Images and Perspectives: 
Young Children and Digital Photography

By
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY

We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

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ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY
June 2012
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Abstract

This research explores the use of digital photography by young children as a visual language for expressing their views regarding the outdoor environment. It was carried out in a licensed daycare setting with a group of twenty-one 2-4 year old children. A qualitative multi-method design was used, based on the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011). The research focused on: (a) the children’s perspectives, and (b) the ability of children’s photographs to encourage dialogue and support a culture of listening. The theoretical framework was informed by a child’s right to be heard, and drew from an image of children as competent learners and builders of knowledge. Findings showed the use of photography supported the sharing of ideas and the co-construction of meaning, revealing perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked. Further studies are needed in order to determine how educators in early learning settings might embed this process of listening into their daily practice.
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Acknowledgements

A journey like this is not taken alone, and I am grateful to many people. I would like to acknowledge some of them here, beginning with my family: I could not have walked this path without their patience and support. I would also like to thank the children and educators at the daycare for welcoming me into their centre, exploring these ideas with me, and adding their perspectives to the dialogue. My supervisor Enid Elliot encouraged me at every step, and challenged me to think more deeply. I learned a great deal from her and truly appreciate the knowledge and experience she generously shared with me. Finally, thank you to K – who always listened, and always believed.
Chapter 1: Images and Perspectives

“We walk around believing that what we see with our eyes is real, when, in truth, each of us constructs our own understandings of what we are seeing”

(Hoffman, as cited in Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 5).

Three-year-old Amy moves about the front yard at her daycare, camera in hand, capturing images as she goes. It is a bright, clear day in October and our pace is unhurried. I have invited Amy to take photographs of things she finds important or interesting in her outside environment. “Oh, that’s really nice,” she says as she snaps a picture of a tree.

I am curious to know how Amy views the outdoor space at her child care setting. After years of working with and observing children at play, I understand that my perceptions are – like everyone’s – shaped by my own experiences and values. If I want to understand how Amy perceives her environment, I need to do more than assume. I am hoping her photographs will open up a dialogue between us. On this day, for instance, I learn of her connections between daycare and home:

When I came outside I knewed that out here I really love when I take pictures of all these things....I know that all around in my backyard it’s so nice to take pictures – it thinks me of my daycare’s yard. So daycare’s yard thinks me of my yard and my yard thinks me of daycare’s yard. (Amy, age 3)

Like many children in the province of British Columbia (BC), Amy attends daycare five days a week. According to Statistics Canada (2006), over half the children in this country ages 6 months to 5 years are in some form of child care (para. 2). Licensing regulations in BC outline the requirements for developmentally safe and appropriate environments for young children,
with individual centres creating spaces and schedules that reflect their underlying philosophies. Educators frequently bring a great deal of thought and experience to the planning of their programs, observing the children carefully when offering new materials and play opportunities. It is not often, however, that children’s opinions are sought regarding the early learning environments in which they reside on an almost daily basis. Rarely do we ask them, “What does it mean to be in this place?” (Clark, 2005b, p. 36)

This research attempts to highlight some of these young voices as it considers images and perspectives pertaining to the field of early learning. Specifically, it follows a group of children in a licensed daycare setting, exploring the use of digital photography as a means for them to express their ideas regarding the outdoor environment. In stepping back to view the study through a wide-angle lens, the picture opens up to reveal additional layers. With a focus on communication, relationship, and the responsibility of listening to the youngest members of our society, the study challenges us – as educators, parents, and other stakeholders – to consider our image of young children. Can their perspectives guide and inform us as we develop the environments in which they live and grow? If so, how can we truly hear what they have to say? This paper looks at the potential of digital photography as a visual language and therefore an alternate way for adults to listen closely to the young people in their care. Framed by guidelines set out for early childhood educators in the province of BC, it invites critical reflection and dialogue from those who work and play with children on a daily basis.

Context

**Early learning framework.** In 2008 I had the opportunity to participate as a field leader for the Early Learning Framework Project. During this time, a number of early childhood
educators (ECEs) from around the province met together online and face-to-face to work closely with the *BC Early Learning Framework*: a newly published document designed for ECEs and other early years professionals. Produced by the BC Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, input for the framework came from numerous stakeholders including school districts, post-secondary institutions, the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, and the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia. As field leaders for this document we engaged in study and dialogue, introduced the framework into our practices, and led workshops for other educators in our communities. The purpose of the *BC Early Learning Framework* is to provide adults with guidance in creating “environments that reflect the latest knowledge on how best to support young children’s early learning and development” (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 3). In order to accomplish this, guidelines have been drawn from local and global views, including current perspectives from New Zealand, Sweden, Ireland, and Italy – resulting in a document that acknowledges the cultural diversity of the province and is meant to be “uniquely British Columbian” in its approach (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 2). The framework seeks to transform early learning through critical reflection (Government of British Columbia, 2009, p. 11); adults are provided with learning goals and questions to consider, but how they apply the information is left to interpretation. Central to its vision and principles is an image of the child as strong and capable. In this paradigm, young children are not empty vessels, passively waiting to be filled. They are, instead, “self-motivated learners actively seeking to understand the complex world in which they live” (Staley, as cited in Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 29). Such views carry the potential
to disrupt traditional discourses regarding the role of adults as teachers and holders of knowledge.

**Image of the child.** Each of us carries an image of the child. Malaguzzi (1994) refers to this internal picture as a theory that directs the way we relate to children, while Fraser (2012) suggests our “view of what a child is and ought to be” is rooted in our culture, society and values (p. 35). Adding to these multifaceted images, early childhood educators may also operate from their understanding of developmental ages and stages, or from theories of child development as set out by Erikson, Piaget, and others. If we refuse to think outside the “established boxes” (Pence, 2012, p. xiv) of the early childhood profession, however, we risk limiting the way we think about and understand children. A poststructural view reminds us these theories “are governed by the particular lens the theorist in question chose to look through at a particular time and place” (Fraser, 2012, p. 32). As Mac Naughton (2003) observes, “there are many truths of the child, not singular certainties” (p. 74). Exploring these truths requires a willingness to challenge our personal and cultural perspectives.

Regardless of their origin, the *BC Early Learning Framework* suggests the images we hold will influence our interactions with children, the decisions we make on their behalf, and the environments we develop for them. In response to this, the document itself invites readers to create a shared image, viewing “young children as capable and full of potential; as persons with complex identities, grounded in their individual strengths and capacities, and their unique social, linguistic, and cultural heritage” (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 4). This paradigm echoes an international philosophy brought forward by child care centres in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia. Carlina Rinaldi (1998), president of Reggio Children, explains:
The cornerstone of our experience, based on practice, theory, and research, is the image of the child as rich in resources, strong, and competent. The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as *unique individuals with rights* [emphasis added] rather than simply needs. (p. 114)

As an early childhood educator, my perspective began to shift as my image of the child expanded; I adopted the role of co-learner with the children, their families, and my colleagues. This new way of being was both challenging and revitalizing; methods that once felt tried-and-true no longer seemed to fit. “In a postmodern world,” notes Pence (2012), “process, engagement, dialogue, and co-construction take precedence over routines, best practice, exclusivity, and the safe haven of predetermined outcomes” (p. xiv). I became aware of new responsibilities and discovered more questions than answers: If children are to be acknowledged as contributing members of our society, what will that look like? It is clear their human rights must be identified, protected, and upheld, but how will their voices be heard?

**Rights of the child.** This attention to social justice and children’s rights – woven into the content of the *BC Early Learning Framework* – is the focus of an international dialogue. Indeed, the rights of all children under the age of 18 are clearly outlined in the United Nations (UN, 1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which identifies the responsibilities of governments around the world toward young people. A basic principle of the document is the right of children to participate in decisions affecting their lives; the Government of Canada’s (2010) child and youth-friendly version of the Convention states: “Children have the right to give their opinions in all matters that affect them and to have their voices heard. Children’s views should always be taken seriously” (principle 4). Gerison Lansdown, an international child rights advocate, believes
the wording of the Convention establishes an obligation for adults who work with young children to listen more closely to their viewpoints and to respect what they have to say. Creating environments of social justice and listening will, in her words, “necessitate profound change” (Lansdown, 2005, p. 40). In upholding children’s rights, “the central issue is not whether we should treat children like adults but instead whether we should treat them like people” (Melton, 2005, p. 646). This issue requires us to continually revisit and challenge our image of the child.

Some adults may question the capability of or need for pre-kindergarten children to provide serious input regarding the decisions that affect them, adhering to an underlying social assumption that young children are not yet competent to participate in such processes. Lansdown (2005), however, contends that even the youngest of children are able to articulate their views, and adults are not justified in dismissing children simply because they use different forms of expression (p. 3). This perspective was underscored in 2005 when the UN adopted *General Comment No. 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood*; in this addendum to the original treaty the Committee recognizes young children as social actors and clearly states the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* applies to all children. They acknowledge that young children are “often voiceless and invisible within society” and declare that “even the youngest children are entitled to express their views….They make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language” (United Nations, 2005, p. 7).

**The hundred languages.** Adults who view children as strong and capable continue to explore methods that allow children’s perceptions to be heard more clearly. Pugh and Selleck (1996) note that communication and involvement rely on a cultural climate in which children are
taken seriously (p. 134). This climate is being developed in part through current research methods, and the use of cameras by children is showing promise as one way of listening more deeply (see Chapter 2). The process of listening cannot be hurried; it needs to be “open to the many creative ways young children use to express their views and experiences” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 7).

The practice of educators in Reggio Emilia has helped to bring the idea of multiple perspectives forward with their emphasis on “the hundred languages of children” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). In their child care centres, young people are invited to share their theories and ways of knowing through numerous forms of expression. Children and teachers collaborate together on projects over extended periods of time; their explorations are “based on the attention of the educators to what the children say and do, as well as what they do not say and do not do” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 123). This pedagogy of listening is viewed as an ethical practice in which adults are called on to leave behind their preconceived ideas of what children can or should say (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009, p. 117).

The BC Early Learning Framework supports the paradigm of a hundred languages by challenging early childhood educators in BC to provide rich and open-ended opportunities in their programs – invitations that encourage children to explore the environment and express their ideas. Reflective questions in the framework include:

- In what ways are children’s natural curiosity and desire to make sense of the world around them encouraged? (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 22)
- How are children encouraged to use a wide variety of materials and expressive mediums to represent and communicate their ideas (e.g., languages, singing, musical
instruments, drama, dance, sculpture, drawing, painting, murals)? (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 26)

As I facilitated workshops and shared information about the framework, I wondered if busy ECEs would make time to engage with these questions. A framework provides scaffolding; it is something to build on, but the document itself cannot affect change. It relies on educators to transform it, infusing their practices with dialogue, listening, and critical reflection. Simply put, the framework needs to be translated into practice. The process of documentation – a cycle of observation, reflection, and interpretation – is helpful in achieving this. Through documentation, educators enter into relationship with other learners, ideas, and environments.

**Documentation.** Documentation often employs a combination of photographs and text (see Chapter 4), but may also include the use of written notes, audio and video clips, and samples of the children’s work. The resulting piece – known in New Zealand as a learning story, in Italy as pedagogical documentation, and in BC as pedagogical narration – offers a reflective lens for educators and helps to make children’s learning visible. It documents the experience and exploration of young children through visual and verbal traces (Fraser, 2012, p. 9), and provides a tangible method for educators to link their practice to the goals and questions of the framework. Engaging thoughtfully with these narratives challenges our assumptions and biases, and requires a willingness to consider what we may have been too busy to see.

Working with documentation allowed me – in the role of early childhood educator in a preschool setting with 3-5 year olds – to explore the children’s ways of knowing more fully. The introduction of pedagogical narration into my practice helped make more of the children’s thinking visible; it also provided an opportunity to facilitate discussion within a learning
community made up of colleagues, family members, and the children themselves. I found this
latter dialogue to be particularly meaningful; when the children and I looked at the photos I’d
taken, they often shared views I had not considered. As Lansdown (2005) reminds us: “Adults
should not assume that they necessarily have the knowledge and insight into what is important
for children” (p. 27).

Documentation has been called “a vital tool for the creation of a reflective and
democratic pedagogical practice” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007, p. 145), allowing children to
share not only their products but their processes and experiences (Katz, 1998, p. 39). Its use,
however, is not without ethical consideration; adults hold the power of choosing or changing the
data that is included (Waller & Bitou, 2011, p. 16). As the adult presence in the preschool room I
had access to the camera, chose when to use it and where to point it, decided which photographs
to include and usually wrote much of the accompanying text. It was while talking with the
children and listening to their ideas that I began to question my own biases in the documentation
process. I wondered: what would the children choose to record if they were documenting their
own experiences and making their own thinking visible? In that moment in time, where would
they focus the lens?

Inviting children’s perspectives in this way means acknowledging them as “experts in
their own lives” (Langsted, 1994, p. 35); it has potential to unsettle the power imbalances that
have traditionally formed between children and adults (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009, p.
117). These changes may initially cause discomfort, but they also allow the educator to adopt a
new role: that of co-learner and co-constructor of meaning with the child. John Dewey (1916)
touched on this relationship nearly a century ago when he wrote: “In such shared activity, the
teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher” (p. 188). The BC Early Learning Framework refers to this reciprocal relationship as a dance in which children and adults take turns to lead and follow. In this back and forth of ideas, a child’s language, culture, and sense of self and community are developed (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 10).

When reciprocity becomes the foundation for relationships in the early learning setting, collaborations between children and adults become “more respectful, more equal, and more interactive” (Fraser, 2012, p. 91).

Outdoor environment. Reciprocity also has the potential to extend beyond human relationships. In Reggio Emilia, the environment itself (both indoors and out) is considered to be an educator (Gandini, 2012, p. 339). From this viewpoint, children enter into relationships with the spaces they inhabit; they “are acutely sensitive to their surroundings” (United Nations, 2005, p. 7). Rusty Keeler (2008), a designer of children’s outdoor playscapes, explains: “The environments we live and work in are teachers, too. They show children what the world is made of. They reveal glimpses of reality. They have the potential to be gentle guides in the natural flow of childhood” (pp. 15-16).

Louv (2005) agrees, but raises a cautionary voice about the failing relationship between children and the natural environment – something he refers to as nature-deficit disorder. He believes this disconnect from nature has negative implications for a child’s health and development, and advocates for unplugged, outside play in order to reintroduce children to the wonder and complexity of natural elements. His book, Last Child in the Woods, has spurred an international movement to leave no child inside.
Louv’s call for more nature-based play is echoed in other literature. Julian (2010) observes that many countries are now making efforts to provide nature play on a daily basis for preschoolers (pp. 57-58), while Fjørtoft (2001) points to an increase in creative play among three to six year olds in outdoor kindergartens in Scandinavia. “Within a natural setting, with its rich diverse materials and opportunities, the possibilities for imaginary play and learning are endless” (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 767).

The Government of British Columbia (2008) supports these views, stating:

Natural environments may play a particularly important role in promoting children’s early learning. Exposure to natural environments strengthens children’s relationship to nature, building the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual connections that are a necessary motivation for environmental stewardship. Natural environments also provide the perfect setting for holistic learning. (p. 11)

Fraser (2012) suggests that on Canada’s west coast (where this study takes place) even children in large cities live near to nature (p. 37). This may be true, but whether children have access to natural play spaces on a regular basis is another matter for consideration. There are numerous preschool programs and daycare centres in British Columbia cities and the size and layout of their outdoor spaces differ greatly. Licensing regulations require only 7m² of outdoor play area for each child, which is approximately half the size of a vehicle parking space (Herrington, Lesmeister, Nicholls, & Stefiuk, 2007, p. 5). The outdoor play area must be enclosed and materials and equipment need to be age appropriate and safely constructed (Government of British Columbia, 2007, Section 16). Beyond these minimum requirements, there can be a marked difference in the way outdoor spaces are developed, including decisions
regarding play surfaces, equipment and materials, and even the program rules that govern outside play and exploration. Outdoor access is also dependent upon a centre’s underlying philosophy around weather and messy play; if adults prefer to stay inside on a rainy day children may not have a voice in the decision. Licensing regulations do require a program to offer “activities and materials that foster a greater understanding of the environment” and “a flexible daily program that responds to the needs and interests of the children” (Government of British Columbia, 2007, Schedule G, 2).

In addition, the BC Early Learning Framework asks educators to reflect on the following questions when providing outdoor play experiences:

• What opportunities do children have to play in natural environments?
• How are children encouraged to explore important features in their natural environments (e.g., local plants, animals, rivers, forests, mountains, the ocean)?

(Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 27)

This concern regarding natural environments has been instrumental in establishing the context for this research; there is a growing body of evidence citing the importance of outside play, but the voices of very young children have been silent throughout many of the conversations. The children’s views can enrich the dialogue; with this in mind, the central questions for the study have been developed.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this qualitative study focus on the role of listening in an early learning setting. They are:
• What does the visual language of photography reveal about the children’s perspectives regarding the outdoor environment at their child care centre?

