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Exploring the use of emoji as a visual research method for eliciting young children's voices in childhood research

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Introduction
Childhood researchers are increasingly advocating for a move from research on children to research with children – research where children's experiences and understandings are sought and valued (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2008). Recognition of the value of research with children in childhood research has resulted in substantial interest in child-centred research paradigms which place children's views and experiences centre stage. This interest has also resulted in considerable debate on the merits and methodological challenges of these approaches (Clark, 2011; Fraser, 2004; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Despite widespread recognition that children's active participation in the research process is essential, the 'how to' remains far from straightforward. The 'how to' remains even less straightforward for young children (aged 0–5 years) who are largely excluded from research with by traditions privileging the written word in social research (Chaplin, 1994; Harrison, 2004; Klerfelt, 2007). Young children have been largely excluded from research due to their positioning as 'pre-literate' via traditional definitions of literacy which largely restrict its conceptualization to the ability to read and write (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore, & Fowler, 2012; Justice, Skibbe, & Canning, 2005). As a result, childhood researchers are debating methodological considerations and innovative methods which move from framing young children as pre-literate 'becomings' with limited capacity to participate, to 'beings' imbued with innate capacity as experts of their own lived experiences (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Pyle & Danniels, 2015).
Due to their potential to move beyond reliance on reading and writing within the research process, visual research methods (such as drawing, photographs, video observations, modelling clay, puppets, and manipulatives) have become widely used in child-centred research with young children (Clark, 2011; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Lomax, 2012). It is important to test the assumption that visual methods are a natural or best method for engaging young children with the research process (Christensen & James, 2008; Punch, 2002), even though the highly participatory and practical nature of visual methods seems to indicate their use with young children in child-centred research designs (Cook & Hess, 2007; Gray & Winter, 2011; Harcourt, 2011).
Visual methods may be seen to mimic activities children may do in the home or early childhood education and care settings (i.e. drawing, photography, and using clay). However, there is a tradition of visual methods from the sub-discipline of visual sociology: the study of visible domains in social life, including the visual languages and sign systems through which we communicate (Emmison & Smith, 2000). One of the core tenets of visual sociology asserts that the habitual activities of social life reveal what may be hidden or taken for granted in the inner mechanisms of ordinary life (Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). As technology and media become an increasing part of young children's everyday experiences and lifeworlds, they offer a potentially fruitful avenue for the examination of how methodology can react or respond to technological and social change. This

article investigates the use of emoji, a media-based visual material, as a visual research method for researching with young children, evaluating its use as a tool to position young children as the 'knowers' and 'framers' of knowledge within childhood research.

Children's voices: missing perspectives in childhood research

According to Thomson (2009), two fundamental beliefs about children form the notion of child voice and its place in research and knowledge-making about children and their lifeworlds. These two beliefs are children's capacity to speak and their right to do so. Children's right to speak and be heard is recognized internationally by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). The two fundamental beliefs forming the concept of child voice, as outlined by Thomson (2009), are enshrined in the UNCRC under articles 12 and 13. Article 12 speaks explicitly to children's capacity to form their own views, express them freely, and have them carry weight in matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989). UNICEF (2014) has published guiding principles to support the interpretation of article 12, stating that

Children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account … [and] encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making. (http://www.unicef. org/crc/index_30177.html)

UNICEF's guiding principle in relation to article 12 is an important consideration for child research as it recognizes children's perspectives as distinct from those of adults (Cook & Hess, 2007). This distinction asserts that children are innately imbued with the capacity to share their knowledge and under- standings about childhood, by virtue of being children. From this standpoint, the onus is on the researcher to recognize, understand, and generate knowledge with children who have experiential knowledge distinct from that of adults. Pursuant to article 12, article 13 states that children have the right to freedom of expression including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds … either orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (United Nations, 1989)

If research continues to privilege the written word over the visual, young children, whose capacities often do not include the construction or representation of meaning using the written word, will remain excluded. On the contrary, visual research methods which expand upon narrowly defined concepts of literacy and communication can offer young children multiple ways of imparting information and ideas, and may also facilitate their ability to choose and decide how they want to be heard.

If visual methods are to support young children's participation within the research process, they must contribute more than just another 'child-friendly' method. Visual methods should be examined for their capacity to both position young children as rights holders (Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011), and acknowledge that they are able to provide valuable insight throughout the research process. The simultaneous commitment to process and outcomes in a rights-based approach proffers two essential considerations for child-centred research. The first is the insistence that the processes themselves should respect and fulfil human rights (Sengupta, 2000), meaning that until young children have been given the chance to participate and have their needs and rights met, young children's voices are not being heard. The second is that a rights-based approach can allow for redefinition of the nature of a problem or question under investigation from the view of the participants (Uvin, 2007), allowing the participants themselves to contribute to the way that aspects of childhood and childhood itself are defined and problematized.

