LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES THROUGH ART: COMMUNICATING EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS IN MOSAIC RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Young children are able to express their experiences, understandings and thoughts by communicating through the use of the creative arts media with which they are comfortable and confident. My PhD study employed a qualitative Mosaic approach, so I was able to witness the way creative arts empowered children to make their often marginalised voices heard by: parents, educators, other researchers and policy makers. The study involved children aged two to five years within a long daycare service who were research participants and who became researchers themselves. A range of creative arts responses provided ways for children to: explore their experiences at home, express feelings about these events, share their desires for different experiences and create solutions for better outcomes. Children were also able to discuss each other's art responses and some were able to validate research themes. As researchers, using disposable cameras, the children were able to record happenings in their lives that were important as well as personal and cultural artifacts that had special meaning within the research themes. Parents were able to photograph the children guided by the children's instructions, so in effect, they directed data collection. The study presented ethical moments that required researcher reflexivity, including: ownership of data, educator involvement, management of activities and data collection. The study promoted an increase in the abilities of the children to verbally express emotional issues that were affecting them.

Key words: Mosaic approach, expression, emotional balance, participatory research, military families

INTRODUCTION

While working on a charity storybook writing project for ADF families with young children, I became interested in their need for more early childhood resources. This project sparked an interest in military families. Preliminary research revealed there was a dearth of research directly with young children globally (Chandra & London, 2013) and the research that was done with young children was normally approached from a deficit, psychological perspective. Within Australia, very little research had been conducted with families (McFarlane, 2009; Siebler, 2009) and those that were, consisted of secondary

data about the children, collected from parents. Overall, children's voices within ADF families had been largely ignored. My PhD research aimed to partially address that gap with initial research with young children, their parents and educators that provided insight into young children's understandings and experiences within an Australian military family. This paper focuses on the use of arts-based data collection tools that enabled very young children's voices to be heard.

Note: All of the illustration in this paper are taken from my 2016 paper *'Narrative, acculturation and ritual: Themes from a socio-ecological study of Australian Defence Force families experiencing parental deployment'*.

What did the literature say about listening to children's voices?

In 1990 the Australian Government ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2015), thereby making it mandatory to listen to children's voices in issues that affect them. To address this, there has been more participatory research in the last two decades with children in certain topic areas have started to address this necessity. I believe that in listening to young children's voices it is imperative to also listen to the voices of their educators and family. As a society, it is important that we listen to children's views and understandings on matters and services that impact them. Most research before the mid-1990s involved research on the child, as opposed to research with the child, thereby 'ignoring the views of children as active agents and key informants in matters pertaining to their health and wellbeing' (Darbyshire, McDougall, & Scheller, 2005, p. 419). Mazzoni and Harcourt (2013) and Lewis and Porter (2007) report on policies from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2015), advocating for children to be involved in research, and to be given opportunities to express their ideas and beliefs about experiences that involve them.

