

2011

## Pay Attention: Children's Understanding, Experience and Attitudes to Having a Say in Their Everyday Lives

Aileen Murphy

*Technological University Dublin, aileen.murphy@tudublin.ie*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/aaschssldis>

---

### Recommended Citation

Murphy, A. : Pay Attention: Children's understanding, experience and attitudes to having a say in their everyday lives. Masters Dissertation, Dublin, Technological University Dublin, 2011

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Sciences at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie](mailto:yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie), [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [brian.widdis@tudublin.ie](mailto:brian.widdis@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/)

Title - Pay Attention: Children's understanding, experience and attitudes to having a say in their everyday lives

Name - Aileen Murphy

## DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the **Masters in Child, Family, and Community Studies** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

*Signature of candidate:*.....

*Date:* .....

## **ABSTRACT**

Paying attention to children's participation rights has gained momentum during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study explored the views and experiences of children between 10 and 12 years in relation to 'children having a voice in matters that affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity' 10 years on from the National Children's Strategy (NCS, 2000). Focus groups were employed to carry out the research. Children in the study demonstrated a limited understanding of the concept of rights. Children in this study provided a clear message that they wish to have a voice and that they often feel that they are not listened to. Children taking part articulated the reasons why they think they should be listened to. Children identified that adults play an important role in supporting children to exercise their right to have a voice. Children's views on the reasons or factors why adults do not listen to them are interesting and unforeseen. The findings are discussed with reference to theories on childhood and children's rights, past research on children's rights and current practice. Gaps between policy and practice in recognising children's rights, adults' status as decision makers and unequal child-parent interactions may all interact to constrain children's experiences of exercising their right to a voice consistently.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank all of the children who took part in the focus groups for sharing their views and experiences. I appreciate greatly their enthusiasm and valuable insights.

I would also like to thank the principals and teachers who facilitated my research by collecting the parent consent forms, providing me with a space to carry out the research and supplying me with tea.

Lastly I would like to thank all those who have helped me including my supervisor Anne Fitzpatrick and my family and friends. While this has been a labour of love without the support of others I would not have made it to the finish line.

## CONTENTS

List of Tables	1	
List of Figures	2	
Glossary of Terms	3	
List of Abbreviations	4	
<b>1</b>	<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1	Introduction	5
1.2	Research Context	5
1.3	Research Rationale	6
1.4	Research Aims and Objectives	7
1.5	Research Limitations	8
<b>2</b>	<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	Legislative Context	9
2.3	Key Issues Concerning Children’s Rights	11
2.4	Children’s Experiences of Having a Voice in Matters that Affect Them	16
2.5	Facilitating Children’s Right to Have a Voice	18
2.6	Conclusion	20
<b>3</b>	<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1	Introduction	21
3.2	Research Objectives	21
3.3	Research Design	22
3.4	Data Collection	22
3.5	Data Analysis	26
3.6	Ethical Issues	27
<b>4</b>	<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1	Introduction	29
4.2	Sample	30
4.3	Theme One: Awareness and Understanding of Rights	31
4.4	Theme Two: Fragility of Having a Say	38
4.5	Theme Three: Adults as the Boss and the Protector	40
4.6	Theme Four: Why Adults May or May Not Listen	42
4.7	Theme Five: Reasons to Listen to Children	43
4.8	Theme Six: Advice for Adults on How to Listen Better	44
4.9	Summary	46

<b>5</b>	<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1	Introductions	47
5.2	Children’s Knowledge about Rights in Context	47
5.3	The Fragility of Children’s Right to a Voice	50
5.4	Supporting Children’s Participation Rights: Moving beyond Theory to Practice	53
5.5	Limitations	56
<b>6</b>	<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>57</b>
6.1	Conclusions	57
6.2	Recommendations	57
<b>7</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>68</b>

## **List of Tables**

Table 1	Gender break down of the children .....	37
Table2	Children's identification of Children's Rights .....	39
Table 3	Areas Children would like to have a say in.....	40



## List of Figures

Figure 1	Children’s illustrations of areas they would like to have a say in.....	42
Figure 2	Children’s illustrations of areas they would like to have a say in.....	43
Figure 3	Child asking to have say her side of the story .....	45
Figure 4	Child asking a teacher to listen.....	46
Figure 5	Child Asking Teacher for help re bullying.....	48

## Glossary of Terms

Self- Determinism Rights	Acknowledge rights to freedom of choice and expression of views
Nurturance Rights	Acknowledge rights to care and protection
Citizenship	Refers to a status of having rights and responsibilities within a certain country or geographical area
Autonomy	Is the ability to make decisions and carry out actions independently
Competencies	In the context of children's rights describes children's abilities particularly in terms of making logical decisions
Evolving Capacities	Relates to the UNCRC identification that as children grow older/develop they may require less protection and may possibly be given more autonomy

### **List of Abbreviations**

CRA	Children's Rights Alliance
CRAE	Children's Rights Alliance of England
NCS	National Children's Strategy
OMC	Office of Minister for Children
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# 1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Paying attention to children's participation rights has gained momentum during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Kellet, 2009). Participation rights sometimes referred to as self-determinism rights acknowledge children as active agents with the right to share views and shape decisions on matters that affect them in their life (Montgomery, 2010). The term '*right to have a voice or a say*' refers to children's rights to share their views and influence decisions on issues that affect them. This research aims to add to growing body of research on children's right to have a voice by focusing on children aged between 10 and 12 years experiences and views of their right to have a voice in rational to everyday situations.

By taking a qualitative approach this research provides an opportunity to gain new insights into children's views and experiences of their right to have a voice in matters affecting them (Greene, 2006). The research is timely given that National Children's Strategy (NCS) has been in existence for over 10 years and is currently being revised (<http://www.dcy.gov.ie>).

## 1.2 Research Context

Internationally and nationally children's right to voice views and contribute to decision on matters that affect them has been recognised (Hayes, 2002). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 provides an international method of recognising and promoting children's rights (Montgomery, 2010). UNCRC identifies that children have rights in terms of protection, provision, prevention and participation (UNICEF, 1989). Participation rights identified by the convention afford children with rights in terms of expressing views and taking a role in decisions making. Article 12 of the convention identifies children's rights in terms of expressing their opinions as follows:

*'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the*

*views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'* (UNICEF, p20).

The ratification of the convention by the Irish government in 1992, and subsequent development of the ten year NCS acknowledged Irish children's rights including their right to have a voice in matters that affect them (Government of Ireland, 2000). In addition since the NCS there have been numerous legislative developments which have advanced children's rights such as The Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. However, despite political promises since 2006, on a referendum to amend the constitution to strength children's rights this has yet to take place (CRA, 2011).

### **1.3 Rationale**

The overarching purpose for the research was to gain insights into children's perceptions and experiences of their rights with a specific focus on their right to have a voice in matters that affect them. Researching children's views and experiences of their rights is useful as children's knowledge of their rights is important. For example, UNICEF's 'Global Child Protection Strategy' identifies it is important that children understand their rights, in order that can identify when their rights are violated and take action such as seeking help or removing themselves from situations (2008).

Children's entitlement to have a say in matters that affect them is underpinned by UNCRC and national policies such as NCS (Pinkerton, 2004; Hayes, 2002). However there is evidence that policies have not translated into lived experiences for children. Both reports published by the Ombudsman for Children and reports on child abuse highlight the often children's views are not sought and or listened in Ireland (Ombudsman for Children, 2010; Gibbon, Lunny, Harrison, &, O'Neill, 2010; Commission of Investigation, 2010; Department of Children of Youth Affairs, 2011). For example the 2011, research with Young People in Care highlighted that children and young people feel they are rarely consulted about decisions that affect them (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2011). This suggests that there may be a mismatch between children's right to have a voice in matters that affect them as identified in the UNCRC and Irish policies and children's experiences not being listened to.

A large amount of research on children's rights has focused on assessing children's ability to understand their rights without exploring contextual factors or children's views and experiences (Morss, 2002; Peterson-Badali and Ruck, 2008). Peterson-Badali and Ruck highlight the importance of using qualitative methods to study children's rights due to the complexities of the topic (2008). This qualitative research provides an opportunity to explore children's understanding, experiences and their views on their experiences of their right to have a voice. Current qualitative research on children's experience of their right to have a voice has tended to focus on particular issues such as domestic violence or young people in care (Hogan & O'Reilly, 2005; OMC, 2006). This study will extend knowledge of children's experience of their right to have a voice to everyday situations.

Gaining insights into children's views experiences is valuable exercise in itself (Green & Hogan, 2005). It also provides an opportunity to extend understanding of the barriers and solutions to children rights to have a voice being realised. From a personal perspective extending my understanding of children's views and experiences is relevant to my professional role of designing and developing children's services that respect and acknowledge children to express views and take part in decisions about their lives. In the wider context the study will hopefully contribute to the understanding of the complexities of children exercising their right to have a voice. Lastly the study may be relevant to policy makers, such as those currently revising the NCS, as it provides a snapshot of everyday experiences of children of being listened to and may help identify possible actions to strengthen the implementation of such policies.

#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives**

The overall aim of the study is to explore what are the views and experiences of children aged between 10 and 12 years on their right to have a voice on matters that affect them.

The specific objectives of the study are to explore the following questions:

1. What is children's understanding and awareness of their rights?
2. What understanding and views do children have of children's right to have a say in matters that affect them?
3. What are children's experiences having a voice in Ireland in 2011?

4. What factors do children identify as impacting on whether children have a voice or not?
5. What themes or issues can be identified in relation to children's right to have a voice in matters that affect them?

### **1.5 Limitations**

The study is narrow in scope as the children who took part were between the ages of 10 and 12 years old. While this provides for an opportunity to explore issues for these children, it inhibits exploration of similarities and difference of children's experiences and views across different age ranges. As all the children in the study came from the same urban area in Dublin, it is impossible to ascertain if children's views and experiences reflect views and experiences of children in other areas in Dublin or Ireland. The non-random convenience sample method employed to recruit the 47 children for the six focus groups may have an inherent sampling bias. For example that fact that principals and parents allowed children to take part in the research may mean children in this study have different experiences and views to children who would or were not be allowed to participate in the study.

### **1.6 Overview of Chapters**

The thesis is divided into six chapters and also includes appendices which contain more detailed information in relation to the methodology and findings. **Chapter Two** the literature review synthesises theories on childhood and children's rights with research and current national and international polices on children's rights. **Chapter Three** outlines the methodology of the research in terms of sampling, data collection and data analysis. **Chapter Four** presents the findings from the research. **Chapter Five** discusses and interprets the current study's findings in terms of theories of childhood and children's rights, national and international policies and research on children's rights. Lastly **Chapter Six** offers a conclusion and a number of recommendations from the present study.

## **2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore issues and concepts in relation to children's right to have voice in matters that affect them. Firstly the legislative context in which rights exists will be identified and discussed to set the scene for children's rights in an Irish context. Secondly, key issues in relation to children's right to have a voice will be considered, namely, theories of childhood, children's competencies and autonomy, adult power, the best interest of the child and children's as citizens. Fourthly, research on children's understanding, attitudes and experience of their rights with a specific focus on their right to have a voice will be examined. Lastly, frameworks and methods to facilitate and support children to have their say will be discussed with reference to the importance of adults attitudes to children's rights.

### **2.2 Legislative Context of Children's Rights**

Children's experience of their rights is influenced by numerous factors one of which is the legislative context in which they live (Montgomery, 2010; Valentine, 2003).

For example laws on child labour can shape children's experiences of the right to an education (Valentine, 2003). International views and concerns on children's rights have shaped Irish legislation on children's rights. Hayes notes that international interest in children's rights can be linked to the establishment of the organisation 'Save the Children' in 1919 and it's founder Eglentyne Jebbs work on promoting children's rights (2002). In current times, the UNCRC of 1989 is the most significant international document on children's rights with 192 countries signed up to it (Alderson, 2008). The UNCRC comprise of rights which focus on the 4P's, namely, 1) Protection from harm, 2) Provision of basic needs, 3) Prevention of abuse, and 4) Participation through having a voice and a role in decision making about their lives (Quennerstedt, 2009; Montgomery, 2010).

While many states have ratified the UNCRC some fail to put the legislation and resources in place to support it's implementation (Montgomery, 2010; Freeman, 2007). Governments can lodge reservations about certain rights within the UNCRC (Dauite, 2008). Thus children's rights are not inalienable due to the ability of governments to make statements limiting their agreement to the UNCRC (Dauite,



2008; Pressler, 2008; Montgomery, 2010). Some of the guiding principles within the UNCRC can be used to limit children's participation rights such as the best interest of the child and evolving capacities. For example the principle, all actions will be in the best interest of children. Quennerstedt suggests the best interest of the child principle provides parents with decision making rights but those not stipulate that children should have a role in deciding what is in their own best interest (2009). Thus it can be suggested that adults control the extent to which children rights are realised depending on factors such as a government's agreement to and implementation of the UNCRC and adults assessment of what is the best interest of the children (Dauite, 2008; Montgomery, 2010).

Within the Irish context the NCS 2000-2010 was shaped by the UNCRC and consultation with young people and adults (Government of Ireland, 2000; Pinkerton, 2004). The NCS in 2000 identified goals and an overall vision for children. The vision is as follows:

*'An Ireland where children are respected as young citizen, with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; Where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential'*(Government of Ireland, p2).

The NCS can be seen as a progressive step by the Irish government in acknowledging children's participatory rights (Pinkerton, 2004). Not only is children's right to have a voice identified as one of the three goals in the NCS, children were consulted with during the development of the strategy (Pinkerton, 2004). However within the NCS, children's right to have a voice may be reduced by the proviso 'in accordance with their age and maturity' (Pinkerton, 2004). Nevertheless since the publication of the NCS, there have numerous positive actions by the government such as the establishment of office of the Ombudsman for Children, and the funding of research projects to aid greater understanding of children's lives (Pinkerton, 2004). In addition a second NCS for 2011 to 2017 is being devised which indicates that children's wellbeing and rights is still on the national agenda (CRA, 2011a).

While the extent to which the Irish government have been successful in progressing children's rights is difficult to assess there are some indications of failings (Pinkerton,

2004). The recent review by the CRA of the NCS highlighted that there have been a number of progressive steps such the establishment of Dáil na nÓg which is a national parliament for young people (CRA, 2011b). However the practice of only recruiting children over 12 years for Dáil na nÓg means the mechanism excludes younger children (CRA, 2011b). Early reviews have also pinpointed areas of weakness in the NCS implementation. For instance, the review by the National Children's Advisory Committee in 2006 notes that the government does not require government departments or non- statutory organisation to report on their implementation of actions related to the NCS (Peyton & Wilson, 2006). Also in 2006, the UN recommended amendments to constitution to strength children's right to have a voice. Amendments to the Irish Constitution to strength children rights have been proposed by the Irish state since 2006 proposed but to date these changes have not been presented to the public for a referendum (Children's Right Alliance, 2011a; Ombudsman for Children, 2010).

It is noteworthy that the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) have been advocating for changes to the constitution in order to recognise children's right's since 1995 (Children's Right Alliance, 2011b). The CRA director recently noted

*'The power of asking the people of Ireland to tick a box that says 'yes children have rights' should not be underestimated. We believe that this will have a significant impact on how we shape our future'* (MulQueen, 2011, para. 8)

While current policies aspire for all children to have a voice the lack of constitutional support for children's rights may undermine these aspirations (Ombudsman for Children, 2011). A referendum on children's rights if passed would allow for the enshrining of children's rights in the constitution. A referendum on children's rights would also provide an opportunity for discussions on children's rights in general. These discussions could be useful in people questioning themselves about their own views and highlighting issues related to children's rights.

### **2.3 Key Issues Concerning Children's Rights**

Children having a right to have a voice, is commonly referred to today when talking about a wide range of issues such as health or poverty (Redmond, 2008). However

children's rights to have a say in matters affecting them have not always been so prominent in discourses on issues related to children (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Hendrick, 2004). The concept of children having rights emerged during 19<sup>th</sup> century and focused purely on children's entitlements to care and protection (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). The concept of children's rights expanded during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with the acknowledgment of children having rights to express views and make decisions separate to their parents (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Davie, Upton & Varma, 1996). These rights to express views and make decisions are often referred to as participation or self-determinism rights.

Our understanding of childhood has also dramatically changed through the centuries (Archard & Skivenes, 2009a; Christensen & Prout, 2005; Hendrick, 2004). Discourses on children's rights are closely related to theories on childhood. Within developmental psychology childhood tends to be understood in terms of '*becoming*' an adult and related to norms and predictable patterns of development (Christensen & Prout, 2005; Hogan, 2005).