Visual sociology and visual research methods

The sub-discipline of visual sociology developed as a cognate to visual anthropology in the 1960s,

building on the seminal work of Bateson and Mead (1942), Balinese character: A photographic analysis (Harper, 2012; Pink, 2003, 2006). While both traditions have focused largely on photographs, the study of the visual across disciplines does include other forms of visuals such as film/video, documentaries, and semiotics (sign/symbol systems) (Emmison & Smith, 2000; Harper, 2012; Harrison, 2002), in response to the ubiquitous, complex, and evolving use of visual materials in societies. As cogently expressed by Pauwels (2010), visual sociology is 'grounded in the idea that valid scientific insight   can be acquired by observing, analysing, and theorizing its visual manifestations' (p. 546), and that visual manifestations can be used in a variety of research designs to increase our knowledge of social actors and the social world.

Visual materials and their use in social science research have been defined in a variety of ways. Chaplin's (1994, p. 8) work defines two approaches to working with the visual in social science. The first is to take existing visual artefacts and investigate their production, use, and interpretation. The second is to manufacture visual artefacts as part of the process of doing research. Drew and Guillemin (2014) offer another way of classifying visual approaches which focuses not only on the product, but also on who produces the visual material. They define two approaches: the first is classified as researcher-generated visual methods, where a pre-existing image is provided and asks for participants for their interpretation of the image; and the second is participant-generated visual methods, where the participant provides the image and, depending on the design, their interpretation as well. The use of pre-existing societal images and visual artefacts is what Pauses (2010) names 'found' materials. Found materials are visual materials not created or produced with a researcher's purpose in mind. Yet, to the extent of their purposeful selection, 'they become capable of providing valid answers to specific research questions' (Pauwels, 2010, p. 567). This approach, however, relies heavily on the knowledge and ability of the informants (participants) to conceptualize the visuals presented (Pauwels, 2010). As such, the purposeful selection of visual materials for use as visual research methods requires thought to how the visual material will be interpreted. Rose (2012, p. 5) refers to this process as audiencing, building from the concept identified by Fiske (1994, p. 190), a process through which a 'visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances'. As the interpretation of the visual materials relies heavily on the participant's process of audiencing, the use of visual methods supports the positioning of young children as the knowers and framers of knowledge who are capable and necessary contributors in childhood research.

Emoji as a visual research method
Visual research has a strong link with technology and new technologies can contribute to and inform our knowledge about social worlds and actors (Cipriani & Del Re, 2012). Emerging technologies have the potential to produce 'new, innovative, reflexive, and theoretically informed' research (Pink, 2003, p. 191), through their ability to accommodate different audiences and purposes. However, purposeful selection of visual materials requires careful attention to the visual material's likely impact on the intended audience (Jewitt & Van Leeuwen, 2001). As the exploration and engagement with technologies and digital literacies become increasingly commonplace in early education and care environments, these literacies, known as multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), offer fertile grounds for new visual methods for research with young children. The concept of multiliteracies extends traditional concepts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to include symbols, icons, logos, and multiple sign systems such as video clips (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2006). Semiotic theory, or the study of signs, acknowledges that symbols are visual sign systems through which reality is represented and meaning is made. Contemporary sign symbols found in electronic and digital mediums may be relatively new, but their roles and use in conveying knowledge are indeed the oldest form of literacy (Chandler, 2007). Emoji are a type of graphic

symbol, originating from Japan, which express concepts and ideas pervasively used in mobile communication and social media (Novak, Smailović, Sluban, & Mozetič, 2015). Emoji are the descendent of the emoticon, a shorthand form of a facial expression created using a standard keyboard, for example, :-). Rather than keyboard shorthand, an emoji is an ideogram which can be used to represent a facial expression, but has been more widely co-opted to represent feelings, gestures, objects, animals, food and drink, and activities (Novak et al., 2015). The increased focus on multiliteracies and technology within curriculum and designs for learning in early childhood education (Marsh, 2005) supports the use of emoji as a research method for engaging young children in how they understand and make meaning of their world, and may offer both a practical and an insightful approach to eliciting young children's voices in childhood research.

