Chapter 2: The Child’s Perspective

# Case Study – Eliciting Children’s Views in Research

In a recent research study evaluating the use of iPads in the early years of primary school, Gray et al. (2016) wanted to elicit the views of children. They based their methods on the Mosaic Approach which included a variety of methods which chimed with the research team’s beliefs about young children’s abilities as research participants. Gray et al. also used their knowledge in what activities appeal to children in order to gain the most authentic and useful data. One of the methods included asking children to bring the researcher on a ‘virtual tour’ of the child’s iPad. The researcher had a number of questions to use as prompts but the focus was on listening to the child talk about their iPad, the apps they enjoyed using and why. The following extract is from one of these tours:

*Researcher - Do you have an iPad at home?*

Child - I have a phone and an iPad at my mummy’s. And a tablet at my daddy’s.

*Researcher – What sort of things do you do with it at home?*

Child - I play games on it and I have a school game you have to write. And one that adds up numbers and it gets easy and then harder.

*Researcher – Can you show monkey how you use your iPad? Would you like to pick an app?*

Child - This is Puppet Pals. You walk them about like this. You can jump them up like this. You can make them run really fast. It can run by itself when you do that.

*Researcher – What do you like about Puppet Pals?*

Child - There are people in it. All these people here. My favourite person is her because she’s a ballerina. She can put her legs up and down. She can put her arms up like that.

*Researcher – Can she talk?*

Child - You have to make her talk with your own voice. (Child demonstrates how to record and says ‘Her name is Holly. She can run really fast and she can do the splits. She has to go back to class’.

*Researcher – Can you show me another app that you like?*

Child - I like this one. You can make buns. (Child does not know the name of the app.)

I’m going to make chocolate ones. You have to cut your butter up when you tap like this. You pick what shape you want. Then you ice it.

*Researcher – What do you like about that app?*

Child - You have to make stuff.

*Researcher – Is there any app you don’t like?*

Child - Blobble Write. You have to do all this (child shows Researcher all the letters and numbers). It’s too hard. Look what happens when you miss the line. It’s too hard. (Child shows researcher how she has to keep doing it 5 or 6 times to get a letter right.)

## Activity

1. Reflect with a peer on how useful you think this activity is in finding out what children think about apps.
2. How is this approach different from simply asking children questions in a focus group?
3. How might this approach work in eliciting the views of children who are very quiet in a small group setting such as a focus group?
4. A lot is written about the power differences between adults and children in research. How do you think this approach impacts on the power differences, if at all?
5. How do you think this approach challenges the notion of ‘the expert’? Who is acting as ‘the expert’ in this scenario?
6. How important is it to understand young children and how they think and learn when designing research approaches which will gather useful and authentic data?

## Reference

Gray, C., Dunn, J., Moffett, P. and Mitchell, D. (2016) *Digital Technology in the Early Years Classroom.* Belfast: Stranmillis University College.