Researching Early Intervention and young children's perspectives – developing and using a 'listening to children approach'

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Abstract

This article considers the current context of early intervention in England from the perspective and experiences of two families and in particular focuses on two young children identified as having Down syndrome. This case study research has emerged from previous research involving interviews with parents of children diagnosed as having Down Syndrome (Paige-Smith and Rix, 2006, Rix and Paige-Smith, 2008a.b.), which raised further questions about early intervention and the pedagogical relationship between the parent and the child, and recognised that 'early intervention' can be more than structured activities led by professionals. The research in this article, which has been funded by the British Academy, used ethnographic methodology to understand the process of early intervention with two young children with Down syndrome and their families. The methodology developed to include narrative first person observation of the child and photography. In addition to this a method of reflecting on the process of early intervention developed that included the researchers, the parent and the child. The development of this research methodology is considered in detail in this article.

Introduction

In this article we firstly consider the context of early intervention, we then discuss how our ethnographic research on early intervention was carried out in order to support a clearer understanding of the child's experiences and perspective. This research builds upon and extends the mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) by researching the perspectives and experiences of two children who are participating in

early intervention programmes in England. The research takes a socio-cultural view of learning, recognising that parents and children are involved in early intervention as 'situated learning' (Rogoff et al, 2001), and focuses upon listening to the child within their everyday context. The child centred pedagogical framework established by Luis Malaguzzi informs this approach by drawing on the notion of 'one hundred languages of children'; in particular, the child is viewed as 'strong, competent and active' (Clark, 2004).

The data collection process included a narrative description of the child's activities and reflective discussion with the parent. Photographs were used as a record to provide feedback to the child and parent about what the child was doing, and, in particular, what the child enjoyed doing. We present examples of the experiences of two young children identified as having Down syndrome and their families who participated in the research and describe how the research methodology and data has provided an insight into the experiences of these two children and their parents during early intervention. The research raises questions about the ways in which parents and children are involved in early intervention and, by reflecting on children's experiences during early intervention, leads to a more in-depth understanding of pedagogy and child agency.

Researching early intervention and the child's perspective: the context of early intervention

Early intervention (EI) in the early years is very much at the forefront of current policy and practice in many countries including England (C4EO, 2009, DFES, 2006, 2004a, DfE 2010,UNESCO 2010 p.4). In particular there have been significant

changes in England relating to patterns of service delivery, with reports like Every

Child Matters (DfES, 2003), Together from the Start (DoH, DfE, 2003) and the Early

Support Program (2004b) placing the child at the centre. There are a number of

different perspectives on how early intervention has been defined, for example, as

'intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems that have already emerged for

children and young people' (DCSF, 2010, p4). Guralnick (2008) considers that an

early intervention system must have a developmental framework as an essential part

of the design: 'it is essential that the generality of the developmental model be

recognized, particularly its value in understanding the development of all children'

(Guranlick, 2008 p 93). Both the DCSF definition and Guranlick's approach place EI

within an in-child-deficit approach to supporting a child's difficulties. However, this

approach expects parents to teach their child to achieve developmental targets (Bridle

and Mann, 2000) and, as Carpenter (2004) notes, has been widely condemned. He

considers early intervention should come from a position of equivalent expertise

between parent and professional in a partnership relationship, whereas Bridle and

Mann (2000) express concern about pressure being placed on parents in the home.

Increasingly early years settings have become a base for early childhood intervention

and, as Carpenter (2008) notes, managers and support planners need to look carefully

at provision and at innovative approaches such as the Early Support Programme

(DfES 2004b). Whilst some early intervention programmes generally recognise the

need for child-centred, family-centred activities, there can still, however, be a focus

on 'activities' for children's identified problems and 'deficits'. This approach could

be considered to professionalise the parents (Rix & Paige-Smith, 2008a) and to create

a 'special needs family' by encouraging parents to take on the professionals' values

and to work with their children - rather than allowing them to enjoy a relationship in which they support their children's natural growth, development and creativity through typical childhood experiences (Bridle and Mann, 2000). Little is known about children's perspectives and experiences of these early intervention activities.

