

Contents –

1. AI Statement
2. Portfolio

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 24th April 2026 to

I used the prompt(s):

1. Where can I find credible, academic sources of information within the last 10 years regarding the Mosaic approach.
2. Can you summarise this work?
3. Out of these sources, which are relevant to the Mosaic approach?

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 27th April 2026 to review my work.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Review my work so far and provide feedback on academic level, critical analysis, structure and coherence.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 2nd May 2026 to proofread my work.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Identify areas of repetition, grammatical issues and opportunities to strengthen critical evaluation.

2. Check referencing consistency and academic style within this literature review and methodology section.
3. Check any mistakes with my reference list. It should be Harvard.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

To what extent does the Mosaic approach enable authentic children's voices in early years research?

Introduction

Research within early years recognises children as active contributors whose perspectives inform practice, reflecting their rights to be heard. As a result, children's voices have become a central focus within early years research, supported by the rise of participatory research approaches that aim to involve children more meaningfully in the research process and recognise them as competent contributors to knowledge production (United Nations, 1989; Sun *et al.*, 2023; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). This emphasis is also reflected within early years policy frameworks that promote child participation, rights and responsive practice, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education (DfE), 2024) and wider rights-based approaches within early childhood education.

However, these approaches raise concerns about whether they genuinely capture authentic children's voices, notably where adult perspectives, including research design, may shape the contributions made by children. Here, authenticity refers to the extent to which children's perspectives can be expressed with minimal distortion through adult interpretation (Clark, 2017; Lundy, 2018). Although participatory methodologies aim to challenge traditional power imbalances inherent within adult-led research, researchers argue that adult influence often remains embedded within processes of data collection, interpretation and representation, limiting the extent to which children's voices can be considered fully authentic (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). The Mosaic approach has an opportunity to address some of these issues through a combination of multiple methods for collecting children's views, including drawings or photographs taken by children as well as observation of children in their environment (Clark, 2017); nevertheless, though used extensively, there continues to be some controversy about whether or not this method authentically represents children's voices.

This portfolio will examine the extent to which the Mosaic approach facilitates authentic children's voices in early years research, arguing that while it supports participatory involvement and seeks to reduce traditional adult-child power

imbalances, its effectiveness is shaped by methodological and ethical limitations that continue to influence the collection, interpretation and representation of children's perspectives (Clark, 2017; Sevón et al., 2023; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024).

Literature Review

The perception of children's voices has become progressively central within early years research, reflecting an expansive shift towards the recognition of children as active participants in their own lives (Clark, 2017; Lundy, 2018). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) represents this shift where all children can express opinions that are taken into consideration on all matters that directly affect them. These principles are further reflected within rights-based educational agendas in Wales, which emphasise participation, wellbeing and listening to children's perspectives within educational practice. Sun *et al.* (2023) claim that research today supports this position and that children are competent and create meaning from their surroundings instead of simply receiving information as passive learners. Therefore, there is much more emphasis on developing meaningful methodologies that will capture children's perspectives (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Clark, 2017). This focus aligns with contemporary early years frameworks, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2024), which emphasises understanding children's interests, experiences and individual ways of communicating. Although there has been a surge in participatory methods being used to involve children, there is still no clear agreement about how well participatory methods represent the authentic voices of children; therefore, this is an area of tension within early childhood research (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Lundy, 2018).

As a result of this shift, participatory research has become a prominent way to include children in the research process. The intent behind these types of approaches is to challenge traditional inherent power imbalance within adult-led research by acknowledging that children are knowledgeable participants. Participatory methods have the potential to enhance children's experiences of belonging, engagement and agency, while producing more comprehensive and

contextually relevant data (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Clark, 2017). However, Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas (2024) contend that these benefits may be constrained by continued adult control over research design, interpretation and decision making. Taken together, these findings suggest that participation alone may not guarantee authentic representation. Studies show that many adult researchers continue to dominate the research design, data interpretation, and decision-making process; therefore, limiting the extent to which children's voices can be authentically represented (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Lundy, 2018). This suggests that participatory approaches may create an appearance of empowerment, while adult control over perception therefore constrains claims of authenticity.