The present study
This paper reports on the first stage of a research project which seeks to investigate young children's experiences of well-being as they transition from early learning/preschool environments to formal schooling. The research project stems from the findings of a systematic review of young children's well-being during the transition to school (Fane, MacDougall, Redmond, Jovanovic, & Ward, 2016), in which a key identified finding was that current conceptualizations of young children's well-being are almost exclusively derived from adult perspectives. This first stage tests the potential of using emoji as a visual research method to investigate how young children understand and experience well-being. The aim of the paper is twofold. The first is to explore the utility and capacity of emoji as a visual research method for eliciting young children's experiences and understandings of their own well-being. The second is to investigate the potential of emoji as both an additional method for researchers conducting child-centred research, and as an opportunity for young children to exercise further choice in the ways they can express themselves within the research process and matters that affect them as outlined in Article 13 of the UNCRC. This study takes a rights-based approach, positioning young children as experts in their own experiences and lifeworlds (Lundy et al., 2011) to investigate how they use their understandings and experiences to define well-being.

Participants
Participants were 78 children (49 boys and 29 girls) aged 3–5 years across 8 long day-care centres in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. The eight centres were chosen to represent a theoretical sample of the diversity of South Australian early childhood education and care services for pre-school-aged children in relation to socio-economic status (Australian Government Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2012) and site type (i.e. standalone long day-care centre or integrated long day-care centre and primary school). Regardless of service type, all early childhood education and care services in Australia are governed by the same regulating body, the Australian Children's Edu- cation and Care Quality Authority; follow the same curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework; and are expected to meet the same national requirements, Education and Care Services National Law, and the Education and Care Services National Regulations (Jovanovic & Fane, 2016).

Ethics
Ethical research with young children is facilitated by a multistep procedure for ensuring that both the research design and protocols are suitable, reasonable, and prioritize the safety and security of child participants. This study's research ethics protocol was as follows. First, ethics approval for the study was sought and granted by the Social and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee at the lead researcher's university. Second, written permission to conduct research was obtained from the centre director of each participating site. Third, all parents of three- to five-year-old children attending each of the eight sites were given written information about the study and asked to sign a

consent form if they gave permission for their child to participate in the group child interview which was audio recorded. Lastly, on the day of the third visit (when data for this study were collected), children whose parents had signed a permission form were asked to give their assent to participate and have their ideas recorded. When the researcher asked for children's assent, they clearly explained what the research activity would entail, and took into account both verbal and non-verbal cues to ensure children had the opportunity to give their assent (or not) in a variety of ways (Klerfelt, 2007; Taylor, 2014), and had any questions about the process answered.

Procedure

Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2015) assert that if the aim of a study is to understand the views and experiences of young children, mutual relationships must develop that prize child knowledge and create sensitivity, proximity, and analytic distance from the phenomena under study. In this study, the research design endeavored to create sensitivity and proximity to build mutual trust and respect through repeated interactions with all child participants during multiple site visits. The first site visit entailed meeting with the long day-care centre director and staff, and touring the centre to familiarize the researcher with the centre layout, age grouping, routines, and centre foci/priority areas. During the second visit, the researcher led a group activity with assenting children which involved brainstorming, identifying, and acting out different types of feelings using drama, songs, and manipulatives (large hula hoops and cut-outs of eyes, mouths, tears, and tongues) to create large emoji faces. While relationship building was an important focus of the second visit, another equally important focus was the researcher's purposeful positioning of children as the experts and the researcher as the learner. This was done through the open-ended use of songs, drama, and manipulatives, rather than telling children what the researcher wanted to know, or what the research study was about. The third visit, and the focus of this paper, entailed the use of emoji as a visual research method in 13 focus groups across 8 early learning and care services.

In this study, each of the 13 focus groups contained a researcher and 4–9 children, with most having 6–7 (8 of the 13). The number of participants per group depended on the number of pre- school children at each site who had parental consent and assented to participate. Larger sites had two to three focus groups per site. The length of the focus groups varied from 12 to 21 minutes, dependent on children's participation, comfort, and interest. During the focus groups, the children and researcher were seated on the floor in a circle in either a quiet corner of the pre- school room, or a separate quiet space within the site. Some focus groups had an early childhood educator join the focus group, dependent on the site's preference or children's preference/needs. All focus groups were audio recorded and detailed field notes were recorded by the researcher at the end of each interview.

The physical positioning of the researcher on the same plane as the child participants (the floor) within the children's space was intentional, as was the use of emoji to elicit children's ideas and experiences without the need to use leading questions, or structured/semi-structured interview techniques. This was done to avoid providing the children with implicit or explicit instructions or ideas about what the researcher 'wanted' during the interviews. This positioning was enacted both through physical space and methodological tools, and through explicit statements by the researcher which stated that adults need children to explain to them what children know about feel- ins and emotions, and that these important ideas will be used to teach adults. Together, these elements worked towards challenging and dismantling the hierarchical arrangements that elevate the views and understandings of adults over children, and acknowledge and position the child participants as authoritative sources of knowledge (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2009).