• Can children’s digital photographs encourage dialogue and support adults in creating a culture of listening?

These questions are explored further in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Theoretical Framework

Pondering a history of research carried out on young people rather than with them, Smith, Duncan, and Marshall (2005) note that “researchers (reflecting wider societal norms) do not have a culture of listening to children, and children are not accustomed to being asked their opinions” (p. 474). In recent years, however, researchers have begun to acknowledge children as active participants, with important perspectives to share regarding their lives. Informed by the dialogue surrounding children’s rights, research in the field of early learning has become inclusive, participatory and child-centered (Barker & Weller, 2003), challenging traditional views of knowledge, participation, and power (Clark, 2010b, p. 115). In this approach, children help to gather much of the data used in the co-construction of meaning. Tools are chosen to “play to young children’s strengths” (Clark, 2007b, p. 351), and methods are selected based on the preferences of the participants (Clark, 2010b, p. 117).

This paradigm shift reflects a move away from modern or “science-based” theories of child development that may lead early years professionals to assume they can speak for children because they know what is best for them (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007). These theories have become part of our cultural reality (Graue & Walsh, 1998) but are now being challenged by a new sociology of childhood which seeks “to understand the meaning of
children’s present lives rather than to identify normative patterns of child development” (Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2010, p. 2). In this model, educators step back from their position of power and redefine their expertise, taking on a new role as “equitable collaborators with children” (Mac Naughton et al., 2007, p. 161).

Educators at Reggio Emilia have adopted multiple perspectives, declaring that “to be postmodern means to challenge” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 182). Postmodern views allow room for uncertainty; they invite children, educators, and researchers to act as social constructivists by collaborating, constructing meaning together, and sharing perspectives. Mac Naughton (2003) reminds us that children’s ways of knowing may differ from those of adults, but they are not inferior (p.76). This study, therefore, invites us to “deconstruct our thinking” regarding childhood, and to reconstruct a collaborative view of young children that is “responsive to the families, community, and culture of our time and place” (Fraser, 2012, p. 33).

Finally, in relating the story of this research and my interactions with the children and educators who participated with me, I have adopted a narrative voice. The study itself has been couched in narrative; in this approach children are invited to “tell what is important to them at the moment” (Eide & Winger, 2005, p. 78); they decide what they will talk about. Hill (n.d.) speaks to the validity of this method:

The narrative approach to research is often used in feminist and indigenous research and concerns the ways people interpret and make sense of their experiences. Many feminist scholars argue that there is no such thing as a pure, value free, objective approach to observing people’s behaviour. In fact ‘the silencing of the personal voice’ in academic
writing may be criticized because it allows researchers to pretend that they are distant and removed from the people observed. (p. 2)

It would have been impossible to spend as many hours as I did at the daycare centre and remain distant from the children and their stories - even had I wished to. As Lewis (2007) notes: “When we reflect on our experiences and tell our stories we are eliciting our own potential for making meaning of our lives. Humans narrate as ways of knowing and being” (p. 1). We tell, and as part of a learning community, we also find ways to listen. “Stories”, say Witherell and Noddings (1991) “are powerful research tools” (p. 280).

**Thesis Outline**

**Chapter 1** has reflected on our image of the child, as well as some of the global perspectives that are reshaping the way researchers and early years professionals interact with young children. Within the context of a provincial framework for early learning, the introduction has acknowledged a child’s right to be heard and the responsibility of adults to listen. The importance of outside play has been established, and the guiding questions have been set.

**Chapter 2** draws on current literature in order to explore participatory research methods that invite young children to collaborate as co-researchers. The concept of listening is defined, and the Mosaic approach is highlighted – with a specific focus on photography and the role of technology in listening to children.

**Chapter 3** outlines the methodological framework for the research and describes the planning and implementation of the study in detail.

**Chapter 4** speaks to the role of documentation and reflects on two pedagogical narrations developed during this study.
Chapter 5 looks closely at the data, considering the children’s photographs and the perspectives they provide. Common themes are identified and discussed.

Chapter 6 offers conclusions, recommendations for future research, and suggestions to take the dialogue forward.

Twenty-one children chose to participate – at varying levels – in the study. In honouring their voices and the philosophy of a hundred languages, the children’s photographs and words are woven throughout the paper. The names of any locations and of all participants, both children and adults, have been changed or omitted to help protect privacy.

By talking to children about their environment, and by giving them some control over it, adults may gain valuable insights about what children are noticing, and may be in a better position to adapt the environment to support children’s learning and healthy development. Ideally, the environment should be a dynamic expression of children’s learning, and of their capacity to shape their own experiences.

(Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 11)

Limitations and Delimitations

I am grateful to the children for accepting my invitation to explore their outdoor play space with me, and I value their input. Although I was aware of the potential for adult bias and power imbalance, I found I was not able to remove these issues from the study. The research was not child originated; I came to the centre with questions in mind and methods outlined. Although the children participated in the data collection, I have chosen the photographs and dialogue to be included in this paper. In these decisions, I have worked independently rather than collaboratively.
In addition, this study took place with a small group of children at one daycare centre in a coastal city in British Columbia. Their photographs and shared conversation reflect their personal perceptions regarding their outdoor environment. The same is true of the early childhood educators who spoke with me. Children and adults in other settings, at other times, might offer differing views and would certainly express ideas fostered by their own culture, surroundings, and interests. During my time at the centre the seasons changed, the weather grew cooler, leaves fell from the trees. The educators introduced a variety of materials and activities into the outdoor space. On any given day, a young photographer would be viewing the environment through a unique lens.

The purpose of this study is not to capture the opinions of these participants and hold them static. It is, rather, to give voice to the children and educators of the centre, to consider their perspectives, and to explore another form of narrative in the field of early learning. It is hoped the images will invite dialogue and perhaps, a new way to listen.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Consultation takes place when adults recognize that children have views and experiences that can make a valuable contribution to matters that affect them”


Like all of us, children hold preferences and opinions about numerous aspects of their daily lives, but they often have limited opportunities to share their ideas. With the 2005 addition of General Comment No. 7 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, countries around the world have begun to recognize that even very young children have a right to participate in the decisions that affect them (Article 14). Translating this belief into action, however, requires adults to willingly enter into children’s “cultures of communication” (Christensen, 2004, pp. 169-170), with an underlying “presumption that children are entitled to be involved” (Lansdown, 2005, p. 19). Those who work with and advocate for children’s rights are engaged in a global dialogue regarding children’s perspectives, exploring how they can best be articulated and supported. Clark (2010b) believes that “participatory, visual research methods provide possibilities for young children and adults to engage in alternative forms of knowledge construction” (p. 122).

This chapter draws on some of the current literature surrounding the move to participatory research with children. The terms “listening” and “pedagogy of listening” are explored. The Mosaic approach – a multi-method framework for listening to young children – is described, with a specific focus on the roles of technology and photography. Finally, the need for this study is confirmed. Current research in early learning and other related fields supports the
inclusion of children’s opinions in matters that pertain to them; finding ways to bring these perspectives into the discussion here in British Columbia is a primary objective of this study.

**Participatory Research with Children**

In recent years, “researchers have been developing inclusive and participatory children centred methodologies, which place the voices of children, as social actors, at the centre of the research process” (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 33). This shift has been directly related to the children’s rights movement (Barker & Weller, 2003; Cremin & Slatter, 2010; Smith et al., 2005; Waller, 2006) and therefore to ideas of social justice as they pertain to childhood (Lansdown, 2005). Christensen (2004) urges researchers to see children “primarily as fellow human beings” (p. 165); indeed, the factor of age “is increasingly being viewed as irrelevant” when seeking children’s views (Smith et al., 2005, p. 474; see also Clark, 2010b; Lansdown 2005). *General Comment No. 7* states:

> To achieve the right of participation….requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child’s interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating. (United Nations, 2005, Article 14.c)

With this approach, children’s voices are repositioned and research itself becomes “more outward and responsive”; it attempts to “communicate the experiences and needs” of the participants (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 35). Barker and Weller (2003) note there has been a move towards qualitative research that incorporates “methodologies of representation” such as music, storytelling, drawing and photography (p. 36). These inclusive methods may help to create an environment in which young children can more openly express their ideas. In addition, many researchers recommend the use of multiple methods within one study (Clark & Moss,
2011; Einarsdottir, 2010; Waller & Bitou, 2011) in order to engage a variety of participants and to gather children’s “unique insights” regarding their lives (Clark, 2010b, p. 115).

Multiple methodologies suggest multiple ways of constructing meaning with children, and in these moments adults become co-learners who are freed from knowing all the answers:

The social constructionists and postmodernists challenge the idea that we can know anything for certain about the child. They argue instead that we must expect some uncertainty as we try to find new ways to think about and work with and for young children. (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 74)

Seen from this perspective, research becomes “a practice that is part of social life rather than an external contemplation of it” (Christensen, 2004, p. 166).

**Situating the researcher.** When carrying out a participatory study, it is important to consider the many roles of the researcher. One of these can be the “novice role,” where “the researcher is genuinely less informed of the details of a particular play environment than the children who have played in that space for many months” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 97). This allows for a shifting of power, and invites the perspectives of the children. At the same time, researchers will bring their own voice and expertise to a study (Clark, 2010a). In my case, I have been an early childhood educator for many years; I feel comfortable engaging with young children and enjoy listening to their ideas. Clark (2010a) suggests a number of other possible (and shifting) positions, including teacher, learner, artist, translator, facilitator, and narrator; the research process “includes a thirst for understanding and a desire to negotiate rather than dictate meanings” (p. 194).
Clark and Moss (2011) also “acknowledge the role of the researcher as a ‘visible’ part of the process” (p. 37). This was my experience; much of my time at the centre was spent interacting with the children and educators. Indeed, “it is very difficult to remain an invisible person in a class of inquisitive three-year-olds” (Clark, 2010a, p. 33). In situating myself as a researcher, I appreciated Christensen’s (2004) description of “a different sort of adult”:

One who, whilst not pretending to be a child, seeks throughout to respect their views and wishes. Such a role inevitably involves a delicate balance between acting as a ‘responsible adult’ and maintaining the special position built up over a period of time. (p. 174)

When I began the study, I already knew the educators and was acquainted with one or two of the families at the centre. For most of the daycare community, however, I was a new face. Building trusting relationships was a key part of my role.

**Ethical concerns.** Participatory research may create opportunities for children’s voices to be heard, but there are ethical concerns. Clark (2010b) points out a number of obstacles “relating to power and communication,” particularly if children are non-literate (p. 116). Cheeseman and Robertson (2006) question if children “realise that their contributions will be edited, interpreted and made available for public discussion” (p. 194). Indeed, when we ask children to share their perspectives, “are we intruding on their space and privacy?” (Waller, 2006) Children’s participation in research remains adult-led and controlled in many ways, which can also be seen as “a dilemma of power” (Waller & Bitou, 2011, p. 18). In addition, Waller (2006) contends that participation methods may not have empowered children (p. 80). This might be the case if new insights are not used to affect change; there is also the potential for listening to become “a means
to govern the child more effectively, albeit behind a mask of child-centredness” (Moss, Clark, & Kjorholt, 2005). Finally, a researcher’s subjective interpretation of data can “silence or misrepresent the voices of children” (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 50). To address issues of power imbalance and processes of interpretation, researchers should reflect critically on their roles, methodologies and approaches (Barker & Weller, 2003; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010). The methods used for interpretation in this study are explored further in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

In regards to participatory research, Smith et al. (2005) note the value of a collaborative approach, wherein multiple voices and insights are used in the construction of children’s perspectives. In the end, however, “children are key commentators on their own learning and authors of their own stories” (Smith et al., 2005, p. 486). Adults must find ways to listen to children’s voices, and to facilitate the telling of these stories.

**Definitions of Listening**

In a conversation that focuses heavily on the need for adults to hear what children have to say, it is helpful to determine just what is meant by listening in this context. What is being asked of researchers, early childhood educators and other stakeholders when we are challenged to listen?

To begin with, listening is both an active and a reflective process. Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) suggest: “When you listen to someone you attend to them. You concentrate on what is said and what is not said; you note what they are saying and not saying and think about it carefully” (p. 116). Through respectful exchanges such as these, trusting relationships can be formed. “This means listening to the ideas, questions and answers of children, and struggling to
make meaning from what is said, without preconceived ideas of what is correct or valid” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 60). Listening in this way shows children we value their contributions; Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) refer to this as “building a climate of respect for listening” (p. 117).

As previously noted, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) clearly states that children have the right to express their views in matters that affect them (Article 12). This perspective links the act of listening to concepts of citizenship and social justice. While Lansdown (2005) believes that adults must “create the spaces in which young children can be heard and begin to inform and influence the world around them” (p. 40), Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) speak to the challenges faced by educators when being listened to becomes a right. These challenges include the shifting of power between children and adults, and questions of how a child’s input will be acted on (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009, p. 117). “But if adults working with and for young children are to fulfill their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, listening must become part of their role” (Lansdown, 2005, p. 40).

Rinaldi (2012) writes about a “pedagogy of listening…an attitude for life” (p. 235) which informs the philosophy found in Reggio Emilia and plays a role in “the search for meaning” (p. 233). In this search, children and adults develop theories; they build “a narrative that gives meaning to the world around them” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 234). In order for a theory to exist, Rinaldi says, it must be articulated and listened to. This exchange takes the form of reciprocal listening, where “understanding and awareness are generated through sharing and dialogue” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 235).
Clark (2005b) expands on Rinaldi’s concepts of listening by focusing on three specific elements. The first is “internal listening,” which is an opportunity for children to engage in self-reflection, to “make new connections and express understandings” (p. 35). The second element is described as “multiple listening,” in which children reflect on their theories with others (both children and adults) (Clark, 2005b, p. 38). The third element is “visible listening,” which relates to the process of documentation (Clark, 2005b, p. 42). This type of listening, which can help to make a child’s learning visible and also invites collaborative interpretation, is explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

Rinaldi (2012) suggests that “listening produces questions, not answers”; she relates the act of listening to curiosity, uncertainty and emotion (p. 235). Listening, then, is complex and multifaceted; it has the potential to bring people into a place of dialogue and shared understanding. “From the beginning,” Rinaldi (2012) reminds us, “children demonstrate that they have a voice, that they know how to listen, and that they want others to listen to them” (p. 237). The Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) provides a number of tools that may help adults to better hear what children have to say.

The Mosaic Approach

Developed in the UK by researchers Alison Clark and Peter Moss, the Mosaic approach is a multi-method framework for listening to young children and gathering their perspectives. It “is participatory research and as such challenges the dominant discourses about whose knowledge counts” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 5). Clark and Moss have carried out three empirical studies during which the framework has continued to evolve; the second edition of Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic approach was recently published (Clark & Moss, 2011), marking
more than a decade of work and exploration. There have been other books (see Clark, 2010a; Clark & Moss, 2005) and several journal articles as well (see Clark, 2005b, 2007b, 2010b; A. Clark, 2011), creating a wealth of first-hand information to draw from. In addition, there are a growing number of articles by other researchers (see Cremin & Slatter, 2010; Einarsson, 2010; Greenfield, 2011; Stephenson, 2009; Waller, 2006; Waller & Bitou, 2011) outlining ways in which they have used or adapted the Mosaic approach in their qualitative studies with children.

I was drawn to the Mosaic approach as an adaptable model for this study for many reasons. As a rights-based framework, it is focused on listening to young children’s perspectives in a respectful and genuine way (Clark & Moss, 2005, pp. 7-8); it is informed by an image of children as active co-constructors of meaning (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 8). The researchers have continued to develop the participatory tools, and have found ways to bring children’s voices into decision-making processes regarding their early learning environments (Clark, 2010a; Clark & Moss, 2005). In addition, working with multiple methodologies provides inclusive opportunities for children, and children’s photography (the primary tool of this study) also plays a large role in the Mosaic approach. Finally, I appreciate the researchers’ desire to make this framework available to early childhood educators, encouraging them to embed the act of listening to children into their daily practice (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 62).

The Mosaic tools. The design of this study was informed at all stages by an image of children as competent learners and researchers, with valuable perspectives to share. In order to provide opportunities for the children to express their ideas, I needed to find and employ methodologies that were based on a similar image. The Mosaic approach offers a strength-based framework; Clark and Moss (2005) view young children as skillful communicators and meaning-
makers, suggesting “the question is not whether children have any knowledge to convey but how hard we work to make sure every child has the opportunity to share their point of view” (p. 7).