*'Universally laws governing development continue to be sought and the findings are explicitly or implicitly held to be globally applicable across both place and historical time'* (Hogan, 2005, p26).

In terms of children's rights the idea of children '*becoming*' adults underpins the view that children as incomplete, in need of protection and/or control (Pressler, 2010). Historically the state, religious orders and philanthropic organisations sought to protect children from child labour, immoral actions, and abuse (Hendrick, 2004; Cunningham, 2005). This view of childhood was social constructed in terms of children being described simultaneously as a victim in need of protection and a threat to society in need of constraint (Hendrick, 2004).

Many contest the view of childhood as linear with children passing through a set of predetermined stages (Valentine, 2003; James & James, 2004). The growing focus on childhood as '*being*' with children having abilities, needs and rights and the ability to shape their environment influences views of children as having rights (Uprichard, 2008). The conceptualization of the child as an active agent with rights that promote self-determinism can be viewed as conflicting with views of childhood as needing

protection (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Kellet, 2009). Uprichard advocates that childhood should be seen as both 'being' and 'becoming'. The joining of the concepts of 'being and becoming' allows for recognition of children's current capabilities and children's on-going growth process (Uprichard, 2008; Hogan, 2005).

Children's right to have a voice is associated with a view of children as people who are social actors in their own right (Pressler, 2010; Alderson, 2008). Children have historically been viewed as possessions of their parents (Quennerstedt, 2009). Family rights to privacy and autonomy can be seen as conflicting with children rights (Hendrick, 2003; Woodhead, 1999). Children's rights are based within the context of how much the state wishes to control or intervene in the role of the family as primary care giver of children (Cunningham, 2005; Hendrick, 2003). The power issues between parents and children are illustrated in Postman's by 'Disappearance of childhood' which focuses on children's non-compliance with parental wishes (Cunningham, 2005). Postman's concept of childhood centres on children having good behaviour and following their parents directions (Cunningham, 2005). Some suggest by adults acknowledging children's rights they are giving away some of their power (Freeman, 2007). Adults misgivings around children's rights can rise issues related to children's competencies, autonomy and what is in the best interest of the child (Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Kilkelly et al., 2004; Lundy, 2007).

Children's competencies are often called into question when discussing their rights (Lowden, 2002). While the UNCRC acknowledges children as rights holders it also suggest those rights should be viewed in terms of children's '*evolving capacities*'. Competencies can be difficult to judged and there is a notable lack of guidelines on how to make such judgements (Helwig & Turiel, 2002). Developmental research often highlights age differences in children's ability to understand the concept of rights (Helwig & Turiel, 2002). For example Metlon's classic research found that with age children's reasoning about rights develops from thinking in terms of adult's authority to give rights towards a more theoretical understanding of the inalienable nature of rights (1980). There have been a number of subsequent studies supporting the concept that children's thinking about their rights develops and deepens with age (Cherney & Perry, 1996; Damon & Lerner, 2006; Kagan, 2008).

However, there is mounting evidence that relationship between age and children's ability to understand the concept of rights is not clear cut. Research findings indicate that parental attitudes on children's rights influence how children understand and think about their rights (Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Day, 2002). Casas (2006) suggests that age is not a reliable predictor of how children understand specific rights. Casas et al. research reveals that children's experience of exercising their rights, such as having rights to give views on family activities, is related to their ability to understand the concept of rights (2006). (2006). In conflict with views that children develop understanding of their rights after the age of 13 year, there is evidence that that children as young as 5 years display an ability to understand their rights (Covell, Howe & McNeill, 2008; Helwig, 1998). Helwig's research found evidence that children aged 6 years could understand the concept of rights as being universal and separate to adult authority (1998). While these studies do not contest that children's cognitive abilities develop with age, they highlight the importance of context in shaping children's development.

Research with 12 year olds from USA, Switzerland and China suggested that culture and religion can influence how they perceive their rights (Cherney & Shing, 2008). This research is particularly interesting as it highlights that influence of cultural on children's understanding of their rights is complex with national laws and customs, interacting with religious subcultures within a particular country. Comparing research on children's knowledge of specific rights suggests difference may exist between countries. For example, research indicates children in Norway displaying more knowledge of the concept of rights and specific rights compared to children in England (Sandbaek & Einarsson, 2008; Children's Rights Alliance of England, 2008). While research signifies that children can display competencies at varying ages depending on their experiences and context, adults still have the deciding role in acknowledging whether children's rights are acknowledged (Cherney, 2010).

Adults often do not recognise children's rights to citizenship and autonomy (Alderson, 2008). Culture also plays a role in shaping adults judgments on children's rights (Cherney, Greteman & Travers, 2008; Cherney, 2010). Marshall's

conceptualisation of citizenship involved citizen having certain capacities and being afforded certain rights by the state and have certain responsibilities (Sandstrom, et al, 2010). Children's autonomy is embedded in concepts of children as citizens in their own right with the right to voice views and make decisions (Sandstrom, et al, 2010; Lowden, 2002). Autonomy can be understood as an individual's ability to make choices for his or her self (Lowden, 2002). Recognising children's citizenship as separate to their parents citizenship acknowledges children's inherent human dignity (Freeman, 2010). The idea of children's as citizens can be seen as incompatible with views of children as passive (Freeman, 2007).

Research suggests children ability to act autonomously develops with age (Helwig & Turiel, 2002). In 2002, Helwig & Turiel outlined recent research with preschoolers who demonstrated their ability to make decisions on personal issues such as what clothes to wear and who to be friends with. Children's ability to act autonomously is greatly curtailed by control of family members and society (Helwig & Turiel, 2002). Nixon and Halpenny's study with children aged 8 to 16 years children expressed beliefs that parents have a right to control their children (2010). However older children noted that they resist limiting setting by parents and take an active role in negotiating with parents to gain more autonomy (Nixon & Halpenny, 2010). Children may view themselves as as having a lower or subordinate role within the family (Mayall, 2001). A study by Melton (1990) with 12 year children found they were competent to make decisions but were not given the power or authority to do so (Helwig & Turiel, 2002). Conversely, the Ombudsman for Children (2010) noted that parents, family members and professional play a critical role in supporting children to make complaints and without the support of adults children can currently be left 'voiceless'. However both children's reliance on adult to express views and views as children as having a low status in the family supports a view of children as passive and also limits their ability to exercise their right.

The 'Best Interest of the child' is a concept which has guided legislation can limit children's right to have a voice (Lowden, 2002; Qvortrup, 2005b). Adults decide what is in the best interest of the child during decisions making processes (Lowden, 2002). Smeyers (2010) noted that the best interests of any child are difficult to define is it is hard to identify target outcomes or to be certain target outcomes will be achieved.

The best interest concept is not an objective concept, it influenced by social norms and values of those making the decision (Smeyers, 2010). Best interest of the child may not always be similar or compatible to the best interest of the family (Smeyers, 2010). Best interest of the child is often cited as a reason to limit children's rights (Lowden, 2002; Smeyers, 2010).

Children's rights are negotiated or asserted within the context of childhood, parental rights, state control, children's competencies, children's autonomy and best interest of the child. Achieving an agreed conceptualisation of children's is right is problematic given the multitude of possibly conflicting and contested views of childhood. Parents and advocacy groups often seek to campaign on issues effecting children and thus act as a spoken person for children (Hayes, 2002). Thus it would appear that children need adults to have their voices heard but that an over reliance on adults to allow children to have a say may in fact conflict with a view of children as active agents. A progress step in children's rights may be instead of allowing children to have rights as a gift, adults need to facilitate children to assert their own rights (Kellet, 2009).

#### **2.4 Children's Experience of Having a Voice in Matters that Affect Them**

It is important to recognise in the Irish context children's rights and the silencing of children's voice has been highlighted by a number of reports into child abuse (Gibbons et al, 2010). The inquiries in to clerical abuse of children also highlight how children were not listened to (Commission of Investigation, 2010). For instance, the Cloyne report which spans from 1996 to 2009, reported failings by the state and church authorities to listen to children (Commission of Investigation, 2010). UNICEF's Voices of Youth website provides an interactive space for children and young people to highlight issues with regard to their rights (Lansdown & Karkara, 2006). For example a young person from Pakistan noted '*If children don't know anything about their rights, how can they ask for them*' (Lansdown & Karkara, 2006, p691). Research on children's perception and experience of their rights helps to provide insights into children's lived experiences (Greene, 2006; Greene & Hogan, 2005).

Within an Irish context research funded by the former Office for the Minister for Children and new Department of Children and Youth Affairs on a range of topics

illustrated children's ability to express their views and also highlighted their experiences of not being listened to (OMC, 2006; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, Hogan & O'Reilly, 2007). For example research on domestic violence with children provided insights into their experiences of domestic violence and their suggestions for methods to improve services for families (Hogan & O'Reilly, 2007). This study found that children were often not listened to by professional (Hogan & O'Reilly, 2007). A study on children's experiences of participation and decision making in Irish Hospital found children did not want to exclude parents from decision making processes regarding their health but expressed a desire to be included in the process (OMC, 2006). The 2011, study with children in state care provided an opportunity for children and young people to talk about their experiences in state care and highlight issues related to their rights (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2011). Children who took part in the study highlighted the need for professionals involved in state care and foster families to listen to them (2011).

A Northern Irish study on children's rights indicated that children feel they have little or no say in various aspects of their lives such as home life, school, healthcare (Kilkelly et al., 2004). Kilkelly and colleagues found that while children did not have all or adequate information on their rights they did have a sense of injustice (2004). Children reported the unfairness of adults particularly in relation to them not listening to them (Kilkelly et al., 2004). The study highlights that in everyday life a large number of children feel they are not treated with respect (Kilkelly et al., 2004). International research suggest that children and young people have an understanding of issues related to fairness such as equality of treatment and procedural fairness (Fondacaro, et al, 2006; Thompson, 2007). In fact, innovative Irish research by Dillon, Ruane and Kavanagh suggest that children between 4 and 6 years can understand some aspect of the concept of justice through the use of stories, drama activities and photographs to promote discussions (2010). Highlighting that through the use of age appropriate methods children can be facilitated to discuss complex topics (Dillon et al, 2010).

Research also indicates that children have limited access to information on their rights (Kilkelly et al., 2004; Lalor & Baird, 2006; ).For example, the 2011 research on



Children's and Young People in Care highlighted that children were unaware of the compliant processes in place. The Ombudsman for Children noted that it was insufficient for compliant processes to be in place, children and young people need to be informed about processes in a way that ensures they fully understand them (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011).

Children's ability to exercise their rights is affected by various factors governmental legislation and policies, how those policies and laws are implemented, societal customs including how childhood is constructed and interactions between adults and children. The concept of '*high consensus, low intensity*' describes the mismatch between what is accepted in theory and what exists in real life settings (Casas et al., 2006). Research has identified a discrepancy between broad policy goals on children's right to have a voice and the reality of children's experiences.

## **2.5 Facilitating Children's Right to Have a Voice**

Adults views and behaviour play a critical role in support and or facilitating children to realise their rights such as their right to have a voice in matters that affect them (Cherney, 2010; Ruck, Peterson-Badali & Day, 2002). Davie (1996) suggests that listening to children is not an easy process and can often be very time consuming. Head notes that adults and particularly professionals have a responsibility to support children in expressing their views (2011). The *Hearing Young Voices* study found that there was support among policy makers and professionals for listening to children (McAuley & Brattman, 2002). The study identified a number of barriers to translating desires into practice such as lack of resources, funding and facilitation training to support participation of children in consultation processes (McAuley & Brattman, 2002).

Studies suggest adults views on rights are not straight forward with differences emerging between views on nurturance and self-determinism rights. Research by Peterson-Badali and Ruck indicates that adults tend to value children's rights to nurturance or protection compared to their rights to self-determination (2008). Adults tend to acknowledge self-determinism for adolescence rather than pre-adolescent children (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). Casa's et al study in Spain and Italy found differences between parent and teacher views on children's right to

express their views. In the study approximately 65% of parents compared to approximately 55% of teachers from both countries totally supported children's right to freedom of expression (Casas et al., 2006). Casa et al notes that parents and teachers views on children's right to express their views may not match their behaviours.

Devine (2003) describes findings on how children and teachers perception of interactions and power dynamics in primary school settings are different. Children view teachers as holding all the power and that interaction are controlled by teachers (Devine, 2003). Children noted that teachers expected more compliance than their parents such as in terms of not talking and sitting up correctly (Devine, 2003). Devine (2003) highlights that teachers give directions and children follow them. One child described teacher control as follows:

*'They are always at you ....don't slouch on the chair.... sit up straight...'*  
(Devine, 2003, p14).

Teachers feel that children are aware of their rights and voice their opinions regularly (Devine, 2003). However principal and teachers repeatedly refer to the importance of maintaining control and order within school (Devine, 2003). Devine (2003) suggests that teachers and principals in the study demonstrate an unwavering desire to maintain authority.

Frameworks for participation have been developed to highlight how children can be supported children to access their right to participation and what adults need to do to support children. Hart's *Participation Ladder* provides a method of describing the extent to which children and young people are supported to participate on a continuum of non-participation to full participation with children making decisions with adults (Hart, 1997). Hart's Ladder of Participation has dominant in both policy, academic and practice fields (Shier, 2001). Alternatives models or methods of viewing children's participation have also been put forward (Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2010). Shier and Lundy put forward separate models which focus on the importance of adult receptiveness to children's views and ability to support children to express their views. A key aspect of Shier's model is for adults to question whether they are willing to share control with children. Lundy identifies four elements to listening to children including the importance of creating a space for children and young people to

express their views (2007). The mosaic approach has been developed for young children and provides a method of listening to children which highlights the need for adults to create meaning with children and be sensitive not only to children's words, but also their behaviour (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Children and young people have provided insights into how adults can support them to exercise their participation rights. McAuley and Brattman reported that children suggest that a number of ways adults can support children to express views, such as by being friendly and giving clear information (2002). McAuley and Brattman noted that while consultation is supported broadly there is still some discussion on what level in terms of frequency and type of topic should be children consulted with (2002). Even when adults may in theory agree with children having a rights, does not result in adults listening to children. The plethora of participation frameworks and children and young people's own views highlight ways adults can support children to have their voices heard (Shier, 2010; Wandersman, 2009). Hayes referred to the need for adults to be 'active arrows' that is adult need to be proactive in supporting children through childhood (MulQueen, E. 2011, August 19). Adults beliefs and views and changes in behaviours are crucial in the process of facilitating children to exercise their right to have a voice (Shier, 2010).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Children's perception and experience of rights is shaped by adult-child interactions, access to information, culture and legalisation (Cherney, 2010; Cherney & Shing, 2008). Children's age itself it not the only salient factor in determining children's ability to understand their rights. However, it is important to recognise children need information and support in order to understand their rights. In addition research highlights that children often experience not being listened to both at home, in school and under state care. This suggests we need to attend to both children as '*being*' entitled to rights now and '*becoming*' in need of support to exercise their rights. Frameworks and models for supporting children to exercise their rights are dependent on adults to implement them. The use of qualitative research methods in studying children's rights provides opportunity to gain insights into this complex topic (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008).

## **3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will describe the research methodology employed to research children's understanding of their rights and perceptions and experiences on their right to have a say in matters that affect them. The research will be conducted within the context of a multidisciplinary approach sociology and psychology. The multidisciplinary approach recognises both psychological knowledge concerning the universality of child development and sociological thinking around the importance of context in shaping childhood experiences (Greene & Hogan, 2006). Specifically age appropriate methods were employed to facilitate children participating such as the use of pictorial aids to prompt discussion. In addition children were provided with a relatively open format of questions to facilitate them sharing their views and experiences. This epistemological approach acknowledges the voice of the child and also the power dynamics between children and adults. This chapter will provide an overview of the methodology including research design, focus group methodology and sampling method. In addition the method of data analysis will be outlined.

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The study explored children between 10 and 12 years old understanding and awareness of their rights and what are the views and experiences of young people in relation to 'children having a voice in matters that affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity' (2000).

The research will focus on into the following research questions:

- What is children's understanding and awareness of their rights?
- What understanding and views do children have of children's right to have a say in matters that affect them?
- What are children's experiences having a voice in Ireland in 2011?
- What factors do children identify as impacting on whether children have a voice or not?
- What themes or issues can be identified in relation to children's right to have a voice in matters that affect them?