The use of emoji in this study was adapted from a project by the Jack Brockhoff Childhood Health and Wellbeing Program at the University of Melbourne, which sought to understand what primary

school-aged children felt was important to their lifeworld. The project used a variety of data collection methods and prompts including emoji faces printed on A4 laminated sheets to allow children to handle them and select their choice. In this study, emoji were used as the sole data collection tool, and were modified for use with young children by enlarging them to 10 cm by 10 cm, cutting them out individually, and laminating them so they could be manipulated by children. Triplicates of each emoji were used within focus group interviews so that multiple children could choose the same emoji if they wanted, facilitating children's engagement with their picture of choice. The researcher began by giving child participants five different emoji representing feelings through facial expressions (emoji 1–5 in Figure 2). Children were first asked to identify the feeling or emotion being portrayed by the five faces. Next, children were asked to pick one of the emoji, and tell a story about why someone might feel that way. The idea of storytelling was used to give children opportunities to share a personal feeling without having to identify themselves as the person feeling the emotion, or to be able to try out or express new ideas. Once children had shared all the ideas they wanted with the researcher, the researcher gave each focus group 13 other emoji pictures, chosen to represent common objects, environments, activities, or iconography that young children would be familiar with (emoji 6–18 in Figure 2). Once child participants had the opportunity to explore the new emoji, they were asked to pick one and tell a story about the one they chose. The researcher engaged with every child's response throughout the interview, asking clarifying questions if the response was not understood by the researcher, and repeating the child's idea or story back to ensure the researcher had correctly understood. The focus groups were concluded once all child participants had finished telling the researcher what they wanted to share. All focus groups were audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and included additional con- textual information from field notes recorded by the researcher.

Analysis

A directed content analysis, an approach to qualitative content analysis deriving from relevant theory or research findings within the greater literature of the phenomena under study, was used in this process. The strength of a directed content analysis approach is its ability to validate or extend conceptually current theoretical ideas or frameworks (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A directed content analysis offered a valuable approach to investigating how the child participants viewed and experienced well-being. During this initial coding phase, data that could not be coded using one of the predetermined codes were identified with a descriptive code to be analysed later, to determine if it represents a new category, or a subcategory of an existing code (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data which did not fit within these existing six codes and identified with descriptive codes were then re-analysed and coded in a secondary round. This secondary round resulted in the further refinement of the descriptive codes into two additional categories.

Even within the study's use of a rights-based approach which sought to uphold young children's rights to participation and being heard within process and issues that affect them, analysis of the data required the researcher to interpret the knowledge shared by the participants. As such, it must be recognized that researchers and other professionals who work with young children use conceptual tools and discourses available to us as adults when interacting with, responding to, and making meaning of what children share with us – tools and discourses which differ from those of children (Fleer, 2006). However, several measures were taken to determine if the interpretation of the knower's knowledge was trustworthy and demonstrated the four tenets of trustworthiness outlined by Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness of the data was measured through two processes. The first was independent coding of the transcripts by a transdisciplinary research team working in childhood research in the disciplines of education, public health, and social policy who have all contributed as authors to this

paper. The second was through sharing and discussing the findings with three- to five-year-old children at the eight participating sites. This process was facilitated by organizing the findings into a story book format which was read to the children and asking for feedback and clarification as to whether the ideas in the book represented their experiences and/or understandings, and if anything was missing. Through these two processes, it was determined that the findings were trustworthy, from a child, adult, and interdisciplinary perspective.

Findings and discussion

The use of technology and media-based symbols as a visual research method for eliciting young children's voices in child-centred research with young children has received little attention, despite the increased exposure to and usage of these symbols in young children's lifeworlds. The following section presents data from the research project to elucidate the capacity of emoji as a data collection tool for eliciting child voice and considerations for its use.

Limiting adult voices in the making of meaning and generation of knowledge

Using found visual materials for research necessitates that the researcher choose the visual material carefully with both the research question and the research participant in mind. However, as attested by Banks and Zeitlyn (2015), visual materials are not simply 'read' as if they contain an internal meaning that the viewer can 'listen to'. Instead, interpreting visual materials requires attending to both internal (the image's content) and external narratives (the social contexts and relations within which the image is embedded at any moment of viewing) (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). While the researcher selects the visual material and thus its internal narrative or content, the interpretation or external narrative rests solely with the participant. As such, when working with young children in the research study, the use of emoji permitted the introduction of the research method with very limited instructions or ideas from the researcher, limiting the influence of the researcher or the research agenda on young children's interpretation of the visual materials.