The range of participatory tools employed in the framework invites children “to create a ‘living picture’ of their lives”; the methods do not rely on writing and speaking, but enable participants to communicate in the ways they find most comfortable (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 13). Clark and Moss (2011) describe a “portfolio of tools” that can be adapted or even added to (p. 55). Tools found in the portfolio include observation, cameras and book-making, tours, map-making, “magic carpet” (a slide show of local spaces), and interviews with children, parents, and educators. “Participatory research tools,” explains Clark (2007b) “enable children to play an active role in the research process” (p. 351). This study used a number of methods from the “portfolio” (see Chapter 3), choosing those that best suited the children’s interests and the context of the research. Clark and Moss (2005) admit:

The multi-method approach is time-consuming. It would be far quicker to use one or two tools. However, it is drawing together the information gathered from different sources that enables a more in-depth picture to be produced, and allows children of different abilities to make a contribution to the research. (p.100)

The use of multiple tools makes listening “an active process,” in which children and adults interpret and construct meaning together (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 9). Greenfield (2011) reflects on this process, admitting the Mosaic approach is not the easiest way to conduct research: “Having multiple roles along with multiple data-collection tools adds to the complexity of the task” (p. 114). Meanwhile, Waller and Bitou (2011) challenge the assumption “that the tools themselves somehow automatically enable participation”; literature shows “it is the
research design and relationships that confer real participation and engagement” (p. 12). Clark and Moss (2011) agree, noting “this approach is less about particular methods than a way of conceptualizing ‘listening’ and the relationships and processes involved” (p. 10). Although there is flexibility regarding the methods, current journal articles show the use of technology is becoming more prevalent when carrying out participatory research. Digital cameras, video cameras, computers and whiteboards are proving to be tools even young children can master and operate with confidence. This calls for a closer look at the presence of technology within the field of early learning, and how it is used and perceived by early childhood educators.

**Technology.** Today’s children are forming relationships with technology at an early age. According to a 2010 newspaper article, a recent study announced that “84 per cent of Canadian children have an online presence by the time they are two years old” (Kadane, 2010, para. 7). They may be growing up as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), but as Zevenbergen and Logan (2008) point out, there is often a digital divide when children come from technology-rich homes to child care centres that view “the use of technology as the antithesis of good practice” (p. 37). While some early childhood educators embrace new technologies and look for innovative ways to incorporate them, others question the benefits and appropriateness of their use with young children (Blagojevic & Thomas, 2008).

A lack of budget for suitable equipment may also curtail opportunities to explore technology in early learning settings, as will a lack of confidence and comfort with the necessary tools. Clark (2005b) explains her initial reluctance in using digital cameras when working with the Mosaic approach; it was “partly due to the cost, but also due to a lack of personal competency with the technology” (p. 46). In Australia, research reveals that “early childhood
professionals felt a low level of efficacy regarding the integration of technology in their teaching environments” (Gregory, 2010, p. 835). Practitioners there have shown “considerable resistance” and a “lack of confidence” when faced with new technologies to learn (Campbell & Scotellaro, 2009, pp. 12, 15). These challenges can become significant barriers for educators considering digital tools as a way to listen to children’s insights. The large amount of data generated by this study, for example, required the use of digital cameras, a digital audio recorder, computer software, electronic files, and some understanding of how to manage them effectively. Educators need to be comfortable in supporting children as they use the equipment, allowing them to “take the lead” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 75). My reasons for choosing digital photography and other tools for this study are outlined in Chapter 3.

Zevenbergen and Logan (2008) contend that educators who believe in a child-centered approach may need to rethink their stance on technology in the early learning setting. “As technology transforms our education systems around the world, early childhood professionals must also be transformed” (Gregory, 2010, p. 835). Hong and Trepanier-Street (2004) agree, stating “when technology is integrated in a meaningful way into an early childhood curriculum, the possibilities for the construction of knowledge in both the children and teacher are greatly expanded” (p. 93). The “interactive element” of “appropriate technological tools” supports a constructivist environment in which children can explore their ways of knowing (Lisenbee, 2009, p. 93, see also Mitchell, 2007). It promotes “discussion, sharing and collaboration” among children and adults (Hong & Trepanier-Street, 2004, p. 93).

The BC Early Learning Framework supports this view by inviting educators to explore the use of technology in their programs through the following questions:
• How are children encouraged to make their thinking visible to others (e.g., maps, diagrams, *photographs* [emphasis added], models and drawings)?

• What opportunities do children have to use technology to explore their thoughts and ideas (e.g., computer software, websites, cameras, camcorders)?

(Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 30)

Clark and Moss (2005) believe technology has the ability to “empower young children to express their views” (p. 75). Clark’s (2005b) own reluctance with technology prompted her to say, “It is a good example of how adults may need to take the leap to be co-learners with children in order to listen more effectively” (p. 46). A number of researchers are now exploring the use of visual tools – including digital cameras – as participatory methods with young children (see Blagojevic & Thomes, 2008; Einarsdottir, 2005; Waller, 2006). As Kellock (2011) notes: “The ability of visual language to communicate sense of identity and sense of place is not to be underestimated” (p. 45).

**Photography.**

“*If given the chance to use the camera, both children and teachers can discover important things about themselves and the world in which they play and work*”

*(Byrnes & Wasik, 2009, p. 247).*

Teachers in Reggio Emilia speak of the environment as an educator (Gandini, 2012). Lind (2005) takes this idea a step further in considering the camera itself as pedagogue – interactive and responsive. She suggests that when children look at their photographic images, the camera and the photo session become co-constructors of their projects. “Here the camera is not an external, objective recorder, a depicting eye; but instead a highly ‘responsive’ element in a
learning environment as a ‘third pedagogue’” (Lind, 2005, p. 262). At other times, child and camera may act as one. In these situations, access to the camera allows children power over process. They are free to capture images that reflect their ways of seeing; photography offers them a “visual voice” (Burke, 2007).

Cameras have been referred to as a “silent tool” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 15), yet they hold the potential to spark communication when placed in the hands of young children. Taking photographs involves active participation; the process is “task centred rather than talk centred” (Barker & Smith, 2012, p. 92) and is therefore seen as an “attractive tool” for children (Stephenson, 2009, p. 136). Photography invites research participants to express their ideas in a language that is visual, helping to ensure the views of younger or non-verbal children are included (Stephenson, 2009, p. 139).

The use of photography increases children’s power because they are choosing the images they will capture and talk about (C. D. Clark, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2005). With this method, “the researcher does not have control of what is photographed; the children are providing the data” (Greenfield, 2011, p. 112). Since children are the experts in understanding and explaining their own photos (Einarsdottir, p. 538), this power continues with them into subsequent conversations, including photo elicitation interviews (PEI). Photo elicitation has roots in visual anthropology (Harper, 2002) and has become a “common technique” in social research (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006). It “is becoming rapidly accepted among child-centred qualitative researchers as a technique usable to very good effect” (C. D. Clark, 2011, p. 158). Harper (2002) sees photo elicitation as “a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher” (p. 15). There are numerous names for this type of
dialogue, including photo novella, photo-voice, and photostory. The method, however, is consistent: participants are invited to share their perspectives and experiences as they view and talk about their photos (C. D. Clark, 2011).

“Photographs can support and serve as prompts for high-quality discussions and increase children’s confidence in expressing their views” (Blagojevic & Thomes, 2008). Conversations that are based on children’s images play an integral part in the “co-construction of meanings” (Clark, 2010a, p. 51); without the photographers’ insights researchers will be left with a “partial story” (Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 538). Throughout the PEI process adults must remain aware of their research agendas (Cook & Hess, 2007), and take care their “interpretation of the images [does] not overrule the meanings offered by the children” (Clark, 2010a, p. 51).

Digital photography is proving to be “a notable method to use when seeking children’s perspectives” (Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 523). Children rarely have access to adult tools in the early learning environment (Stephenson, 2009), but cameras (and computers to display the resulting images) can become authentic tools in their hands. Technology does not replace the need for relationships and interactions with others, but may provide opportunities to build knowledge, share ideas, and enhance learning (Mitchell, 2007). The children’s photos can be a catalyst for meaningful dialogue; it was this potential I set out to explore.

Encouraging Dialogue

This chapter has discussed the role of participatory research in accessing children’s voices. It has considered definitions of listening and has provided a brief look at the multi-method Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) as a framework for listening to young children.
A “portfolio” of tools has been listed, with a particular emphasis on photography and the role of technology.

Current literature clearly shows that many researchers are now adopting a rights-based approach by actively engaging children’s participation and ideas. “If children are to be able to express their views” says Lansdown (2005), “it is necessary for adults to create the opportunities for children to do so” (p. 2).

This study considers the use of visual methodologies as a way to listen more closely to young children’s perspectives regarding their outdoor spaces. It adds a Canadian – and more specifically, a British Columbian – viewpoint to similar studies that have been carried out elsewhere. Clark (2005a) believes there is room for more research regarding young children’s perspectives of their environment (p. 502). Referring to children’s accounts of their outdoor areas, she states: “As more participatory research studies are carried out, there will be more examples gathered of the sometimes hidden meanings children give to these spaces” (Clark, 2007b, p. 361).

Carrying out this study has provided opportunities for self-reflection as well as discussion with others. Many questions remain as to how early childhood educators might successfully adopt these tools into their daily practice. Clark and Moss (2011) offer the framework as a “starting point for others to build on…in order to establish new ways of listening to young children” (p. 71). By exploring the potential of these methodologies, individual qualitative studies such as this one add another piece to a growing mosaic.
Chapter 3: Methodology

With everything I know regarding ordinary moments of play and the importance of placing process before product, I find I have nevertheless struggled with wanting to create an “ideal” for this study. In my mind’s eye I see children in an amazing outdoor setting, surrounded by trees and bushes and gardens and water (and the list of natural elements goes on). I understand I have a bias for natural play spaces, but if I’m going to be successful in this research I need to put that personal preference aside. As [a colleague] reminded me, reading about children in an ideal setting does little to create real dialogue for educators who don’t practice in that sort of space. They may like what they see, but it doesn’t reflect the reality of what is available at many urban settings. Because of this, I have changed the wording in my proposal from “exploring the natural environment” to “exploring the outdoor environment.” I have yet to confirm a centre, but I can see my curiosity needs to be focused on what children have to say about their outdoor space, not on how I perceive it. (Peg’s Journal: 2011.06.02)

Research Participants

This research was carried out in an established licensed daycare, operated by a registered non-profit society. Located in an urban setting, it was situated within walking distance of parks, waterfront areas, and other places of interest. The educators and children went out for walks on a regular basis and took part in both planned and spontaneous outings, but the majority of their outside time was spent playing in the back yard of the daycare. The centre employed three early childhood educators and a director (who was also an ECE); the philosophy was based on
learning through play. Throughout the day, the children had opportunities to interact with each other in both small and large groups.

When I first visited the centre for the purpose of this study there were 23 children enrolled, although one was transitioning out of the program. Parents were notified of the research through a letter of information (see Appendix A) and a short introductory video. I also posted a personal introduction and photo on the parent board as this was a common form of communication at the centre and I hoped it would provide families with a better idea of who I was. In addition, the educators introduced me to parents at drop-off and pick-up time, and pointed out folders containing the letters and consent forms (see Appendix B) that had been placed in their children’s cubbies. This paper-based information helped to maintain the ethics of the study by covering what File (2008) outlines as the “basic rights of research participants” in early childhood settings (p. 83). These rights include the ability of participants to ask questions, expect confidentiality, and to withdraw at any time. The forms I provided explained the purpose of the study, and how photos and audio files would be used. Parents were also assured their children’s participation would be entirely voluntary.

The educators at the centre were very welcoming, and I looked forward to learning more about their perspectives. We’d already had the opportunity to build good relationships and I believe this was reflected in their comfort level regarding my presence there, as well as in the way they spoke to the families about the research. Twenty-two parents signed the consent form, and 21 of those children accepted my spoken invitations to participate in the study in some way (primarily through photo-tours, booklets, interviews, and collages). One child did not wish to take part and although invitations were extended, he was not pressured to do so. During the
period of data collection (September through December 2011), two children left the daycare; the photographs and audio files generated by their involvement remained part of the research data. New children joining the program did not participate in the study.

The research was carried out over a 14 week period. Most weeks, I visited the daycare on Tuesdays and Thursdays – staying between two and five hours depending on the schedule of the centre as well as the stage we were at in the study. As Stephenson (2009) notes: “The luxury of being able to spend a sustained period of time with the children, to develop relationships, to introduce a range of research strategies and use them flexibly and responsively, contributed to the complexity of the data gathered” (p. 139). I completed my first observation of the children at play in the outdoor space in mid-September, 2011. At that time, the ages of the children ranged between 2-years 7-months, and 4-years 8-months. Although I initially considered carrying out this research with a group of 4-year-olds, I found the age span provided by a daycare setting allowed for insight into the use of photography with children who are 3 years and under. A breakdown of the demographics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Child Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Child Participants</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2yrs, 7mo – 2yrs, 10mo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3yrs, 0mo – 3yrs, 11mo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years, 0mo – 4yrs, 08mo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 Girls</td>
<td>10 Boys</td>
<td>21 Participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Setting

The daycare program was available to children between the ages of 30 months and 5 years, when they were ready to transition to school. Children attended the daycare Monday through Friday, year-round; the centre therefore played a major role in their early years. It was a place where children gathered on an almost daily basis to play, eat meals, have naps, develop close relationships, and explore their world. Time spent outdoors was an important component of the daily schedule, and parents were asked to send weather appropriate clothing.

The daycare was located in a residential area with neighbours on either side. The primary play space was a fenced back yard accessed through a door near the children’s cubbies (where their outdoor clothing was stored). The lower part of the yard contained a climber with a slide, a large train structure, a small playhouse, a child-sized picnic table, a covered sandbox, stumps, tires, and some raised garden beds. The groundcover was gravel. The upper part of the yard (directly outside the door) had a cement surface; it contained another sandbox (covered during my visits), a variety of toys, a sensory table, a small basketball hoop, and tables for colouring and other activities. A portion of this upper play area was situated underneath a deck, which provided some shelter from the elements. In addition, the back space contained two sheds used for storage.

The fenced front yard of the centre was not frequently used, although many of the children remembered a bouncy castle set up there during a party. The director and educators all spoke to me about the potential of this underutilized space, and for this reason the children were invited to photograph the front yard as well as the back. Unlike the back, where no green space
was available, the front provided a small grassy lawn and a number of bushes. Large trees were visible from both spaces (front and back), but all were located in neighbouring yards.

As the study began, I wondered if the children would choose to photograph one space more than the other; I looked forward to touring the yards and discussing their pictures with them. I approached the research with a genuine interest in what the children had to say.

**Methodological Framework**

“If we want to search for children’s points of view both as practitioners and researchers, we have to make serious methodological reflections and choose methods that are both suitable and ethical” (Eide & Winger, 2005, p. 78). This qualitative, inductive study invited children to gather data and share their perspectives through the use of participatory tools. It explored a child’s epistemology – welcoming the participants’ ideas and ways of knowing about their outdoor environment. When a narrative approach is used, “it is the children who decide the subject or what they want to tell about” (Eide & Winger, 2005, p. 78). A child’s right to be heard and an adult’s responsibility to listen informed the framework of this study.

The research incorporated a multi-method design, based on the Mosaic approach by Clark and Moss (2005, 2011). It included child-led photo-tours, photo-selection and book-making, collage work, and semi-structured interviews. Children were invited to participate at each stage, and were free to engage with the activities according to their interest. As noted by Clark and Moss (2005), using a range of tools “gives young children the opportunity to demonstrate their perspectives in a variety of ways, calling on their ‘hundred languages’” (pp. 13-14). This approach was grounded in constructivist theory; the use of photography was explored as a means of building knowledge with the children.
Getting Started

My time at the centre began with observations and opportunities to get to know the children. “Listening also involves watching. Slowing down enough to watch how children spend their time in an early childhood institution is a necessary beginning, even for those who work in that environment” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 15). My observations helped me see how the children were using their outdoor space:

Eight children (five boys and three girls) had outside time in the back yard this afternoon while the rest of the group napped. During a 20 minute period, the children were engaged in play in the following ways:

- Three boys arranged the tires and played “space driver.”
- Two boys kicked a ball and created a chasing game.
- Two children (a girl and a boy) played with the hockey sticks.
- One girl coloured at a small table while another played on a tambourine.
- When the sand box was opened, all five boys went there to dig and use the vehicles.

At one point, S found a wasp; the creature was quiet and still in the cool, overcast weather. When this discovery was made, all the children left what they were doing and gathered around it (with the educator). The children decided they would transfer the wasp to a leaf, but as they were doing so, it flew away. (Peg’s Journal: 2011.09.13)

While I waited for the consent forms to be returned, I concentrated on building relationships with the group and learning as much as I could about their routine; this included eating with the children and joining them for free play and circle times. “Children’s
perspectives” remarks Greenfield (2011), “are much better understood if the researcher spends time in the setting with the participant children” (p. 109). Some of the children were curious about my presence and asked if I was a teacher. This gave me the opportunity to explain that I was there as a visitor and wanted to learn more about their outside places at daycare. I soon learned that outdoor play occurred both morning and afternoon; the older children also used the back yard while the younger children napped. Right away, I began to notice how my own ways of seeing differed from those of the children:

What do the children notice when they are in this space? What is important to them? Do they see things that I do not? Today the children were peering through the lattice of the back yard fence; on a bush in the neighbouring yard they had spotted a spider. It is time for me to set aside my own perspectives and consider how their gaze is focused. I would never have noticed that spider on my own. I am not in the habit of peering through small openings in fences; I tend to look over them. But in doing so, what am I missing?