### **3.3 Research Design**

In keeping with the objective to gain insights into children's views and experiences, the qualitative approach of focus groups was chosen. Focus groups are interviews or discussions designed for up to twelve participants to obtain their views on a particular topic in a non-judgmental and encouraging environment (Horowitz et al., 2003). Cherney suggests the study of perceptions on children's rights is extremely complex (2010). Qualitative methods are suitable to investigate complex topics as they support the in depth exploration of topics (Smith, et al., 2011). Research by Heary and Hennessey's comparing data collect from individual interviews and focus groups, found that data was more detailed from focus groups (2006). Focus groups provide a relative open method of exploring a topic (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Hennessy & Heary suggest that using focus groups with children and young people may be particularly beneficial as they may reduce the likelihood that the researcher is seen as an adult author figure, as the their role is to facilitate the discussion rather than directing all the interactions (2005). The purpose of employing the focus group method was to create a safe place for children to share their experiences and express their views. In addition group interactions during focus groups provide an opportunity for participants to discuss each other's views and suggest other viewpoints (Heary & Hennessy, 2006).

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1. Focus Group Methodology**

For the purpose of the research objectives focus groups were carried out with children aged between 10 and 12 years. Focus groups were recorded using an audio recorder and data was transcribed. There was a maximum of 10 participants in each focus group. Focus groups lasted a total of 60 minutes.

All the details of focus group interview schedule are detailed in Appendix A. The focus groups comprised of the following methods to explore children's understanding, views and experiences:

- Open Questions
- Open Question with pictorial aid
- Vignettes
- Drawing Activity

Open questions were used as it has been shown they provided an opportunity for children to direct the focus group discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A range of open questions and verbal nods were utilised throughout the focus group sessions to explore children's views and experiences. Children were also asked open questions to elicit their ideas. For example: *'What advice would you give adults?'*

The question *'What rights do these children have?'* was accompanied with a pictorial aid of a group of children (See Appendix B). This method is identified as way of supporting children to engage in conversations around particular topics (Veale, 2005).

The use of vignettes in focus groups can support participation of all group members (Maclean, 1998). Bailey suggests that vignettes can stimulate discussion on topics and elicit a variety of views (2008). Vignettes were used in the focus groups to support the children in discussing what has been identified as a complex topic by researchers such as Cherney and Helwig (2010 and 2002). Barter and Renold highlight that vignettes support can be particular effective in supporting young people to express their views on sensitive or complex topics (2000).

The two vignettes utilised during the focus group were taken from The Revised Children's Rights Interview (RCRI) was developed by Professor Isabelle Cherney (Cherney, 2003). The RCRI contains 22 vignettes regarding children's rights and was designed for individual interviews (Cherney et al, 2008). RCRI has been used solely for individual interviews to date (Cherney, 1980; Cherney et al, 1996; Cherney et al, 2008). However in correspondence from Professor Chenery, she indicated they are suitable for use within focus group setting (See Appendix C). The vignettes were used to provide a concrete example for children to discuss and to stimulate debates on issues related to children's right to have a voice in relation to everyday scenarios.

Lastly the drawing and writing activity was employed to provide an alternative way for children to express their views about children's right to have a say. The children were asked to draw or write about the areas in the life that they would like to have a say in. Children had the option of keeping their drawing or written work or giving it to the researcher. In addition children were given the option of talking about their drawing or written work. Veale highlights that the use of drawing provides support

children to express their views and feelings and also is a method of supporting children to keep engaged in the research process (2005).

### **3.4.2. Role of the Moderator in the Focus Group**

The role of the moderator in the focus group is vital to collect quality data (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998). The moderator needs to create a safe place for participants to voice opinions by setting down clear ground rules for the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998). The moderator explained the ground rules at the onset of every focus group aiming to use age appropriate language and checking with participants understood her. The following ground rules were highlighted:

- 1) Individual participants would not be named or other identifying information when the research was written up. All identifying information would be kept securely and destroyed after the research was completed;
- 2) Participants were asked to agree to keeping all comments made in the group confidential;
- 3) Everything that is said in the group is confidential except in the case of Child Protection and Welfare concerns as per the Children's First Guidelines. The moderator explained that if she was worried about someone's safety due she would have will break participant confidentiality;
- 4) All participants had the right to voice or not voice an opinion;
- 5) All participant had right to voice opinions differing from other members in the group;
- 6) The moderator noted that there is no right or wrong answer;
- 7) Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage.

Before the group commenced the moderator checked that all children had signed parental consent forms. The moderator provided children with an outline for the focus group session (See Appendix A & D) and explained the ground rules. Once children were provided with all the aforementioned information they were given the choice to take part in the focus group or not. If children were happy to take part in focus group,

they could assign the child assent form. The moderator reinforced the optional nature of the focus group.

During the focus group session the moderator supported participants to express their opinion by asking open questions and probing questions in order to fully understand the participant's points of view. The moderator actively encouraged participants to respond to each other's inputs.

### **3.4.3. Reliability and Validity of Focus Group Method**

Morgan and Johnson note that providing a comprehensive record of the data collection method is essential to ensure qualitative research methods have reliability (2005). In order to ensure the reliability of the focus group method, detailed interview schedules were devised to give information on all questions and activities which took place (See Appendix A).

Validity of qualitative research can be viewed in terms of the extent to which the findings represent accurately the input from participants (Choincel, et al, 2003; Morgan & Johnson, 2005). Participant's inputs during the focus group were recorded using a voice recorder and subsequently transcribed verbatim. In addition the moderator attempted to avoid 'Group think' within the focus group by facilitating participants to voice divergent opinions. 'Group Think' is defined as when all members express the same or similar views due to dynamics within the group (Choincel, et al, 2003). Group think reduces validity of the research as it does not provide or support opportunities for participants to articulate alternative viewpoints (Choincel, et al, 2003).

### **3.4.4. Sampling**

Convenience sampling was used to recruit children to take part in the focus groups. The researcher contacted two principal of schools which were physically close to the researcher's place of work. Both school principals agreed to be involved in the research by facilitating the recruitment of participants and providing a space to hold the focus groups. Both principals were provided with a focus group interview



schedule, an overview of the research, parent information leaflet, parent consent forms, child assent forms and a meeting to discuss the research. For samples of the aforementioned documents see Appendices A, E, F, G and H respectively. Principals liaised with teachers to identify children to participate in the focus groups.

Teachers identified children to take part in the focus groups from their class. Ten children were identified by teachers for each focus group. Teachers discussed the purpose of the focus group with the children and distributed parent consent forms to children interested in taking part. Teachers collect parent consent forms from the children. Children with parental consent form were invited to the focus group and the researcher explained the purpose of the focus group and how it would work in detail (See Appendix A). After the researcher explained the purpose of the research children were invited to sign a child assent form if they agreed to take part in the focus group (See Appendix H).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was carried out to identify patterns in response from participants with reference to the objectives of the research. Krueger and Casey highlight that the purpose or objectives of the research always need to be kept in mind when identifying themes (2010). The following steps were taken in order to identify themes within the data collected. Firstly, all the transcripts were read three times, in order for the researcher to become familiar with the data and identify a number of crude themes which were evident in the transcripts. Secondly a basic coding system was developed based on the crude themes identified. Thirdly, all the focus group transcripts were saved in the Nvivo computer programme and coded using the basic coding system. During the process of coding the transcripts data it emerged that some themes need to be changed due to lack of supporting data in transcripts and/or new themes were identified. Fourthly, there was a lengthy process of checking coding and themes to assess if there was overlap between themes and whether there were sub themes in themes.

It should be noted children's drawing and written work was scanned into the computer but not interpreted. A decision was made not to interpret children's

drawings as the majority of children opted not to speak about their drawings during the focus group.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

#### **3.6.1. Consent**

Informed consent was sought by giving children and their parents information on the purpose, methods of the research (See Appendices F). Children were provided with information on the research via their teacher and at the onset of the focus group.

Consent was obtained using both parental consent and child assent. In conjunction with informed consent children were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

#### **3.6.2. Voluntary**

Children and parents were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate in the research. The voluntary nature of being involved in the focus group was stated in the information leaflet and at the commencement of each focus group.

#### **3.6.3. Confidentiality**

Children's confidentiality was protected by the coding of the data and removal of participant names and identifying information. All data was stored securely. The moderator of the focus groups asked children to agree to keep all comments made in the focus group confidential.

#### **3.6.4. Child Protection and Welfare Concerns**

In accordance with best practice participants were advised that if any person gave information which indicated a child or children's safety is at risk the moderator would report the information to a Social Worker or Garda as appropriate.

#### **3.6.5. Participation of Children**

The moderator talked about voluntary participation and reinforced the idea that it was completely children's choice whether they took part in the focus group or not.

### **3.6.6. Appearance of discomfort during the focus group**

The moderator was vigilant to any verbal or non-verbal cues that indicated that children may not have wanted to take part in the focus group. Children were reminded that they could leave focus group at any stage and that was completely okay.

## 4 CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the results of the six focus groups exploring children's understanding and awareness of children's rights and their views and experiences of children's right to have a say in matters that affect them. Full details of the methodology are described in Chapter three. A sample transcript for one the focus groups can be found in Appendix I. In this chapter details on the sample, children's responses to specific questions and identified themes from the data collected will be presented.

Thematic analysis was carried to identify themes using the Nvivo computer programme to identify key themes. Recurring topics were identified and basic coding system was developed. All data was coded using basic coding system and themes were refined during the process of coding. Given the large amount of data collected the findings have been divided into sections for ease of use. Specifically the result chapter is divided into the following sections:

1. Sample;
2. Theme One: Children's awareness and understanding of their rights;
3. Theme Two: Fragility of rights-views and experience of having a right to have a say;
4. Theme Three: Adults status as protectors and decision makers;
5. Theme Four: Children's views on factors influencing whether children are listened to;
6. Theme Five: Reasons why children should be listened to
7. Theme Six: Children's advice for adults on how they can listen better;

As part of the focus group children drew pictures or wrote about what they would like to have a say on (For a sample of the pictures are provided in Appendix J). A selection of these pictures will be presented in this chapter to compliment the findings. It should be noted that most children did not avail of the opportunity to talk

about their pictures in the focus groups. Due to this fact the pictures are presented as standalone items and are not interpretation.

## **4.2 Sample**

In total a convenience sample of forty seven children participated in six focus groups. Full details of the sampling process are available in Chapter Three. The six focus groups comprised of two separate focus groups with 6<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> class primary school children respectively. The children participating in the focus groups were aged between 10 and 12 years. Two groups had nine participants, two focus groups had eight participants and two focus group had ten and three participants respectively. Children who participated in the focus group were from two primary schools in a suburb of Dublin. The schools were approximately one mile from each other. Both schools were in the department of Education's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme<sup>1</sup>. Both schools had over 400 pupils on their roll.

One of the forty eight children who had parental consent and was present at the time of the focus group did not want to take part in the focus group. This child returned to her class prior to the commencement of the focus group. In addition one of the school principals reported that two children who were identified by their teachers to participate in the focus group did not want to take part. The two children who told the teachers they did not want to take part in the focus group when consent forms were being distributed, as a result these two children were not given parental consent forms. The teacher identified two other children who were given parental consent forms. Six children who had received parental consent to take part in the focus group were absent from school on the day the focus group was held.

Children from 4<sup>th</sup> classes were aged between 10 and 11 years old. Children from 5<sup>th</sup> class were aged between 10 to 12 years. Children from 6<sup>th</sup> class were aged between 11 to 12 years old. Almost equal numbers of girls and boys participated in the focus groups. Table One provides details of the number of boys and girls who participated in the focus groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> The DEIS Scheme provides resources to school which are classified as disadvantage.

**Table 1 Gender break down of the children**

<b>Class Group</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
4 <sup>th</sup> Class	7	6	13
5 <sup>th</sup> Class	8	9	17
6 <sup>th</sup> Class	10	7	17
Totals	25	22	47

### **4.3 Theme One: Children’s Awareness and Understanding of their Rights**

This theme provides information and insight into children’s awareness and understanding of their rights. Children’s were asked specific questions on their rights and details of their answers are divided into the following sub themes: 1) Children’s definition of the concept of a right; 2) Children’s identification of specific rights; 3) Children’s understanding of their right to have a say in matters affecting them 4) Areas children would like to have a say in.

#### **4.3.1. Children’s Definition of the concept of a Right**

All children in the focus groups were asked what they thought a right was. Children in four out of the six focus groups provided an explanation of what children’s rights are when asked about it. It should be noted there were a number of pauses during this question in all of the six focus groups. Children made comments such as ‘*I am not sure*’. Below are all the comments made on what children rights are in terms of formulating a definition.

*‘things that children are entitled to’*

*‘what you should be allowed to do’*

*‘children are allowed to have what they want’ (laugh)*

*‘stuff that children are supposed to do’*

In addition, children in Focus Group One identified legal entitlements when attempting to explain what a right was, such as the right to drive at 16 years and leave school after the junior cert.

Children appeared to have a limited understanding of the concept of a right and the pauses during this question may suggested they found the question difficult.

#### **4.3.2. Identification of Specific Children's Rights**

The majority of responses to the question on defining what children rights resulted in children identifying particular rights. For example, children identified rights such as the right to go to school, have fun and have food. Children identified a wide range of rights when presented with a picture of children and asked what rights do these children have (See Appendix B). Children identified a wide range of rights. The rights children identified were compared to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. All focus groups identified rights within the sub categories of guiding principles, survival and development, protection and participations as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (refer). However there were differences between focus groups in which particular rights children identified. Focus group six identified less rights than other groups but is should be noted there were three participants compared to the focus group average of eight participants. The children's responses are presented in Table 3 and compared to the convention on the rights of the child. In Table 3, F refers to focus group. As illustrated in the Table 3 identified numerous rights such as *'food' 'a home' 'a family' 'an education'*

Children also identified the concept of equality of treatment.

*'And they are equal to other kids, like if you're a black kid, you have a right to be equal to other kids'*

During the process of identifying rights children started to discuss issues related to children's rights versus adult rights.

*Child One: 'Say if your mam wants you to babysit you have a right to say no'*

*Child Two : 'but that is her right to make you do that (laugh)'*

**Table 2 Children’s identification of Children’s Rights**

<b>UN Rights of the Child</b>	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
<b>Guiding Principles</b>						
Applies to all children	✓		✓			
All adults are required to act in the best interest of the child			✓		✓	✓
Parent are allowed to exercise responsibilities			✓		✓	
Right of survival						
<b>Survival &amp; Development</b>						
Shelter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Food	✓		✓		✓	
Clothes	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Health			✓			
Leisure	✓	✓		✓		✓
Family		✓	✓	✓		
See parent		✓				
Religion	✓		✓		✓	
Racism	✓		✓			
Identity			✓			
<b>Protection</b>			✓	✓	✓	
<b>Participation</b>		✓		✓		✓
				✓	✓	
Privacy					✓	
Friends		✓	✓	✓		
<b>Total Number of Rights</b>	8	8	14	8	8	4

**4.3.3. Children’s understanding and views on ‘Voice’**

Children defined a children’s right to have a say in matters that affect you in terms of being able to put forward an opinion or have a say in things.

*‘Your opinion in a discussion’*

*‘say what your think should happen’.*



One feature of children’s definition of children comments on children’s rights include the concept of having a say when something happens such as family break up. Section 5.3.4 provides details of the areas children would like to have a say in.

Across all six focus groups children identified a number of areas which they would like to have a say in ranging from events in the home, schools, in their lives and world issues. Children expressed their desire to be able to express their views on everyday matters such as their choice of clothing and events such as parents getting divorced. In two focus groups, children also identified the desire to have a say in broader societal issues, namely global warming or the government closing a school.

*‘Like if your parents were divorced ....like you still should be seeing them’*

*‘Like talk to your mam about if your being bullied’*

*‘Having to move house’*

Table 4 provides full details of all the areas children would like to have a say in. Please note X identifies the number of times that area was identified.

**Table 3 Areas Children would like to have a say in**

<b>Home</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>World issues</b>
Family matters X 13	Home work x3	Getting Bullied X2	Global Warming X1
Parents getting divorced X2	School X3	KidnappingX2	Government shutting down schoolX1
	Having to move to a new school X1	Friends X1	
		Likes or dislikes X3	
		Accident /getting accused of something X6	

In addition Figure 1 and 2 present samples of the pictures children drew during the focus when asked to draw about areas of their life they would like to have a say in. As presented in Figure 1 children drew pictures of home, school, incidents with friends and parents and world issues. It should be noted fewer children tended to draw pictures related to world issues.

Figure 1 Children's illustrations of areas they would like to have a say in



Picture of the World  
'A right to say about the world around us'



Picture of Children playing outside of home.  
Dialogue  
'What is going On'  
'That's mine'  
'No that's mine'

**Figure 2 Children's illustrations of areas they would like to have a say in**



Picture of Home Scene.