When given the five facial emoji (see Numbers 1–5 in Figure 1) and the verbal prompt 'can you tell me what feelings you see?' at the beginning of the focus groups, the children generated 24 different feelings, emotions, and ideas (see Figure 2). Figure 2 illustrates the range of responses as to what feelings were generated by the children in response to emoji 1 through 5. Of particular interest was the volume and diversity of responses for the straight-mouthed emoji (emoji 5) that children shared. This emoji (Number 5) also generated the most discussion between child participants, and, in four focus groups, generated disagreements and negotiations between children as to what feeling was being depicted. For example, the following excerpts from two separate focus groups highlight how children interpreted emoji differently and communicated their understandings to the researcher.

Focus Group 2

Researcher: [talking to Maisy1 who is holding the straight-mouth emoji] What is that feeling?

Maisy: Frustrated

Researcher: Oh frustrated, that's an interesting idea Violet: No! That's bored!

Figure 1. Emoji used in child focus groups.

Researcher: [speaking to the Violet] There are perhaps a lot of different emotions it could be, do you want to tell me a bored story in a minute? Right now I want to hear about Maisy's frustrated

story. [Turns to Maisy] When might you feel frustrated?

Maisy: When my friend got sick

Researcher: If your friend was sick. That would be frustrating. That's a really good idea, thank you. [Turns to Violet] Violet did you want to tell me a story about feeling bored?

Violet: It's angry because, I changed my mind cause … that boy pushed him, pushed him over

Researcher: Oh, somebody pushed someone, and that would make you feel angry?

Violet: Yes

Figure 2. Ideas generated by three- to five-year-old child participants using emoji as a visual research method.

Focus Group 3

Researcher: Does anyone have any ideas for what this feeling is? [Holding up the straight-faced emoji] Tom: Um straight

Researcher: The mouth is a straight mouth? Yes? [Tom nods], but how are they feeling? David: Angry

Researcher: Maybe angry? That's a good idea.

Tom: No! Not angry! Because, because it hasn't got a sad face, look, upside down is a happy face [pointing to the emoji to indicate that the angry face has a downturned mouth and the happy face has an upturned mouth]

In addition to generating the most discussion and disagreement, the straight-mouthed emoji (emoji 5)   Generated three to six times more feeling ideas than emoji 1–4 (see Figure 2). This suggests that while all the emoji allowed children opportunities to interpret the internal and external narratives of the symbols in a variety of ways with little adult/researcher input, the increased ambiguity of the symbol resulted in a greater amount of ideas, disagreement, and negotiations generated. The limited need for researcher instructions and guidance in using and encouraging children to interact with the emoji as a visual research method supported the positioning of young children as meaning makers and knowledge generators through the limiting of adult voices within the research process.

Shifting power and control within the research process

Thomas and O'Kane (1998) assert that a core aspect of child-centred research with children is the breaking down of power imbalances that occur between adults and children in both society at large and within the research process. The process of breaking down power imbalances begins with shifting power from the researcher to the participants. This means giving children further control of the research agenda, the space and time to share what is important to them, and creating an environment in which answers are not right or wrong (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). An important question when evaluating the use of emoji as a visual research method is to analyse the ways in which the emoji and research procedure may have worked to shift power and control from research to young children. Throughout the focus groups there were many instances where children built on from ideas shared by their peers. This helped children for whom storytelling was unfamiliar as they could use language modelled by their peers and add their own ideas to it. However groupthink, or the phenomenon where participants are reluctant to disagree or criticize their peers ideas, can be a

concern as this can lead to 'group- think trap' where only the dominant voices are heard (Van Mechelen, Gielen, Laenen, & Zaman, 2014). Divergent views, where participants freely express disagreement with what their peers have shared, can add a wealth of information and knowledge to the phenomena understudy and allow for a wider range of voices and ideas to be heard. Two examples of divergent views within focus groups are included below to illustrate how differing voices were heard and negotiated within focus groups.

