

Tools for listening: the Mosaic approach

There have been a range of recent research studies which have focused on the views and experiences of young children in early childhood settings.

Some of the first of these studies (for example, Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark and Moss, 2005) developed a set of research tools described as the Mosaic approach. The Mosaic approach is based on using multiple methods to gather multiple perspectives about children's (and adults') experiences.

The multi-method approach is aimed at providing a range of different modes of communication that play to the strengths of young children. This has meant moving away from gathering views by written means such as questionnaires to finding tools which enable young children to communicate their knowledge in other ways. Observation and interviewing are brought together with visual methods in which children are actively engaged. This includes book making using young children's own photographs and children taking photographs on child-led tours which are made into maps. Material gathered using the different research tools forms 'snap shots' or tiles in a mosaic which can begin to be built up into a more detailed picture.

The drawing together of multiple perspectives acknowledges that building up a detailed picture of young children's lives will benefit from including the views and experiences of children and adults that know the children well. Including different perspectives can help to strengthen the validity of the research by checking for similarities and differences in the understandings gathered.

The Mosaic approach was first developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss to include young children's perspectives in an evaluation of early years provision. Since the first study (Clark and Moss, 2001), the research framework has been developed by researchers and practitioners to listen to young children's perspectives in a range of contexts including social work (for example, Holland, 2004) and children in hospital (for example, O'Callaghan et al., 2010). This approach forms a central plank in the researching practice element of this module because we consider it to provide the necessary tools for carrying out your case study. It is both an effective technique for

reconsidering the views and experiences of young children and a framework for reflecting on a range of perspectives including your own. No approach is an instant answer to listening to young children. It will be important to remember that you will still be interpreting children's perspectives even if the children have played a more direct role in gathering the material. It is not possible for any of us to know exactly what it is like to be someone else.

Research Tool	Comment
Child interviewing (or child conferencing)	A short, structured interview schedule conducted one to one or in a group. This can be conducted sitting inside or outside or 'on the move' depending on where the child feels most comfortable.
Photo Book	Children using photography to document 'important things'. These can be individual records for one child to choose 5 or 6 images. Children can add their own captions in their own writing or dictate to a practitioner. This can be adapted for younger children or children with special needs to include photographs taken by siblings, peers or a practitioner of activities and places which appear to be important.
Tours	Tours of a setting directed and recorded by children. One or two children lead a practitioner around their setting, stopping to document important places by taking photographs, talking or drawing.
Map Making	Tours of a setting directed and recorded by children. One or two children lead a practitioner around their setting, stopping to document important places by taking photographs, talking or drawing.
Interviews	Informal interviews with practitioners and parents to gather adults' perspectives on what they see as important to individual children. These interviews can include reference to the other tools, such as to the photo books and maps.