(Peg’s Journal: 2011.09.13)

Once the consent forms had been signed and returned, it was time to talk with the children. I asked the educators if I could begin with the group of non-nappers at circle time. At this point I knew the children by name and they were starting to feel comfortable with my presence. I began by showing them my camera, explaining why I was there, and telling them I hoped they would help me by taking some photographs on the days I visited their centre. Together we looked at how the camera worked – exploring the on/off button, the lens, and the shutter release. There was a great deal of back-and-forth conversation regarding cameras the
children and their parents had at home. Each child was then invited to try out the camera by
taking a couple of pictures of the indoor space.

The next few visits were spent introducing the camera to the remaining children and
providing opportunities for those interested to take practice photos in the back yard. I initially
kept track of the photos in my notebook but soon realized the easiest way of identifying the
photographer was to take a picture of each child before he or she began to use the camera. When
I uploaded the photos onto my computer at the end of each day, I divided them into folders
labeled by coded initials and date. Practice days provided an opportunity for the children to
become more comfortable with the process of taking pictures; they also proved to be an
important time of observation for me. During these photo-taking sessions I discovered the
camera I had chosen for the study was not suitable for the group I was working with. I also
realized I would need to have a second camera available in order to document the study. It was
time to reconsider the tools we’d be using.

**Equipment**

**Cameras.** I began the study with a decision to use a digital camera rather than a
disposable; this was based on a number of reasons. To begin with, many children are exposed to
digital cameras at an early age and are accustomed to having immediate access to their
photographic images. In my previous work in a preschool setting, children would often crowd
around the camera as soon as I had taken a picture – clearly understanding the photograph would
be available to look at on the screen. In addition, if a child care centre has a camera it is likely to
be digital and I wanted to build on this familiarity; it is convenient (and more cost effective) for
educators to be able to take multiple photos and then print only those that are required. Some
photographs may be stored and shared digitally without the need for printing at all. Although I was drawn to the idea of each child having a personal camera to use (an inexpensive, disposable model) I realized that educators who wanted to explore the use of children’s photography as a way of listening would not be able to offer disposable cameras on an on-going basis. Finally, digital technology allows for the quick and easy uploading of images to a computer or disc for storage, viewing, discussion, printing, and the creation of pedagogical documentation.

I used three cameras during the course of the research. My initial plan to use one camera was flawed; it meant that I would not be able to document the process with my own photographs when the camera was in use by a young photographer. My primary purpose in adding a second camera, however, was based on trying to find the right equipment for the children. I began with an older point-and-shoot digital model, a Sony 3.2 megapixel Cyber-shot. This had been my personal camera for many years; it still worked fine but I knew I would not be upset if it was dropped or broken. The problem with this model turned out to be “shutter-lag” – once the shutter release was depressed it took a number of seconds before the camera was capable of taking another photograph. The children often pressed the button again before the camera was ready, and as a result the screen would freeze. Seeing this, I decided to keep the Sony for my own use (documenting the study) and find something more suitable for the children.

Heading out to the stores, I discovered a huge selection of cameras with a wide range of options and prices. I decided against a children’s camera (found in toy departments) as they sometimes have less than one megapixel and I wanted the participants in this study to have access to proper tools. I found a few models that were both waterproof and shockproof – making them good candidates for rainy weather and for possible drops and bumps. From an adult
perspective their thin profiles meant they could be tucked away easily in a pocket or bag, but the children were at different stages in their fine motor development and I was hoping to find something a little larger for ease of handling. I was surprised when my choice turned out to be an inexpensive ($50) model, as I had anticipated paying a much higher price. The 10 megapixel Fujifilm Finepix C10 was small and light with a 1.5 x 2 inch screen for viewing, but the need for two AA batteries provided some bulk to the unit. It clearly wasn’t waterproof or shockproof, but I thought we could give it a try and replace it if necessary. It worked very well for the older 3 and 4-year-olds; they handled it easily and some were able to find their stored images with no prompting or guidance from me (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
*Using the Fuji Camera*

I asked the children to wrap the strap twice around their wrist and although it was used numerous times, the Fuji camera was never dropped. (Before beginning this “twice around the
wrist” routine, the Sony camera was dropped). On a few occasions I did remind the children the lens should not be touched or pressed up against something when it was open and extended (to keep it from being scratched). This issue could be countered by choosing a model with a lens that doesn’t extend out when the camera is on. Aside from that, I tried to step back so the children had full and independent use of the equipment. They treated the camera carefully, and the older group quickly learned how to operate it on their own. This mirrored the experience of other educators who have worked with young children and photography: “The comfort level with the camera was surprising, as was the level of competence the children had gained in a short time span” (Blagojevic & Thomes, 2008, p. 70).

In the planning stages of the research I had envisioned working with 4-year-old participants. At the daycare, only a third of the children fell into that age category, with the remainder being 3-years-old and under. Although most of them were able to operate the Fuji camera, a few of the younger children had trouble with the two-stage shutter release. They would press the button down and hear a beep, but they weren’t actually capturing an image. I also observed one or two children who clearly pointed out items they were interested in, but had trouble finding the image on the screen of the camera in order to take a picture. This called for more problem solving.

As noted, I had initially shied away from the use of children’s cameras due to their low resolution and because I wanted to work with authentic tools rather than toys. I had seen (and even purchased and returned) children’s models I wasn’t happy with. When I went looking again, however, I was pleased to find the 2 megapixel Vtech Kidzoom model. The camera was built for small hands to grasp; it had a digital screen, the button depressed easily and there was a
clear “shutter-sound” when a photograph was taken. There were also two viewfinders instead of one (so the children did not have to close one eye). This was helpful for the youngest of the children, who could use the viewfinders to locate the image they were looking for more easily (see Figure 2). The quality of the photos was not as good as those taken by the Fuji camera, but the Vtech model did make the photo-tours accessible to all children who expressed an interest in participating.

Figure 2
*Using the Viewfinders*

Audio. Recording the photo-tours and interviews allowed me to set pen and paper aside and to focus more fully on what the children were doing and saying. I used a Sony ICD-SX712 digital voice recorder; it was lightweight and easy to carry, and the digital (mp3) files uploaded easily to my computer. I always asked the children for their permission before turning the recorder on, never recorded our voices without their knowledge, and respected their decision when they did not wish to have our conversations taped. A number of children asked to have a portion of their photo-tour or other conversations played back and appeared to enjoy hearing their voices. In a daycare centre there is often a lot of background noise so the quality of the
recordings varied; however, the use of the recorder allowed me to revisit specific moments to listen for key points and clarification. Likewise, outside recordings were sometimes compromised by the sound of wind, traffic, and other noises, but still proved useful. One challenge was the amount of time it took to review the audio files; I had initially hoped my voice recognition software (Dragon NaturallySpeaking 11.5 Premium) might help with some of the transcription but that was not the case. It did a fairly good job with my personal audio journal entries (some editing was required), but recordings containing background noise and more than one voice could not be transcribed by the software into anything legible. Working with the audio data, I found that “logging” the tapes (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 139) was helpful. By listening to the files, marking the time of key passages and adding some notes, I could then return and transcribe specific portions of the dialogue as required. The process of going back and listening to the recordings proved to be very valuable; I was able to hear the tone of our conversations and revisit small moments of discovery as they unfolded.

The digital voice recorder was also used during interviews with adults, and to capture my own thoughts after a visit to the centre. I discovered I often preferred this method to writing, and I kept better notes once I started recording them in an audio format. The practice of keeping a research journal (book-form or digital) as a reflective tool is “vital in qualitative participatory research” (Greenfield, 2011, p. 113), and offers “a space for an internal dialogue to take place” (Clark, 2010a, p. 189).

Methods

Photo-tours. As the children continued to practice with the camera, they also expressed their growing interest in photography in other ways. A toy camera (non-working) was brought
into play, and children used foam shapes from the block centre to create their own cameras (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
“Block” Cameras

In addition, I brought in some cardboard frames (cut from poster board) and invited the children to decorate them with stickers. I encouraged the children to use these “cameras” around the yard to frame what they were seeing. This idea was adapted from the Young Photographers Project, in which Blagojevic and Thomes (2008) gave children cardboard viewfinders and “discussed the idea that photographers can move around and view things from different angles and from up close and far away” (p. 69). Although it was a simple activity, I found that introducing the frames into the children’s play engaged some in the group who had not yet chosen to take part in the camera practice.
Based on my interactions with the children, I believed a number of them would now be willing to take me on a tour of their outdoor space. Clark and Moss (2005) explain:

The physicality and mobility of this technique lends itself to being used by young children. This tool plays to their strengths as natural explorers and knowledgeable guides. The ‘normal’ power balance in the classroom is reversed and children are in control of the content of the tour and how it is recorded. (p. 16)

The photo-tours were planned as a one-on-one activity, so it was important for the children to feel comfortable around me. I was inviting them to take the lead, and I needed them to know they were free to stop the activity at any time. I reminded the children of this at the beginning of each tour, offering phrases such as “Peg, I want to stop” as a way for them to let me know when they were finished. While some children used these – or similar – words, others simply communicated they were done by taking off the wrist strap and handing the camera back to me.

At the start of each tour, I asked the children’s permission to take photos of them and to record our voices. I helped them with the camera strap, and let them know we could visit the front yard as well as the back during the tour. I told them I was curious about their outdoor space at daycare, and I wondered if they could show me around their yard and tell me about it. I also invited the children to take pictures of things they thought were important or interesting. A handful of children chatted with me throughout the tour, but many of them were quiet and focused while they took their photos. I sometimes enquired: “Can you tell me about the picture you just took?” but if the child didn’t wish to engage in conversation, I simply followed and observed.
Throughout the tours, I attempted to acknowledge the children as experts in their play space and to see myself as an “authentic novice” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 97), “genuinely hoping to learn from the children more about how they perceive their environment” (Clark, 2010b, p. 120). By adopting this approach, I was able to let go of my assumptions and take on “a passive role” (Clark, 2010a, p. 35). I never suggested the children photograph particular objects or parts of the yard; if they appeared to be losing interest, however, I might ask if there was anything more they wanted to show me. Each tour turned out to be as individual as the young photographer leading it. Of the 21 children who chose to complete photo-tours with me, 20 wanted to take pictures in both yards while one child chose to photograph the front space only. The photo-tours lasted between 5 and 40 minutes in length, with the average tour running approximately 16 minutes. The number of images captured ranged between 10 and 78; the average was 40.

I admit I had not anticipated the children taking as many photographs as they did. As (Browne, 2005) notes, an “advantage to digital cameras is their ‘stamina’. Simply put, digital cameras don’t run out of film” (p. 86). The children seemed to understand this, and took pictures freely. Some interesting observations and photos would have been lost if I had imposed a limit, and would have taken choice (and therefore ‘voice’) away from the children. In retrospect, I feel that spreading the viewing and choosing of the images over two sessions rather than one would have been an effective process for those children with a very large number of photographs.

Selecting the photos. Initially, I had planned on making 4 x 6 inch prints of all the photos. The number of pictures taken by the children caused me to rethink this idea as the cost would have been prohibitive, so I decided to work with digital images and small (2 x 3 inch)
proofs instead. I brought my laptop to the daycare centre so we could view the images full-size. The children were able to scroll through their photos as they pleased, in some cases pausing to comment on them. This process gave them more power over the direction of the conversation. One girl pressed the keyboard button to advance the images, saying “no, no, no,” and finally, “yes!” when she came to a picture she wanted to tell me about. Another child remarked: “This is the first time I ever did this on a computer.” The computer proved to be an excellent companion to the digital camera; the two technologies supported one another in making the children’s views visible and accessible.

I then laid out proofs of these same photos on a table or the floor, and the child was asked to choose five pictures he or she would like to tell me more about. I explained that I would have them printed at the photo store and bring them back so the child could make a small book. The children used wooden beads to cover the images they wanted. If they had taken a large number of pictures, I divided the proofs into two batches to make the selection process more manageable. In most cases, the children chose their images thoughtfully, sometimes reconsidering and moving a bead before their final selection was made. One child (with the largest number of photos) had trouble choosing; after some reflection I asked him to complete a second tour taking fewer photos and he made his selection from those. During the second tour, I was conscious of limiting the number of photos and found myself reminding the child of how many pictures were left. I was unhappy with this process as I felt the tour lacked spontaneity and had become more adult-led. As noted previously, I believe that spreading the viewing and choosing of the original photos over two sessions rather than one would have been more successful. This is supported by the
idea of “unhurried listening” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 72), which is an important component of the Mosaic approach.

**Photo-books.** Once the photos were selected I had them developed into 4x6 inch prints. I brought these back to the children who were then invited to glue them into small booklets constructed from plain cardstock. “Making books has a long tradition in early childhood education practice in New Zealand, and is becoming recognized as a useful tool when researching with young children” (Greenfield, 2011, p. 113). As the children added their photos (choosing the order and placement) and sometimes coloured in their booklets, I offered to write any words they would like included on the pages. Although I did not ask the children to “order their photos from most favourite to least” (Greenfield, 2011, p. 112), I was curious to see which photo would be chosen for display on the front cover. I also asked the children if they had anything more to tell me about their images; our conversations were recorded with their permission.

**Collages.** Most of the study had been carried out with individual participants, and I wanted to provide an opportunity for the children to work together with their photos. “Through shared activity, communication, cooperation, and even conflict, children co-construct their knowledge of the world, using one child’s idea to develop another’s, or to explore a path yet unexplored” (Gandini, 1998, p. 170). Eight children completed collages, working together at a table in groups of two or three (one boy worked on his own). The children were given glue, poster board, and the 2 x 3 inch prints they had used when choosing their photos. I was interested to watch and listen as they interacted with their peers, but like Greenfield (2011) I found there was not as much back and forth dialogue as I had anticipated. The children were often willing to
talk to me about the photos they placed on their collages, however, and these conversations provided further insight into their perspectives.

**Interviews.** In addition to our work with the photographs, thirteen children (primarily the older ones) participated in semi-structured interviews in which I asked questions about their outside play (see Appendix C). The conversations were conducted one-on-one or in pairs. In my audio log, I recorded that “the children were very interested” in participating in the interviews (Peg’s Journal, 2011.11.22). As always, they were reminded they could stop and return to their play at any time. This was the case with a group interview that was attempted but not carried through as the children’s attention was focused on their play.

During our conversations, I invited the children to draw a picture of something from their outdoor environment; they appeared to enjoy this activity and their desire to continue drawing sometimes extended the length of the interview. Although I made minor changes to the interview guide as we went along (to support clarity), if I were to do this again I would simplify the questions and ask fewer of them. I might also try Greenfield’s (2011) method of keeping a set of questions for each child on a clipboard and recording answers over time. My experience was similar to Greenfield’s (2011) in that “during conversations with the children, the rephrasing of the framework questions was sometimes required, as was having conversations about all manner of things, and responding to their requests and questions” (p. 111).

**Documentation**

As the study progressed, I continued to work with the data, going over the images and audio files in detail. As outlined in my proposal, I created a display for the children and their families to help document the process. I posted three 6 x 8 inch photos for each participant: one
of the child (engaged in the process of taking pictures when possible) and two photographs taken by the child. The larger sized prints helped to highlight the children’s images and make their work visible. I left post-it notes nearby and encouraged educators, parents and other family members to share any thoughts they had after viewing the pictures. The display board also contained an invitation for parents to participate in an interview.

I then completed two pedagogical narrations, using the children’s photos, my photos, and dialogue from the audio files to capture moments from our outdoor photo-tours (see Chapter 4). Each story was shared with the child, the child’s family, and the educators – inviting comments and reflections about the narrative. The narrations were posted at the centre with the permission of the children who were featured in the stories. I also left a binder at the daycare containing a group story, reflections from the educators, and examples of the children’s photographs. In addition, the children took home their photo-books, and each child received a computer disc containing digital copies of the photos from his or her tour.

**Adult Participation**

This research considered multiple viewpoints; therefore, the educators at the child care centre were interviewed in order to provide an adult perspective regarding children’s play in the outside environment. (Parents did not choose to participate.) These one-on-one conversations “provided a formal opportunity to acknowledge that their opinions were valid and their knowledge about the children was valuable” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 51). The interviews were semi-structured, conducted face-to-face, and lasted an average of 45 minutes.

In preparation for the interviews, the ECEs were given letters of information and consent forms (see Appendices D & E). I offered to meet with the educators before or after work (or on a
non-work day) in order to accommodate their schedules. All three preferred to meet in the staff room at the centre during their lunch breaks. I began each interview by reviewing the consent form and reaffirming the right of the educator to pass on a question or stop the meeting at any time. I asked each participant how long she had been practicing as an early childhood educator, and how long she had been employed at the daycare centre. I then followed with a series of questions regarding outside play, natural elements, weather, and so on (see Appendix F). The interviews were “not intended to replace or undervalue the children’s own responses but to become part of the dialogue about children’s lives” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 34).