Moss (2007) puts forward the idea of democratic political practice at early years institutions. He considers early years settings as places for technical practice that govern children, and where mass technologies can be applied in order to enable specific outcomes for children. Within this perspective, early intervention could be considered to be a space in which technical practice very much governs children's actions in order to bring about specific developmental outcomes. Democratic participation, on the other hand, allows for adults and children to participate in decision-making, supporting diversity and encouraging new thinking and practice. Moss refers to Reggio Emilia as a local cultural project of childhood that is about democratic practice and he raises the important question - how can this be encouraged?

Democratic practice in settings requires intention and supportive conditions – this involves seeing the child and parent as competent with the right to participate. Being able to listen to the child is important. Moss (2007) suggests that pedagogical documentation – rather than child observation - is about values of subjectivity and multiplicity, and that the use of this method of considering practice could possibly be a way of resisting power and fostering democratic practice. As we have stated earlier, early intervention could be considered to have certain expectations from parents, requiring them to take on the role of the child's 'teacher'. This raises questions in

relation to the social construction of the pedagogical experiences of the parent and the child, with professionals advising parents. Perhaps it would be possible for early intervention to become a 'democratic space' with democratic participation? By understanding more about the child's perspective and moving away from a developmental view of the child's learning it becomes possible to find out more about parent and child agency in the early intervention situation and how learning is socially constructed. As Woodhead (2006) notes, the development of a socio-cultural process has important implications for policy, curriculum and pedagogy:

> Instead of seeing early childhood as a universal, decontextualised process of developing towards a taken for granted state of maturity, it draws attention to young children's engagement with a range of settings, relationships, activities and skills through which they acquire culturally-located competencies and identities. 'Development' is about the acquisition of cognitive tools and cultural competencies which are themselves products of human civilization - forms of discourse, literacy, numeracy, and more recently information technology – that are adaptive to particular socio-economic contexts and historical epochs. (Woodhead, 2006 p.21).

The research in this study focused on a listening to children approach which sees learning as a collaborative process between adults and children (Clark, 2004). This approach draws on three theoretical starting points:

- children having their own time, activities and space;

- participatory appraisal including the giving of 'voice' to children;

- the notion of the competent child.

Clark's (2004) research on children's perspectives in early years settings showed that by listening to children, they can be involved and empowered to participate in decision making in their setting. This research study aimed to develop and adapt a 'listening to children' approach to collecting data that was appropriate for children in an early intervention situation. In particular, through using this approach, we wanted

to tell the child's story, to include a narrative that would assist in the understanding of the child's experienced world, and the pedagogy of early intervention. The research methodology was also concerned with understanding the meanings of children (Davis 1998). As Davis asks, 'what are children's voices and how should we listen to them?' (p.425). Davis places emphasis on the importance of being reflexive about pre-conceptions, and the need to employ 'cultural resistance' between the researcher and the children's culture in order to understand the diversity of children's lives. Our previous research on parents' perspectives and early intervention has also included an exploration of how one of the researchers personal experiences as a parent provided insights into the process of researching early intervention (Rix and Paige-Smith, 2008a). Research carried out by Beresford et al (2004) with parents and children with autistic spectrum disorders was informed by the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2004) using photographs taken by the child. They conclude that it is important for researchers to be flexible to accommodate those participating and to ensure the project itself does not become a barrier to participation.

Ethnographic research and children's experiences of early intervention:

An ethnographic study was carried out as a way of finding out more about child agency and identity and the experience of early intervention. The study involved an in-depth set of observations and interview-discussions relating to the experiences of two children identified as having Down syndrome using a qualitative approach (Moll et al, 1992). This data collection process allowed for triangulation (Moll et al, 1992) and, as this is a small scale study, the research does not attempt to generalise across different circumstances.