Focus Group 7

Researcher: Which one did you pick Natalie? What feeling could that be? Caleb: Shy
Natalie:… ..Shy
Researcher: Interesting idea. Does anyone have an idea why somebody might feel shy? Or when you might feel shy?
Kyle: Umm, Santa. We would be shy if Santa Researcher: You might be shy? Or if you met Santa
Kyle: You'd be shy to meet Santa
Researcher: Interesting ideas, does anyone else have an idea about when someone might feel shy? Carter: I never!
Researcher: No, you've never felt shy Carter? [Carter nods] Anyone else? Chase: Excuse me, I never felt shy on Santa
Researcher: You've never felt shy with Santa Chase [Chase nods]? Lots of different ideas.
Anthony: I never be shy at all

Focus Group 11

Researcher: Simon, which emoji did you pick? Simon: Sad face
Researcher: Sad face. Can you tell me a story about someone feeling sad? [no response] Do you want to think about it? [Billy nods] Yeah. Can anyone think of a sad story?
Andrew: Um, a sad, um when, um, when the happy friend went out with his mum and dad and he went the wrong way and he didn't know where his mum was, or dad was, or brother, and he was lost. And he was so sad.
Olivia: I got, I got lost at the shop but I didn't worry about it, I looked around to see if I could find a mummy and daddy and I did find mummy.
Connor:You should ask … you should at the shopping
Olivia: I didn't get to ask it cause lots of people were in the way at the shopping
Connor:Um, you should ask the shopping man and you can say, um 'where's my mum or dad gone', and then he will say 'it's gone that way'
Researcher: Ah, so you could ask a grown up you could trust for help? To help you find your mum or dad Connor: Yep
Olivia: I didn't do that
Researcher: You were able to find your mum all on your own? Olivia:Yeah

In both focus groups 7 and 11, multiple children interjected differing ideas and understandings of the feeling being discussed, and how they would experience or negotiate meeting a new person or navigate a difficult situation such as being lost. The presence of divergent views in the focus groups suggested that the use of emoji not only moderated the researcher's input, but also promoted the idea that there are no right or wrong answers, and that all ideas children shared were important   to the research process.

Empowering young children to take an active role in the research process requires that their voices are heard and interpreted correctly by the researcher. The researcher used a 'check back'

mechanism of reiterating what each child said to ensure that the idea was understood correctly. While it is evident in the below excerpts that the researcher did not always get it right in the first instance, children's willingness to correct the researcher suggests that they felt confident in asserting their role as equal partners in the research process and taking control of how their voices were heard and understood.

Focus Group 10

Researcher: [Observes Jonas pretending to push buttons on the phone/table emoji (emoji11) after another child spoke about ringing family on the phone] Jonas, are you ringing someone on your phone?
Jonas: No I'm playing on my ipad
Researcher: Oh you're playing on your phone, my mistake. What are you playing?

Focus Group 7

Researcher: Can you tell me a story about the picture you're holding Carter [emoji 18]/ Carter: It's a paw print
Imran: I've got a dog
Researcher: It's a paw print, or maybe a dog print?
Carter: At the car park and the bitumen I saw some, I saw a few footprints
Researcher: [misunderstanding the word bitumen for beach] Oh on the beach when people walk on the beach they leave footprints?
Carter: No! On the car park!
Researcher: Oh, on the car park, thank you for helping me to understand. Can you tell me a story about the paw prints? Could you use one of the feeling emoji in the story?

In addition to correcting the researcher when an idea was not understood, children also corrected the researcher to ensure that elements of their stories or ideas were understood and repeated back to them with the correct emphasis. While the researcher understood the children's main ideas below, both Maddie and Ali continued to express the key elements of their story so that the researcher fully understood the important ideas and information.

Focus Group 12
Researcher: Maddie, what emoji did you pick? Maddie: Um, sad
Researcher: Sad. Can you think of a reason someone might be feeling sad? Maddie: Because, um, somebody did something wrong with their toys. Researcher: Oh, like what?
Maddie: Um, like wrecked it.
Researcher: Oh, if somebody wrecked their toy, they might be feeling sad? Maddie: And when they just bought it
Researcher: Ah, so it was a brand new toy and somebody wrecked it? Maddie: Just when they bought it

Focus Group 6
Researcher: Which emoji did you pick Ali? Ali: Angry
Researcher: Angry. Can you tell me a story about when someone might feel angry? Ali: When the monster came, I feel strong! And then, I just hit the monster! Researcher: So if a monster came you would be angry?
Ali: And then I just hit the monster

In addition to encouraging divergent views and supporting participants to correct the researcher if their ideas and stories were not understood correctly, the emoij also imbued children with the

confidence to take control of the research procedure and, in some instances, dictate how they would like to participate even if it differed from the researcher's prompts. To encourage children to work with a variety of emoji to generate a wide discussion about feelings and being well, the researcher asked children at several points during the focus groups to return the emoji they had selected previously for a different one for the next prompt (i.e. can you tell me a story about). Despite this prompt, however, Ciara exerted control over the procedure by retaining the same emoji as she had a specific story she wanted to tell about it.