*Dialogue from right to left*

*'Mum and Dad I would like to go dancing'*

*'Fine with Me'*

*'Okay'*



Picture of School

*Areas labelled in the picture:*

*Bullying, Homework, Rules, Yard Rules, School Work and Teacher Things.*

#### **4.4 Theme Two: Fragility of Having a Say**

All six focus groups identified that children's right to have a say is fragile. Within the context of the two scenarios one in a situation in school and one at home were children wanted to have a say all children felt that the children should have a right to have a say (See Appendix A). No child in any of the focus groups disagreed with children having a right to have a say when discussing the two scenarios.

*'Yeah'*

*'She should have a right'*

However children noted that whether children in the scenarios did actually get a chance to have a say depended on numerous factors.

*'But realistically they are not going to listen or anything, like nothing is going to happen'*

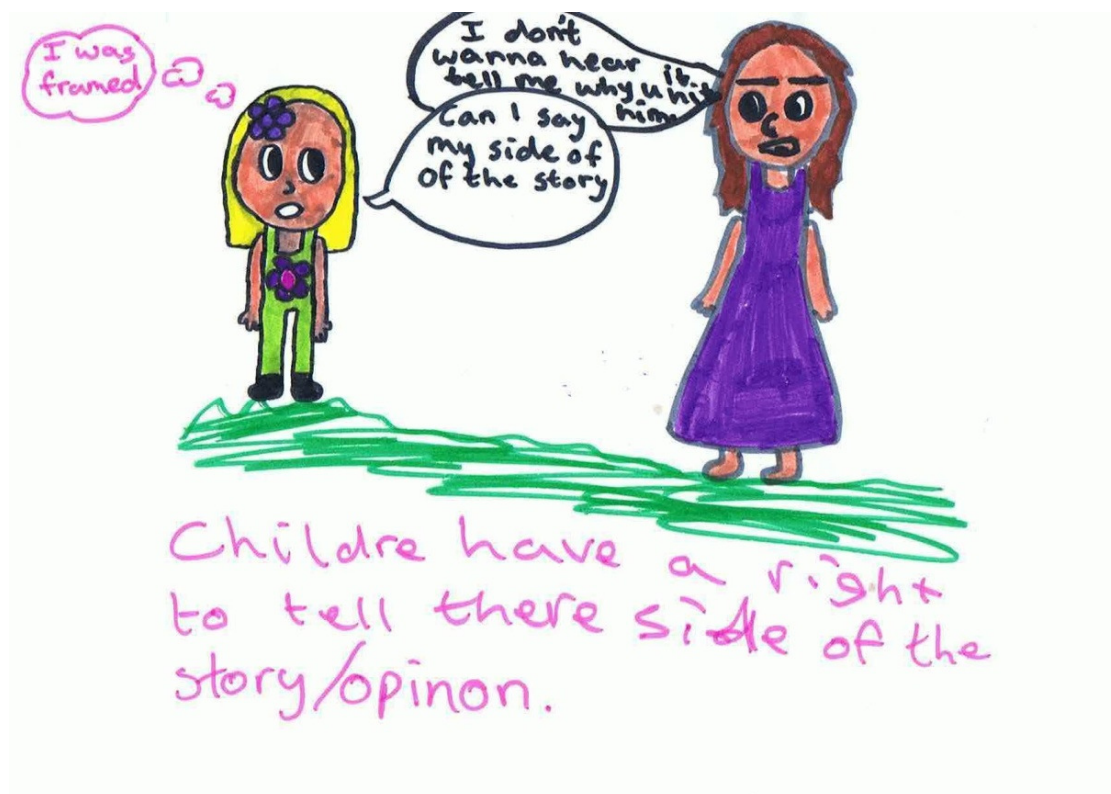
Children describe how their right to have a say is not constant and how it largely depends on adults.

*'sometimes your parents don't listen to you and sometimes they do'*

*'it depends'*

In terms of children's personal experiences, in all of the six focus groups children highlighted that sometimes they get to have a say and sometimes they don't. Children identified times when they are not listened to. Figure 2 is one of the illustrations which depicts a child not getting an opportunity to have her say. This picture was drawn as part of the activity to draw a picture of an area/s of your life you would like to have more say in.

**Figure 3 Child asking to have say her side of the story**



Children identified times at home when they were not listened to.

*'mam would hear my side of the story and then she would say go to your room , she doesn't care'*

*'some children do (get to tell their side of the story) but sometimes they just don't let them talk'*

In addition children highlighted times in school when they were not listened to such as the following quote which refers to the workings of the student council.

*'We can ask our class want they want and then pass it on , they don't really do want we pass on they just listen'*

During the focus group children identified times when they were listened to less frequently.

*'sometimes you mam is really angry and she wouldn't want to hear and sometimes she is in a calm mood so she wouldn't mind listening to you'*

In addition, in one group, a child identified a method used in a crèche at an afterschool group she currently attends. The method the child discussed involved

listen to all those involved in a fight and coming up with a plan together.

*'Miss like what we do in the crèche there are two signs. You should not take sides, then they say what do you think should happen next and they say what have you done to affect others. Then try and figure out what should happen,, like hear both sides of the story and see how they can communicate together'*

In three of the focus groups children discussed how they feel when they are not listened to during discussions on their experiences of being listened to. Children discussed feeling frustrated and upset.

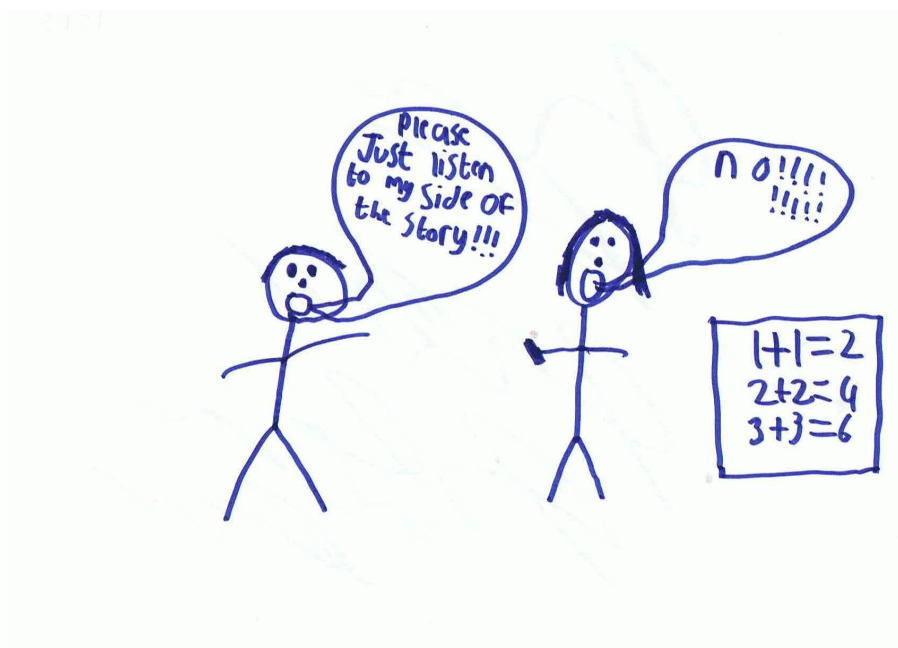
*'it feels like you are talking to a wall'*

*'it feels like a waste of time'*

#### **4.5 Theme Three: Adult Status: the boss and the protector**

All six focus groups highlighted the difference between the status of adults and the status of children. Children specified differences in status in terms of adults' opinion being valued more, adults having the decision making powers and their role protecting or teaching children. Figure 4 depicts the teacher refusing to listen to a child.

**Figure 4** Child asking a teacher to listen



Dialogue as follows:  
Child: *Please just listen to my side of the story!!!*  
Teacher: *No!!!!!!!*

Children identified a difference in the value of their views compared to adults views tended to be discussed when they predicted what would happen in scenarios or discussed own experiences of children being listened to.

*'but I think say if you get in trouble with an adult, it's your word against their and they think they are more mature and they go with them'*

*'Your not the boss, your parents are the boss of you, they tell you what to do you'*

*'Because like the teacher might say no because you are only a child'*

Children stress adults role in deciding whether to listen to children's view and if the view is of value.

*'it depends on his mam, because his mam could be the mam who just sends you straight up to your room , the i don't want to hear it type of mam or she could be the mam who is like what happened?'*

*'if you agree and your parents disagree there is nothing you can do if they wont listen to you'*

Children also identify adults as the decision makers.

*'Then the principal and teacher can pick if it is good or not'*

*'It's like when I said to my ma I wanted to go live with him and she said I don't know what I want'*

The role of parents was discussed during the identification of children rights. There was a discussion on focus group three among participants about parents' rights to tell children to do things such as the dishes. One participant commented that parents don't have a right to tell you to do things. This prompted a discussion on parents role and rights. Another participant felt parents have a role to teach children how to do things in focus group three. Many children agreed with parents having a role in teaching children how to do things. Children also identified parents' role in helping and children's role in being responsible. A child in one of the focus groups commented that *'you can be protected but you have a right to talk'*.

Parents attempt to protect children was also identified as a reason some decisions were made. A participant in focus group six noted *'Like a bmx and stunt bike, you mam is trying to protect you because a stunt bike can get you very injured'*. Figure 5



illustrates a situation where a child asks a teacher for help when he/she is being bullied. This picture displays the role of adults as the helper or protector.

**Figure 5 Child Asking Teacher for help re bullying**



*Dialogue*

*Child 1: 'Your like a pig in a barn. Ha Ha'*

*Child 2: 'Teacher I am getting bullied'*

*Teacher: 'Who is bullying you? I'll talk to them, stay away from them'*

#### **4.6 Theme Four: Why adults may or may not listen**

Theme Two the fragility of children's rights describes children's view on the unstable nature of their right to have a voice. Mirroring aspects of Theme three, the factors influencing whether children are listened to are largely dependent on adults. A number of reasons why children's right to be heard may or may not be recognised were identified, namely, 1) adults mood, 2) content of children's views, 3) whether adults are busy 4) if the child is seen as being good

In three of the six focus groups children refer to adults mood as a factor which influences whether a child will or will not be listened to.

*'sometimes you mam is really angry and she wouldn't want to hear and sometimes she is in a calm mood so she wouldn't mind listening to you'.*

Adults' perception on the content of children's views is also seen as a factor in children's rights in three of the six focus groups. Children highlighted that children need to say reasonable things to be listened to.

*'it has to be a sensible rule'*

If adult were busy, that is occupied with other activities it was factor in four of the six focus groups.

*'the principal listens or if the principal has free time or something to talk'*

*'Sometimes your parents are too busy to listen'.*

Whether adults' views a child as being good was identified as a factor which would influence whether a child would or would not be listened to in three of the six focus groups.

*'It is not like if she's good at her work it is more like she is keeping the rules*

*Already, if she wasn't keeping the rules then she really shouldn't get a say'*

#### **4.7 Theme Five: Reasons to Listen to Children**

Children articulated a number of reasons why children should be listened to. During the thematic analysis a number of sub themes related to why children should have voice were identified. Five sub themes emerged, 1)Fairness, 2)Truth, 3)Agency 4)Value of Children's and 5)Rights.

Firstly, in terms of fairness, children discussed the importance of allowing children on opportunity to give their side of the situation and have their say. All six focus groups identified fairness as a reason for giving children a voice.

*'Because like you have to give people chances'*

*'but like it is fair that he gets to tell his side of the story, she could be grounding him for no reason and letting the other boy off'*

Secondly in relation to the sub theme of truth, children highlighted that in order to find exactly what happened the children involved had to have an opportunity to have his or her say. Four of the six focus groups identified truth as a reason for giving children a voice.

*'It wasn't true, no one believed him and he has to say what he really did'*

*'Some teachers don't see what happens in the school'*

Thirdly, children in three of the focus groups highlight themselves as being agent, that is, being part of what happened as a reason to having a right to have a voice.

*'because it was him that was in the fight'*

*'because it is her school, she goes to the school and she is going to have to obey the rules'*

Fourthly, children suggested that children have views that are of value in two of the focus groups.

*'she would be able to make good rules'*

*'Sometimes they might come up with a good idea the adults didn't come up with'*

Lastly in one focus group children refer to the concept of rights directly to explain why children should have a say in matters that affect them. It should be noted children in the other five focus groups did not highlight that children have a right to have a say as a reason why children should be listened to.

*'because she has a right to say what happens in the school because she is in it'*

*'or her just to have no rights in the school is just wrong'*

#### **4.8 Theme Six: Advice for Adults on how to listen better**

This subtheme identifies advice for adults and researchers. In terms of advice for adults, in order to assess who the advice would be most relevant to children were asked who they talk to if there was something on their mind. Children identified the

following people Mother, Father, Sibling and Teachers. The majority of Children over 89 % identified that they would talk to their mother if there was something on their mind, follow both father and teachers.

Children in all six focus groups were asked to come up with advice for adults on how they could listen better. The following subthemes were found 1) Listen; 2) Pay attention; 3) Being calm; 4) Giving children time; 5) Privacy

Across all six group children advocated for adults to listen.

*'like i'd say like , listen' 'Listen to children'*

In two focus groups children suggested adults should pay attention.

*'Pay attention'*

*'put everything down and listen'*

In two focus groups children gave the advice the adults should be calm

*'just to take their time and listen carefully be calm'*

Giving time to the children was also identified across two of the focus groups.

*'you shouldn't have kids if you don't have time for them'*

Lastly two focus groups identified providing children with a private place to talk as being helpful

*'they can talk in private so like you feel a bit more safer because your brother and Sister don't hear it, it's just between you two so nobody else has to know'.*

Children in all six focus groups gave positive comments about the experience of taking part in the focus group. The positive comments included noting it was enjoyable and fun.

*'it was interesting' 'I really liked it'*

Two children felt the focus group session was long and boring, one child stating it was *'a bit boring'*

Children in one focus group noted that parts of the focus group were hard.

Children in all groups were positive about the format of the focus group.

*'stick with what you do, it was good'*

Children offered a number of suggestions about how the format of the focus group could be improved. Children suggestions included using paints, having a writing activity and playing a game.

#### **4.9 Summary**

Children taking part in the research study could identify a range of rights but did not explain what the concept of rights is. The research findings suggest that children feel their rights are fragile and largely dependent on adults. Children identify reasons why it is important to listen to children and offer advice to adults about how they can listen better. In addition they provided feedback on how they found the experience of taking part in the research and how the focus group format could be improved.

## **5 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Paying attention to children's voices means doing more than just passively listening to children. This chapter will endeavour to pay attention and explore the meaning of the views and experiences children shared during this study on their rights to have a say in matters that affect them. Firstly, the possible reason or interpretations of why children's understanding of the concept of rights appeared to be limited will be explored. Secondly, children's experiences and views of the fragility of their right to be have a say will be explored. Finally, children's advice for adults on why and how children should be listened to will be considered in terms of current approaches to supporting children's participation.

### **5.2 Children's Knowledge about Their Rights in Context**

Children in this study identified a large range of rights including self-determinism rights such as practicing their chosen religion and nurturance rights such as having shelter. This is comparable with a recent study by Sandbaek and Einarsson in Norway where children identified a broad range of rights (2008). And in contrast the 'What do They Know' research by Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) finding that children have a limited awareness of specific rights (2008). The Irish children's in this study ability to name a litany of rights may be viewed as a positive finding. However while children identified a broad range of rights they appeared to display a limited understanding of the concept of rights. This finding was similar to the CRAE research which found that children identification of specific rights did not necessarily mean they displayed an underlying understanding of the concept of rights. This finding is consistent with national and international development psychology research which identifies children's limited understanding of rights before the age of 13 years (Cherney & Shing, 2008; Kilkelly et al., 2004; Lalor & Baird, 2006; Nixon & Halpenny, 2010).

Children in this study display of a limited understanding of the concept of rights can be interpreted in a number of ways, namely an indication that children are incompetent of understanding the abstract concept or that children are not supported

by adults to develop an understanding of their rights. From a developmental psychology perspective children's under 13 years lack of understanding of the abstract concept of rights can be judged as consistent with their developmental stage (Cherney & Shing, 2008). However this view has been challenged by research findings that children as young as five can display an ability to understand the concept of rights (Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Covell et al, 2008). Thus children's limited understanding of the concept of rights is may not be purely due to their development stage of maturation.