Within this context, the Mosaic approach has developed into a prominent methodology in early years research (Clark, 2017). The approach is based on the principle that children communicate in various ways and therefore requires a spectrum of methods to capture their viewpoints. These practices usually include drawings, mapping, observations, photographs and informal conversations, which are brought together to form a 'mosaic' of children's experiences (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). While the multi-method form of the Mosaic approach enables an expansive and inclusive representation of children's perspectives, this does not guarantee that those perspectives are represented without adult bias (Gözütok and Özgün, 2024; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). This reflects wider debates within participatory research regarding the relationship between voice, power and adult interpretation (Lundy, 2018). Furthermore, the Mosaic approach positions children as co-constructors of knowledge, aligning with sociocultural theories that understand learning as socially mediated and collaboratively constructed processes (Hedges, 2021).

Although it has notable strengths, the Mosaic approach has been subject to increasing critical scrutiny. A key concern relates to the role of the adult in interpreting data within the research process. Although children supply data through various modes, the analysis and representation of this data are generally directed by adult researchers (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Lundy, 2018). This may cause the authenticity of children's voices to be limited, as it is mediated rather than directly presented. This reflects broader concerns within participatory research that

adult interpretation may continue to shape how children's perspectives are understood and represented (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024).

Furthermore, applying the Mosaic technique may provide complications. Participatory techniques need significant time, trust, adaptable design, and continual interaction (Clark, 2017; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). This might indicate a gap between theoretical aspirations of participatory research and actual reality in contexts where time, money, and organisational constraints restrict the authenticity and depth of children's engagement. Hayes (2024) identifies a persistent gap between theoretical commitments to listening to children and practical use, suggesting that participatory techniques may not be implemented as intended. This underscores previous worries about whether participatory aspirations can be completely fulfilled in real-world research contexts (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024).

Another key concern surrounding inclusion also remains significant. The Mosaic approach strives to be inclusive, yet research reveals there is no guarantee that all children are willing or equally able to participate in this way (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). The level of participation can also depend on factors such as age, communication skills, confidence levels, and social context which may lead certain voices to be favoured over others (Sevón *et al.*, 2023) therefore suggesting that the use of participatory methods may unintentionally favour more confident or communicative children, hence restricting the level of representation of all voices equally, subsequently challenging the validity of any claims to be inclusive (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024).

The Mosaic method of participation through children's perspectives only partially reconciles and provides opportunities to address inherent power, voice and representation tensions (Lundy, 2018; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). As a result, the ability to provide unique and authentic representation of children's lived experiences is limited, since children are shaped, interpreted and presented within controlled research frameworks. This creates a need for critical reflection on the use of participatory methodologies in Early Years research and provides reasoning for questioning how well the Mosaic method provides authentic representation of children's voices in practice (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024).

Methodological Considerations

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the extent to which the Mosaic approach enables authentic children's voices in early years research (Creswell, 2014; Denscombe, 2021). Qualitative approaches are acknowledged as an effective strategy for early childhood research given that they allow for in-depth examination of meaning and promote flexible, child-centred approaches (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Denscombe, 2021; Creswell, 2014).

This study will take place within an early years setting and will use purposive sampling to recruit four to six children aged between three and five years old. A purposive sampling strategy is useful as it creates a pool of willing participants who fit within the parameters of the study (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Bell, Waters and Johnson, 2024). This small sample size allows for an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, consistent with qualitative research principles (Creswell, 2014; Denscombe, 2021). However, it should be noted that this approach restricts the extent to which the findings may be extended to a wider population (Denscombe, 2021).

The primary approach of data compilation will be the Mosaic approach, which incorporates multiple participatory techniques to collate children's perspectives (Clark, 2017; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). The methodologies employed will encompass visual representations, photographic documentation, unstructured dialogues, and direct observation. Children who are taking part in the study will be encouraged to photograph elements of their environment or experiences that are personally meaningful to them. These visual representations will then serve as catalysts for unstructured talks, allowing children to explain their choices and voice their opinions. Drawing will be encouraged for those children who prefer visual communication (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Additionally, observational data will be gathered to provide contextual insights regarding the children's activities and behaviour. The use of multiple methods reflects the principle underpinning the Mosaic approach that children communicate meaning through diverse forms of expression rather than through verbal language alone (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024).

