can’t wait to get big.’

This example supports Sibley’s view (1995) that children’s experience of place is closely associated with issues of power. Adults’ demarcation of place use by age led to a differentiation of experience for the children in the group. Hart (1979) has

analysed children's experience of place in terms of 'place preferences' and 'place fears'. These proved useful categories to examine children's feelings about places in their nursery and preschool.

Favourite places

Researcher: Where is your favourite place in the nursery?

Clare: Outside and inside and having fruit time.

Laura: On the bikes

Gary: Going in my cave, near the big dark trees (July)

In my cave listening to music. Its magic music from my magic radio (November).

John: The garden. I roll in the green rollers

Gaby: Inside -the fruit place. We always do singing there.

Mark: I live in here (classroom) so my mummy knows where I am.

I like playing with the sharks.

[Excerpt from child conferencing, first study]

Children's preferences ranged from personal spaces of imagination or safety to social places linked to activities. Gary was unusual, at age three, in being able to speak about his imaginary space. Children in the second study associated favourite outdoor spaces with the bikes and scooters and the play house. One

girl named her favourite outdoor place as where she could watch an adult she liked drinking a cup of coffee.

Social spaces

Children identified several key sites which were focal points for being with their peers, and sometimes also with adults. The ‘fruit place’ in the first study, was a shared space for children and adults to interact together. A curved bench in the garden was another meeting place. Carys, the shyest member of the group, took a photograph of the bench and included it in her set of important photos. It represented for her the place where she used to sit with Molly, her keyworker, who had recently left on maternity leave. The memories associated with the space still gave this part of the nursery meaning for Carys. She had reiterated the importance of her old key worker by stopping on the tour next to Molly’s photograph on the staff notice board, and insisting that one of the other children take a photograph of Carys ‘standing’ by Molly.

A large sandpit was a favourite social space in both studies. The sandpit in the second study was inside the preschool, but one of the three-year-olds nevertheless emphasised its importance by running inside with his camera and taking a photograph of the indoor sandpit to include in his book of important ‘outdoor’ places. In response to findings from this study, an outdoor sandpit has been added to the play space.

Individual landmarks

In addition to the shared spaces which held meaning for children in the group, both studies revealed a complex web of individual traces or landmarks (Weinstein, 1987; Trancik & Evans, 1985). These landmarks ranged from objects and photographs to people, and summed up what was important about the nursery and preschool for different children. Younger siblings acted as landmarks for two of the children in the first study. The child-led tours indicated that their morning routine of taking their younger brother and sister to their place in the nursery was a significant part of their day. Gary and Meryl, for example, took photographs of their siblings including personal objects such as their siblings' mattreses, towels and pegs.

Photographs displayed around the building also acted as individual markers, and provided links to past activities and events enjoyed by the children. A display of photographs taken on a recent outing to a train station was pointed out by Clare and she took a photograph of the display. Children's own work also acted as personal landmarks around the nursery. Children leading the tours were quick to point out any work of their on the walls. They also stopped to show the researcher their portfolios of work. These carefully presented folders held examples that the children had chosen with their keyworkers of the things they had made or done since joining the nursery. Children on the tour took photographs of memorable paintings and drawings in the portfolios. These personal details or 'traces' of the children's own work appeared to have great

significance in developing ‘place identity’ as well as self identity: ‘the history of who I am in this place.’

Place Fears

As well as place preferences, some children also expressed place fears. The young children in the studies were given direct as well as indirect opportunities to express negative feelings about places.

Researcher: Which part of the nursery don’t you like?

Clare: The staff room cos they have their lunch break.

Laura: I don’t like the boys.

Gary: That building there and the bridge.

John: Where ‘x’ did ‘y.’

Gaby: Nowhere

[Excerpt from child interviewing, first study]

The direct question in the child interviewing led to a range of responses. Children’s negative feelings towards places included frustration. The tours and children’s photographs had clarified the views given by some of the children in the child interviewing that the staff room was out of bounds. This underlined their interpretations of the nursery as a place where different hierarchies operated between adults and children. One of the children in the group expressed what appeared to be fear rather than discomfort or frustration. These negative feelings

were associated with a past incident involving another child whom he disliked. John mentioned this incident several times during the child interviewing, and his keyworker confirmed that he was aware that John had found this disturbing. This incident was like a negative marker which affected John's feelings about the space in the past and the present.

Children in the second study were also able to express negative feelings about people and places, perhaps helped by sitting in the space associated with the emotions.

Researcher: What don't you like about being here?

Esther: Sometimes I cry in here because some one [another child] tells you off

Robert: I don't like playing doggies in here –its too noisy too many in here some of the teachers gets one of them out (and the kite with the scary face)

Bob: I don't like X (*H. agreed*).

Jim: Its boring sometimes when I'm there on my own. Researcher: When? Jim:I like it with Julie.

[Excerpt from child interviews, second study]

The examples above help to illustrate how using the Mosaic approach enabled three- and four-year-olds to express their views and experiences associated with particular places, people and objects in a nursery and preschool setting. We turn now to discuss its potential use in other situations and settings.

Discussion

The Mosaic approach has been used to talk and listen to young children about their lives in early childhood institutions. It could, however, be applied in work with young children who experience fostering or adoption. In particular, the approach could help children to reflect on their own experiences, provide a bridge for children and adults to discuss meanings together, and contribute to future decision-making. It could also be used with groups of siblings to help to ascertain different perspectives and priorities, and possibly with foster carers' or adopters' own children, especially when the latter find it difficult to articulate their feelings about the new arrivals in their family and feel that their views are not being taken into account.