It is interesting that while children in this study displayed a limited understanding of the concept of rights they tended to demonstrate an awareness of issues related to justice or fairness. The concept of justice relates to being treated fairly and equally by other people (Thompson, 2007). Research has found children' as young as five years old have an understanding of justice within the context of their everyday lives (Thomspon, 2007; Dillion et al, 2010). Children in the study highlighting of issues related to fairness are important for two core reasons. Firstly, children in the study have voiced a desired to be treated fairly, which is important as reinforces the need for children to be recognised as citizens with rights. This supports a growing body of research where children highlight their desire to be treated justly (Kilkelly et al, 2004; Governement of Ireland, 2011; Gaskell, 2008). Secondly, children's ability to discuss justice taking into account a variety of factors showcases their ability to understand complex issues. Evidence from the present study and previous research suggest children's under 13 years have an ability to evaluate justice with reference a variety of factors such as equality of treatment (Thompson, 2007). This suggests to contrary to the developmental psychology research indications children under 13 may be able to understand abstract concepts in certain circumstances. However, further study is required to fully assess children's ability or tendencies to think abstractly on issues related to justice.

An alternative way of viewing children's limited understanding of the concept of their rights is to look at it from the point of view that childhood is socially constructed and children's abilities are shaped by factors such as culture, religion and legislation (James & James, 2004). This is supported by cross cultural research on children's

understanding of children's rights (Cherney, 2010; Cherney & Shing, 2008; Kilkelly et al., 2004; Lalor & Baird, 2006; Covell et al). Differences between Sanboek et al's finding that Norwegian children's display a high level of understanding of the concept of rights and the current study indications that children who took part in the study had a limited understanding could partly be due to different legislation and cultural practices. For example Norway has very specific legislation which emphasises children's rights and outlines requirement for children to be listened to, compared to Irish less specific legislation (Kellet, 2009).

The current research highlighted examples of children's of experiences of being listened to, with most of the experiences shared by the children being negative. However, one child highlighted a positive process that was employed in the crèche she currently attends afterschool, where all voices were heard when a fight between children occurs and each child is involved in coming up with a solution. In contrast a number of children recalled experiences of being involved in the student council were there views were listened to but feeling frustrated that no actions occurred. Children's negative experiences of taking part in a school council are worrying as rather than support children to develop experiences of participating in decisions they may reinforce children's view that they're views are not valued. Irish research on secondary schools councils indicated that often there was a disparity in the views of school management and students on the purpose of the student council (OMC, 2007 ). School management tended to view the council as for filling a consultative role while student felt its purpose was to allow them to be involved in school decisions (OMC, 2007).

The experiences children recounted are important, as research indicate that children's daily interactions with adults where children get an opportunity to exercise their rights at home or in school can also support or inhibit children's understanding of their rights (Covell, Howe & McNeill, 2010; Peterson-Baladi, 2004). Everyday experiences of exercising rights such as taking part in family decisions provides children with an opportunity to gain a deeper know of their rights through a lived experience (Helwig, 2006; Covell, Howe and McNeill). Therefore, while providing children with more information on their rights is useful, a focus on facilitating children to exercise their rights may be more beneficial than giving children an opportunity to learn lists of



rights (CRAE, 2008; Helwig & Turiel, 2002). In addition a shared understanding between adults and children on what particular rights mean or what the purpose of activities, such as the student council could support positive experiences and may reduce children's sense of not being listened to.

Alderson suggests that one of the biggest obstacles to children's rights is not children's competence but rather adults' negative attitudes towards acknowledging children's rights (2008). Given that children's understanding of the concept of rights is related to their everyday experiences it is important that adults respect children's rights in everyday life. Adults need to pay attention to children's desire to be treated fairly and acknowledge children's rights in everyday life. UNICEF have identified that children having knowledge about their rights is important in terms of child protection as they can themselves advocate for their own rights (2008).

### **5.3 The Fragility of Children's Right to have a Voice**

Children in this research study highlighted that they felt their right to be listened to was fragile. One child in the study noted that '*sometimes your parents don't listen to you and sometimes they do*'. Children in this study recalled feeling frustrated and upset when they were not listened to. Children's experiences of not being listened to are comparable to findings nationally and internationally (Casas et al., 2006; Kilkelly et al., 2004; Lalor & Baird, 2006). Children in the study tended to talk about their parents role in protecting and teaching them in positive terms. In this study children tended to identify their mothers as the primary person they would talk to about things. In this research as with previous research children identify that adults have a role in protecting children from harm and the power to make decisions for children in both everyday issues and significant life events (Casas et al., 2006; Cherney & Shing, 2008; Devine, 2003; Nixon & Halpenny 2007; Qvortrup, 2005a).

As one child in the current study noted children are subordinate to adults '*your parent is the boss you are not the boss*'. The generational order which gives adults superior status can reduce children status as citizens and can often silence children's voices (Mayall, 2000; Montgomery, 2010). The current research suggests that children feel their right to be heard hangs in the balance depending on adult decisions. Previous

research highlights the tendency for adults not to listen to children (Hogan & O'Reilly, 2007; Kilkelly et al., 2004). Children taking part in this research highlight adults fail to listen to their views for the following reasons, adults being busy, the content of what they are saying, adults moods, and judgements on whether the child is good or not. Factors such as content of adult's views and busyness of adults have been identified previously as barriers to children's right to have a voice (Kellet, 2009). Issues around the credibility or value or the content of children's views is often raised when discussing children's right to be heard (Davie, Upton, & Varma, 1996; Lowden, 2002). Likewise adult's busyness is often highlighted as a factor which influences whether adults listen to children (Lundy, 2007).

The role of adult mood in influencing whether children are listened to or not, is unexpected and interesting finding. Researchers have found a link between mood and parenting behaviours. For example, Conger and Patterson found that parents who were stressed tended to use more harsh disciplining strategies such as shouting at children (1995). Conger and Patterson's research also highlights the interaction between a parent and child are shaped by both parties (1995). Child adult interactions have been identified as playing a vital role in whether children right to have a voice is realised (Cherney & Shing, 2008). A search of literature using Academic Premier Search Engine in September 2011 did not find any research papers on the link between an adult's mood and tendencies to listen to children within the context of children's rights (<http://0-web.ebscohost.com>). This suggests that the link between an adults mood and patterns of listening to children may not have been highlighted or explored in previous research on children's rights.

Another interesting and unforeseen finding was that children report that a child's rights to have a say may be granted or ignored by an adult based on the adults perception of whether a child is viewed as good or not. Quennerstendt notes that parents' and teachers' power or rights within child-adult interactions can limit children being recognised as citizens (2009). Here we see indications of adults power within the adult-child interactions. Adults have the power not only to decide if a child is making sense but to decide if the child is good and thus whether he or she should be listened to. The concept of the good child being worthy of a voice could be linked to

social constructions of children as either innocence in need of protection or evil in need of controlling (Hendrick, 2004; Cunningham, 2005; James & James, 2004).

Hayes recently highlighted that in order for children to be respected as citizens we need to listen to them (2011). A pervasive discourse of adults having power to limit their right to have a say is evident throughout the children's in this studies discussions. It is possible that the weakness in UNCRC and national legislation in terms of children's rights may provide space within which adults can legitimately choose not to listen to children (Dauite, 2008). Namely, the lack of clarity within the UNCRC on how what is meant by 'evolving capacities' and how it should be judged. Also, within the Irish constitutions the lack of recognition of children's rights outside of their family (Hayes, 2002; CRA, 2011). In order for children's rights to be fulfilled they have to be respected as citizens and adults have to support or facilitate children to achieve citizenship (Mayall, 2001; Uprichard, 2008; Sandstrom et al, 2010). Hayes suggests that adults need to act as 'active arrows for children' actively supporting children to realise their rights. However, it appears that children in the study view adults as limiting their right to have a say. This suggests that adults do not always act as 'active arrows'. Children in the study may experience having a voice as a gift from adults rather than a right.

Adult views on childhood and children's rights impact views on rights impact or shape how research on children's rights. Differences in how children are viewed which underline research approaches also need to be considered when interpreting differences in research findings on children's views and understanding of their rights. For example, all the children in the research, all of who are under the age of 13 advocated strongly for the right to have a say in areas such as home and school. On the surface this research finding seems to be contrary to some international studies findings that only children over 13 advocate strongly for the right to have a voice (Akengin, 2008; Cherney, 2010; Cherney & Shing, 2008; Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Day, 2002). However on closer examination methodological differences highlight deeper difference in how children's rights were viewed. The aforementioned international studies focused on assess children's comprehension of their rights and asking children to consider different scenarios and decided whether children or adults should make decisions. The design of the current

research allows children to assert their right to have a say and then provides them with an opportunity to discuss what might actually happen. This highlights the need for methodological triangulation where different methods are needed to research the same research questions (Hogan, 2005). The further use of qualitative methods in the study of children's rights may be useful to ensuring that children's voice is heard during discourses on children's rights.

#### **5.4 Supporting Children's Participation Rights: Moving beyond Theory to Practice**

At the launch of the report *Young People in care* Minister Francis Fitzgerald noted there is a need to embedded practices of listening to children.

*"The experience of not being heard has been documented in a number of reports published in recent years. It is now time to embed participation in all decision making processes related to children and young people."*(Department of Children and Young People, 2011b, para. 2)

Children in this study shared their insights and views on why and how children could be listened to better. Children participating in the focus group put forward a number of reasons why they should be listened to namely, fairness, truth, agency and the value of children's views. Children's views in this study echo elements of previous research highlighting the injustice of not listening to children about the situation that they are affected by (Kilkelly et al., 2004). Concepts of fairness and truth identified by this study's participants can be linked to concepts of human dignity (Freeman, 2007; Gellinsken, 2008). Freeman suggests that by providing children with participation rights we ensure that children's status as full human beings with a right to justice is secured (2007). Giving children a voice has also be seen as a method of safeguarding children from injustices as they can identify when their rights are being ignore and take action (Alderson, 2008; UNICEF, 2010).

In this study children identify themselves as having a role or being affected by decisions adults make. This could be interpreted as children in the study identifying themselves as active agents rather than passive beings. Viewing children as active agents acknowledges children's capacity to act and influence their environment (Freeman, 2007; James & James, 2004; Mayall, 2000). However adults may not view

children as active agents and instead focus on children needing the protection and care of their parents (Lowden, 2002). Views of children as in need of protection are not incompatible with views of children as active agents (Freeman, 2007). The children in this study highlighted both parents role in protecting them and their own agency. However an over emphasis on the protection of children can reduce acknowledgment of children's agency.

Children in this research noted that what they have to say has value. For example in the current study, children highlighted that they could contribute to making school rules which are '*sensible*' and work. The value of children's views has been highlighted previously (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; James & James, 2004; Lundy, 2007). However the reasons put forward for why children's views are of value differ. For example Archard and Skivenes highlighted that sometimes professionals place a value on listening to children because it provides information they may need to make decisions rather than because children's views are in themselves significant in shaping any decision made (2009). In contrast sometimes valuing children's views is seen as tokenism rather than something has to be done all the time (Lundy, 2007). The differences in why children views are of valued impacts on how children experience being listened to (Lundy, 2007).

The danger of only superficially listening to children's views is highlighted in this study when children were asked what advice they would give adults on how to listen better. Some children in this study suggested that adults would not listen to their advice. This mirrors the findings of the Northern Ireland study where children displayed pessimism about adult desire to really listen to them (Kilkelly et al., 2004). Children's negative experience of not been listened to such as the negative experiences of being involved the students council mention in this study may lead children to opt out of such processes. Gaskell highlighted that children can lose hope and disengage from structures such as school when they feel their rights are not respected (2008).

Children's strongest piece of advice is for adults is for them to listen. For example one child noted:

*'That they should listen to us when we are in trouble, they should listen to our opinions about it as well'*

The children's advice highlights that adults need to carry out the actual activity of listening in order for children to express their views. A myriad of approaches have been put forward to facilitate children expressing their views. For example, the Mosaic approach emphasises adult role in listening to very young children and paying attention to them and how they communicate verbally and nonverbally (Clark & Moss, 2001). However adults need to be motivated to listen to children in order for them to utilise approaches to listening to children.

Children in the study recommended adults do the following, give children time, pay attention, be calm and listen to children in private. Children's advice in the study of allowing children time and paying attention to their views children mirrors elements of a number of approaches to supporting participation (Clark & Moss, 2001; Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001). Again children in the study pin point adults' role in child adult interactions support the expression of their views. Children advice that adults are calm is consistent with recommendation on how to support participations (McAuley & Brattman, 2002). Children in the study highlighted the importance of privacy in supporting them to express their views. The right to privacy is set out in the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989).

Children in the study were given an opportunity to give feedback on how they found the experience of taking part in the focus group. Overall children gave very positive feedback on the experience of taking part in the focus group. The children's feedback supports the value of using focus groups (Greene & Hogan, 2005). In addition children's voiced support for the format of using scenarios, group discussions and art during the focus group supports the value of using multiple methods. There were differences in children's views on how the focus group format could be improved with some noting that everything should be kept the same and other suggesting writing activities, games and the use of other materials. For instance, children in one of the focus groups recommended having a writing activity before the discussion starts. Another child suggested using paint instead of markers. This feedback is

important as it highlights the need for researchers to provided choice during research which allows children to participate in ways that children prefer (Hogan, 2005).

## **5.5 Limitations**

One of the shortcomings of the research was the method in which participants were recruited by teachers and principals to take part in the focus groups. The researcher did not set any criteria of eligibility for children to take part. However, there may have been a selection bias with certain children not being selected due to judgments on their suitability or capability to take part in the focus group. In hindsight, it would have been better to randomly select the children to the focus group. It would be beneficial to conduct further research where children were randomly selected to take part in the focus group to ensure all children had an equal opportunity to share their views.

## **6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

The overall aim of this research was to contribute to knowledge on children's right to have a voice. The study focused on children aged between 10 and 12 years experiences and views of their right to have a voice in relation to everyday situations. The qualitative nature of the research allowed for attention to be placed on children's views and experiences as well as their understanding of their rights. The five specific research questions will be outlined in terms of key findings and conclusions.

#### **6.1.1 What is children's understanding and awareness of their rights?**

The findings indicated that children in this study could identify a broad range of specific rights. Children identified both nurturance and self-determinism rights. Children in this research offered very few explanations on what a right was. The finding suggested children in this study had limited knowledge about the concept of rights while displaying an ability to discuss issues around justice. One conclusion that may be drawn from children's discussion of issues in relation to justice is that children of this age can discuss abstract topics. This could indicate that children's limited knowledge of the concept of rights was due to factors other than their age. However, further research is needed to examine the extent to which factors other than age influence children's ability to understand the concept of rights.

#### **6.1.2 What understanding and views do children have of children's right to have a say in matters that affect them?**

Children in the study defined having a say in matters that affect them as involving being able to voice an opinion or shape a decision. Children identified a broad range of areas where they wanted to have a say, encompassing home, school, their peer interactions and world issues. All the children taking part in the study asserted that they felt children should have a say in matters that affect them. Children in the study discussed a number of reasons why children should have a voice. Five sub themes of reasons emerged, 1) Fairness, 2) Truth, 3) Agency 4) Value of Children's and 5) Rights.



A number of key messages emerge from these findings, namely, children value their right to have a voice, they advocate for their right to have a voice and outline strong arguments for why they should be listened to. One possible conclusion from these findings is that children themselves identify their right to be listened. Also children's view of their right to be listened could be interpreted as due to their understanding of justice and their own agency rather than their knowledge of the concept of rights.

### **6.1.3 What are children's experiences having a voice in Ireland in 2011?**

Children taking part in research identified experiences of being listened to and not being listened to both at home and in school. Children tended to recount experiences of not being listened to more frequently than experiences of being listened to. Some children highlighted feelings of upset and frustration when they were not listened to. It could be interpreted from the findings that children's right to have a voice in matters that affect them is often ignored.

### **6.1.4 What factors do children identify as impacting positively or negatively on whether children have a voice or not?**

Children in the study perceived that adults have a higher status or a key decision making role in deciding whether a child was listened to or not. Children talked about reasons they felt impacted on whether children's right to be heard may or may not be recognised, namely, 1) Adults mood, 2) Content of children's views, 3) Whether adults are busy 4) If the child is seen as being good or not. Children in the study also provided advice to adults on how they could listen better 1) Listen; 2) Pay attention; 3) Being calm; 4) Giving children time; 5) Privacy. Children highlighted that importance of adults '*really listening*'.

The findings suggest children experience times when they are not listened to due to adult decisions. One conclusion that could be drawn is that adults do not listen to children for reasons that are not related to the child's 'best interest' such as adult mood or judgements on whether a child was good or not. This finding is significant as it highlights there may be barriers to listening to children that have not been previously identified. Children provided advice on how adults could listen better. This advice is practical but also highlights the deeper issue that adults have to choose to engage in the action of listening.