Two researchers went into the homes and early years settings of two children during a period of 5 months, making 10 visits of ethnographic observations with each of the families ranging from 1 – 5 hours. The parents in both of the families were professionals. In one family the father, Alan, was the full time carer for his son, Tim, aged two and a half and daughter aged nine months. In the other family the mother, Rachel, was the full time carer for her son, Samuel, who was one and a half; Rachel was expecting her second child. The research involved different shared spaces such as family meal times, parent-led early intervention, playing in the park, getting ready for bed, physiotherapy sessions, play session in a sensory room, speech and language sessions, home visiting from a professional, eating lunch in a café, playing in a play centre, a session in an early years centre, at the childminder, and included the presence of guests that came to stay - such as grandparents. As the ethnographic research process was carried out, the child's participation and learning was recorded in different settings and circumstances. This led to a deeper understanding of what it was like for the child in certain learning situations as we moved from home to early childhood centre, to open spaces, with different professionals and other adults (and children) supporting the child's learning. The children's views on their experiences were also sought by giving them access to the days' events through a photographic record, both printed and uploaded onto a computer. The children's interest in controlling which image they looked at led to one child being provided with large switches to press, whilst the other child used the arrow key on the laptop. The pictures were the basis for subsequent recorded interview-discussions with the parents and between the researchers.

Both children lived in inner London, and were a part of the same health authority. As one of the researchers used to teach in the inner London education authority in which the research was carried out, access to parents of pre-school children with Down Syndrome was negotiated with the head of the paediatric occupational therapy service. The researchers then sent formal letters explaining the aims of the project, which were followed up by phone calls and an initial visit. The service already had a close relationship with these parents through the 'baby group' for parents of children categorised as having Down syndrome who meet on a regular basis. Parents' consent was gained through explaining to them prior to the start of the research what would be involved.

Both researchers wanted to be accepted and 'useful' to the parent and child. In particular there was a concern about the parent thinking 'What is in this for us?' Hence a collaborative approach was developed which evolved into reflective discussions on the EI activities with the parent and child. By conceptualising the ethnographic research as a collaborative reflective process the researchers were able to explain in the first visit that we were not 'judging' or wanting to increase any tension around early intervention with the child and parent. A pictorial diagram was developed that explained the process of data collection involving reflection and participation with the parents and the child following the observations (see Figure 1).

The process of observing early intervention

LOOKING

↓

NOTING DOWN WHAT YOUR CHILD IS DOING

↓

RECORDING LEARNING MOMENTS

↓

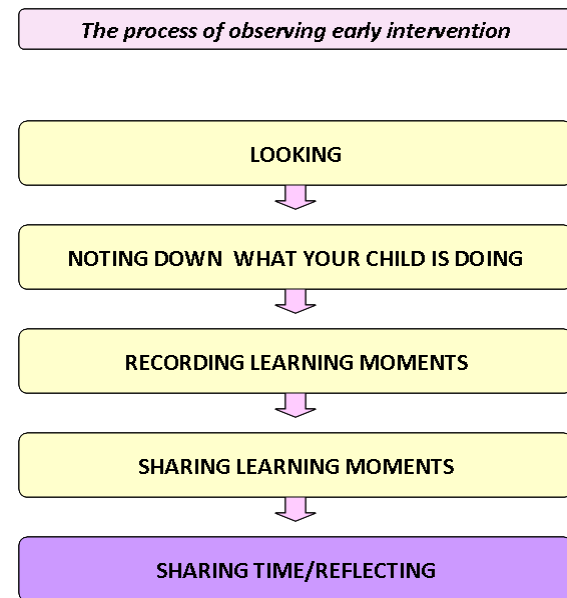SHARING LEARNING MOMENTS

↓

SHARING TIME/REFLECTING

Figure 1: The process of early intervention: sharing and reflecting

Conversations that arose from this collaborative reflective process were recorded and photographs were also used to reflect on the learning moments with the child and the parent. First person narrative observation notes were made by one researcher whilst the other researcher was taking photographs. As we did not intend to merely act as 'observers', we interacted with the parent and child, except when the parents carried out their specific 'early intervention' sessions, that is, the planned activities relating to the child's EI programme from the child's physiotherapist, speech therapist, occupational therapist and the Portage home visitor (Portage 2010). The narrative notes of the child's experiences were written in the first person, in an attempt to capture the child's lived experiences.

