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Conference or Workshop Item

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The Utility of Critical Ethnography as a Tool for Empowerment in Early Childhood Research

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The Utility of Critical Ethnography as a Tool for Empowerment in Early Childhood Research

- Young children are marginalised from the academy (Redmond, 2008)

- The Young Children as Researchers (YCaR) Study aimed to conceptualize ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, could develop as researchers and might be considered to be researchers.

- How did critical ethnography help to capture young children's voices as researchers in their own right?

- How did critical ethnography give young children's voices an authoritative space in which to speak?

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Guiding questions included:

- What is the nature of research?

- How can a study be conducted to establish young children as researchers?

- What enquiries are important to young children and how can they engage in them?

- What support structures might encourage young children to participate in research?

Structure of presentation:

- Why did we do what we did?

- What did we do? (3 Phases)

- How were children empowered as researchers?

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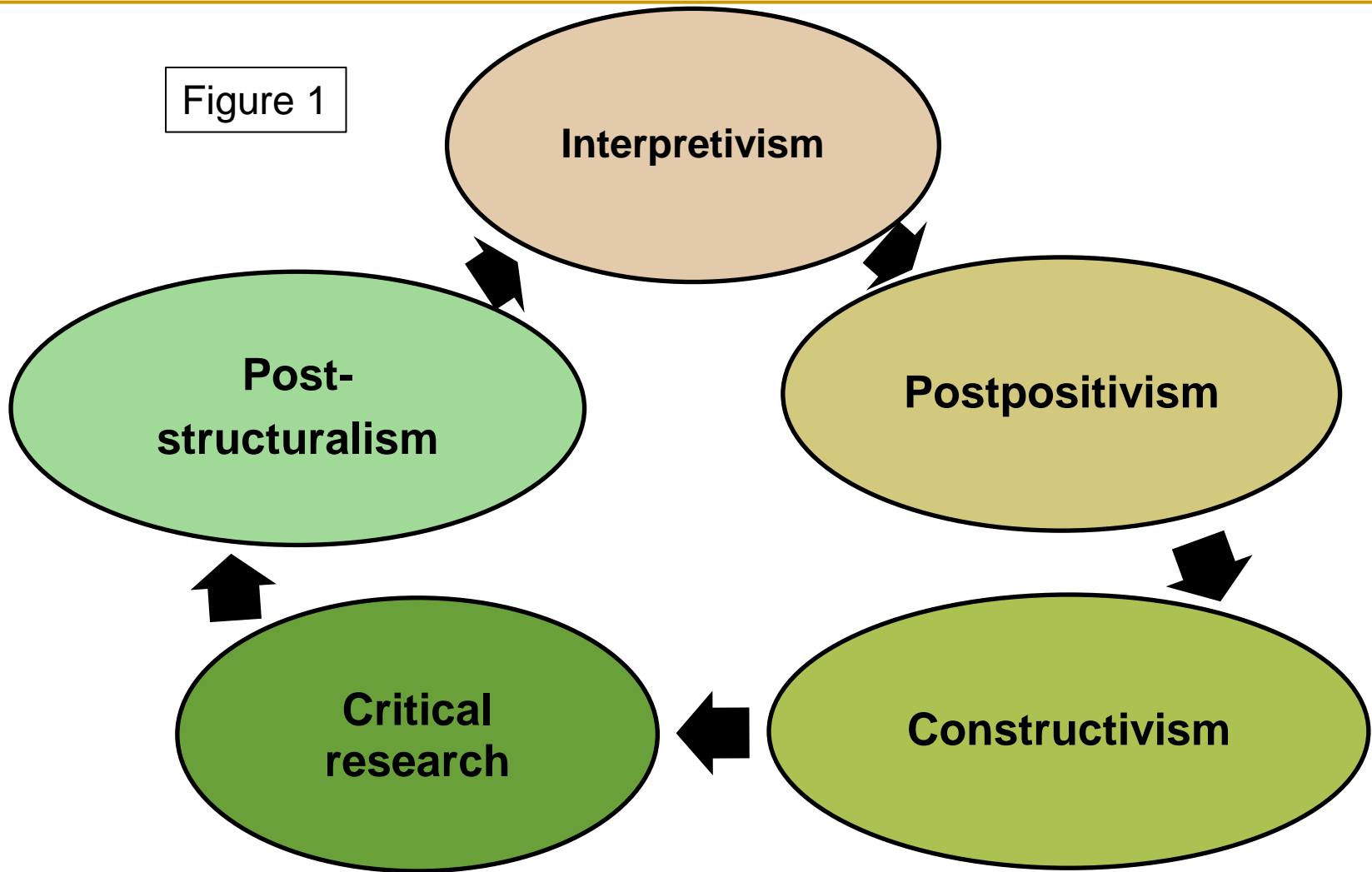
Why did we do what we did?
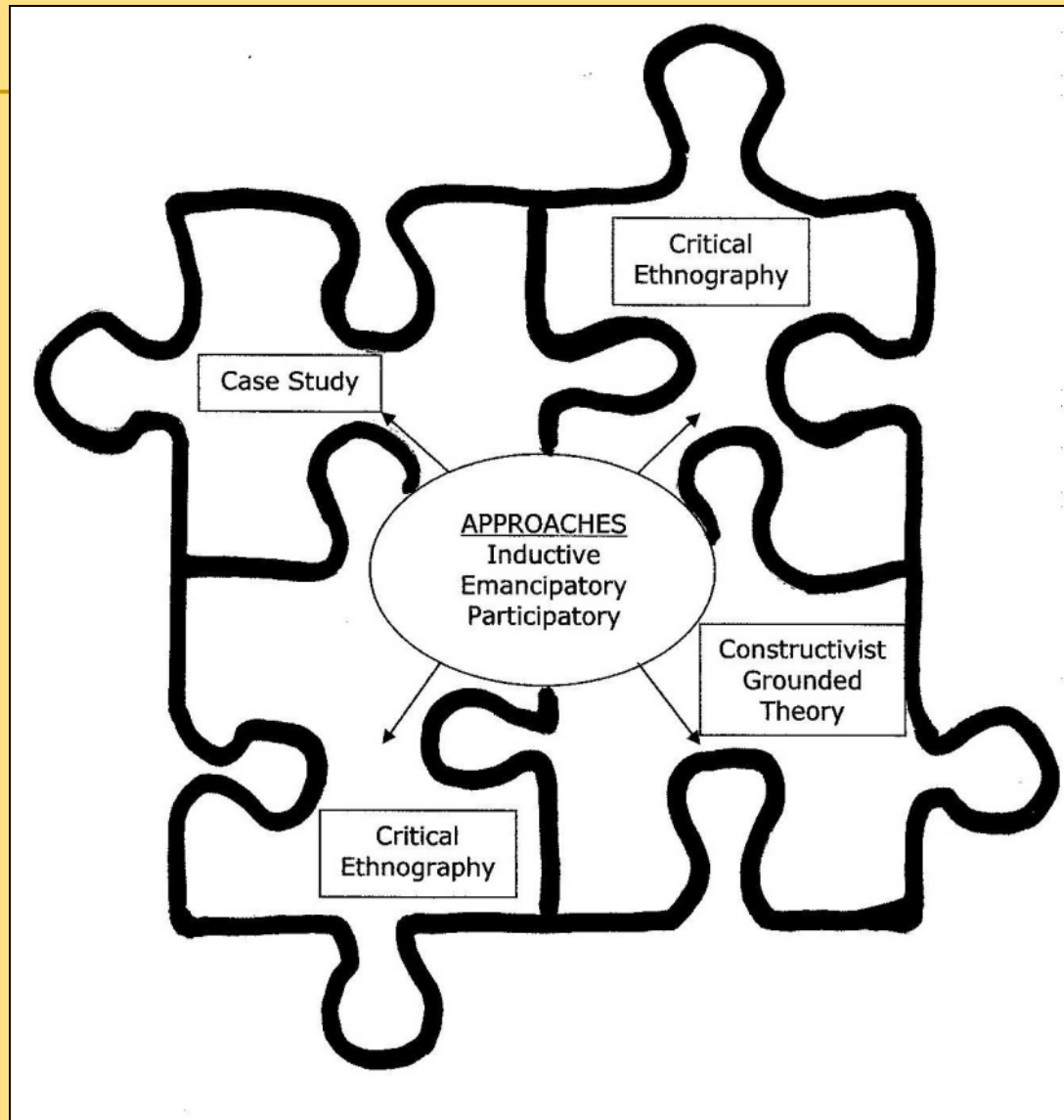## Assumptions (Hatch, 1995)