Focus Group 11

Researcher: What fantastic ideas everyone. Ok, this time, I would like you to pick up a different face and see if you can think of a story that goes with that face. Who can tell me a story about their face? Ciara, what face did you pick?

Ciara: I didn't pick another one cause I had the bestest story ever

Ciara exerted control in this situation to ensure that what she felt was important and meaningful to her experiences and understanding was heard, and in doing so contributed to the phenomenon under study, but on her own terms.

Other children also asserted control over their contributions, but not always to contribute to the research process. In the below excerpt, Hazel asserts control by responding to the researcher prompt with an answer that would elicit laughter from her peers rather than contribute to knowledge about feelings or feeling well.

Focus Group 5

Researcher: Hazel, which emoji have you picked? Hazel: The sad face is inside my belly [giggling]

Researcher: Ok, and what else are you holding? What's this a picture of [referring to the emoji Hazel is holding]? Hazel:Paint [emoji 10]

Researcher: Paint. Can you tell me a story of how someone might feel when painting? Hazel: Ah, happy.

Researcher: Someone might feel happy? Hazel: No, no angry!

Researcher: Why would someone feel angry painting?

Hazel: Um, cause I'm putting my hands in the whole entire pot. Researcher: You might feel angry if your fingers were messy from the paint?

Hazel: And then I, but I feel silly and I also feel happy and I also well I just stick my head down the toilet.

Here Hazel demonstrated her agency, defined by Deacon and Mann (1999, p. 413) as 'actions, activities, decisions and behaviors that represent some measure of meaningful choice' within the research process to exert control within the confines of the focus group. While Hazel's above contribution may not have been relevant to the phenomenon under study, her willingness and ability to exercise control and agency, alongside the multitude of divergent participant views and participant willingness to correct the researcher within the research process, elucidate that there were shifts of power between the researcher and children.

Emoji as choice, opportunities, and capacity

All 78 children who participated in the focus groups were willing to pick up an emoji of their choice at the researcher's request. The vast majority of children readily gave verbal responses to the researcher prompts or engaged in conversation and discussion with their peers about the emoji and the feelings and stories being shared. Instead of or in addition to using verbal language, children used a variety of communication techniques including body language, noises/sounds, matching

pictures together, and pairing pictures with their friends/peers. For children who were cautious about participating verbally, or had limited spoken English language abilities, the emoji offered a variety of ways for children to engage in the research process once they felt comfortable or had the language/vocabulary to express their ideas. The excerpt below is an example of how Ling, a child who is learning English as an additional language or dialect (EALD), negotiated her participation in the research process using the emoji and a variety of non-verbal and verbal responses.

Focus Group 6

Researcher: Can everyone pick up an emoji? [all children in the focus group select an emoji] Ling, which one did you pick? Which feeling is that?

Emilio: Angry! Angry!

Ling: [no verbal response]

Researcher: That's an interesting idea Emilio. [speaking to Ling] Could this be an angry face? [Ling nods] Multiple voices: Angry!

Researcher: Ling do you have a story you'd like to share about why someone might feel angry?

Oscar: Cause someone called him silly

Researcher: Oh that's a good idea Oscar, but I'm wondering is Ling has an idea. Do you have a story you'd like to share? [Ling doesn't respond]. Should I come back and ask after? [Ling nods] Thanks Ling, I'll come back to you later to see if you want to share any ideas.

[Later on in the focus group]

Researcher: Who else would like to share an idea or story? Ling, would you like to tell me about the one you're holding?

Ling: Heart, that's heart [emoji 8]

Researcher: A heart. Thanks Ling. Would you like to tell me a story about the heart or how it might make someone feel?

Ling: [shakes head] Researcher: Thanks Ling

Ling was eager to select an emoji and share her choice with her friends. She also readily responded to questions using non-verbal cues in the beginning of the focus group. The emoji offered a variety of ways for her to participate and share her ideas and feelings with her peers and the researcher without the need to communicate verbally. As EALD speakers commonly experience being excluded from the research process (Frayne, Burns, Hardt, Rosen, & Moskowitz, 1996), children (who as a group have also been largely excluded from research) who are EALD speakers are likely to be even further silenced. However, later on in the focus group, after watching and listening to her peers respond, Ling did respond verbally to identify the emoji she had chosen. Ling was visibly proud of her verbal contribution to the group, and when another child chose the same emoji afterwards, she indicated that they were the same while repeating 'that's heart'. The emoji were used in a variety of ways by Ling and other children to convey children's ideas and the images' importance to them, presenting opportunities for children to engage in the research process in the ways they wanted and/or were able to.