There were 8 digitally recorded informal reflective interview-discussions with parents at the start and at the end of the data gathering, which consisted of 33 recorded family observations, using photographs and first person narrative observation notes. The questions in the reflective discussions focused on how they perceived early intervention and how they carried out activities with their child (see Figure 1). There were 19 digitally recorded discussions and informal interviews with professionals such as an early years practitioner, childminder, physiotherapists, speech and language therapist and Portage home visitor, both in the presence of the families and separately. These interviews with professionals were recorded when appropriate, or in some cases - such as with the nursery leader - notes were taken. The interviews with the professionals consisted of questions about the background to the provision, how they considered their role as a professional, how they carried out early intervention with the child and parental involvement.

The parents were informed that the data would be confidential and that they would receive feedback on any information collected about their child and the early intervention process. Hence any observation or interview data collected from the early years settings where the children participated were discussed with the parents. The photographs of the children were used during the research and the children and their parents were given a book of photographs of their child playing.

The data collected in the form of interview-discussion, transcripts, written observation notes and first person narrative observation notes of the child were analysed according to the child's perspectives and experiences. The children's views, collected through the photographs and through the first person narrative observations, were analysed

and then compared and contrasted with the interview-discussion transcripts. Themes were developed from these photographic representations of the child's perspective and the narratives of the child's experiences, using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), identifying categories as they emerged from the data. The initial categories, identified through reflective discussion between the researchers during the data collection process, underwent ongoing development during this period including discussion with parents to capture their insights into the representation of the child's experience. Subsequently, open coding was used to break down the data into discrete parts so that it could be closely examined and compared for differences and similarities. For example, quotes were identified which described what it was like for the child, and what were recurring experiences. This was followed by a process of axial coding, using categories developed as a result of discussion and from the initial open-coding process; for example, a category developed around 'throwing' and another was 'empowering'. As categories built up, the researchers cross-referenced them, looking for relevant links between phenomena. This process involved the adding of more information from the categories, until a situation of saturation was realised. For example, for the category linked to the child being empowered, there were a number of examples, such as:

- The degree and form of choice offered by the parents varied.

- Children waited when they knew they had a choice.

- When they had not made a choice they tended to ignore or resist the intervention

- Choice does not mean that annoyance will not follow

- Clear moments where the choice is to do the 'wrong' thing…just as moment to choose to do the 'right' thing.

- Choice is negotiated at times

- Making choices is often linked with enjoying themselves

The data were also considered in terms of what the child enjoyed doing, their learning and form of participation. The main categories which emerged were: enjoying themselves, being congratulated, unplanned moments, making choices, being part of a community, being misunderstood, things not picked up upon, being supported, thinking about photographs, being rewarded, the assessment process.

As the ethnographic research process was carried out certain examples of how the child's learning was affected in different settings and circumstances and with different adults and children present became apparent. These incidences led to a deeper understanding of what it was like for the child in certain learning situations as we moved from home to early childhood centre, to open spaces, with different professionals and other adults (and children) supporting the child's learning.

By considering the child's perspective, in terms of their agency in an early intervention session it became clear that there was a difference between what the child was interested in and what the parent or adult wanted the child to do. The approach taken was a sociocultural approach, following Hall (2008) who considers that:

> Identities are made available and chosen through participation in activity and a person's agency lies in the choices made, the decision to choose one identity or position over another. In this sense, identities can be thought of as resources that can be employed in the construal of a self.
> (Hall, 2008, p.88)

Hence child agency and identity were also considered through participation and in relation to contexts, such as during a physiotherapy session, or during the sharing and talking about photographs of favourite toys or objects.

Early intervention and children's participation

However, the main theme emerging from the data collection process related to the

child's participation and empowerment through choices of activities. Table 1 indicates

the different types of early intervention activities that were observed and the different

types of participation by the children.