Looked after children have often experienced many changes of place and carer. In such circumstances, familiar objects and personal possessions take on a special significance for the child, and loss of them can be particularly traumatic. Yet adults may be unaware or careless of such attachments, not realizing how

distressing it is for the child to lose them when moving between placements (Skuse and Ward 2003). Similarly, places - such as a bedroom of their own, or somewhere where they can lock the door - may have a particular meaning for a child who has experienced much instability. Children interviewed in a study of short-break foster care talked about how they sometimes wanted to be left alone when they were missing their parents, but with the reassurance of emotional support: 'She knows when I need to be alone – says, 'Why don't you go and give that Care Bear a hug and I'll bring you a drink and a chocolate biscuit?' (Aldgate and Bradley 1999). Younger children may be less able to articulate such feelings if asked directly, but use of the Mosaic approach could help carers to understand how they feel. This methodology, and the inherent competent view of children it represents, may enable carers to 'tune into the minds of children' which Beek and Scofield (2004) identify as a key step in providing a secure base, particularly for children with severe learning disabilities in long-term foster care.

Although the research described in this paper was carried out in early childhood settings with children who lived with their parents, the findings showed how the approach helped children to communicate information that would be relevant in a situation where a child was not able to live at home. Carys, for example, clearly displayed her attachment to a particular worker who was no longer available, and John was able to indicate the places and circumstances that made him feel unsafe. Listening to children in this way could thus be an important means of safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

There may be different stages in the adoption or fostering process when it is particularly important to listen to children, in order to help them reflect on what is happening and to enable adults to gain an insight into children's perspectives. In adoption, for example, these times could relate to the four stages identified by Thomas and Beckford (1999). These are: being introduced to the idea of adoption and pre-placement preparation; matching and introductions; moving to the new placement; and going to court. For example, one possibility would be to explore with young children the process of moving to a new carer. This could include children taking an adult on a tour of their old home, taking photographs and choosing a favourite part of the house (or garden, if applicable) for the interview. This material could be made into a book for the child to show and discuss with other adults, siblings and friends; and the process repeated after a few months in the new home.

There are some similarities between the Mosaic approach and life story work, which has been described as providing a 'structure for talking to children' (Ryan and Walker 1999). Life story work uses a variety of techniques to help children and young people express their feelings about the often traumatic events that have occurred in their lives (Rose and Philpot 2004). It commonly results in a life story book, which might contain photographs, birth certificates, letters, mementos and other material to help children understand the background and history of their birth family. Such books aim to 'provide a tool by which adoptive parents or

long-term carers can give the child details about his/her birth family and history in an age-appropriate way as the child grows up' (Harnott and Humphreys 2004).

This kind of preparation for adoption is increasingly common. Virtually all the agencies interviewed in one study of adoption support referred to it, and two-thirds of the adopters said that their children had been involved in making such a record (Lowe et al. 1999). Three-quarters of adopted children in another study reported taking part in life story work (Thomas and Beckford 1999). However, there has been little research evaluating the effectiveness of such pre-placement preparation (Parker 1999, Rushton 2003), and some concerns have been raised about its potential to re-awaken abusive experiences from the past (Rushton 2003).

The Mosaic approach could perhaps offer another strategy that builds on life story work. It shares some common features, particularly the use of different methods to help children communicate and the production of a visual record, but it also differs in other respects. Perhaps the most significant is the focus on the child's *present* rather than past life, and on understanding the world from the child's perspective rather than on enabling adults to convey information to the child about his or her history. The Mosaic approach is also based around children's own documentation rather than that collected for them by others. Whilst the main UK guide to life story work (Ryan and Walker 1999) does stress the importance of this process being led by the child, individual social work

practice has been shown to vary. For example, it appears that not all children in the Thomas and Beckford study had played an active role in the creation of their life story book. One girl described how she 'had a folder from the social worker before we moved here….she'd already written it and we were just reading it through and sticking in the photographs' (Thomas and Beckford 1999, 82).

Conclusion

Fundamental to the Mosaic approach is a belief that children, including very young children, are experts in their own lives, and that working with them to understand how they see the world and then acting on this can strengthen their identity and sense of control. Feeling understood and having their views taken seriously by adults is likely to be particularly important for children who are unable to live with their parents, and who have often experienced serious disruptions in their lives. We referred earlier to Malaguzzi's phrase, the 'hundred languages of children', emphasizing the many different ways in which young children communicate (Edwards et al., 1998). Malaguzzi also refers to the 'hundred ways of listening'. One of the challenges to adults, whether as professionals or parents and carers, is to find new and sensitive ways of engaging and communicating with young children. The Mosaic approach offers one way in which this might be done.

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Table 1 Tools used in the Mosaic Approach

Method	**Comments**
Observation	**Narrative accounts**
Child interviews	**A short structured interview schedule conducted one to one or in a group**
Cameras and book making	**Children using single use cameras to take photographs of 'important things' and compile these into individual books**
Tours	**Tours of the site directed and recorded by the children**
Map making	**2D representations of the site using children's own photographs and drawings**
Magic carpet	**Slide show of familiar and unknown places**
Interviews	**Informal interviews with practitioners and parents**

Table 2: Stages in the Mosaic Approach

Stage One	Gathering children's and adults' perspectives
Stage Two	Discussing the material
Stage Three	Deciding on areas of continuity and change