Using multiple methods reflects the principle that children communicate in diverse ways and supports a more inclusive approach to data collection (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). It also allows for triangulation whereby divergent forms of data are compared to develop a more extensive understanding of children's perspectives (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2014). Triangulation can strengthen the credibility and depth of qualitative research by lessening reliance on a single source of data (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). However, strengthened credibility should not be confused with objectivity, as all data remains filtered through researcher interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In this research, triangulation will develop through the combination of verbal, visual, and observational data, creating a more holistic view of children's experiences. While triangulation may strengthen the credibility of findings, it does not guarantee authenticity, as all data remains shaped by the same interpretive framework, reinforcing wider debates surrounding voice, interpretation and adult influence within participatory research.

However, triangulation does not remove researcher bias (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2022). The researcher's perspectives continue to influence data interpretation; thus, conclusions may still represent adult preconceptions (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). This is especially essential in studies with young children, when meaning is frequently assumed rather than clearly expressed. Furthermore, triangulation may create an appearance of objectivity, even though all information is filtered through the researcher's interpretative lens (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This emphasises the necessity of researcher reflexivity, since critically assessing one's own preconceptions and impact is necessary when understanding children's viewpoints (Berger, 2015). However, reflexivity does not eradicate prejudice; instead, it makes the researcher's influence more obvious, strengthening the claim that children's voices are, to some extent, produced within adult frameworks.

The decision to use the Mosaic approach aligns with participatory research principles and its fitness for working alongside children (Clark, 2017; Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Unlike traditional methods, such as questionnaires or interviews, the Mosaic approach allows children to express themselves in ways that

are developmentally appropriate and meaningful to them. Due to the reliance on literacy skills and limited capacity to capture complex and non-verbal ways in which children communicate, questionnaires were not selected. Similarly, interviews were not chosen as a primary method as they may inhibit children's responses and place adult expectations at the forefront of the interaction (Punch and Oancea, 2014; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

Additionally, the halo effect may influence interpretation, as prior perceptions of individual children may impact how their contributions are valued, potentially privileging certain voices over others. This can also be understood through the Hawthorne effect, which occurs when individuals become aware that they are being observed, potentially leading to responses that reflect perceived expectations (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). This further complicates claims of authenticity since children's contributions may be influenced not just by adult interpretation, but also by their knowledge of their involvement in the study process.

Alternative methodologies for data acquisition were explored; however, these were ultimately not chosen because they were found to be deficient in eliciting genuine expressions from children within this specific age demographic (Bell, Waters and Johnson, 2024, Creswell, 2014). While structured interviews are a prevalent technique in qualitative inquiry, they are heavily contingent upon verbal proficiency and can inadvertently establish the adult as the authoritative party in the exchange, potentially influencing the responses provided by the children (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). Analogously, questionnaires were judged to be unsuitable owing to their reliance on literacy competencies and their restricted ability to capture the subtle, non-verbal, and contextual modes through which young children convey meaning. Observational approaches, when utilised independently, also failed to fulfil the criteria for the main methodology since they risk prioritising adult interpretation above the child's unique perspective (Clark, 2017). The Mosaic method, on the other hand, promotes a more flexible and child-centric sample, allowing for a variety of modes of self-expression while decreasing reliance on a single communication medium (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). As a result, adopting the Mosaic approach is an intentional methodological decision that

prioritises comprehensiveness, simplicity of access, and the opportunity for a better knowledge of children's lived experiences. This comparative rationale emphasises the importance of data triangulation and reflective involvement, recognising that even more adaptive approaches, such as the Mosaic approach, are subject to interpretive biases, including the possible impact of the halo effect.

Although the Mosaic approach has strengths, it is not without several limitations. One key limitation concerns the potential influence of the researcher on data collection and interpretation. Methodological decisions concerning observation, questioning and interpretation shape how children's perspectives become research data. Although the approach aims to place children's voices at the centre of the research process, adult researchers still play a significant role in selecting methods, guiding interactions and interpreting findings (Clark, 2017; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). This suggests that continued dominance of adult interpretations limits the extent to which those voices can be considered authentic. Additionally, children may be influenced by the presence of the researcher, which could affect their behaviour and responses, a limitation often associated with observational research (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). This raises a wider methodological question of whether research can ever truly access children's voice, or whether it inevitably produces adult interpretations of children's experiences.