Validity

(Graue & Walsh, 1998) tackle the challenge of applying validity to research that is based on narrative rather than measurement instruments; they suggest “four interrelated dimensions” when discussing validity: technical and methodological, interpretive, textual/narrative, and praxis-oriented (p. 246). Using their framework as a guide, this study demonstrated validity in the following ways:

- Technical and Methodological – Through the use of participatory research methods, the study employed a methodology that empowered children to generate their own data and share their perspectives.

- Interpretive – The study invited multiple perspectives in order to support an interpretation that acknowledged children’s ways of knowing.

- Textual/Narrative – Using a rights-based approach, a narrative format was adopted in order to acknowledge the voices and stories of both children and educators.
Praxis-Oriented – “How does this work create possibilities for new understandings of children’s lives, and further, how does it promote action to that end?” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 248) As an educator and a researcher I attempted to invite dialogue among the learning community and to explore ways in which listening to children can be incorporated into busy early childhood settings; the results of the study will be shared with other educators.

**Interpretation**

One of the most difficult aspects of carrying out this study was accepting time restrictions that kept me from bringing additional perspectives and participatory activities into the “mosaic” I was attempting to explore. Clark and Moss (2005) remind us that research with young children takes a “surprising amount of time to carry out” (p. 99) and that “one of the advantages and disadvantages of a multi-method approach is the mass of research material that is generated” (p. 100). They also admit the process of analysis “can feel like sifting sand” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 100). This sifting process involved many hours of sorting through the photos and logging the audio recordings. I used spreadsheets to organize the data collected from the tours, grouping the images and recording the number of photos taken in each yard. I also created tables detailing the photos chosen by the children for their books (see Table 2). These tables included snippets of relevant conversation, words the child had asked me to scribe, the location (front or back yard), my description of the photo, and a note of any drawings or words the child had added.
Table 2
Description of a Child’s Photo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Comments</th>
<th>Words Scribed</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Researcher Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peg: Why did you choose this picture? Child: That’s because I like going in it and saying chugga, chugga, chugga, chugga choo-choo! (7:55) …. And I also like looking at it when I say goodbye.</td>
<td>Train</td>
<td>Back yard</td>
<td>A photo of the train. Child wrote name to the left of the photo and drew two people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to help collect and categorize the information contained in the audio transcripts, I used the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 9, which was particularly helpful when exploring themes or looking for certain passages or keywords. With this program, I was able to code the transcripts by highlighting excerpts and dragging and dropping them into files. The topics were not predetermined, but were based on the children’s conversations; I created the files as I read through the transcripts. The NVivo 9 software was then able to generate lists showing the most frequently used words and categories, compiling all related comments (from multiple sources) into one search result. This allowed me to consider the participants’ input from many angles. Ultimately, however, nothing replaced the time I spent looking at and reflecting on the children’s photos and listening to or reading the interviews. I returned to the data many times, searching for connections and attempting to “tell a story of thinking something through” (Davies, 2011, p. 124).

Waller and Bitou (2011) contend that participatory research is fraught with ethical and power-based issues, “especially as the interpretation of children’s perspectives is usually made
from an adult point of view” (p. 5). The following two chapters, Documentation and Interpretation, look more closely at the data generated by the study in hopes of providing an ethical analysis of the “patterns, themes and categories” discovered through a “holistic” and reflective process (Greenfield, 2011, p. 115).
Chapter 4: Pedagogical Narration

“Documentation, therefore, is seen as visible listening” (Rinaldi, 2005, p. 22).

Overview

The use of multiple participatory research methods generates a great deal of data to visit, revisit and consider. In this study, there were hundreds of photographs, the photo-books, drawings, and hours of recorded audio originating from the children and educators. I also logged my own thoughts and observations in both audio and written form. Rinaldi (2005) refers to this process as “the construction of traces” and believes these traces “not only testify to the children’s learning paths and processes, but also make them possible because they are visible” (pp. 22-23). Weaving these pieces together into narrative creates a form of documentation that invites continued reflection from a community of learners.

The roots of pedagogical documentation can be found in the democratic practices of Reggio Emilia; “most simply expressed, pedagogical documentation is a process for making pedagogical (or other) work visible and subject to dialogue, interpretation, contestation, and transformation” (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 225). Documentation is deeply interwoven with threads of relationship: to self, to community, to social justice, to the learning environment. Young children are observed from a strength-based perspective and, in their search for meaning, are seen as competent builders of theory (Rinaldi, 2012). “This attitude of the child,” contends Rinaldi (2012), “means that the child is a real researcher” (p. 239). Early childhood educators who are willing to let go of predetermined outcomes and embrace the uncertainty of working with an emergent curriculum will find opportunities to collaborate and question alongside the children. “When teachers make listening and documentation central to their practice, they transform
themselves into researchers” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 244). The child and the educator thus become co-researchers, learning together.

Listening plays a key role in the development of documentation (Rinaldi, 2005, 2012); however, the process of listening and then recording what we see and hear is accompanied by ethical considerations that need to be addressed when making children’s thinking accessible to others. Dahlberg (2012), for instance, warns of the danger of using documentation “to ‘predict and control’ children” (p.229), while Cheeseman and Robertson (2006) challenge our assumptions of children who appear to participate willingly. They imagine what it would be like to find their own drawings posted on the wall with no warning, or to have their dialogue and mannerisms captured at a staff meeting and then displayed in the foyer of their centre. In thinking about the documentation of children’s lives, “I try to put myself in their shoes,” Robertson notes (Cheeseman & Robertson, 2006, p. 196). It is clear that children need to be aware they are being photographed and recorded, and permission should be asked before posting narrations and sharing them with others.

Seen at its best, documentation is an expression of respectful, caring relationships and a true desire to learn together. Rinaldi (2012) sees it as “an act of love and interaction” (p. 238) while Felstiner, Kocher, and Pelo (2006) refer to documentation as “a series of love letters about the children, exchanged between teachers and families, traces of our shared lives” (p. 60).

Process

As I spent time pondering the data the children and I had collected on our photo-tours, two pedagogical narrations emerged: *Looking over the Fence*, and *Exploring the Bush*. There were many stories I could have told, of course; “what we document represents a choice, a choice
among many other choices….Likewise, that which we do not choose is also a choice” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 147). Pedagogical documentation is never objective (Dahlberg, 2012; Dahlberg et al., 2007); it is “imbued with the subjectivity of the documenter” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 238). Looking back, I recognize the moments I chose to record as times when I truly found myself in the role of authentic novice. As I observed and interacted with the children, I was challenged to consider new ways of listening and seeing; my assumptions were pushed aside. In documenting these moments, I was making visible my own learning and curiosity, along with that of the children; I was also able to engage perspectives other than my own. This process of sharing ideas and co-constructing meanings adds to the richness and complexity of working with pedagogical narration. Being part of a learning community opens up new ways of looking at the world. We not only ask “what can we see?” but invite the question “what else can we see?” (Robertson, 2006, pp. 49-50). Learning shifts from top-down to a collaborative exchange of “what if?”

The BC Early Learning Framework reminds educators that “pedagogical narrations can be used in any setting to engage in critical reflection through observation” (Government of British Columbia, 2009, p. 13). As I wrote the documentation, I attempted to tell the story of what had occurred in a certain space and time, believing that “our lives and the lives of others are entwined in narrative” (Lewis, 2007, p. 9). I wanted the narrations to be about the children, highlighting specific moments shared on the photo-tours. I looked forward to inviting additional thoughts from the educators, the families, and from the children themselves, as the process of documentation “should be ongoing, cyclical and based on the art of critical reflection on the part of a community of learners” (Government of British Columbia, 2009, p. 13). Rinaldi (2012) sees
this as a “spiral movement” in which “observation, documentation, and interpretation are woven together” (p. 238).

Although the educators at this centre displayed many photographs and descriptive posters where families could easily see them, at the time of the study they were not engaged in a regular process of working with pedagogical narration. The experience, therefore, of being featured in a learning story may have been new for these children and their families. Indeed, the parents did not respond to my written or vocal invitations to add their perspectives to the conversation – nor did any families at the daycare share their written thoughts regarding the display of children’s photos I posted. Introducing pedagogical narration earlier in the study – highlighting its value as an ongoing dialogue rather than a finished product – may have encouraged more involvement. Documentation can lend itself to “a wealth of questions, doubts, and reflections” (Rinaldi, 2005, p. 25), and “opens up the complexity, so that we can work and learn from it” (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 227). At the same time, it “presupposes the creation of a culture of exploration, reflection, dialogue and engagement” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 154), a culture of trust that must be built up over time.

Understanding this was likely to be a new process for the participants, I wanted the pedagogical narrations to feel inviting and accessible – relating the stories in ways that would enrich this daycare community (Felstiner et al., 2006, p. 60). Each educator shared her reflections, adding additional layers and new insights to the narratives. When the documentation was posted at the centre (with the children’s permission) a parent asked if there would be a story for each child involved in the research. In response to this request I created a narration for the group, outlining the study and explaining how the children had participated. The story included
photos taken by all participants; it was placed in a binder so the children could easily view it, revisiting their images and ideas. This prompted conversations among the children about who took the photographs, and who was in them.

This was the first time – when creating a narration – in which I had access to children’s photographs in addition to my own. I appreciated having this extra data to work with; I found the children’s perspectives held greater weight within the narratives due to their visual voice. I feel there is much potential to be explored by inviting children to co-create the documentation that makes their ways of knowing visible.

Finally, in sharing these narrations (as well as other interpretations of the data as discussed in Chapter 5) I offer “not what [I] know, but the boundaries of [my] knowledge” (Rinaldi, 2005, p. 26). I openly welcome the perspectives of others, along with their varying and complex lenses, and invite the reader to join in a reflective dialogue with the documentation. The narratives as they are included here represent the beginning of a conversation. I approach them with the understanding that my interpretation is but one of many, and in these relationships we build, “there is never a single true story” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 147).
Pedagogical Narration: Looking over the Fence

When I met with Amy to discuss her story (the pedagogical narration *Looking over the Fence*), she showed interest in viewing the photographs and listening to the following narrative. Although this part of the tour had caught my attention, Amy’s photo-book did not include any of the images used in the documentation.

When I asked Amy if she would like to add anything to the story, she said wanted to draw a picture. She copied one of the photos of herself, and made four attempts until she was satisfied with the perspective of the arm that was reaching out. She kept her drawing, but photographed it first so I would have a copy to refer to. I also gave Amy a copy of the narration to take with her, and she told me she wanted to hang it on her wall at home.

After reading this documentation, the educators mentioned Amy’s problem-solving skills and determination in finding a way to photograph the yard next door. In addition, they reflected on the interest she had shown in spaces beyond the daycare’s fence. One of the educators observed: “I think the neighbour’s yard may seem fascinating because it is hidden by the fence, and because it is a place where we cannot play it may seem forbidden and so unknown.”

As an observer I was surprised when Amy began to roll the tire during our tour; I wondered, initially, if she had lost interest in taking photographs. Her desire to capture the landscape beyond her yard was one of many examples of children turning their gaze outward as they showed me around their space (see Chapter 5). Their images have challenged me to question my ideas regarding children’s connections to their neighbourhoods and the roles they play within their communities.
Looking over the Fence

On a sunny day in October, Amy was showing Peg around her outdoor play space at daycare. She was taking pictures of things she felt were important or interesting.

“There’s two trees over there that are my favourite” she told Peg, pointing to the yard next door. Amy looked around. “I need to get a tire,” she said. “I need a tire but they’re all wet. Maybe…”

“Would you like me to hold the camera for you?” Peg asked. “So you have two hands?”

Amy gave Peg the camera, lifted a tire onto its side, and began to roll it across the yard.

“They’re really big though….
Come on you, you wobbly tire.”

Peg asked Amy what she was trying to do.

Amy: “I’m trying to get the tire…”

Peg: “And you’re moving the tire…”

Amy: “Yeah, by my hands… I’m rolling.”
Amy rolled the tire over to the fence, let it drop, and climbed on top.

“Could you give me the camera now?” she asked Peg.

“Cause I just had to move it over to see their back yard.”

Peg helped Amy put the camera strap around her wrist.

Amy held the camera up high - so it was pointing over the top of the fence – and took a picture.

Here’s the photograph Amy took:
Amy looked at the camera screen to check her photo. “There,” she said. “And even I have to take a picture of their house so I might need to move the tire.”

She gave Peg the camera and began to roll the tire again. “Come on tire, you can do it...I’m going to need to...there you go...” She let the tire drop.

“Now I need to have the camera,” she told Peg.

“I just had to move it over to the house.”

When Amy climbed onto the tire and tried to take a photograph, she found this part of the fence was too high. She asked Peg to move the tire for her, and showed her where to place it, but she still couldn’t reach over the top.

“I wonder what else you could do?” Peg asked.

“Can you take a picture of the house for me?” Amy asked. “Cause I can’t do it. It’s high up.”

Peg held the camera over the fence and took this picture of the house next door.

“How is that?” Peg asked, showing the screen.

“Good!” Amy said, and reaching for the camera, she set off to take more pictures.
Thoughts from Peg:

I really enjoyed the opportunity to take photographs outside with Amy. At first, I didn’t know why she was rolling the tire, but she had figured out a way to show me what was on the other side of the fence! I asked Amy if she had ever used the tire to look over the fence before. She said no, but she had looked through the fence.

Thoughts from Amy:

When I met with Amy to show her the photo-story I had put together, she wanted to make a drawing. This is Amy, reaching out for the camera so she can take a photo of the yard next door.

When she was finished, Amy took her drawing home with her - but she took a photograph of it first so I would have a copy.

Thoughts from the Early Childhood Educators at Amy’s Daycare:

“I could hear Amy’s voice as I read her captions. This story brought a smile to my face.”

“In this story Amy really shows her interest in her surroundings, and that the neighbour’s yard is important to her.”

“She used her problem solving skills creatively by rolling the tire up against the fence to get a good angle and take pictures.”

“It never occurred to me that she had ever looked beyond the confines of the yard, so her determination, and the problem-solving she showed was an eye-opener to me.”

“Not only are the children interested in the wider world beyond the daycare’s fence, they also focus on tiny details, and use the objects around them in different ways than they are intended.”
Pedagogical Narration: Exploring the Bush

During our tour, Sarah spent time photographing a bush in the front yard from many angles. She was one of two children who went in behind that bush with the camera. Later, as Sarah and I looked over her photos on the computer, we came to her images of the bush. “I was behind there when I took that picture,” she reminded me.

“That’s right!” I said. “You were behind the bush.” Sarah then advanced the computer screen to show another photo of the leafy stems. “Oh,” she said. “I was behind this one too.”

Sarah’s comments encouraged me to look more closely at her exploration of the bush. I could see that she had been very thorough and purposeful in her use of the camera. My photos of Sarah helped show the physicality of her work, the way in which she crouched down and moved her body in order to gather different perspectives. The audio revealed the intentionality of her process as she took time to view her images on the camera screen and asked if I would like to see them as well. When we looked at the pedagogical narration together, I told Sarah: “I never would have seen the bush that way, because I never would have thought to go all around it like that.”

After reading Sarah’s story, the educators commented on the importance of having natural environments for children. They also shared ideas regarding ways in which they might encourage further exploration of the under-used front yard space.

Sarah herself, however, told me that she liked being behind the bush “because it was so dark.” In looking back at the mosaic of Sarah’s comments – gathered during our conversations – I have since made additional connections between her interest in the dark space behind the bush and other areas such as the play house (an outside space she likes best) and the train. During her interview Sarah told me: “And I really like the train and slide really much because I get to go
inside them.” Other children at the centre also showed an interest in accessing small private areas. This has led me to more carefully consider the need for such spaces in a large group daycare setting (see Chapter 5).
One day, Sarah and Peg were out in the front yard at daycare. Peg had asked Sarah to take photographs of things she felt were important or interesting.

Sarah took many pictures of the bush that grows beside the door.

She took some from in front…
Sometimes Sarah would stop and show a picture to Peg.

And some from behind.

“Want to see this one?” she’d ask.
Sarah used the camera to look closely at the bush from different angles. Her photos can help others to look closely too.
Thoughts from Peg:

It was fun to explore the front yard with Sarah. I never would have thought to photograph the bush from so many angles, but Sarah’s pictures helped me see what I was missing by not looking more closely. I especially like the photo that shows the bush from behind; it has so much detail.

Thoughts from Sarah:

When Sarah and I were reading her story, I pointed to the photo of her taking pictures behind the bush. “What were you curious about when you were back there?” I asked. Sarah said, “I liked it because it was so dark.”

Thoughts from the Early Childhood Educators at Sarah’s Daycare:

“This really shows how important a natural environment is for children. Dirt, rocks, grass, leaves, and flowers offer so much opportunity for imaginative play/exploration.”