Several children seemed challenged by the concept of telling a story about a feeling, especially for the more ambiguous emoji, and often waited to let another child go first to tell a story about a particular emoji and use the previous example to build from. Marcus, however, who is a child with special needs, actively participated in the beginning of the focus group but, when prompted to tell a story, would instead reidentify the emoji he had chosen, even after several other children had modelled storytelling. Recent years have seen an increasing involvement of young children involved within the research process; yet, they have often been relegated to or have occupied passive roles, with their participation being largely tokenistic (Gray & Winter, 2011; Shier, 2001). Marcus' engagement with the emoji, however, was far from passive. Despite the initial challenges for Marcus in moving past the description to storytelling, by the end of the focus group, Marcus was able to

communicate an example of how he might feel and offer a significant insight into how he conceptualizes feeling well.

Focus Group 9

Researcher: Great ideas, everyone. Marcus, can you tell me a story about this one? Why somebody might feel happy or silly?

Marcus: Silly

Researcher: Can you tell me a story about why someone might feel silly? Marcus: There's a silly one and an angry

Researcher: Interesting ideas, they're showing different feelings. Thanks Marcus, I really appreciate your ideas. Marcus: I want this one [referring to emoji Number 4]

Researcher: You'd like to hold that one? Marcus: Yeah

Researcher: Ok, you hold onto that one, and I'll come back to you to see if you'd like to tell me a story about that feeling.

[Later on in the focus group]

Researcher: Reid, can you tell me a story about feeling sad? Reid: This week

Researcher: Did you feel sad this week? Can you tell me what made you feel sad? Marcus: I've been sad

Lee: A creature bite you

Researcher: Lots of interesting ideas … [interrupted by Marcus] Marcus: I've been sad!

Researcher: I want to hear your ideas in a minute Marcus, but I'd like to let Reid finish his story? Reid when did you feel sad?

Reid: Someone hit me

Researcher: You would feel sad if someone hit you? That would make me feel sad too, thanks for sharing Reid.

Marcus, did you want to tell me your story about when you felt sad?

Marcus: I missing my mum

Researcher: [didn't quite understand what Marcus said] When you were with your mum?

Marcus: I tell me mum

Researcher: You would tell your mum if you are feeling sad? That's an excellent idea. What would your mum do if you tell her you're feeling sad?

Marcus: And gives me medicine

Researcher: She gives you medicine? If you are sick? Marcus: Yes

During the focus group, children were prompted on a number of occasions to pick an emoji, describe their choice, and tell a story. The extract above shows how this supported Marcus to move from a description of the emoji and connect to his own experiences and feelings. In this way, the repeated, yet open-ended nature of the emoji and the focus group procedure allowed opportunities for participation for both children who were easily able to communicate their ideas and stories verbally, and children who required further support and modelling from peers, such as Ling and Marcus, to be active participants in the research process.

Conclusion

The findings of this study give evidence for the utility of emoji as a visual research method for eliciting young children's voice within childhood research, and as a promising method for child-

centred research with young children. Authentically capturing children's voices requires both the ontological positioning of children as having the right to be heard and having their opinions taken into account, and their innate capacity to generate and share meaning, knowledge, and experiences about their lifeworlds distinct from adult knowledge and understanding. Children's engagement within the research process in this study indicated that the use of emoji as a visual research method did work to shift hierarchical power balances between the researcher and children and leave space for children to determine what was important for the researcher to know, and enact control over their participation in the research process. Emoji as a visual research method offered a vehicle for limiting adult input and bias about children's experiences and understandings of feelings and feeling well, providing opportunities for young children to express their understanding and interpretations of feelings or everyday objects or events. In this way, the use of emoji as a visual research method suggests its capacity for use within research framed from a rights-based approach due to the ability of emoji to allow children to define or redefine the concept, problem, or question under investigation. These processes powerfully contributed to the positioning of children as the knower and framer of knowledge within the research process. It is important to acknowledge that visual research methods, including emoji, do not in and of themselves present solutions to complex methodological challenges of conducting research with young children. However, their use within an ontological framework that positions children as capable and necessary contributors to knowledge of childhood can promote the shift of power and control from the researcher to participants, supporting children's voices in being heard, being authentically captured, and being used to inform matters that affect them.

This study explored how young children engaged in research when the emoji method was added to a focus group. Next steps in this research are to refine the use of emoji in the focus group, and then consider how to position emoji within methodologies in a way that provides children with a choice of methods as part of a movement to transfer some power to children within the research process, consistent with Article 13 of the UNCRC.

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