### **6.1.5 What themes or issues can be identified in relation to children's right to have a voice in matters that affect them?**

A number of strong themes emerged from the thematic analysis, which has already been highlighted. Two of the key themes which emerged were the fragility of children's right to have a voice and adults power in deciding whether children could exercise their right to have a voice. Also children's desire to have a voice in a range of matter that affects them was evident from the findings. Children reporting enjoying taking part in the focus group. It appear children's ability to share views and offer insights was facilitated by the use of a variety of activities during the focus group.

Overall the research questions were exploratory in nature and the aims of each question were met in terms of getting children's views and experiences. In addition the value using qualitative methods to research children's rights was supported by the richness of the data collected and the new insights children shared in the issues related to them having a voice.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Children's rights to have a voice in matters that affect them is complex and multiply factors interplay to either support or reduce to the realisation of this right. The following recommendations are aimed at enhancing our understanding of the children's rights, developing comprehensive policies on children's right to have a voice and implementing practices which support children to have a voice:

1. Further research to examine the factors that influence children's ability to understand the concept of rights. In addition further research on adults views and behaviours would be useful;
2. Dissemination of the current findings on children's views and experiences to professionals working with children to raise awareness of children's perspectives
3. Given that children's right to be have a say can often ignored, clearer legislation which stipulates requirement of adults to facilitate children expressing views on matters that affect them;

4. A national public awareness campaign on children's status as citizens would be useful to highlight children's rights and perhaps encourages adults to reflect on whether they treat children as citizens;
5. Lastly, continued use of qualitative research methods which involve a variety of mediums to facilitate children experiencing their views.

## 7 References

- Akengin, H. (2008). A Comparative study on children's perceptions of the child rights in the Turkish community of Turkey and Northern Cyprus. *Education, 129*(2), 224-238.
- Alderson, P. (2000). *Young children's rights: exploring beliefs, attitudes, principles and practice*. London: J. Kingsley.
- Alderson, P. (2008). *Young children's rights: exploring beliefs, principles and practice* (2nd ed.). London ; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Archard, D., & Skivenes, M. (2009a). Balancing a Child's Best Interests and a Child's Views. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 17*(1), 1-21.
- Archard, D., & Skivenes, M. (2009b). Hearing the child. *Child & Family Social Work, 14*(4), 391-399.
- Camfield, L., Streuli, N., & Woodhead, M. (2009). What's the Use of 'Well-Being' in Contexts of Child Poverty? Approaches to Research, Monitoring and Children's Participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 17*(1), 65-109.
- Casas, F., Saporiti, A., González, M., Figuer, C., Rostan, C., Sadurní, M., Rago, M. (2006). Children's Rights from the Point of View of Children, their Parents and their Teachers: A Comparative Study between Catalonia (Spain) and Il Molise (Italy). *International Journal of Children's Rights, 14*(1), 1-75.
- Cherney, I. D. (2010). Mothers' Fathers' and their Children's Perception and Reasoning about Nurture and Self-Determination Rights. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 18*(1), 79-99.
- Cherney, I. D., & Shing, Y. L. (2008). Children's Nurture and Self Determination Rights: A Cross Cultural Perspective. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(4), 835-856.
- Cherney, I., Greteman, A., & Travers, B. (2008). A Cross-Cultural View of Adults' Perceptions of Children's Rights. *Social Justice Research, 21*(4), 432-456. doi:10.1007/s11211-008-0079-7
- Children's Rights Alliance (2011a). *Report Card 2011*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance
- Children's Rights Alliance (2011b). *Ten Years On: Did the National Children's Strategy Deliver It's Promises*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance
- Children's Rights Alliance (2009) *Report Card 2009*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.

- Children's Right's Alliance (2010) *Report Card 2010*. Dublin: Children's Right Alliance.
- Chioncel, N. E., van der Veen, R. G. W., Wildemeersch, D., & Jarvis, P. (2003). The validity and reliability of focus groups as a research method in adult education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(5), 495.
- Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2005). Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives on the Study of Children. In G. Sheila & H. Diane (Eds.), *Researching Children's Experience. Approaches and Methods* (pp. 42-60). London: Sage.
- Clarke, J. (2010). The origin of childhood the beginning. In K. Derek, M. Lisa & T. Elizabeth (Eds.), *Key Issues in Childhood and Youth Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Commission of Investigation (2010). Report into the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne. <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=1585>
- Covell, K., Howe, B. R., & McNeil, J. K. (2008). 'If there's a dead rat, don't leave it'. Young children's understanding of their citizenship rights and responsibilities. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38(3), 321-339. doi:10.1080/03057640802286889
- Cunningham, H. (2005). *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 15000*. Harrow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Damon, W., & Lerner, R. M. (2006). *Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed.). Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.
- Daiute, C. (2008). The Rights of Children, the Rights of Nations: Developmental Theory and the Politics of Children's Rights. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(4), 701-723.
- Davie, R., Upton, G., & Varma, V. P. (1996). *The voice of the child: a handbook for professionals*. London ; Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press.
- Day, D. M., Peterson-Badali, M., & Ruck, M. D. (2006). The relationship between maternal attitudes and young people's attitudes toward children's rights. *Journal of Adolescence*, 193-207.
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011a). *Listen to Our Voices. Hearing Children and Young People Living in the care of the state*. Government Publications: Dublin.
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011b, July 27). Launch of Listen to Our Voices: A report of consultation with children and young people living in the care of the state. Retrieved <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=1604>

- Devine, D. (2003). *Children, power, schooling: how childhood is structured in the primary school*. Stoke on Trent: Trenthon Books.
- Dillon, S, Ruane, B & Kavanagh, AM (2010) 'Young children as global citizens' in *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 11, Autumn 2010, pp. 84-91, available: <http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue11-perspectives3>.
- Dobbs, A. T., Smith, A. B., & Taylor, N. J. (2006). "No, We Don't Get a Say, Children Just Suffer the Consequences": Children Talk about Family Discipline. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 14(2), 137-156.
- Flatman, D. (2002). Consulting children: are we listening? [Article]. *Paediatric Nursing*, 14(7), 28.
- Foley, P., Roche, J., Tucker, S., & Open University. (2001). *Children in society: contemporary theory, policy and practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave in association with the Open University.
- Fondacaro, M. R., Brank, E. M., Stuart, J., Villanueva-Abraham, S., Luescher, J., & McNatt, P. S. (2006). Identity Orientation, Voice, and Judgments of Procedural Justice During Late Adolescence. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 35(6), 987-997. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9035-8
- Freeman, M. (2007). Why It Remains Important to Take Children's Rights Seriously. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15(1), 5-23.
- Gaskell, C. (2008). 'But They Just Don't Respect Us': young people's experiences of (dis)respected citizenship and the New Labour Respect Agenda. *Children's Geographies*, 6(3), 223-238.
- Gibbons, N., Lunny, L., Harrison, P., and O'Neill, G. (2010). Roscommon Child Care Report. Report of the Inquiry Team to the Health Service Executive
- Government of Ireland (2000). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children, Their Lives*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Government of Ireland (2002). *The Ombudsman for Children Act*. Dublin : The Stationery Office.
- Greene, S. (2006). Child psychology: Taking account of children at last? *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 27(1-2), 8-15.

- Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (2005). *Researching children's experiences : methods and approaches*. London: SAGE.
- Hart, R. (1997). *Children's participation the theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development, environment and care*. London: Earthsan Publications Limited.
- Hayes, N. (2002). *Children's rights - Whose Right?: a review of child policy development in Ireland*. Dublin: The Policy Institute.
- Hayes, N. (2004). Children's rights in Ireland-participation in policy development. In C. D. & W. A. (Eds.), *Having their say: Young People and Participation European Experiences*. (pp. 47-58). Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.
- Head, B. W. (2011). Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 33(4), 541-547.
- Heary, C., & Hennessy, E. (2006). Focus groups versus individual interviews with children: A comparison of data. *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 27, 58-68.
- Hedegaard, M. (2009). Children's Development from a Cultural-Historical Approach: Children's Activity in Everyday Local Settings as Foundation for Their Development. *Mind, Culture & Activity*, 16(1), 64-82.
- Helwig, C., & Turiel, E. (2002). Civil Liberties, autonomy, and democracy: Children's perspectives. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 25, 253-270.
- Hendrick, H. (2004). *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Hogan, D. (2005). Researching 'the Child' in Developmental Psychology. In G. Sheila & H. Diane (Eds.), *Researching Children's Experience. Approaches and Methods* (pp. 22-41). London: Sage.
- James, A., & James, A. L. (2004). *Constructing childhood: theory, policy and social practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kagan, J. (2008). In Defence of Qualitative Changes in Development. *Child Development*, 79(6), 1606-1624.
- Kellet, M. (2009). Children and young people's participation *Children and young people's worlds: Developing frameworks for intergrated practice* (pp. 43-60). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Kilkelly, U., Kilpatrick, R., Lundy, L., Moor, L., Scarton, P., Davey, C., McAlister, C. (2004). *Children's Rights in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: NICCY.
- Lalor, K., & Baird, K. (2006). Our Views, Anybody Listening. Researching the views and needs of young people in Co. Kildare.

- Lansdown, G., & Karkara, R. (2006). Children's right to express views and have them taken seriously. *Lancet*, 367(9511), 690-692.
- Lee, K., & Johnson, A. (2007). Child Development in Cultural Contexts: Implications of Cultural Psychology for Early Childhood Teacher Education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(3), 233-243.
- Lowden, J. (2002). Children's rights: a decade of dispute. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 37(1), 100-107.
- Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-942.
- Mayall, B. (2000). The sociology of childhood in relation to children's rights. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 8(3), 243-259.
- McAuley, K., & Brattman, M. (2002). *Hearing of Voice –Consulting with Children and Young People including those experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy development in Ireland*. Open Your Eyes to Poverty Initiative. Dublin.
- Melton, G. (1980). Children's Concepts of their Rights. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 9, 186-190.
- Montgomery, H. (2010). The rights of the child: rightfully mine. In K. Derek, M. Lisa & T. Elizabeth (Eds.), *Key Issues in Childhood and Youth Studies* (pp. 149-158). New York: Routledge.
- Morss, J. R. (2002). The several social constructions of James; Jenks and Prout: The contribution to the theorization of Childhood. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 39-54.
- MulQueen, E. (2011a, August 19). Failure to hold poll on children's rights slated. *Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2011/0819/1224302708907.html>
- MulQueen, E. (2011b, August 22). Higgins says shift in thinking needed to facilitate children. *Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2011/0822/1224302807134.html>
- Nixon, E., & Halpenny, A. M. (2010). *Children's Perspectives on Parenting Styles and Discipline*. Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



- Ombudsman for Children (2010). Annual Report 2010. Dublin: Dublin Stationary.
- Office of the Minister for Children (2006) Giving Children A Voice: An Investigation of children's experiences of participation and decision making in Irish hospitals. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- OMC, Department of Health and Children and City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development (2007). Giving Young People a Voice: Student Councils in Schools. A module of work for civic, social and political education. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Peterson-Badali, M., & Ruck, M. D. (2008). Studying Children's Perspectives on Self Determination and Nurturance Rights: Issues and Challenges. *Journal of Social Issues*, 749-769.
- Peterson-Badali, M., & Ruck, M. D. (2008). Studying Children's Perspectives on Self-Determination and Nurturance Rights: Issues and Challenges. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(4), 749-769.
- Pinkerton, J. (2004). Children's participation in the policy process: some thoughts on policy evaluation based on the Irish National Children's Strategy. *Children & Society*, 18(2), 119-130.
- Peyton, L. & Wilson, K. (2006). *Mid - term Review of the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010*. National Children's Advisory Committee
- Pressler, J. D. (2010). Construction of Childhood-The Buidling Blocks *Key Issues in Childhood and Youth Studies* (pp. 14-26). London: Routledge.
- Quennerstedt, A. (2009). Balancing the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Parents in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Journal of Human Rights*, 8(2), 162-176.
- Qvortrup, J. (2005a). *Studies in modern childhood: society, agency, culture*. New York ; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Qvortrup, J. (2005b). Varieties of Childhood. In Q. Jens (Ed.), *Studies of Modern Childhood. Society, Agency, Culture* (pp. 1-12). London: Palgrave, MacMillan.
- Redmond, G. (2008). Child poverty and child rights: Edging towards a definition. *Journal of Children & Poverty*, 14(1), 63-82.
- Ruck, M. D., Abramovich, R., & Keating, D. P. (1989). Children's and adolescents' understanding of right: Balancing nurturance and self-determination. *Child Development*, 404-417.

- Ruck, M. D., Peterson-Badali, M., & Day, D. M. (2002). Adolescents' and Mothers' Understanding of Children's Rights in the Home. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 12(3), 373-398.
- Sandbæk, M & Einarsson, J.H., (2008). Children and young people report to the UN on their rights. *Annex to Norway's fourth report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*
- Sandstrom Kjellin, M., Stier, J., Einarson, T., Davies, T., & Asunta, T. (2010). Pupils' voices about citizenship education: comparative case studies in Finland, Sweden and England. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(2), 201-218. doi:10.1080/02619761003631823
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15(2), 107-117.
- Shier, H. (2010). Children as Public Actors: Navigating the Tensions. *Children & Society*, 24(1), 24-37.
- Smeyers, P. (2010). Child rearing in the 'Risk Society': on the discourse of rights and the 'Best Interest of a Child. *Educational Theory*, 60(3), 271-284.
- Smith, J., Bekker, H., & Cheater, F. (2011). Theoretical versus pragmatic design in qualitative research. [Article]. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(2), 39-51.
- Thomson N. (2008). Justice in the home: children's and adolescents' perceptions of the fair distribution of household chores. *Journal of Moral Education*, 36(1):19-36.
- UNCRC (2006). Consideration of reports submitted by state parties under Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNCRC
- UNICEF (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, New York: UNICEF.
- Uprichard, E. (2008). Children as 'Being' and 'Becoming'. *Children, Childhood and Temporality. Children and Society*, 303-313.
- Uprichard, E. (2010). Questioning Research with Children: Discrepancy between Theory and Practice? *Children & Society*, 24(1), 3-13.
- Valentine, G. (2003). Boundary Crossings: Transitions from Childhood to Adulthood. *Children's Geographies*, 1(1), 37-52.
- Walsh, T. (2005). Constructions of Childhood in Ireland in the Twentieth Century: A View from the Primary School Curriculum 1900–1999. *Child Care in Practice*, 11(2), 253-269.

Wandersman, A. (2009). Four Keys to Success (Theory, Implementation, Evaluation, and Resource/System Support): High Hopes and Challenges in Participation. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(1/2), 3-21.

Woodhead, M. (1999). Reconstructing developmental psychology—some first steps. *Children & Society, 13*(1), 3-19.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A	Focus Group Interview Schedule for Young People .....	76
Appendix B	Picture for Identifying Rights Activity .....	79
Appendix C	Email from Professor Isabelle Cherney .....	80
Appendix D	Timetable for Focus Group .....	81
Appendix E	Information for School on Research .....	82
Appendix F	Information for Parents on Research .....	84
Appendix G	Parent Consent Form.....	86
Appendix H	Assent Form for Children .....	87
Appendix I	Sample Transcript from One of the Focus Groups .....	88
Appendix J	Sample of 8 Pictures from Focus Groups .....	97

## **Appendix A                      Focus Group Interview Schedule for Young People**

### **Welcome & Overview**

#### **Check Consent Forms Minutes**

**Maximum of 10**

Participants will be invited to sit on the seats. The moderator will thank all participants for coming. The moderator will give a brief overview of what will happen in the focus group. The moderator will answer any questions related to taking part in the focus group. The moderator will ensure all participants have signed the consent form from parent/guardian. The moderator will agree group rules with the participants around confidentiality, child protection, and voluntary consent. The moderator will reinforce that all opinions and views are greatly valued and that there is no right or wrong answers. The moderator will also highlight that participants can respond directly to each other. The moderator will talk through the focus group plan. The moderator will have a large flipchart page displaying the agenda for the session which will include times.

If children are happy to take part in the focus group they will be invited to sign an assent form.

#### **Introductory Rights Activity**

**Maximum of 10 minutes**

Okay we are going to start now, I just want to hear what you think. Remember there is no such thing as a wrong answer during this activity. Just let me know what you think.

- 1. Does anyone know what a 'right' is?*

Next show the children a picture of some children

- 2. What rights do these children have?*

Use probing as appropriate.

#### **Right to Have a Voice**

**25 minutes**

We are going to talk about the right to have a say in things that affect you. First of all we are going to talk about what that means.