“After seeing how truly interested Sarah was in the natural elements, I feel we should put out more items that enhance the exploration of the yard – magnifying glasses, rocks, pieces of driftwood/stumps to climb on, pinecones, etc.”

“I found Sarah’s story about the bush in our front yard to be very important because to me it shows just how important nature is to children.”

“I was excited to see that she enjoyed this colourful green bush so much. There are many insects and surprises that a child might find in the foliage.”

“Sarah seemed very interested in exploring the bush from all angles. Learning about how each leaf is different, how each branch is different, maybe bugs live here… Our front yard is very different than our back yard, so green!”
Chapter 5: Interpretation

“It is sometimes only in standing back from the mosaics that the viewer can understand the whole picture” (Clark, 2010a, p. 32).

The design of this study allowed me to meet with the children on a number of occasions. Each time, as we discussed their photographs and perceptions of the outdoor environment, I learned a little more about the way they viewed their daycare community. While some children were talkative, others spoke very little – choosing to communicate through their photos and the decisions they made regarding them. As Greenfield (2011) relates, at times “there was a tension between wanting children to talk about their photos and respecting their responses such as short answers, nods, smiles and grins” (p. 112). Trusting relationships cannot be forced; they require time, respect, and a willingness to converse in ways that are comfortable to the child. It was helpful to have Clark’s (2010a) reminder that working with photography “can be about knowledge construction rather than knowledge extraction” (p. 30). The children were using the outward gaze of the camera to reflect the inward gaze of their preferences and understandings. Involved in “a messy, open-ended quest” (Clark, 2010a, p. 11), they too were in the process of making meaning.

Working with multiple methods for gathering data, I soon had many pieces to add to the “mosaic”. Although some questions and connections began to emerge, I found I needed to revisit the photos and transcripts numerous times as the themes started to take shape. “Gathering perspectives about particular spaces is a complex knowledge-building process” (Clark, 2010a, p. 11), and the large amount of data generated in a relatively short period of time can appear daunting. Each encounter brings its own surprises and insights, but how will it all come together?
Where does this piece fit? Are there other fragments similar to it? Unlike bits of tile and glass set in stone, a mosaic of ideas must be free to shift and change as new insights are incorporated into the pattern.

Attaching meaning to the ideas of others also demands care; interpretation is a subjective process and it is possible that “children’s wider stories [are] in danger of being framed by researcher expectations” (Cook & Hess, 2007, p. 43). To avoid this, researchers must acknowledge their personal biases, interests, and agendas. Stephenson (2009) suggests “stepping back” from the data and relinquishing “the narrow framework of the research agenda” in order to hear other messages (p. 137). Employing more than one methodology and inviting multiple viewpoints is helpful, but it continues to be a human (and therefore flawed) endeavour at best. I was aware that I approached the interpretation through many layers: my relationships with the children and educators, my desire to be a co-learner, my previous experiences as an early childhood educator, and the accompanying images and assumptions I carried that still needed to be unpacked and challenged. As noted by researcher Max van Manen (1997): “From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5).

Regarding child-centred analysis, Cindy Clark (2011) writes: “I would not attribute to the analyst such leeway that he can conclude whatever he wants to, but rather that the interpreter be a sensitive seeker and collector of tracings, indirect reference, and parallels” (p. 179). As I reflected on the research data I discovered threads that began to form and in time, to weave together. These threads can best be described by an overarching theme of relationship and reciprocity, in which the children interacted with, molded, and responded to their outdoor spaces.
Their conversations (both visual and verbal) revealed multilayered connections; these included *relationship to self*, in which the children articulated their personal perspectives and needs; *relationship to environment*, in which they demonstrated both a sense of belonging and of exploration; and *relationship to community*, in which they looked beyond the parameters of their yard. These areas frequently overlapped one another; the children’s narratives were ongoing and fluid. Each child approached the tour in his or her own fashion, inviting me to see the space anew. As I looked back over the photos I could visualize the children moving around the outdoor space with confidence and intention, exploring their world through the new and literal lens of the camera:

> And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching–questioning–theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world. (van Manen, 1997, p. 5)

Camera in hand, the children led me around their yard. Their photos and subsequent conversations showed me a great deal about their experience of place.

**Relationship to Self**

Sophie (3 years old) was giving me a tour of her space when she decided to turn the camera around to take close-up photos of her eye, her ear, and her mouth. Later, she placed the latter image into her book and asked me to write: “I like to take pictures of my lips and teeth.” On another occasion, four-year old Logan captured a shot with his boot in it. “I taked a picture of me,” he laughed. Yet another child discovered how to take his own photograph by catching his reflection in a mirrored surface on the climber. These explorations with the camera began with a
sense of self; the children were in their photographs, they were part of the story their pictures would tell.

**Children’s personal perspectives.** Of the thirteen children who participated in semi-structured interviews, two said they liked playing inside best while ten preferred being outside. (One child liked both inside and outside equally). This was consistent with Clark’s (2010a) study, in which “many of the children…were quick to identify outdoor spaces as the most important places for them” (pp. 13-14). The children, when talking about spaces they liked to be, mentioned the playhouse, the fence, and the rocks (the main play space was covered by pea gravel). When asked about things they liked to do outside, they often said “play,” with specific activities ranging from going on the train and the slide to colouring and reading.

Spaces some children did not enjoy included the “sidewalk” or cement area, “because I don’t get to run and I don’t get to do anything up there.” One girl related: “A long time ago I liked playing on the sidewalk – do you know why? That’s because the cars were there. But now I don’t like it; that’s because the cars are broken.” The cars (plastic riding toys) had been left at the side of the building, and access was blocked by the garbage bins. During the tours, three children showed me the cars, and photos were taken through the small openings between the containers (see Figure 4). The same girl told me: “We want them to be out but the teachers are too short to get them out of there and we can’t go in there. We can’t squeeze through there.” The combination of photo-tours and interviews helped reinforce the idea that the cars were missed. They also introduced the concept of power in relationship to spaces and materials that only teachers were allowed to access.
For instance, some children took pictures of the outdoor table set aside for the educators’ items, and one-third of them photographed the storage shed:

Child: “That’s for putting toys in here. No one’s allowed to go inside; only teachers.”

Peg: “Oh, it’s a teachers’ place.”

When I asked the children what they would change about their outdoor play space, two referred to the weather while another drew inspiration for his answer (“cows”) from a nearby book cover. I could see the question needed to be worded differently. Playscape designer Rusty Keeler (2008) points out the ineffectiveness of asking children what they want on their playground:

Unfortunately this approach starts children off on the wrong foot by immediately limiting their vision to what a playground is and what they have seen on other playground sites. ‘Seesaws, swings, monkey bars,’ and then in turn, ‘Spiderman’ this, or ‘Barbie’ that. It’s a pointed question, to be sure. Who could blame them for their answers?” (p. 229)
This proved true when one girl informed me she would “change the climber into a Barbie climber.” Another child, however, told me that although she liked the train she would also like to change it for a place “where we could make another house.” She then described a playhouse that looked like a real house with windows and stairs, although her idea was prefaced by the statement: “I don’t know how to change things at daycare.”

**Space and time to be.** This idea of building another playhouse speaks to a recurring theme I observed regarding enclosed and private spaces. When the educators were asked what they liked best about the outside space, one of them mentioned the size of the yard while another remarked that it was “very open.” While the overall space per child ratio is extremely important, many children showed interest in accessing small spaces – such as Sarah (see Chapter 4) who took pictures from in behind the bush, and Erin, who told me that “sometimes we hide in [the train] when we play hide and seek.” Four-year-old Andrew had this conversation with me when he was reviewing his photos on the computer:

Peg: “What were you looking at there?”

Andrew: “The tires.”

Peg: “Are those important things in your yard?”

Andrew (pointing at the screen): “We can hide in there. We put this tire up here and we put that tire up this one, and we put this tire up that one.”

During the tours, I also noticed that four children took pictures of the space underneath the climber – a place where they were not allowed to play (see Figure 5). “Children are given permission to explore their existing space in a new way through the child-led tours. This can allow children to gain access to otherwise ‘out of bounds’ areas, such as hidden corners and
unused ground” (Clark & Moss, 2005). I had asked the children to show me things in their yard that were important or interesting; one three-year-old boy climbed right under and took photographs of both the rocks below and the light above as it spilled down through the cracks between the boards of the structure. In one of his photos, the bottom portion of my boots is just visible – providing the perspective of a young photographer who is hidden from view, and therefore away from the gaze of an adult. Another image shows my body crouched down so I can look in, but I did not take a photo in return. “Some aspects of children’s lives are, and should remain private” (Waller & Bitou, 2011, p. 15). In documenting children’s lives and gathering their perspectives, are there mysteries we should not attempt to interpret? Are there literal and metaphorical spaces that educators and researchers cannot and should not fit into? “Sometimes the children like to be by themselves,” notes Paola Strozzi (2001) of the daily routine in the schools of Reggio Emilia. “This dimension of ‘being’ is sought out in certain moments and is appreciated by both children and adults” (p. 65).

Figure 5
*Under the Climber, by Ian (age 4)*
The importance of providing restful, private spaces for young children has been addressed by those who study and inform the design of play areas (Herrington et al., 2007; Keeler, 2008). “Spaces that allow children to be alone are particularly important because children are often grouped together and they need spaces to get away, to be on their own, or in pairs” (Herrington et al., 2007, p. 27). This issue may be better accommodated in countries other than Canada; Einarsdottir (2005), for example, outlines research in Iceland in which children at a playschool used their cameras “in a closed room where they were allowed to play without adult supervision” (p. 534). Here in British Columbia, educators are required to work within specific licensing regulations as well as the individual policies of their centres, but the ECEs involved in this study also spoke of a desire to provide small outdoor spaces for the daycare group; one of them observed that the children “love hiding.” The children themselves expressed their needs best when responding to the following questions (quotes are taken from individual interviews):

- Peg: “Why do you like to be outside?”
  Child 1: “Play on my own and play with my friends.”

- Peg: “What kind of things can’t you do?”
  Child 2: “I can’t go just read books outside when somebody’s sad.”

- Peg: “Is there something you don’t like to do when you are outside at the daycare?”
  Child 3: “Playing with friends, cause sometimes it makes me feel like I want to play all by myself.”

- Peg: “If you could change something about your play space outside, what would it be?”
Child 2: “My friends. I would change playing with them when I want to play by myself.”

Of the sixteen child care centres that Herrington et al. (2007) included in their study of outside play spaces, only two had intentionally included private areas in their design; some children used the space underneath their climbing structures, while “in outdoor spaces that lacked any subspaces, we observed children huddling in corners or doorway thresholds to talk or be by themselves” (p. 28). As Keeler (2008) reflects: “Sometimes play is wild with children rushing and flowing from place to place. Other times children need a place to rest or be quiet” (p. 90).

**Relationship to Environment**

**Belonging.** This natural ebb and flow of play allows children in a daycare setting to build connections to both their peers and their outdoor environment. “In learning to read the local geography, children develop their attachment to place and their sense of security and competence” (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 774). During the tours, I watched how each child moved through the yard, observing where they focused both their attention and the lens of the camera. Some moved quietly, while others ran from one area to another. But always, I sensed – particularly in the back yard – that this was a space they had formed a relationship with; it was a space they *knew well.*

The children showed me two areas: the back yard where they normally played was dominated by a climbing structure and also contained a large train structure, a play house, a picnic table, sandboxes, and garden beds. There were some moveable parts such as tires, as well as a number of toys. The front yard was smaller and less familiar to the group; it contained grass
and bushes and a view onto the street. The children decided how long they would remain in each space, and how many photos they would take. As mentioned earlier, most used the camera freely and no one asked if there was a limit on how many photographs they could take. Initially, 61% of the images came from the back yard, 34% came from the front yard, and 5% were classified as “other” (such as photos of the digital recorder and my camera, or close-ups of the children or of me). These numbers stayed fairly consistent when the children were asked to choose just five photographs to make a small book: 56% of the images they included came from the back yard, 38% came from the front yard, and 6% were classified as “other.”

The photo-books helped to highlight images that were important to the children, and the process of picking out just a few pictures provided some additional insight when working with participants who did not talk much about their photos but nevertheless appeared engaged in the experience. The books included a range of subject matter that varied depending on individual preferences as well as when the photographs had been taken: What play materials had been put out by the educators that day? Had it been raining? Had the leaves begun to fall?

Of the eight children who worked on collages, all but one chose to add a snapshot of themselves. At the beginning of each outdoor tour I had taken a photo of my “guide,” and these were included in the collection of small 2 x 3 inch prints the children were using. Alison Clark (2011) believes the tactile process of gluing enables “children to construct meanings by anchoring their photographs” in whatever way they choose (p. 320). Therefore, the act of securing their own images made these children “present” on the collages (A. Clark, 2011, p. 321) and a visible part of their outdoor environment.
Exploring. Exploration of the outdoor environment and engagement with natural elements also proved to be a strong theme. During my first observation of the play area, the children had discovered a spider on a bush next door (they had spied it through the lattice in the fence). “I think dirt and worms and bugs and things like that are very important for the children because it’s amazing; they love it,” an educator told me. “If they find a bee on the floor, they’re all there.” This was my observation as well. The children were very aware of spiders, bees, and bugs; they often pointed them out to me on our tours:

Andrew: “I want to take the picture of the spider web. There’s a spider over there.”

Peg: “There’s a spider over there? Wow!”

Andrew: “He’s crawling up something. It’s a little spider.”

Peg: “Oh, I see.”

Andrew: “See?”

In addition to finding spiders, digging for worms was also a popular activity. One of the educators explained:

We also decided to forego planting a garden patch in that spot just so we could have the dirt patch, you know. And they have so much fun digging for worms, and burying things in there and just getting messy. So I know that’s one of their favourite things to do.

On days when water was also available, many of the children were very engaged in mud play. During her interview, four-year-old Zoe told me: “I like to play in the mud, cause I like making a mud-cake.” Zoe’s photos reflected this interest.

Peg: “Here’s another interesting picture” (see Figure 6).
Zoe: “I was going to put it [the mud-cake] right here and then put the pumpkin on top and make a cherry. The pumpkin was going to be the cherry on the mud-cake.”

Peg: “Why is it important to have mud outside?”

Zoe: “Cause I wanted to get my feet in it….Cause I wanted to mush it.”

The educators spoke of tensions that sometimes exist between a child’s desire for outside messy play and a parent’s desire for their child to be clean and tidy at the end of the day. Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) suggest that sometimes “programs have to convince parents of the value of the outdoors to their child’s development” (p. 771). This includes access to “manipulable materials like sand, dirt, gravel and water” which allow “children to exert control over their play space and change their surroundings to suit their needs” (Herrington et al., 2007, p. 6).
The educators also mentioned the time it takes to help children get in and out of their outdoor clothes and to wash and dry clothing when it becomes wet and dirty. When the weather changed and the dirt patch was closed for a time, the children talked to me about it. Looking at their photos of the digging spot, they told me they couldn’t play there any more:

- Conversation 1:
  
Peg: “Why not?”

Child 1: “Cause the teachers don’t want the kids to get all muddy when they don’t have their muddy buddies on.”

- Conversation 2:

Child 2: “We play in the dirt, but not anymore…because it’s closed all day.”

Peg: “Do you know why?”

Child 2: “Yep, because we play in it too much.”

The dirt patch provided a connection to nature, as did the garden itself. Many children photographed the abundant strawberry patch and pointed out bulbs or a small pumpkin that failed to thrive. One girl showed me the garden hose and explained how the teachers used it:

Child: “This is the watering hose and it has a flower tap on it, and [the teachers] water their plants, and they water us too! Then we will grow. I’m just joking!”

In an area that was primarily pea gravel, the garden – with its strawberries, dirt patch, worms and spiders – offered an invitation to explore natural elements and living things. (In the spring and summer months, flowers also grow there and add a burst of colour.)

The front yard provided an entirely different experience; it was smaller, with no toys or fixed climbing equipment. The space, however, contained a grassy surface and the bushes which
prompted Sarah to explore from all angles. All but two participants included images from the front yard in their books. One girl added three photos of the grass, repeatedly stating she liked them because they were green:

    Child: “I want to choose another one for the next page; this one – the grass.”
    Peg: “Is there anything you want me to write about your picture?”
    Child: “I love it.”

Another girl stated she liked the grass “cause it’s so soft and cuddly.” References to the colour and feel of the grass, the darkness behind the bush and the mush of the mud all speak to ways in which children experience their outdoor space: “The senses of young children are especially alert. Each sense gives children information about their environment – how it sounds, how it feels, how it smells, what it looks like. The senses tell us where we are” (Keeler, 2008, p. 41).

In both yards the children took a number of “groundscapes” – pictures in which they intentionally pointed the camera downward to photograph the details of the ground by their feet.

Figure 7
*Groundscape, by Tyler (age 3)*
This was consistent with photos taken by children in a study by Clark (2010a); Ward (1978) believes these views are significant to young children because their eye level is closer to the ground (p. 22). Many photos, including the groundscapes, also showed a careful attention to detail. They framed a single flower, a pinecone, or a pile of leaves; they captured close-ups of the fence boards or the dirt patch, or the rocks (see Figure 7).