Taken together, this chosen methodology reflects a commitment to exploring children's perspectives in a way that is participatory and inclusive (Clark, 2017; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). However, it also recognises the inherent challenges of conducting research with young children, particularly in relation to power dynamics, interpretation, and practical limitations (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Hayes, 2024). These limitations must be considered when evaluating the extent to which the Mosaic approach enables authentic children's voices within early years research.

Ethical Considerations

Due to children's vulnerability and the responsibility placed on researchers to ensure that the safety, dignity and rights of the child are protected, ethical considerations are central to all research involving children (Alderson and Morrow, 2020). The ethical

principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) emphasise the importance of safeguarding participants throughout the research process, including principles of respect, integrity and protection from harm.

Gaining informed consent is a key ethical issue that must be considered in depth. As the research involves young children, consent must be obtained from both parents or guardians and the children themselves (BERA, 2024). Consent will be gained through an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, how the data will be used and the methods involved. However, it must be understood that seeking children's assent involves ensuring they understand, in an age-appropriate way, what participation involves (Alderson and Morrow, 2020). The children will be informed that participation is voluntary and that they can choose not to take part or withdraw at any time. The researcher must remain attentive to non-verbal cues, such as disengagement or discomfort, as young children may not always express refusal verbally. An ongoing ethical tension is that it can be difficult to determine whether children fully understand what they are consenting to, raising questions about the extent to which consent can be considered fully informed.

Confidentiality and anonymity must be safeguarded appropriately. All obtained data will be anonymous, and aliases will be used to safeguard children's identities if necessary (BERA, 2024; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). Furthermore, the use of images and drawings poses obstacles for researchers, particularly in participatory research with young children (Clark, 2017). Images may contain recognisable traits of children or the environment, making perfect anonymity impossible to achieve. To address this, informed consent will be acquired before using any visual data, and actions will be made to reduce the risk of identification, such as avoiding the use of identifiable photographs whenever feasible (BERA, 2024; General Data Protection Regulation, 2018). This brings attention to a wider ethical challenge in participatory research, in which the desire to accurately portray children's perspectives may collide with the need to preserve their identity (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; Clark, 2017).

Another consideration is the protection of participants from harm. The researcher has a duty of care to ensure that the process does not cause emotional, physical or psychological distress (BERA, 2024; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). Activities will be

designed to be familiar and appropriate for the children's developmental stage and reflect practices commonly used within early years settings. This reflects wider expectations within early years practice frameworks that emphasise safeguarding, child wellbeing and responsive adult support (DfE, 2024).

The researcher will also consider power relations, since children may feel pressured to engage in the presence of an adult (Clark, 2017; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). Ethical responsibilities to safeguard children may require researchers to mediate participation, creating tension between protection and authentic representation (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; BERA, 2024). To lessen such risk, it is necessary to provide a supportive and pressure-free workplace. If a child shows indications of concern or discomfort, the activity will be halted immediately.

The research process should be carried out in a way that respects the university's reputation while adhering to ethical guidelines (BERA, 2024; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). This involves ensuring that any information gathered is true and authentic. Additionally, researchers should adhere to acceptable safety precautions. This includes following the research setting's policies and providing adequate oversight (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; ESRC, 2023). For example, a researcher should avoid being alone with a child and ensure that any interaction or conversation occurs in the company of another staff member, mirroring broader safeguarding standards in child-related research (NSPCC, 2024; BERA, 2024).

Data collection and storage should adhere to regulatory standards such as the Data Protection Act of 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018; BERA, 2024). Personal data would be secured using measures such as password security for digital files and lockable storage for physical items (ESRC, 2023; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). The data will only be maintained for the time required before being safely deleted and made available exclusively to the researcher. Participants and their carers will be informed about how their data will be used and kept, as well as their right to access and delete it (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; GDPR, 2018). This promotes accountability and openness throughout the research process (BERA, 2024; ESRC, 2023).