- 'Children are excluded by tradition, authority and dependency, first from the adult world (James *et al.*, 1998; Qvortrup, 1994), and then from the even more rarefied worlds of academia and policymaking' (Redmond, 2008:9)

- The 'academy' privileges certain protocols and retains power;

- Children may engage in research (Punch, 2002)

- Children's engagements and communication may be different from – not inferior to - those of adults (Shevlin and Rose, 2003)

- Children are competent social actors whose capabilities are only limited by their 'functionings': 'the various things a person may value doing or being' (James *et al.*, 1998; Sen 1999:75)

- Children have the right to be respected as persons (OHCHR, 1989)

- Children's perspectives are not less important than adults'.

Plural Paradigms

Figure 1

Interpretivism

Post-structuralism

Postpositivism

Critical research

Constructivism

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Jigsaw Methodology

What did we do?
Phase I: What is the nature of research?

Table 1- An overview of Phase I participants				
Phase I Method	**Pilot survey**	**Survey**	**Interviews**	**Focus Group**
Perspectives sought from…	2 PEYERs (Professors)	20 PEYERs	9 PEYERs	5 PEYERs
Location	2 universities	2 universities	1 university 1 participant home	1 university
Sampling type	Initial sampling (Charmaz, 2006) Purposive (Robson, 1993) 1 x educational research 1 x ECEC research	Initial sampling (Charmaz, 2006) Purposive and convenience (Robson, 1993) Educational and ECEC research	Theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006) Purposive and convenience (Robson, 1993) All educational research	Theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006) Purposive and convenience (Robson, 1993) All ECEC research
Selected because…	Highly knowledgeable and experienced regarding epistemological issues and English research in fields of education and ECEC. Willing to give time.	Knowledgeable and experienced regarding epistemological issues and English research in field of education. Willing to give time.	Knowledgeable and experienced regarding epistemological issues and English research in field of education. Willing to give time.	Knowledgeable and experienced regarding epistemological issues and English research in field of ECEC. Willing to give time.

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Phase II – Children's Enquiries: Multiple Methods

Table 1: Stage 2 participants	
Ash Setting	Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=32) and their practitioners (n=2).
Beech Setting	4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=46) in an ECEC unit and their practitioners (n=7).
Cherry Setting	4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an ECEC unit and their practitioners (n=6).

Table 2: Multi-modal approach to collecting data (Clark and Moss, 2011)	Documents (e.g. planning, school prospectus)	Practitioners' Analysis sheets
Parent Analysis sheets	Live Observations	Interview conversations
Children's Artefacts	Child Analysis sheets	Focus Groups
Photographs	Video observations	Field notes

Phase III – Children's Enquiries: Multiple Methods

Table 4: Stage 3 'Home' Focus Children	Ash Setting		Beech Setting		Cherry Setting
Pseudonym	Annie	Billy	Gemma	Harry	Martin
Gender	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Boy
Age during home fieldwork	8 years	8 years	5 years	5 years	5 years
Living with	Mother (MTHR-A) Father (FTHR-A)	Mother (MTHR-B) Father (FTHR-B) Sister (SIS-B) – aged 9 yrs	Mother (MTHR-C) Father (FTHR-C) Brother (BRO-C) – aged 8 yrs	Mother (MTHR-D) Father (French) (FTHR-D) Brother (BRO-D) – aged 4 yrs	Mother (MTHR-E) Father (FTHR-E) Sister (SIS-B) – aged 4 yrs

Table 18: Phase III Multi-modal Methods (Clark and Moss, 2001; 2011)		Interview Conversations
Observations	Focus Groups	Informal discussions
Field notes	Children's artefacts	Photographs
Video recordings	Audio recordings	Research Behaviour Framework (RBF) Analysis Sheets

Analysis, meta-analysis and interpretations

Table 5: The Recursive Process of Analysis and Interpretation					
Transcribe data and apply numerical codes					
Constructivist Grounded Theory **(Charmaz, 2006)**		**Critical Ethnography**		**Mosaic Approach** **(Clark and Moss, 2001)**	**Case Study** **(Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2012)**
		(Carspecken, 1996)	**Thomas (1993)**		
Constant comparison	Early Memo-writing	Preliminary reconstructive analysis	Repeated thinking	Child conferencing / listening	Analytic statements
	Initial coding	Reconstructive analysis / Dialogic data generation			
	Focused coding	Dialogic data generation		Listening	
	Developing categories	Discovering system relations			
	Axial coding	Discovering system relations			
	Advanced memo-writing	Reconstructive analysis			
	Theoretical coding	Discovering system relations			
		Using system relations to explain findings			

How were children empowered as researchers? The Utility of critical ethnography

- Translation of assumptions into implementation through inductive, participatory and emancipatory principles / approaches.

- The methodology's form matched its function

- The methodology developed throughout the study in response to emerging data

Double Strand:

- 1) The study captured and explored young children's own authentic naturalistic research as part of their everyday lives

- 2) The methodology encouraged young children, practitioners, parents and academics to collaborate actively and authentically in democratic research.

How was critical ethnography (CE) useful in empowering young children as researchers?

- CE shaped the study as a model of 'social and cultural criticism' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994: 139)

- CE retained critical focus on the assumptions and principles underpinning the study

- CE provided a direction of travel towards 'fully democratic research' (Carspecken, 1996:207).

- CE fit effectively with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as well as other methods in the jigsaw

- CE's concern with lived experiences provided a therefore trustworthy 'plausible account'

- CE allowed children's '100 languages' to be captured authentically

- Adults respected children: 'Practitioner H: '...*now that you've come in… there has kind of opened a door thinking "Oh, could children be researchers?"'*

Final considerations

- Exploring children's abilities to do research is not just a matter of observing and detailing what children do in relation to their developing cognitive abilities.

- Rather, it also touches on issues of power and control in determining what doing research means and consequently determining the rules by which what children say is justified and worthy of being recognised as valid and authoritative.

- In this research context, young children's engagements in research behaviours that are regarded 'most important' by the academy were established in ways that suggest their forms of knowledge construction are valid and their voices authoritative.

- Whether or not established academy members elect to recognize those young children's research behaviours have parity with their own will be the subject for a new study.