Early Intervention (EI)–and setting	Child's participation – types of activities
Speech therapy - Language session, speech therapist - children's centre	Sitting in a group at the table responding to questions at a children's centre – formal planned activities
Play activities (as part of EI programme) 1-1 with parent	Playing, singing, bricks, word matching, ball throwing – some set activities –some choice
Play activities - Children's centre	Playing with other children – group activities – free play - choose to participate
Play activities - Childminder	Playing with other children – group activities to play with other children – choose to participate
Portage – portage professional – at home at children's centre (Portage 2010)	Formal planned activities – 1-1, putting on shoes, looking at books Sensory room, 1-1, choice of activities
Physiotherapy – physiotherapist - children's centre	1-1 Formal planned activities – some choice of play activities
Reflective discussion – at home/outside (café)	Looking at photographs relating to early intervention and play activities –- choice.

Table 1: Early Intervention and children's participation

Table 1 indicates the range of activities in which the children participated; some were

formal early intervention activities as a part of a structured programme suggested by

the child's therapists and early years support teachers, and some were free choice activities. The child's participation, and opportunity to choose whether to participate in activities, varied: for example playing ball, walking across a beam, or speaking in a language session. The first person-narrative observations, reflective discussions and the photographs provided a way of identifying what the child seemed to enjoy doing and how the child learned and participated. This provided an idea of the child's sense of self and how the child controlled their environment during learning situations. The reflective discussion with the child that included the photographs, took place after early intervention activities, and led to a change of understanding for the parents about their child's participation. The listening to children approach developed by Clark (2005) has recognised that the power of children's voices can result in a change in adults' understandings (Clark, 2005 p124).

Early intervention – and reflective discussion

The following is a short example from an observation of an early intervention session with, Alan, the father and his son, Tim. This indicates the expressive language by the child during the session which lasted for one hour, and was followed by a reflective discussion with the child using the photographs. This reflective discussion seemed to support the child's learning in this particular instance. The following extract has been written using first person narrative observation, as a way of exploring the child's view:

> *Daddy wants me to throw a ball to the picture of the bear and I roll the*
>
> *ball to the bear and the bear catches it and kicks it and I catch the ball*
>
> *and I roll the ball to the bear and the bear catches it and then the bear*
>
> *kicks the ball away so then I go to crawl over to get the ball and then I*

crawl over to where I was before and then the bear kicks the ball back to me and then it goes to my little sister so I get the ball from my sister and then dad says 'bye bye bear' and puts the bear away. I'm still holding the bear and daddy says 'do you want to kick the ball?' And I say 'yes' and he says up up up and then he comes and I stand and he holds my hands and we are kicking the ball and laughing I'm kicking the ball and laughing and dad's holding my arms and walking me around the room. We are kicking the ball and go round the room and we are kicking the ball round the room, turn around and come back, kick the ball kick the ball and then I sit down.

And daddy throws the ball 'over your head' says dad, I lift it up high and throw 'good boy' says dad 'sit back' he says, I sit on my bottom and the ball hits me and makes me smile I throw the ball back to dad and he throws it to me 'weeeee' he says when I catch it and I throw the ball away and crawl to the sofa I crawl to the door 'bye daddy' I say. I knock on the door which is closed and there are dad's boots, dad's boots. I pick up the ball and say 'dad's boots' and dad says 'what do you want to do?''Have you finished with the ball?' and I do the ball finished sign [in makaton] and smile. And dad says do you want to choose cups or posting? And I choose posting.

Tim was shown a book of photographs of him playing one week after the session which included 20 pictures of objects such as the ball, and dad's boots. He was able to name objects and actions and point at the different pictures, but he was particularly interested in the photos of the boots. The use of photography allowed for the

peripheral learning, that is learning which was not the focus of the early intervention session, to be in the foreground – the child's interest in the boots prompted his language and this could have been developed further if it had been considered to be a part of the 'early intervention'. When he was shown 'his' photograph book of this session he spoke 21 different words in 9 minutes, this was considered to be an example of him showing his agency through his expressive language.

Alan, Tim's father, also considered that the photography had a positive impact on his child's agency and identity:

> 'He's certainly been provided with feedback, particularly the photographic feedback of himself doing more, more than he otherwise would have been, so I think that there's been a greater push on him to think of himself as "me".'

The use of reflection was a way of supporting the child – and sharing learning moments with the parent and the child. It appeared to encourage the child's sense of self and facilitated the expression of Tim's voice, as shown in the example above.