While the Mosaic approach indicates to empower children by providing them a voice, adult control of the research process may hinder involvement (Clark, 2017; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). The researcher adopts decisions on data collection, presentation, and interpretation (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). This produces an inherent power imbalance in participatory research, which should be acknowledged and critically examined. Recognising these ethical concerns is critical, since ethical research necessitates constant self-reflection in which the researcher evaluates their role, actions, and impact on the process (BERA, 2024; Alderson and Morrow, 2020).

Protective measures and the promotion of ethical practice in all aspects of research does not eliminate the difficulties that arise when conducting research. For example, ensuring anonymity, providing informed consent, and understanding the power dynamics between the researcher and participant (BERA, 2024; Alderson and Morrow, 2020; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). This highlights the complexities involved in conducting research with children. This lends support to the notion that ethical research practice is dynamic and should be commented on throughout the study process (ESRC, 2023).

These ethical considerations highlight that protecting children's rights may, at times, limit the extent to which their voices can be fully represented, reinforcing the ongoing tension between ethical responsibility, researcher accountability and authentic participation (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; BERA, 2024; Clark, 2017).

Conclusion

This portfolio has critically examined the extent to which the Mosaic approach enables authentic children's voices in early years research. The findings suggest that while the Mosaic approach represents a significant development in participatory research, its ability to fully capture authentic representation remains limited by methodological, ethical and interpretive challenges (Clark, 2017; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024).

The Mosaic approach provides valued opportunities for children to express their viewpoints through various forms of communication, including verbal, visual and

observational methods, as supported within the literature (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). This design supports inclusion and allows participation in ways that are appropriate to children's developmental stage, moving beyond more traditional forms of adult-led research (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). Consequently, the Mosaic method can be viewed as an effective tool for promoting children's participation and increasing the visibility of their experiences within early years research (Sun *et al.*, 2023; Clark, 2017).

However, these strengths are restricted by several contemporary problems. One of the primary issues is the adult researcher's continuous influence throughout the research process, particularly in terms of study design, interaction guidance and interpretation of data (Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Clark, 2017). Although the Mosaic approach seeks to prioritise children's voices in research, their viewpoints are still largely interpreted through adult perspectives (Gözütok and Özgün, 2024; Sevón *et al.*, 2023). This implies that the approach may encourage engagement without fully eliminating the power disparity that exists between adults and young children in research settings. While strategies such as reflexivity and triangulation can increase transparency and strengthen the research process (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; BERA, 2024), they do not eliminate researcher influence. Yet transparency regarding researcher influence does not necessarily reduce that influence. Therefore, the idea of achieving a completely authentic children's voice remains difficult and open to debate within early years research.

Additionally, practical challenges, including resource limitations, time constraints and varying levels of engagement from children, may restrict the extent to which participatory methods can be effectively implemented within settings (Hayes, 2024; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024). Concerns surrounding inclusion also remains significant, as not all children are equally able or willing to participate, raising questions around whose voices are ultimately heard (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Clark, 2017).

In conclusion, the Mosaic approach allows for substantial child participation but falls short of achieving fully authentic representation. Its efficacy is constrained by methodological, practical and ethical considerations, which restrict the degree to which children's viewpoints can be gathered without adult bias (Clark, 2017; Burke,

Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). This emphasises the importance of ongoing critical self-examination when using participatory approaches in early childhood research (BERA, 2024; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). It is important to recognise that, while participatory approaches offer valuable opportunities for participation, the idea of authentic children's voices remains complex and contested within early years research (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Sun *et al.*, 2023). These findings suggest that authenticity in early years research may be better understood as negotiated rather than fully attainable.

The findings suggest that authentic children's voice may never be fully captured within research contexts, but is instead continually shaped through interaction, interpretation and context (Clark, 2017; Gözütok and Özgün, 2024). The use of the Mosaic approach has assisted researchers in illustrating the complexity of listening to children rather than providing definitive solutions, further reinforcing the need to reflect critically on the experience of conducting research with children in their early years (Sevón *et al.*, 2023; Burke, Jindal-Snape and Douglas, 2024).

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