

Book Review

Listening to Young Children: a Guide to Understanding and Using the Mosaic Approach. London: Jessica Kingsley ISBN: 9781909391260

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This is the third edition of a highly regarded text in research methods with young children. It combines work covered in previous books by the author into one expanded, yet accessible book that will be particularly useful for anyone interested in involving young children in their research.

The book starts with the position that children are 'experts on their own lives', arguably the default position of any genuinely participatory approach to research. Threaded throughout the book are three key themes – methodology, rights and modes of expression – that underpin the Mosaic approach, providing a useful framing device for the reader to engage critically with the book. The book is divided into five chapters, each concluding with a series of reflective questions, which provide useful moments for the reader to pause and consider some of the issues raised in the text.

Chapter 1 provides a 'framework for listening' that formed the development of the Mosaic approach. It also introduces three key themes mentioned above, and the underlying values and principles that underpin the Mosaic approach. This chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book and I found it particularly helpful for navigating the remainder of the book.

Chapter 2 describes the different methods brought together from the Mosaic approach in the original Listening to Young Children study, which was carried out in a pre-school during 1999-2000. Each individual method is explained in detail with examples of the 'new understandings' gained by combining different methods, useful case studies are also given to illustrate how the analysis was carried out. The description of the various methods (e.g. child led tours, map-

making, photographs and book making), is particularly rich drawing on detailed examples from the study.

Chapter 3 describes the second study, Spaces to Play, which again took place in a pre-school, but was specifically concerned with outdoor spaces. Here the author highlights the refinement and expansion of the Mosaic approach, which added further stages (e.g. Magical Carpet) to develop the approach further. Again, detailed examples are provided to illustrate the approach in a real-life setting, and the author usefully describes how to implement change following the review process.

Chapter 4 includes case studies from early childhood settings in four countries, demonstrating how international researchers have adapted the Mosaic approach. Particularly revealing are the examples from Denmark and Norway that highlight imaginative adaptations of the approach that included the perspectives of children under three years old.

The final chapter discusses some of the key ethical and methodological questions, which have arisen while working on the Mosaic approach. It raises interesting questions about the importance of where and how we engage with young children in research, something that is rarely mentioned in research methodology literature.

This book provides a thoroughly accessible and informative introduction to the Mosaic approach, and will be of particular interest to students and researchers in the fields of early childhood studies. It would also be of interest to early years professionals who wish to 'listen to young children' in their everyday practice. Although developed with young children in mind, it would be useful for anyone

working in schools and residential settings who wish to strengthen older children's voices and encourage meaningful participation of children and young people.

Overall, this book is a very useful resource for researchers and essential reading for anyone considering research with young children. One minor criticism is that the book largely ignores the amount of time and resources required to carry out such a multi-dimensional approach, and is light on the 'red tape' that one inevitably has to navigate in conducting research with children. It would also have been good to see more on the 'messiness' of research with children and young people, and examples from its use in other settings (e.g. care settings) would also have been welcome, but these are minor quibbles.

As the author suggests, 'the aim has been to develop an approach to listening to young children which has the potential both to be used as an evaluative tool and to become embedded into early years practice' (p. 28). For this reader, the author has succeeded with room to spare, and this fine book will be my 'go to' resource whenever I want to conduct research with young children.

About the author

Before joining CELCIS, Richard worked in the residential care and education sector. He has considerable experience conducting research with children and young people, and has a particular interest in community-based research methods.