By focusing on the child's perspective, for example, Alan had changed his views on his son's throwing. At the start of the research, Alan had a clear goal which was to stop his son throwing things all the time. At the end of the visits to the family the following discussion took place with Alan when he was asked about his perspective on his son's throwing (Alice and Jonathan (Jonty) are the researchers):

Alan: I've been thinking about this 'cos the one area that I would not have applied the philosophy we're talking about now in would have been the throwing; and

Jonty [Researcher] said a very interesting thing when he observed Tim throwing. He said, 'Why are you trying to stop him doing something that he so much enjoys?', and I think that's probably right. I've been thinking about that a lot, and partly thinking of lots of more creative ways; so throwing things into the box, throwing things over the box, playing games, catching them in the bucket.

Alice: When he was in nursery with his friends …*they were*….throwing things back into the box.

Alan: Precisely.

Alice: He threw them all out, and then they threw them in.

Alan: So making it a much more constructive activity might satisfy us all a bit more, but not worrying about it quite so much unless obviously you see something very very heavy sailing by his sister's head, but that's drawing a distinction between being careful enough so you're not hurting people when you're throwing, and just throwing.

Jonty: But that's not about throwing, that's about being aware of other people.

Alan: That's right.

Although at the time of this discussion not all of Tim's possible meanings related to throwing had been identified and analysed from the data collected, enough were in evidence to initiate a discussion with the father about the significance of the activity. The child was expressing a skill that he wanted to do, however his father did not consider throwing to be an activity that he should be carrying out.

A similar discussion was generated by the use of photographs with Rachel about her time with her son, Samuel. For instance, the first author took photographs of Samuel standing up staring into the washing machine as it spun round, as well as photographs of him carrying out what his mother called the early intervention activities, such as singing songs she had learnt at the speech and language sessions and playing games which were a part of his early intervention programme. At the end of the session, Rachel was clearly pleased to see photographs of her son and herself doing so many different activities within a short time. But she also really liked the photograph of Samuel standing and looking into the washing machine because she felt it was one of his favourite things to do. This of course can be seen as a perfect justification for the delivery of early intervention within the home; a perfect family-centred activity for a Portage home visitor , who is trained to deliver early intervention according to the Portage method (Portage 2010), or a physiotherapist, as it is an early intervention activity that is based on everyday experiences for the child in the home. The significant point from Samuel's perspective however was not that he was practising his standing but that he was expressing his agency as shown through his interest in the washing machine.

The participation of the two children

There were a number of instances in which both children expressed skills that interested them which had not been demonstrated when being focussed upon by adults around them. This enabled the researchers to consider how the child created meaning and related their situation to themselves. It revealed how the child's participation changed in different socio cultural contexts. For instance, the first author and Tim engaged in throwing bean bags at the end of his physiotherapy session whilst his

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father talked with the physiotherapist. Just as this demonstrated different perceptions

and circumstances under which Tim's throwing was considered acceptable, it also

resulted in him walking unsupported towards the bean bag. This brought him evident

pleasure, which was a contrast to his prior refusal to co-operate during the session

when he was instructed to crawl along the beam and to also stand whilst the therapist

held his ankles. The therapist had herself mentioned that he didn't like the activity or

having his ankles held. It would seem as if his agency was expressed in a positive

learning context during the informal child focused play at the end of the session but in

a negative learning context during most of the adult led activities. However, further

research in this area would indicate whether this was representative of all early

intervention sessions, and the tensions that can emerge from this learning situation

(Bridle and Mann 2000; Paige-Smith and Rix 2006).