The children focused in on image after image that my adult eyes had missed. I was often delighted and surprised by the way my perspective of a space was challenged. I was learning to view (or review) the landscape in a new way. While some children focused on the tiniest detail, however, others turned their gaze outward.

**Relationship to Community**

**Looking Outward.** It was Amy’s photos taken over the fence (see Chapter 4) that introduced the theme of looking out from the daycare space to the neighbourhood beyond. Many children captured shots that intentionally extended past the parameters of the yard; some pointed the camera upward towards large trees, open sky and telephone wires, while others (like Amy) focused on the houses and buildings found on their street. When Andrew talked about the picture he’d chosen for the cover of his book (see Figure 8) he showed me the value of engaging in the process of photo elicitation, in which a photograph helps to draw out comments and explanations. He also taught me not to make assumptions. The photo was taken in the back yard, and in looking at it I saw the climber; for me, the structure filled most of the frame and would surely be the subject of discussion. Andrew’s perspective, however, was different from mine.
Andrew: “This is the choo-choo train.”

(The wheels of the train are just visible in behind the climber.)

Andrew: “Avalon; right here.”

(Andrew pointed to the building in the top left of the photo.)

Peg: “What’s Avalon?”

Andrew: “It’s where we go.”

Avalon is a seniors’ home the children sometimes visit; before the winter holidays (while I was still meeting with the children to discuss their photos) the daycare group went there to sing. I asked Andrew if he’d like me to write anything in his book, and only then was the climber mentioned:

Andrew: “Climber; choo-choo train; Avalon. This is my neighbours. That’s all.”
The combination of Andrew’s photography and dialogue helped me to see layers of meaning I would otherwise have missed. As Clark and Moss (2005) point out, “these personal interpretations of the space would have remained hidden without the inclusion of this tool” (p. 36).

The idea of community was supported by the educators when we spoke during their interviews. At that time I asked them about the walks they went on with the children:

Peg: “Do you think they are an important part of your program?”

• Educator 1: “[The children] get to see the world outside of daycare, what’s around them. I think that by going out on the outings, it really shapes a big part of what they know and how they perceive the world. So I think it’s very important, and I think it teaches them lots….Like going to the senior’s home and learning how to respect them and treat them, and how we talk about them.”

• Educator 2: “We ask them all kinds of questions, and I like that. It gets them thinking about what’s around them, and what’s in this area.”

Other children showed interest in their neighbourhood as well. Four-year-old Ian took a photograph of the street from the front yard, and chose it for the cover of his book.

Peg: “I’m just wondering if there’s anything you’d like to tell me about it?”

Ian: “How do trees grow?”

Peg: “How do trees grow? Is that what you wonder when you look at that picture? We were in the front yard here…”

Ian: “And then I took the picture of a house, cars and trees, and the power lines.”
Ian’s description of his photograph reveals the detail he sees when looking at his
neighbourhood, and shows me he is thinking about the natural world and how things grow. There
are no trees in either of the daycare spaces, but there are large, healthy trees visible along the
street and in the yards of nearby houses. Having been with Ian during the tour, I knew that he
had also been thinking beyond the view of the street. When he took the picture, he told me: “My
house is close to daycare.” Like Amy (see Chapter 1) Ian’s thoughts were connected to home.

The same was true of four-year-old Kayla when I asked her if there was someplace she
liked to go on her daycare walks:

Kayla: “I would like to go where my house is, and we could go past my house and I could
tell them it’s my house.”

Peg: “Does that happen sometimes, Kayla?”

Kayla: “No, it never happens, because my house is too far away.”

The fences around the daycare featured prominently in a number of pictures; the use of
photography clearly showed that from the children’s perspective there was often a barrier
blocking or limiting their view of what lay beyond the play space. The back yard had a privacy
fence, with the boards fitted together. It extended above the height of the children, prompting
Amy to roll the tire over to allow for a better vantage point. After reading Amy’s story, one of
her educators remarked: “Even though we think they don’t notice or even have the ability to look
over the fence, they are totally aware of their surroundings.”

Taking photos from the front yard opened up different possibilities. There, the picket
fence allowed for more of the neighbourhood to be seen, and the children were keen observers.
Some of them placed the camera between the pickets, allowing for an unobstructed view. They
commented on cars and trucks and people going by, and took pictures of what lay outside the fence (see Figure 9).

Figure 9
*Through the Fence, by Caleb (age 2)*

“Children enjoy observing – especially adults. Children also appreciate views – such as a dumpster being unloaded – that adults do not” (Herrington et al., 2007, p. 23). Of the children who completed photo-books, one-third of them chose a picture of the front fence (or the view beyond the front fence) for the cover of their book. Looking at their photos I sense both curiosity and a connection to the broader community; their gaze is turned outward to what is happening *beyond*.

**Summary**

This chapter has addressed the study’s primary research question:

- What does the visual language of photography reveal about the children’s perspectives regarding the outdoor environment at their child care centre?
Inviting the children to express their perspectives through the use of digital photography welcomed them into a dialogue in which their contributions were given weight and consideration. The photo-tours and books “provided a glimpse of the individual ‘landscapes’ children established for themselves” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 36). In looking over the data, I was able to identify similar ideas and gather these strands together for further reflection. Drawing on the children’s images and comments, I have highlighted three points that educators, parents and children may wish to explore:

**The children were interested in small, private spaces.** The children expressed a desire to have times and places where they could be alone, something that can be difficult to find in a large group daycare. During the interviews, they explained that sometimes they wished they could play on their own. This was confirmed by photographs taken of areas where they could hide (the train; the tires; the bush), and small spaces where they were not allowed to play (under the climber).

Herrington et al. (2007) found that outdoor play environments need areas – including small places – designed for varying numbers of children. For instance, “a study of den spaces, which are typically created with plant material and created by children, notes that these spaces contribute to children’s developing sense of self and control” (Herrington et al., 2007, p. 29). This notion of the den or nest is eloquently expressed in *The Geography of Childhood*: “Over time, I’ve come to realize that a few intimate places mean more to my children, and to others, than all the glorious panoramas I could ever show them” (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994).
The children enjoyed having natural elements in their play space. The children’s photos highlighted a variety of living, growing things including trees, grass, plants, bugs and worms. Their books contained images of pinecones, rocks, leaves, and other natural materials; they pointed to the sensory joys of dirt, mud, and other messy play. The children focused “on small, intimate places that we adults take for granted” (Keeler, 2008, p. 39); their close-up shots showed they were aware of – and valued – the tiniest details in their environment. The children’s photographs may help the adults in their lives to look at the outdoor space from a new (or newly remembered) perspective.

The children were interested in their neighbourhood and the wider community. The children’s photography showed they were aware of the community surrounding them; they were interested in being and having neighbours. This aligns with observations made by Clark and Moss (2005), which “revealed the importance to the children of being able to watch what was happening outside the play area” (p. 29). Pictures taken from the children’s level showed that due to its location and open nature, the front yard fence provided opportunities for observation that could not be accessed in the back. The children often took photos through the fence, clearly expressing their interest in and engagement with the environment beyond the parameters of their yard.

This chapter has suggested topics for continued conversation between educators, parents and the children themselves. The process of observing, documenting, and interpreting now sits part way through a cycle that still needs to be explored and expanded. The discussion may open up new possibilities and move in new directions. In order to affect change, the ideas presented here require additional clarification and a willingness to act on the children’s perspectives.
As an overview of the children’s perceptions and ways of knowing, this chapter invites educators and parents to consider the use of digital photography as a participatory tool for inviting dialogue and listening more closely to young children. After reflecting on some of the documentation from the study, one of the early childhood educators expressed her thoughts this way:

It is really important for educators to be aware of how children view their environment, from the smallest item to beyond the play space. Everything has an impact on their play, their sense of self and their place in the world.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

“There have always been people who have listened, sometimes there have been people who have heard, and perhaps less often, those who have acted wisely on what children have had to say” (Roberts, 2000, p. 238).

Conclusions

This study employed the use of digital photography and other participatory methods in order to invite children into a conversation about their outdoor spaces. Acknowledging connections to the provincial early learning framework, it built on a foundation of children’s rights, and an image of children as capable constructors of knowledge. The research was guided by two questions, the first being:

- What does the visual language of photography reveal about the children’s perspectives regarding the outdoor environment at their child care centre?

This question was explored in greater detail in Chapter 4, which offered pedagogical narrations to reflect on, and Chapter 5, which identified common themes and patterns within the data. The children’s photographs and accompanying discussion revealed close observations of their visual space (both inside and outside the boundaries of their yard), and emphasized connections the children had formed with their outdoor play spaces through relationship to self, environment, and community. Their photography captured the yard from the height of a child, showing how the fence often disrupted their view of neighbouring areas they found interesting. It also emphasized the children’s interest in small and private spaces that would allow one or two individuals time away from the large-group activities of a busy daycare. “All children need intimate places to hide away now and then. The look of a hideout may take many forms but they all provide a safe haven to get away from it all” (Keeler, 2008, p. 87).
Many of the children’s photos focused on small details – including close-up and ground-level shots – and also highlighted the importance of natural elements in the outdoor environment. These included growing things and natural materials that could be moved and molded. As Keeler (2008) points out: “It’s the small things in a child’s environment that create the biggest interest and excitement” (p. 39).

Finally, the children turned their attention outward, capturing tree tops, stretches of sky, power lines, and the buildings they were connected to. Herrington et al. (2007) “found that several centers in [their] study had created long term and valuable relationships with their neighbors” (p. 23). The children involved in this research looked out through the fence and spoke of connections to the greater community. Their photographs clearly showed areas of interest and importance in their outdoor environment.

The second research question asked:

• Can children’s digital photographs encourage dialogue and support adults in creating a culture of listening?

Conversation around the photographs occurred on multiple occasions, allowing me to better understand the children’s point of view. Some participants chose to talk with me as they led their tours, while others had thoughts to share when they reviewed their images, chose their five prints, made a small photo-book, or created a collage. As Clark and Moss (2005) observe, “bringing together a range of tools may give a more detailed impression of young children’s perspectives” (p. 14). Having their photos to look at helped open up a dialogue between us, and gave the children power over the direction of the discussion. Children who did not choose to
speak were also able to enter into a dialogue – sharing their perspectives and preferences through
the way they approached their tours, and the photos they selected for their books.

Throughout the study, I wanted the children to know I was interested in what they had to
say. A culture of listening suspends judgement and is open to uncertainty (Rinaldi, 2012); it
invites multiple perspectives and creates space for everyone within a learning community,
including those who are not verbally fluent. The children’s photographs encouraged conversation
and allowed for overlapping layers of internal, multiple, and visible listening to take place.

As described in Chapter 2, internal listening occurs when we gaze inward. Clark (2005b)
explains that a multimethod framework helps to support internal listening by providing
opportunities for children to discover “new ways of thinking” and “looking at the same question
in a variety of ways” (p. 36). Viewing the photographs on more than one occasion provided
moments for the children to reflect.

Multiple listening allows for the testing of personal theories within a learning
community. This process was supported during the study by a number of exchanges – including
interviews with the children and educators, discussions between the children as they worked on
their collages, and invitations for educators and families to add their thoughts to the pedagogical
narrations or the display of children’s photos. The parent perspective is missing in this research;
although family members spoke with the educators when viewing the photographs they did not
leave any written comments. Further opportunities to participate, however, may bring their ideas
into the conversation. Looking back, I feel that scheduling my visits to be present during more
drop-off and pick-up times may have helped me build stronger relationships with the families,
thereby encouraging more dialogue and participation.
Visible listening is linked to documentation, allowing children to “emerge from anonymity and invisibility, seeing that what they say and do is important, is listened to, and is appreciated: it has a value” (Rinaldi, 2005). The pedagogical narrations *Looking over the Fence* and *Exploring the Bush*, for example, combined photographs taken by the children and me with transcripts of our conversations (see Chapter 4). Translating this data into narrative form helped create what Clark (2005b) refers to as “platforms for communication” (p. 42). In addition, the children’s photography helped to identify (or make visible) outdoor elements that were meaningful to them, providing opportunities for further discussion.

The study showed that children’s photographs have the potential to foster a climate of participation and inclusion in an early learning setting. By encouraging both visual and verbal languages and providing opportunities for multiple forms of dialogue and listening, these images and perspectives can support adults in creating a culture of listening.

**Study Recommendations**

“This [outdoor environment] is supposed to be for the children, so let’s create a place that is inviting, useable and fun”

*(Early Childhood Educator, 2011).*

Once the children’s perspectives have been gathered, it is important for adults to consider how they will respond to the information that has been shared – inviting collaboration and giving weight to all points of view in the learning community. As outlined in Chapter 5, three areas have been identified for consideration by the children, families and educators at the daycare; they include the children’s interest in small private spaces, their enjoyment of natural elements in their play environment, and their interest in the surrounding neighbourhood and wider
community. Discussing future uses of (or changes to) the under-utilized front yard could therefore be an ideal starting point; it is an area where the children’s interests could be addressed. When I first arrived at the centre the director and educators spoke to me about the potential of this space. During the tours and follow-up discussions, the children also revealed an interest in the front yard (see Chapters 4 and 5) with a focus on the grass and bushes, as well as the neighbourhood that lay beyond the fence (see Figure 10).

Figure 10
The Front Yard, by Julia (age 3)

When I interviewed the educators, they shared ideas regarding ways in which the yard could be used, describing natural and whimsical elements and cozy spots where children could sit or hide. Additional possibilities regarding ways to explore the yard were offered by the ECEs in response to the pedagogical narration Exploring the Bush (see Chapter 4). Playscape designer Rusty Keeler (2008) states:

Children’s access to nature has always been an important issue, but it has recently become a hot topic among educators, researchers, governments and parents. People from
all walks of life are mobilizing to make positive changes regarding children’s outdoor environments. (p. 20)

The children and their family members will have ideas about the yard as well. As one educator remarked, “The environment is supposed to be for [the children], so shouldn’t they have a say in directing how the environment looks?” Inviting children into the decision-making process may not be the norm, but “young children are a key resource in creating child-friendly environments that reflect their needs, interests and safety” (Lansdown, 2005, p. 24).

Research Implications

Implementation.

“I am happy to say I do a few things differently now by choice, after embracing some new perspectives and ideas”

(Early Childhood Educator, 2011).

The third stage as outlined by the Mosaic approach (after information gathering and interpretation) involves the question “what is going to change or remain the same as a result of this process?” (Clark, 2007a, p. 77) The scope and time-frame of this research did not allow it to extend into the action phase; therefore, staff and parents at the daycare will decide if and how they will follow up on the recommendations of this study and the children’s perspectives regarding their outdoor environment. As Cremin and Slatter (2010) point out: “Both at home and at school, children are dependent on the willingness of adults to provide the opportunities and support they need to participate in the decision-making processes which affect their lives” (p. 467).
Without action, the children’s participation will remain “at a surface level” and become little more than a “consultative practice” (Theobald, Danby, & Ailwood, 2011, p. 20). The children willingly participated and openly shared many valuable perspectives throughout this process. Their contributions can either be seen as participation in an interesting project or – within the framework of children’s rights – as invitations to further dialogue and possible change. Lansdown (2005) reminds us: “It is not sufficient just to give children the right to be listened to. It is also important to take what they have to say seriously” (p. 3).

**Suggestions for future research.** Inviting children to join in on conversations regarding their early learning environments is an important first step in recognizing their right to have a voice in matters that affect them. Studies like this one help to create local knowledge and also add to a growing body of interpretation concerning children’s perspectives. Translating these perspectives into action, however, requires further attention. In other words, “where do these new insights lead?” (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 105) There are limited accounts of working with very young children to affect change in their early childhood spaces (see Clark, 2010a; Clark & Moss, 2005).

Adults therefore need to create opportunities as well as adopt appropriate skills to engage young children. With the number of hours young children spend in early childhood centers, the role of educators in making this a reality is becoming increasingly important. (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011)

Further research is now needed that will continue past the gathering and interpreting stages into the implementation phase.
One of the challenges involved in working with a multi-method framework is the time required at every step: gathering and organizing data, meeting with the children, developing visible documentation, inviting multiple perspectives and interpretations, and so on – all this before moving into the decision-making or action stage! Clark and Moss (2011) argue “there is a serious need for more non-contact time for practitioners in early years childhood institutions in the UK. Listening to young children using the Mosaic approach requires space for practitioners to think and reflect” (p. 68). From personal experience in the field, I suggest this need is not limited to the UK but is part of the Canadian educators’ story as well. Therefore, research is needed in which early childhood educators themselves work with these tools in their centres. The studies should look closely at the potential barriers faced by educators (such as time restraints, space to work, access to equipment and comfort with technology). At the daycare, for instance, the educators and children did not have ready access to a computer or printer. If we are to incorporate listening “not as an extra activity when other priorities have been achieved but as an integral part of being learning communities” (Clark & Moss, 2011), then a dialogue around how to do so needs to occur.