- 3. What do you think having a say in things that affect you means?*

I am going to read out a situation, have a listen and then I'll ask you what you think about the situation

*Debbie is 11 years old. Debbie's school is coming up with new school rules. The teachers are having a meeting to come up with the rules.*

4. *What do you, should Debbie get a chance to have her say?*
5. *What do you think would happen? Why?*

In am going to read another situation, see what you think

*Larry got into a fight with another boy outside of his house. Larry is 11. His mother said he would have to stay in for the next three nights, until he learns to behave. Larry said 'wait your have to hear my side of the story!'*

6. *What do you think, should Larry get a chance to have his say?*
7. *What do you think would happen? Why?*

The moderator will encourage participants to identify possible solutions to challenges identified. The moderator will follow up with probes to encourage participants to elaborate.

8. *In your experience are children's views taken into account (in matters that affect them)*
9. *What advice would you give to adults to help them listen?*
10. *What makes it hard for adults to listen?*
11. *Who do you normally talk to about things with? (about school, about friends or about home).*

### **Drawing Activity**

**10 Minutes**

Draw picture /of write about: Things in your life you want to have a say in.

You will have 7 minutes for drawing. If you want to tell the group about your picture you can and if you want to keep private that's okay. I would like to keep the drawings but it is up to you if you want we to keep them.

### **Conclusion**

**5 minutes**

The moderator will thank the participant for coming and sharing their views. The moderator will also seek feedback from the participants on how they found the discussion.

**What Do These Children Have a Right to?**





## Appendix C

## Email from Professor Isabelle Cherney

---

**From:** Cherney, Isabelle D. [mailto:cherneyi@creighton.edu]  
**Sent:** Fri 21/01/2011 01:44  
**To:** Aileen at Tallaght CDI  
**Subject:** RE: Revised Children Rights Interview

Dear Aileen,

I am so glad that you are interested in using the vignettes for your focus groups. I think that they should work – they were adapted to a European sample, but there are additional adjustments that can/should be made. I am attaching the vignettes that I used for the study that compared parents' attitudes toward children's right, as I am unsure what age group you are targeting.

Please let me know how it turns out!

Best wishes,  
Isabelle Cherney

*Isabelle D. Cherney, Ph.D.*

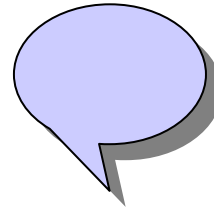
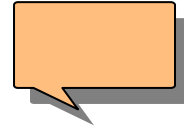
Michael W. Barry Professor  
[Director of the Honors Program](#)  
[Director - Interdisciplinary Ed.D. Program in Leadership](#)

Professor of Psychology  
Brandeis 101  
Creighton University  
2500 California Plaza  
Omaha, NE 68178  
Phone: (402) 280 1228  
[www.icherney.com](http://www.icherney.com)

## **Appendix D          Timetable for Focus Group**

What We Are Going to Do?

- Introductions
- Activity
- Group Talk
- Drawing Activity
- Finish Up



## **Appendix E                      Information for School on Research**

### Contents

1. Overview of Research
2. Information on Researcher
3. Sample Size and Timing of Research

### **1. Information for Schools on Research**

The study explored children between 10 and 12 years old understanding and awareness of their rights and what are the views and experiences of young people in relation to ‘children having a voice in matters that affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity’ (2000).

The research will focus on into the following research questions:

- What is children’s understanding and awareness of their rights?
- What understanding and views do children have of children’s right to have a say in matters that affect them?
- What are children’s experiences having a voice in Ireland in 2011?
- What factors do children identify as impacting on whether children have a voice or not?
- What themes or issues can be identified in relation to children’s right to have a voice in matters that affect them?

### **2. Information on Researcher**

My name is Aileen Murphy. I have a 1<sup>st</sup> class honours degree in Psychology. I am currently in my second year of a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies with Dublin Institute of Technology. I am studying part-time and working full time for the Childhood Development Initiative. In my current role as a Quality Specialist, I oversee the delivery of two evidence based programmes Doodle Den (literacy programme) and Mate-Tricks (prosocial behaviour programme). I have ten years work experience in Child and Family Services. I have extensive experience working with children in group work situations.

### **3. Sample Size and Timing of Research**

I am interested in carrying out focus groups with children in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class. For each focus group I would like to have 10 participants. If possible I would like to conduct three focus groups within your school (one with each class group). Each focus group will take no more than one hour. I would like to carry out the research in May at a time convenient to the school. I can carry out the focus groups all on one day or three days. I will need a small room to carry out the focus groups in.

## Appendix F Information for Parents on Research



### Have Your Say on Children's Right to Have a Voice Information Sheet

My name is Aileen and as part of my master course, I am conducting research on children's views and experiences of children's right to have a voice or say in matters that affect them according to their age and maturity. I would like your child to take part in a focus group.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

Focus groups will be held with small groups of people normally about ten. At the focus group children will be invited to discuss their views on children's right to have a say in matters that affect them. I want to find out what children think, so there are no right or wrong answers. The focus group will last 55 minutes.

#### **How do I sign up to take part?**

In order for a child to take part in the focus group the child and his or her parent has to give permission. That means that the child and parent/carer both have to sign a consent form.

#### **Does my child have to take part?**

Your child can change his or her mind at any time, even after you have signed the parent consent form.

#### **Is it Confidential?**

Everything said in the focus group is anonymous, that is names or any other identifying information will not be put into the write up of the research. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Everyone who

takes part will be asked not to disclose anything that is said in the focus group. All identifying information such as names or addresses will be removed from the collected materials, and all materials will stored in a secure way.

**Any questions**

Please call Aileen on [REDACTED]

## Parent Consent Form

Children Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Carer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick the boxes as appropriate ✓

I have read the Information leaflet on the study      Yes                       No

I give permission for my child to take part in the focus group on children's right to have a voice      Yes                       No

I understand that my child's words may be quoted directly but he or she will not be identified. With regards to being quoted, please tick the statement you agree with:

I do not agree to my child being quoted directly     

I agree to my child being quoted directly     

**By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the study information leaflet and agree to your child participating in this study.**

Parent's/Carers signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Return  
this Form to your  
Child's Teachers**

# Assent Form for Children

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to take part in the group discussion on children's rights Yes

No

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix I                      Sample Transcript from One of the Focus Groups

Focus Group One

Date: 17/06/2011

Number of Attendees: 10

Name of Transcribed by: Aileen Murphy

- I:** Does everyone want to introduce themselves? Do you want to start?
- P:** Mmm, Hello my name is X, I like football, my favourite food is spaghetti bolgnese and lasagne and mmm and I have lots of friends
- I:** Brilliant, thanks, do you want to write your name on one of those name badges
- P:** My name is X and I like the black hawks
- I:** You like what?
- P:** Black hawks
- I:** Black hawks, thanks X
- P:** My name is X, and I like nearly every sport
- I:** Every sport, any particular favourites?
- P:** Probably football
- I:** Soccer or GAA?
- P:** Soccer
- P:** Hi, my name is X, I like skateboarding and going down to X park and I also like football with my friends.
- I:** Do you go to X park a lot?
- P:** About every week
- I:** Very good. Take it off (label) and put it on, and pass it on to the next person. Brilliant. So what was your name?
- P:** My name is X and I live in a house
- I:** You live in a house
- P:** (laughter)
- I:** And what do you like?
- P:** Food (cross talk)
- P:** You have been holding back on me
- I:** Food, okay
- P:** My name is X, and I like cooking
- I:** My name is X and I like going to concerts and hiking
- P:** I like cheese (cross talk)
- P:** My name is X and I am looking forward to my holidays
- I:** You are looking forward to your holidays
- P:** I'm X and I like hanging around with my friends and pizza
- I:** Excellent
- P:** I like pizza (cross talk)
- P:** My name is X and I like to draw
- I:** Excellent, Brilliant. Okay so you are all very welcome. What I am going to do, is explain what we are going to do and if you are happy to do it, then you are going to sign your name on one of these. They are called assent forms, because you are under eighteen you always have to have your parents consent and this (assent form) just says that you are happy to do it as well.
- I:** So can everyone see this up here (flipchart with session plan). Can everyone see it?
- P:** Yeah, what we are going to do
- I:** Do you want to read it out there X?
- P:** What we are going to do? Introductions
- I:** So this is the introductions, you have introduced yourselves, I am going to tell you a little about what we are going to do, basically what that is. What's the next one?
- P:** Activity
- I:** So we are going to have a warm up activity to get everyone comfortable. Everyone looks quite relaxed but just to get everyone into the form of answering questions and talking about stuff. The next thing?
- P:** Eh (2 second pause) group talk

**I:** (laugh) So we are going to talk a lot about children's rights today and your opinions and views on children's rights. So that is the group talk.

**P:** Mmm, drawing activity

**I:** So the last thing we are going to do is a drawing on what we have talked about. Sometimes people like to talk about things and sometimes people prefer to draw what they think about things. Then?

**P:** Mmm, finish up

**I:** Then we will finish up, do you have your break after this?

**P:** No we have our break at about 20 past but

**I:** Oh

**P:** We are going to have it

**P:** After year (cross talk)

**I:** Okay, so does that sound okay to everyone.

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Yeah

**I:** There is just a few rules that I just have to go through so. Basically just so you know, everything.

**P:** Inaudible (cross talk)

**I:** Everything that you say here is anonymous; does anyone know what the word anonymous means?

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Not knowing

**P:** Not talking (cross talk)

**I:** Exactly, so confidential is when no one else knows. An anonymous is so we won't, so I won't X (name) said this or X (name) said this. I will be, you know, children I talked to said these things. So your anonymous, your name isn't put into my project. Does that sound okay to everyone?

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Yes

**P:** Yeah (cross talk)

**I:** So confidential, everything you say is just going into the report, I am not going to be going around telling my friends what you said or anything like that. So it goes into my research project but it is private. Mmm, just to say if anyone says anything concerned about, I don't think this will happen as we are not talking about things where you might get hurt, but if anyone said anything that I was worried about I would have to tell your teacher about it. Is that okay? So that is just if I thought someone was going to get hurt or was in harm or anything like that. So they are just the normal things, mmm, the big thing is there is no right or wrong answer, this is not a text, this is just your points of view and opinions. Does anyone know what an opinion is?

**P:** Someone's point of view about a situation

**P:** inaudible (cross talk ) 4 seconds)

**I:** What do you think X?

**P:** What you think

**I:** Exactly, so there has been lots of research, I suppose, around adult's views on things there has been less research done about what children and young people think. SO, this is what this is about, so there is no there is no wrong or right answer. Does that sound okay to everyone?

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Yeah

**P:** Yeah

**I:** So will we get these forms signed? So do you want to take one and pass them around. I haven't got pens, so we will use markers.

(Pause , 4 seconds)

**P:** I didn't get a form

(Pause)

**I:** There should be one there

**I:** Great, that perfect

**P:** What's a signature?

(Pause, 3 seconds)

I: That's just the way you sign it.  
P: I need a pen  
P: What date is it?  
(Pause, 6 seconds)  
P: 17<sup>th</sup>  
I: Great:  
I: X is finished is well, great  
(Pause, 2 seconds)  
I: We are going to put the markers away for a little bit.  
I: Okay so the first question I want to ask you is What do you think children's rights are? Does anyone have any ideas, what they think they are?  
P: Things that children are entitled to  
I: Okay, excellent. What does everyone else think?  
P: mmm, (Pause 4 seconds)  
P: What children want to do themselves not people wanting them to do.  
I: Okay, so what they want to. Okay yeah. Any other opinions?  
P: Kids could vote in the election  
P: (other children laughed)  
I: So that could be a right, it is not a right at the moment but it could be a right, yeah  
P: Mmm, Drive at 16 years a car  
I: Okay  
P: Free dental care until 16 years  
I: Okay yeah  
P: inaudible (2 seconds)  
I: Sorry  
P: I was just (doesn't finish sentence)  
I: it's okay  
(Pause 4 seconds)  
I: Any other ones?  
(Pause for 3 seconds)  
P: eh allowed leave school when you pass your junior cert  
I: Okay, so some of them are laws, some are rights and some are things the government give you, like dental care.  
(Passes out picture of children)  
I: So when we think of the children in the picture, for them to group up safe, healthy, hopefully happy. What do you think they would have a right to?  
P: An education  
I: An education, okay. What do you think?  
P: A House  
I: A house yeah, so a home  
(Pause 3 seconds)  
P: Dental care like us so they are healthy  
I: Dental care, any idea X what do you think?  
P: Mmm, The right to joy  
I: the right to sorry  
P: joy  
I: joy yeah  
P: Food  
I: Food, yeah X  
P: Healthy  
I: Health yeah. We can imagine your are one of these kids, what rights do you have?  
P: Family love  
I: Yeah  
P: Education  
I: Education  
P: Happiness  
I: Happiness  
P: Right to clothes  
I: Yeah  
P: Clothes like we do (cross talk) whisper)

I: Any other ideas?  
P: inaudible something about spok  
P: Spok out of star trek  
P: (laughter) (short)  
I: I think it might be my photocopying more than anything I would say  
P: It looks likes zero or  
I: It is not so important what they look like, it is more important what rights you think they have.  
So?  
P: Their friends, to have friends,  
I: To have friends yeah  
P: To have friends  
I: Do you think that that is important?  
P: Yeah because you could have no friends  
I: Yeah, anything else you think?  
P: Right to go to school  
I: Yeah, right to go to school  
P: Play for a football team  
I: Yeah  
P: Become taoiseach  
P: inaudible then sigh  
I: It's okay yeah  
P: Be allowed to go to school  
I: Yeah  
P: Be allowed to go to church, be a catholic  
I: Okay  
P: religious (cross talk)  
P: Religious yeah  
I: Okay so they have a right to their own religion. Yeah anything else.  
(Pause for 8 seconds)  
P: And they are equal to other kids, like if you're a black kid, you have a right to be equal to other kids  
P: no racism (cross talk)  
I: Yeah no racism, so there shouldn't be different  
P: Everybody is the same, every body is to be treated the same  
I: Any other  
P: Mmm, every child is unique (cross talk)  
I: Yeah, does anyone disagree with anything that was said and thinks no that is not a right. We have had lots of rights, we talked about education, home, we talked about food, clothes, right to be treated equally. What else did we talk family and friends, right to be taoiseach. Anyone disagree with any of the rights?  
P: right to religion (cross talk)  
P: Mmm, Right to be able to go cinema,  
I: It's like you were saying about sport, it's nearly about free time and being able to do things  
P: Should be allowed bike, or if don't like cycling, if they don't like sport they could get a bike or they could even go for running because it doesn't really cost any money  
I: Yeah so, it's their right to do something that is fun nearly  
P: This girl , the lead singer out of the eurthmitc, she always appears on t.v. fighting  
I: Yeah, what's her name again , blonde hair?  
P: Blonde hair yeah  
I: And what does she say?  
P: She always against unfair rights and stuff  
I: Yeah, I think she does some things for the U.N.. Okay  
I: Has anyone ever hear about the right to have a say in matters that effect them? Has anyone ever heard about that?  
P: Yeah  
I: Anybody else before we talk about it? Has anyone else hear about it?  
P: Yeah (cross talk)  
(Five children had heard about the right)  
P: No  
I: That's okay

(pause 2 seconds)

**I:** Does anybody know what that means? Does anyone want to explain it so we are all kind of singing from the same page?

(pause 4 seconds)

**I:** So a right to have a say in matters affecting you

**P:** So like you have your opinion in the discussion

**I:** Yeah, so your say is your opinion in the discussion and what does matters that affect you? What do we think that means?