Discussion

The study has developed further a way of understanding the participation of the child,

and has led to democratic practice taking place with the parent – empowering the

parent and the child (Moss, 2007). It has recognised the importance of looking closer

at child agency through an ethnographic, narrative lens. We were able to look at 'the

actual processes by which children participate with other people in cultural activity

and the ways they transfer their participation' (Rogoff, 2008, p.70). By taking a

sociocultural approach to the ethnographic research there was shift from observations,

towards guided participation (Rogoff, 2008, p.71). Similar to the ethnographic

research carried out by Tenery (2005), we became more aware of the

multidimensionality of the children and their families, the different roles and ways in

which agency was expressed. Our knowledge base and perspective about each child

developed through our understanding of the participation in cultural practices. The research methodology, through the use of different planes of focus, for example the first person narrative observation, photographs, as well as reflections and interview-discussion data from parents and professionals, allowed us to consider how the child approaches the situation in relation to *their* purpose and meaning (Rogoff, 2008, p.70). As Gonzalez et al (2005) note, we were 'researchers as learners', carrying out emancipatory social research with an agenda for empowering and enabling the participants to change, through self-reflection, and to have a deeper understanding of their situations. This was carried out through the use of a reflective discourse with the parent, and the photographs being shown to the child.

The research process revealed more than expected, in so far as it developed to include the parents and the child, allowing them to be involved in the process and to reflect on their learning and their participation in the process. This was the result of the researchers' concern with feeling a part of the family, rather than being in the position of outside observers, judging the parent and the child in terms of 'how much' the parent was 'teaching' the child. We wanted the parent to be able to feel 'at home' with two researchers in the room, one with a notepad and the other with a camera. The challenge was to be accepted by the child and the parent, so that we could gain insight into the way in which the child was participating in early intervention with the parent.

A key part of this process was the acknowledgement that the narrative observation and photographs were not the child's 'truth'; they were a tool for engaging with their activity, an attempt to impose their subjectivity on the research. Our interpretation of that subjectivity could well have been wrong. There were at least two occasions where

the parents deepened our understanding by offering an interpretation we had not considered. For example we recorded the following from Tim's perspective:

> Grandpa opens the book, and starts reading Goldilocks. I look at Daisy and miss her, and I look at the pictures and look at Daisy. *I reach for the pages to turn,* and Grandad moves it away. I look at the bears. I hear the man writing, he turns the page, I look up 'oh dear, baby bear's chair is broken'.

In our subsequent discussion Alan gave an alternative explanation for Tim reaching out, one which coincided with the distraction which the description captured:

Alan: At some point he will show signs of tiring of it [a book], and we'll retire that one for a while, and bring out something else.

J: What are the signs of tiring?

Alan: Quite literally, I think he did this at one point with 'Goldilocks' funnily enough last night, you get to page 2 or 3 and *he'll want to close the book.*

Exploring the data further led to a depth of understanding that opened up an additional route for discussion and reflection. By acknowledging the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al, 2005) we attempted to see beyond the structure of a set practices within early intervention and our own assumptions in order to understand more about child agency, and the discourses and shifting power that shape the child's life and how the child participates in different contexts.

Conclusion

Documenting children's participation and the development of a 'listening to children approach' has led to an increased understanding about child agency in an early intervention situation. The 'learning story' approach of assessment (Carr 2004) provides an alternative to the developmental approach to assessing the child, and has been used for children with disabilities or learning difficulties (Dunn, 2004, Cullen, 2009). Cullen (2009) suggests that the successful use of the learning stories method depends on a shared perspective of inclusion, and a vision that does not adhere to the 'expert lens'. This study has explored ways of understanding how children participate during EI and has led to the development of a methodology that considers the child's views, and acknowledges their right to have their agency understood and recognised in every learning situation. The children's experiences of EI that were observed affected their agency in so far as they were being guided by their parent or a professional to follow structured activities with expectations related to their stage of development that had been assessed as appropriate by the teacher, therapist or Portage home visitor. The research revealed that when the child's participation in the learning situation was reflected back to the parent and child, the child engaged in that process, as did the parent. This reflective discussion supported the child's agency in the learning situation, as Carr (2010) notes:

> '….learners have not had the same opportunity to practice agency if they have not had the equivalent experience with the social practices where they have been invited to act with agency and responsibility'
> (Carr, 2010, p.41)

The research illustrated in this article invited the child to act with agency through the use of photographs and interview-discussions with the parents to support learning. Child agency during the EI observed in this ethnographic research was identified

through the development of the use of methodology that included first person narrative observations, and photography. The expert lens was removed through the use of reflection on EI with the parent and the child, and learning was seen to take place through the children's participation in this process.

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