This study has established the potential of children’s digital photographs to encourage dialogue and support adults in creating a culture of listening; the next step is to determine if educators can access the necessary resources to successfully work with this tool.

Summary

This chapter has addressed the guiding questions of the study; recommendations and research implications have been discussed, and possibilities for future studies suggested. Throughout the study, the Mosaic approach has proved to be a helpful and adaptable framework,
providing a multi-method approach for gathering children’s perspectives. For some centres, the process of listening to young children in this way will be new. Children may not be accustomed to giving their opinions or being part of a decision-making process. As noted by one child during this study: “I don’t know how to change things at daycare.” Clark and Moss (2011) remind us this is not meant to be a one-time endeavour: “Practitioners observed that children became more competent at expressing their views and preferences with each opportunity” (p. 62; see also Lansdown, 2005, p. 7).

Children in this study sometimes gave me feedback regarding the methodologies and tools, such as one girl who told me: “I love it when I talk about these pictures.” Another child asked me to write the following on various pages in her book: “I like to use the tape recorder…I like to take pictures…I like to use the camera.” When asked to show me things that were important or interesting, some children chose to photograph the digital recorder or my camera; two images of cameras were included in the photo-books.

Listening is meant to be “more than a tick-box activity” (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 13). Working from a rights-based approach with an image of children as capable and competent means that time spent with children needs to be flexible and open to emerging interests, conversations and shifts in the daily plan. When I returned to the centre one day to drop something off (after the data collection phase was over) a child approached me and asked, “Have you come to visit because you haven’t seen us in a long time?” Above all, listening is about relationship.
It is a bright, clear day in October and my outside tour with three-year-old Amy continues. We have moved to the back yard and I’m helping her with the wrist strap on the camera. “I just want to say something,” Amy tells me, as she reaches out and takes hold of the digital recorder. She moves the recorder close to her mouth and says:

*So, daycare’s back yard, and my back yard. And at my back yard it feels like I like it when I am at my daycare’s back yard. And when I’m at daycare’s back yard I like when I think that I like when I’m at my home.* (Amy, age 3)

Ten minutes after she first shared this thought with me in the front yard, Amy is making sure I hear it again. “You said that right into the recorder,” I observe. “We’ll be able to listen to that later.” But it’s not until I am transcribing the audio that I really develop an appreciation for the connection Amy feels between her daycare and her family home. When she is at one location, she is thinking of the other; the two are interrelated. This is something she wants me to know.

A few minutes later, Amy rolls the tire over to the fence so she can take a photograph of the house next door. Her use of this visual language confirms and clarifies what she has been saying. “It never occurred to me that she had ever looked beyond the confines of the yard,” muses one of her educators. Yet Amy is showing us that she is aware of and thinking about her home, her community, and her place within the relationship. In order to understand her perspective, it’s up to us to listen.
References


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Appendix A
Letter of Information for Parents/Guardians

Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

Dear Families,

Hello! My name is Peg Hasted; I’m a graduate student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University and I’m currently completing my thesis. I am also a licensed early childhood educator with many years of experience working with 3-5 year old children.

Your child is invited to participate in a research project I am conducting titled Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment, in which (Name of Child Care Centre) is participating.

I welcome your questions, and may be contacted at:
Phone: ---; Email: ---

In addition, this research may be verified by contacting:
(Name), Thesis Supervisor; Phone: ---; Email: ---

The purpose of this study is to explore:
- Pre-kindergarten children’s perceptions and preferences regarding their outdoor environment.
- The use of digital photography as a means for adults to listen more closely to children’s ideas.

The study will take place over a period of four months; based on a participatory, child-centred model known as the Mosaic approach it will employ a number of methods including observations, interviews, and the children’s use of digital photography. There are no known or anticipated risks to you or your child by participating in this research; your involvement is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your child’s care and your access to services at (Name of Child Care Centre) will remain the same whether you choose to participate or not.

If you agree to your child’s participation in this study, you will be required to sign a consent form. The form outlines the specifics of the research and addresses confidentiality. I am very happy to discuss the project with you, and to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Research of this type is valuable because it creates opportunities for adults to listen more closely to children and to honour their perspectives. I look forward to meeting you during my time at your centre, and to listening to the children’s ideas.
Appendix B
Consent Form for Participation of Minors

Permission to interview and use children’s work, photographs and audio recordings

Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

Your child is invited to participate in a research project titled:
Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

This thesis study is being conducted at (Name of Child Care Centre) by Peg Hasted, a licensed early childhood educator and a Masters student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University.
Peg welcomes your questions, and may be contacted at:
Phone: ---; Email: ---

In addition, this research may be verified by contacting:
(Name), Thesis Supervisor; Phone: ---; Email: ---

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to explore:

- Pre-kindergarten children’s perceptions and preferences regarding their outdoor environment.
- The use of digital photography as a means for adults to listen more closely to children’s ideas.

The importance of providing young children with opportunities for outside play and exploration has become a much-discussed topic among parents and early childhood educators. There are many concerns related to sedentary lifestyle, too much “screen-time” and not enough connection with nature.

At the same time, the visual language of photography is proving to be an effective way for children to articulate their ideas. The use of digital cameras in this study may provide an example of how carefully chosen technologies can play a role in quality early learning and care.

Research of this type is valuable because it creates opportunities for young people to become active participants in the research process. The study will explore methods of listening to children and honouring their perspectives; it has the potential to encourage deeper reflection and dialogue between children and adults. Understanding how children relate to their environment will allow adults to enhance outdoor experiences based on children's thinking.
The Study:
The study will take place over a period of four months, allowing time for the children to become accustomed to my presence and to become comfortable with the use of the camera. Based on a model known as the Mosaic approach, it will employ a number of methods:

Observations will be of a general nature; in particular I will be noting how the children engage with the outdoor environment. The children will not be assessed in any way.

Interviews will be conducted with the children’s permission, and in ways that are most comfortable to them. This may include talking with groups of two or three, or interviewing “on the go” as children move about the centre. The children and I will be readily visible to the educators, and a child can choose to end the conversation at any time. Questions will revolve around outside spaces, activities and weather, and children will be invited to draw a picture of something in their outdoor environment. Parents may request to see the full list of questions. I will take notes by hand, and with the children’s permission the conversations will be recorded.

Photography will be used by the children during walking tours. In this activity, the children will be invited to take me on a tour of their outside space; they will be asked to take photographs of areas that are interesting or important to them, and may record their thoughts on a digital audio recorder if they wish. The children may also have the opportunity to take photos during out-trips or on walks that have been planned by the child care centre. Once the photos have been developed, the children will choose the ones they would like to discuss. With their permission, the conversation will be recorded; I will also take notes by hand. The length of the conversation will be determined by the children, and they will receive copies of their photos to bring home. Please note that it is possible that some children may choose to include images of their friends in their photos.

Once the interviews and photo-tours have been completed, I will transcribe the conversations and look for common topics and themes. I will then return to the centre to share what I have learned and to collect any final thoughts from the children and educators. During the study, I will document the process through photographs and text, and a copy of this learning story will be presented to the centre.

Participation:
There are no known or anticipated risks to you or your child by participating in this research. Throughout the study, your child’s involvement will be completely voluntary. He/she may decide to withdraw from a specific activity or the entire study at any time without explanation or consequence. We will talk about each activity before we begin, and children will know that participating is a choice.
Your child’s care and your access to services at (Name of Child Care Centre) will remain the same whether you choose to participate or not. If you withdraw your child from the project, his/her data will only be used if you sign an additional authorization form. In the case of any group discussions your child may have participated in, his/her comments will be minimized as much as possible while still preserving the clarity of the conversation and the insights and ideas of the other participants.

Confidentiality:
In terms of protecting your child’s anonymity, his/her name will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications. I will change his/her name, and remove or change other identifying information (with the exception of gender and age). My research results will not reveal the identity of your child or your family.

However, those who know your child – including staff and families at your child care centre, and members of your community – may be able to recognize your child from his/her photograph or by his/her interview comments. I cannot guarantee that those who know you will keep your identity confidential. I do ask that educators and parents at the child care centre respect the confidentiality of those involved in the study by not revealing their identity or any identifying information.

Your child’s confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all files and data in a locked box or filing cabinet and password protected computer files in Peg Hasted’s office. Data will be stored for a maximum of five years. All data will be destroyed by July 15, 2016. Electronic data will be deleted, paper copies will be shredded and audio recordings will be erased.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: the data will be used for Peg Hasted’s Masters Thesis, including a written summary and photo documentation that will also be shared with the child care centre. In addition, it is possible that academic articles and book chapters may be written, and presentations made at professional development workshops and conferences. Any other use will require additional permission.
Consent:
You are encouraged to ask any questions you may have regarding your child’s participation in this research. Your signature below indicates:

- You understand the above conditions regarding your child’s participation
- You are the legal guardian of the child named below
- You are not involved as a researcher in this study

A copy of this form will be left with you and a copy will remain with the researcher.

Name of Child Care Setting: ____________________________________________________

Name of Child (Please Print): __________________________________________________

During her time at the child care setting, and according to the conditions outlined in this document, I give permission to Peg Hasted to:

- Interview my child
- Record interviews with my child (audio)
- Take photographs of my child during activities pertaining to the study in which he/she may be involved
- Use my child’s comments, image, photos and work as a part of the research project as described above

Name of Parent/Guardian (Please Print): _______________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C
Interview Guide: Children

Child’s Initials: ________ Age: ________

1. ____________________, I’m curious. When you are at daycare, do you like to spend more time playing inside, or more time playing outside?

2. Why do you like to be (inside/outside) best?

3. What (what else) do you like to do when you are outside (at daycare)?

4. Is there something you don’t like to do?

5. Would you like to draw a picture of something outside at daycare?

6. What kind of things can you do when you are outside (at daycare)?

7. What kind of things can’t you do?

8. Is there something you really wish you could do?

9. Is there a place you like best when you are outside (at daycare)?

10. Is there a place you don’t like to be?

11. What kind of weather do like when you are outside?

12. Is there weather you don’t like?

13. If you could change something about your play space outside, what would it be?

14. Sometimes your daycare goes for walks. Do you have a place you like to go?

15. When you are not at daycare, do you or your family like to spend time outside?

16. Can you tell me something about your drawing?
Appendix D
Letter of Information for Educators (Interview Request)

Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

Hello! My name is Peg Hasted; I’m a graduate student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University and I’m currently completing my thesis. I am also a licensed early childhood educator with many years of experience working with 3-5 year old children.

You are invited to participate in a research project I am conducting titled Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment, in which (Name of Child Care Centre) is participating.

I welcome your questions, and may be contacted at:
Phone: ---; Email: ---

In addition, this research may be verified by contacting:
(Name), Thesis Supervisor; Phone: ---; Email: ---

The purpose of this study is to explore:
- Pre-kindergarten children’s perceptions and preferences regarding their outdoor environment.
- The use of digital photography as a means for adults to listen more closely to children’s ideas.

The study will take place over a period of four months, and will include the viewpoints of adults. You are being asked to participate in this research because you work at (Name of Child Care Centre) and as an educator, your perspective is valued.

You are invited to participate in a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. You will be asked to share your thoughts regarding outside play spaces, weather, and activities for children. There are no known or anticipated risks to you or your family in relation to your participation; your involvement is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your treatment and employment at (Name of Child Care Centre) will remain the same whether you choose to participate or not.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be required to sign a consent form. The form outlines the specifics of the research and addresses confidentiality. I am very happy to discuss the project with you, and to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. By agreeing to be interviewed, you will be contributing your ideas to an important dialogue regarding young children and the outdoor environment.
Appendix E
Consent Form for Educators

Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

You are invited to participate in a research project titled:
Young Children and Digital Photography: Exploring the Outdoor Environment

This thesis study is being conducted at [Name of Child Care Centre] by Peg Hasted, a licensed early childhood educator and a Masters student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University.

Peg welcomes your questions, and may be contacted at:
Phone: ---; Email: ---

In addition, this research may be verified by contacting:
(Name), Thesis Supervisor; Phone: ---; Email: ---

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to explore:
• Pre-kindergarten children’s perceptions and preferences regarding their outdoor environment.
• The use of digital photography as a means for adults to listen more closely to children’s ideas.

The importance of providing young children with opportunities for outside play and exploration has become a much-discussed topic among parents and early childhood educators. There are many concerns related to sedentary lifestyle, too much “screen-time” and not enough connection with nature.

At the same time, the visual language of photography is proving to be an effective way for children to articulate their ideas. The use of digital cameras in this study may provide an example of how carefully chosen technologies can play a role in quality early learning and care.

Research of this type is valuable because it creates opportunities for young people to become active participants in the research process. The study will explore methods of listening to children and honouring their perspectives; it has the potential to encourage deeper reflection and dialogue between children and adults. Understanding how children relate to their environment will allow educators to enhance outdoor experiences based on children's thinking.
The Study:
The study will take place over a period of four months and interaction with the children will include interviews and photo-tours. In addition, the viewpoints of adults will be sought.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you work at (Name of Child Care Centre) and as an educator, your perspective is valued.

Participation:
You are invited to participate in a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.

You will be asked to share your thoughts regarding outside play spaces, weather, and activities for children. I will take notes by hand, and with your permission the conversation will be recorded.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you or your family in relation to your participation; your involvement is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. By agreeing to be interviewed, you will be contributing your ideas to a dialogue regarding young children and the outside environment. Upon request, you may review the transcripts from your interview and may choose to add additional comments or take away comments from the original transcript. Interview results will be coded to protect anonymity, and specific comments will not be attributed to you without your permission. Your treatment and employment at (Name of Child Care Centre) will remain the same whether you choose to participate or not.

If you withdraw from the project your existing data will only be used if you sign an additional authorization form. In the case of any group discussions you may have participated in, your comments will be minimized as much as possible while still preserving the clarity of the conversation and the insights and ideas of the other participants. To ensure your continued consent to participate in this research, this consent form will be reviewed verbally prior to the interview session.

Confidentiality:
In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications. I will change your name, and remove or change other identifying information. My research results will not reveal the identity of you or your family.

However, those who know you – including staff and families at your child care centre, and members of your community – may be able to recognize you from your photograph or by your interview comments. I cannot guarantee that those who know you will keep your identity confidential. I do ask all personnel and parents at the child care centre to respect the confidentiality of those involved in the study by not revealing their identity or other identifying information.
Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all files and data in a locked box or filing cabinet and password protected computer files in Peg Hasted’s office. Data will be stored for a maximum of five years. All data will be destroyed by July 15, 2016. Electronic data will be deleted, paper copies will be shredded and audio recordings will be erased.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: the data will be used for Peg Hasted’s Masters Thesis, including a written summary and photo documentation that will also be shared with the child care centre. In addition, it is possible that academic articles and book chapters may be written, and presentations made at professional development workshops and conferences. Any other use will require additional permission.

Consent:
You are encouraged to ask any questions you may have regarding your participation in this research. Your signature below indicates:

- You understand the above conditions regarding your participation
- You are not involved as a researcher in this study

A copy of this form will be left with you and a copy will remain with the researcher.

Name of Child Care Setting: ____________________________________________

Name of Participant (Please Print): _______________________________________

During her time at the child care setting, and according to the conditions outlined in this document, I give permission to Peg Hasted to:

- Interview me
- Record our interview (audio)
- Take photographs of me during activities pertaining to the study in which I may be involved
- Use my comments and image as a part of the research project as described above

Signature: ______________________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________________
Appendix F
Interview Guide: Educators

Name: _____________________________________________

Position at Centre: ________________________________

How long have you been employed at this childcare centre? _____________________________

How long have you worked in the field of early childhood education? ____________________

How many days/hours do you work per week? _____________________________

1. Do you feel it is important for the children to spend time in outside play each day? Why or why not?

2. On average, how much outside playtime would you prefer the children to have?

3. Do you think natural elements are important to an outside play space? Why or why not?

4. Do you think climbers, sandboxes, and other structures are important to an outside play space? Why or why not?

5. Do you think toys are an important addition to the outside play space? Why or why not?

6. At your centre, what outside activities do you think the children enjoy the most?

7. At your centre, what outside activities do you think the children enjoy the least?

8. Are there outside activities you wish were available to the children in your program?

9. What do you like best about the outside play space at your centre?

10. If you could change something about the outside space at your centre, what would it be?

11. What are your thoughts about risky play?
12. You go on regular walks with the children.
   Do you think they are an important part of your program? Why or why not?

13. Is there someplace you particularly like to go with the children on your outings?

14. Do you believe that children should play outside in most kinds of weather?

15. Do you have any concerns regarding outside play and weather? If so, what are they?

16. How do you feel about children getting dirty during outside play at your centre?

17. How do you think parents at your centre feel about their children getting dirty during outside play?

18. As a child, was outside play an important part of your day?

19. As an adult, are outside activities part of your personal or family routines?

20. Do you think it’s important for children to have a say in the planning of their environments and activities?

21. Is there anything you would like to add?