**P:** Em like, If somebody thought a bad thing was right, and you thought it was wrong you could give your opinion

**I:** Yeah, yeah

**P:** Your own opinion, em ..... you should eh..... about doing things like we said a few minutes ago

**I:** Yeah so you could have a say in those things

**P:** Yeah

**I:** Yeah, so what kind of things affect you in your own life?

**P:** Getting bullied

**P:** Homework

**I:** Bullied, homework, yeah

**P:** I get stressed from homework (cross talk)

**P:** Sometimes friends , oh no your doing this,

**P:** And they sneak off

**I:** So friends, homework any other things?

**P:** School

**I:** School

**P:** I said that (cross talk) whisper

**I:** School is that something that affects you?

**P:** Yeah

**I:** So we got school, friends ,

**P:** Homework

**I:** Bullying, anything else you think?

**P:** Kidnappers scary,

**I:** That is scary

**P:** There are people who drive around

**I:** So it is something that could affect you possibly

**P:** Global warming

**I:** Global warming, things that affect you personally like school and things that affect you because you live on the earth like global warming yeah

**P:** 2012,

**I:** What is 2012?

**P:** the world is going to end (cross talk)

**P:** some weird fella said the world is going to end but he said it before

**P:** but my dad said that when he was growing up they were always saying that

**P:** Yeah, it was supposed to end in 2000 and then 2010

**I:** yeah (cross talk)

**P:** It was going to end in may and now it is to end in October

**P:** a big fire ball is going to eat the earth

**I:** okay, so what else might affect you as well as 2012, which hopefully won't affect us. What else might affect you?

(Pause 5 seconds)

**I:** Or have we covered everything?

**P:** your mam and dad,

**I:** Yeah

**P:** nanny and granddad,

**I:** Yeah

**P:** Family

**P:** They can stress you out (cross talk)

**P:** /brothers and sisters

**I:** Okay so, (crosstalk)

**P:** /Eh

**P:** /Brother hitting my friend  
**I:** Okay so kind of, friends and  
**P:** /Family  
**I:** Okay definitely, if I was to tell you this situation, I want you to think about it and then we are going to talk about it .  
**I:** So, Debbie is 11, she is going to school. The school that she goes to started to think up new school rules and the teachers are having a meeting to come up with the rules. What do you think should Debbie have a chance to say what she thinks the rules should be?  
**P:** Yeah (cross talk)  
**P:** /Yes  
**P:** /Yeah (multiple children)  
**I:** Everybody is in agreement that Debbie should have a say. Are we all in agreement?  
**P:** Yes (multiple children)  
**P:** Yeah, I think all the children should have their own opinion  
**I:** Yeah  
**P:** Like to run in yard,  
**P:** We are not allowed in this school  
**P:** yeah other schools . (inaudible)  
**I:** And why do you think Debbie should have a say in what way the rules are?  
**P:** Because she paid to go to the school  
**I:** Okay  
**P:** The teachers might make unfair rules and the children won't be happy (cross talk)  
**P:** /No listening to people  
**P:** / The children are like ah are fed up with it  
**P:** Then it could stress the children and distract their work  
**I:** Okay, yeah, what do you think?  
**P:** X said the one, I wanted  
**I:** Cool, cool  
**I:** Any other? (Pause 3 secs). So how do you think Debbie should have her say?  
**P:** Go to the meetings (to have her say)  
**I:** So she should be included in the meetings.  
**P:** Should be student council  
**P:** Or the principal should take them into the hall, like a student council and let the children make up their own rules  
**P:** ask the children  
**I:** What do you think about the student council?  
**P:** The student council doesn't work (cross talk)  
**P:** /They get one person they vote.....  
**P:** I wanted us to get a bike shed and we haven't got one yet  
**P:** They voted in our class for student council and me and X, I am doing it for our class.  
**P:** X got 10 votes  
**I:** You got elected  
**P:** they don't really be on that much , because of everything going on and all the end of the year things and everything. We asked for a bike shed but that is not going to happen, we don't really mind because we are leaving school next week  
**I:** Okay (laugh).So you were elected (cross talk)  
**P:** /We can ask our class what they want and then pass it on , they don't really do what we pass on they just listen.  
**I:** How does that make you feel? What do you think about that?  
**P:** It feels like your talking to the wall,  
**P:** yeah, it feels like a waste of time  
**I:** Yeah, okay  
**I:** Okay, I have another scenario for you and then we are going to talk more generally. So this guy Larry, has gotten into a fight outside of his house Are you , is that okay?  
**P:** Yeah he has got into a fight outside his house  
**I:** Fair play. And his mother said he would have to stay inside for three nights, right when she finds out he has had this fight. And Larry said wait you have to hear my side of the story? What do we think? Should Larry have a right to say his side of the story?  
**P:** Yeah  
**P:** Yes (multiple children)

**P:** because he should have a right to say his side

**P:** Because I always there was X at my house, and he bullied me, he won't come out of the garden and he came in and he pushed me, boxed him around and then he went back to the school and told the school, my mam saw it all out the window and my mam had to go up to the school, but it was nothing go to do with the school like, at home, and then ah, my mam went up, my mam went on a mad one, it was afterschool when it happened, so just don't get involved

**I:** Do you think larry? Just think about larry for a sec

**P:** What about if the chap was fighting with Larry hit first and Larry just hit back, that wouldn't be so bad ,

**P:** self defence

**P:** Yeah self defence

**I:** So, it is not nearly about whether larry had a right to hit the guy or not,it happened (cross talk)

**P:** /So what happened? Why did it happen?

**I:** and does he have a right to tell his side of the story? It does not actually matter what happened but does larry have a right to tell his mam?

**P:** Yep, yeah

**I:** So you said what might have happened or you gave a reason, do we think he has a right to say?

**P:** Yeah (multiple children)

**I:** Why?

**P:** Because the other boy could be telling lies, say the other boy thought he was tough going to kill him but he killed him. The other boy was telling other fibs and then the other boy had the real story about it

**I:** Yeah, so to see what happened? What do you think? Any other opinions or do you agree?

**P:** I agree

**P:** Agree

**P:** Agree

**I:** Where all in agreement?

**P:** yeah (multiple children)

**I:** So we are all in agreement

**I:** Okay, in your own experience, we have talked about Debbie and larry and we have talked a bit about our own experience. But in your own experience do you think childrens views are taken into account in matters that affect you? So things we talked about school, home, friends and then we talked about bigger things as well , like global things

**P:** but I think say if you get in trouble with an adult, it's your word against their and they think they are more mature and they go with them

**I:** So you think maybe there is more weight maybe put on the adults opinion? What does anyone else think?

**P:** Em, Just because their older doesn't mean they know more about the story than the younger people

**P:** like in Mateldia, when the dad thinks he is smarter

**I:** Rold Dahl, do you want to say anything else about it X?

**P:** I don't think it is really far just because they have seen more of life that they know more about the situation .

**I:** Yeah

**P:** they might have just seen the situation out of the window for the last few minutes but the younger person has been in that for the whole thing and they would know more about it. But the adult would take no notice, he wouldn't care , just say 'you were fighting sorry stay in for the next three nights'

**P:** Yeah, that is what he does, like I hit my brother, when he is annoying me and he jumps and hurts me and if I hit him back I get in trouble and my mam just sends me up to my room and I am not allowed to tell her my side of the story as he is younger than me.

**I:** Okay, what do other people think?

**P:** Sometimes X2

**I:** So, who would listen?

**P:** My dad (listen to opinions)

**P:** Mam and dad probably

**P:** My mum

**P:** Teacher

**P:** My mam  
**P:** Friends  
**I:** Yeah friends (cross over)  
**P:** /If you did something bad like only asking for a rubber get a discipline sheet,  
**P:** Yeah  
**I:** For listening?  
**P:** Yeah  
**P:** X got a discipline sheet for listening, X was talking to me and I was listening  
**I:** Okay right, I was first like for listening? (laugh)  
**P:** I remember on the second day I got one (cross talk)  
**P:** I got one  
**P:** /yeah he got one and  
**P:** for not writing down home work properly?  
**I:** What do you think? If you were giving adults some advice about what they should do to listen to you more? What do you think would help? What advice would you give them?  
**P:** Don't be so strict and listen to us  
**I:** Okay any other advice, what else?  
**P:** Have time  
**I:** Do you think that is a big thing?  
**P:** If you don't have time for your kids you don't know what is going on in your lives  
**P:** You shouldn't have kids if you don't have time for them  
**P:** I don't like adults who have the saying 'My way or the high way, it's your way too  
**I:** Yeah, so you think it's all the one way, yeah.  
**P:** Listen to your children , just do it  
**I:** Okay, What does everyone else think? What makes it hard for adults to listen to children's opinions or take their views into account?  
**P:** Kids lie more often than adults  
**I:** Okay, interesting  
**P:** But certain kids don't lie  
**P:** They work and they could be busy or cleaning the house  
**P:** They could just be lazy  
**I:** Yeah, so they just don't want or don't bother to do it  
**P:** They might want more time to the wives than their children . like they would rather go out with their wife than take their kid to MacDonalds with them  
**I:** Okay, so maybe they have other things they put higher up in priorities  
**P:** The kid is the second priority  
**P:** There could be more than one child in the family , to listen to everybody  
**I:** Yeah anything else.  
**P:** Their everyday lives  
**P:** When I have a fight with my brother he tells his side of the story and ruin my side and he could lie and I might get sent to my room. He is my smaller brother so they go with him more than me  
**I:** Okay, yeah  
**P:** His mam probably thinks, he is only little and he doesn't know any better, so go with him more than me.  
**P:** like with X, his mam probably thinks he is only little and does not know any better.  
**P:** Yeah, like he is only little and doesn't know any better  
**I:** Okay, so there might be a reason why they are not listened to?  
**P:** yeah like he is only 4  
**P:** 5  
**P:** Sorry, 5  
**P:** And my brother, any time I get into trouble , I am more bolder, then my older brother and anytime we get into a fight, like he could hit me first but my mam would always blame it on me, like I am bolder  
**I:** So it was kinda of like you were saying early, adults views can be taken 1<sup>st</sup> and also adults can pick who they are listening to  
**I:** Yeah like (cross talk)  
**P:** /Same with my mother, but she is starting to see wait how come he is getting into trouble and your not



**P:** When we get into trouble when we do something together I am always the one who gets caught. Like last night me and my brother went down stairs to get ice cream, my brother handed me the ice cream and my mother caught me. He just said I was getting a drink of water

**P:** My cousin was down in my house late a night and he went down to get something to eat, at like 11 o'clock. He went down, I did everything, my mam walked in and I got in trouble

**I:** Yeah, okay

**I:** So we have talked about like rights and what we think about adults listening who and when? So just last questions about this before we soon be doing art

**I:** Who would you normally talk to?

**P:** My mum

**P:** My dad

**P:** My dad probably

**P:** My mum

**P:** My dad, because if someone was bullying me, he go over to their house and sort it out

**P:** He would break neck

**P:** My dad

**P:** My friend and brother

**P:** My friends

**I:** Yeah

**P:** Friends and parents

**P:** Dad and parents

**I:** Okay, so now we are going to do our last activity, it is an art activity. Basically, what I want you to try to do, if you want can draw you can draw or if you don't feel like draw you can write, it is fine

**P:** Yeah drawing

**I:** Draw a picture of the things in your life that you want to have a say about. So we have talked about different things, em so far. So this is your own opinion, what are the things you would like to have a say in?

**P:** So you could draw to picture of school?

**I:** Yeah, like school, a picture of whatever you want to have a say in

Children drew pictures from 29.46 to 43.00

Things in your life you would like to have more of a say in?

**P:** mines about a boy who plays with girls and his brother comes over and hits him

**I:** What do you think about the session and any advice

**P:** it was fun

**P:** it was interesting

**P:** don't change anything

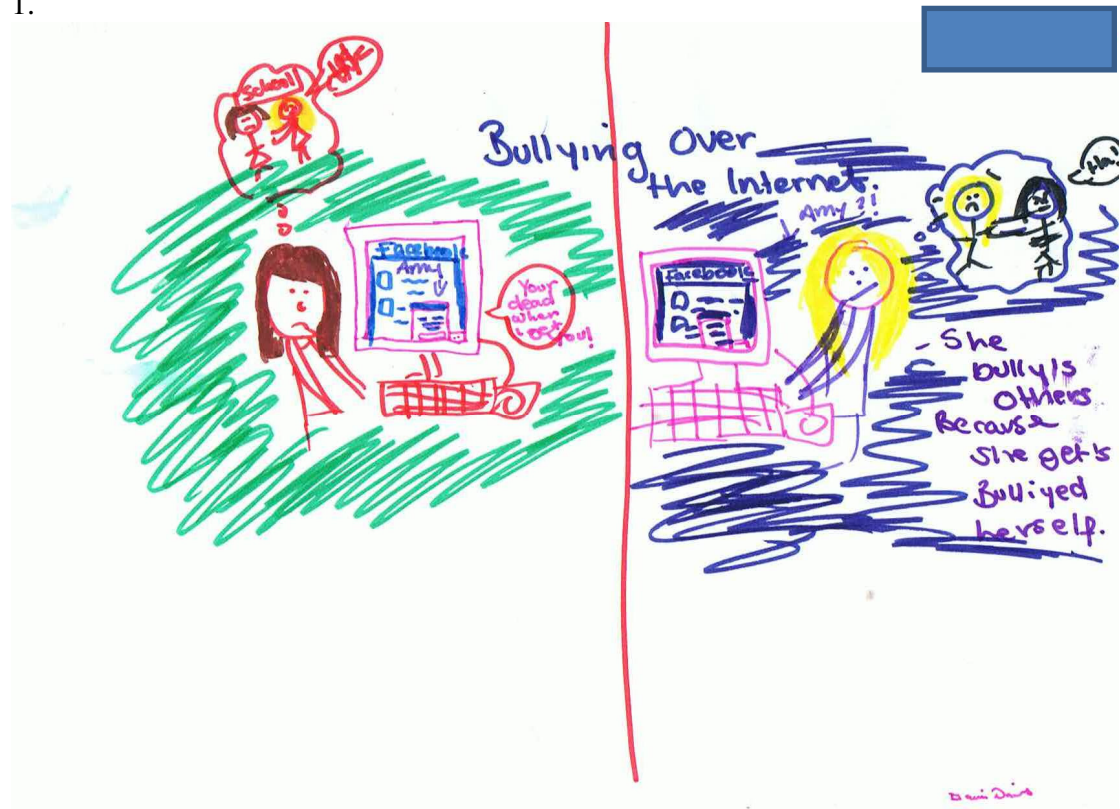
**P:** I like it

**P:** It thought it was good to talk about things

**P:** I like it too

Appendix J Sample of 8 Pictures from Focus Groups

1.



2

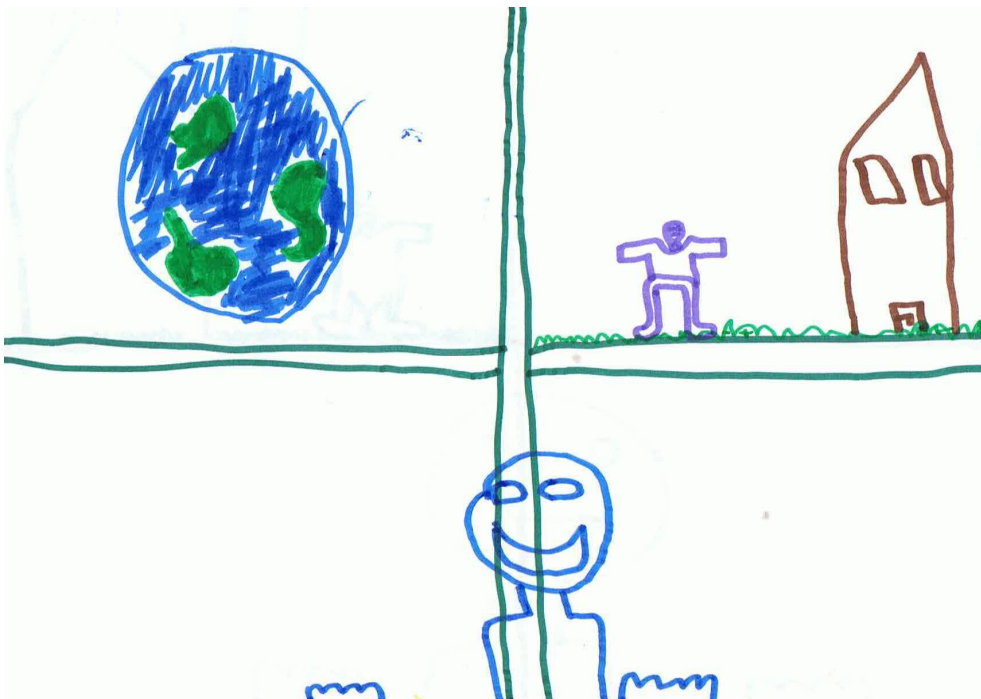
7-6-11



3




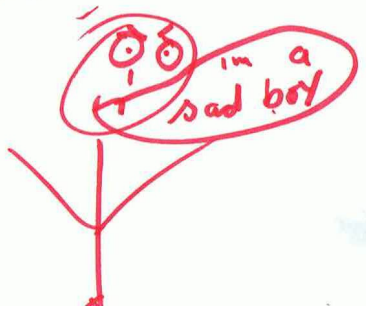
4



7989 things in my life that I want to have a say in.!

- \* the government
- \* what happens in my life (eg. who I live with)
- \* my religion (reasons)
- \* what school I go to
- \* how some of my money is spent (only abt)

I'd like to have my rayin in school  
because when ever teacher give me about at  
me I get  so I would  
like to ray my side of My story but  
they won't listen.



7