To listen to marginalized voices, a strong research framework is required. Generally, qualitative researchers focus on unveiling information about the understandings and feelings related to participant's experiences and their associated perceptions. Thus, meaning becomes a result of the participant's experiences of the world, that are shared with the researcher, through co-construction. Indeed, 'research that facilitates equal partnership in research between at least one academic party and one non-academic party' is co-constructed research (Horner, 2016, p. 8). Historically, children's ability to effectively communicate their understanding of their experiences was considered limited. More recently, a more enlightened conceptualisation of childhood stresses the skills, rights and knowledge of the child (Clark & Moss, 2011; Clark & Statham, 2005; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Greenfield, 2011). The framework below, created by Clark and Moss (2011), outlines a Mosaic research approach that includes three important elements about children.
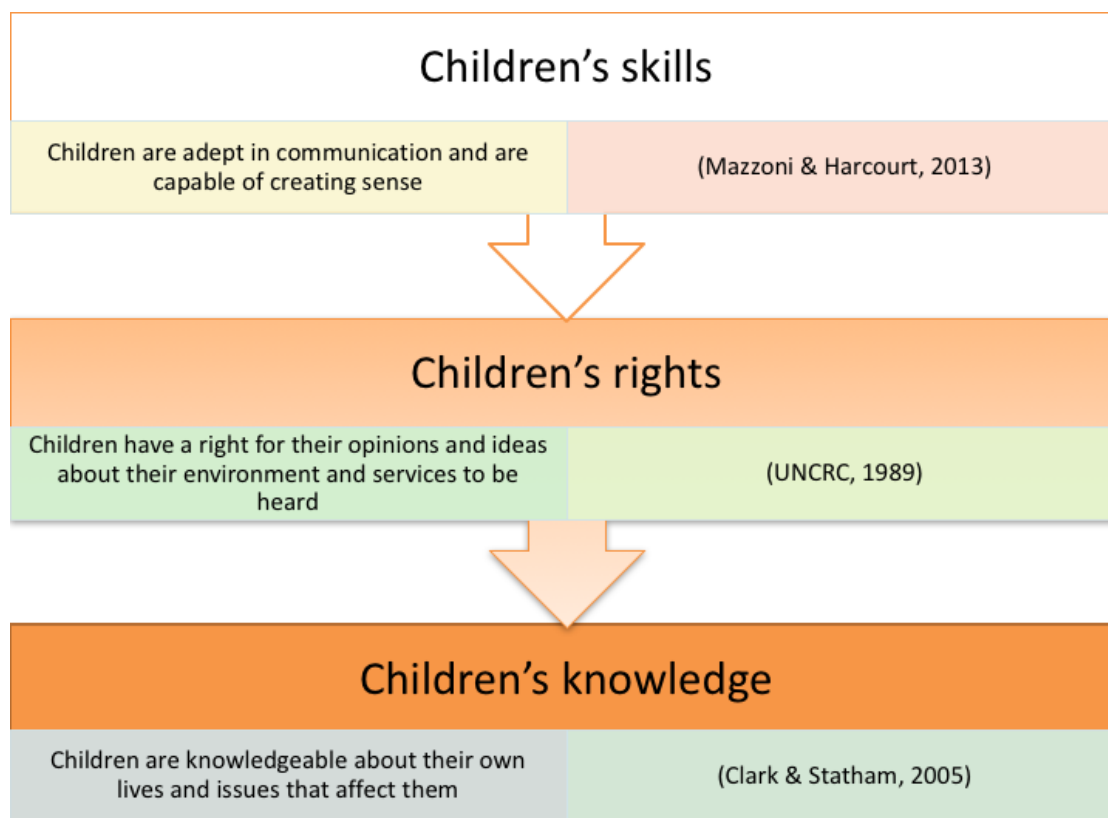
Figure 1: Framework for Mosaic research (Adapted from Clarke & Moss, 2011)

LISTENING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

However, young children are not always able to express their full gamut of experiences and understandings verbally due to their age and development. Additionally, their ability to write is affected by cognitive, language and physical development, because writing is a complex activity (Fellowes & Oakley, 2014). According to Wright (2012), creative arts provide a medium for expressive communication in a non-linguistic way. It provides cultural and symbolic representation of thought and experience (O'Toole, 2012). The arts also allow us to break through the confines of written and spoken language and express what is beyond words (Roy, Baker, & Hamilton, 2015). The importance of using creative arts for personal and cultural expression is demonstrated by the utilisation of arts in every culture on earth. The importance of using the arts with children was expressed in the 6th Century BC by Plato when he said 'I would teach children music, physics and philosophy, but most importantly music for in the patterns of music and all the arts are the keys to learning' (Plato in Fitzpatrick, 2013, para. 1).

WHAT DID THE LITERATURE SAY ABOUT THE RESEARCH CONTEXT?

Children from military families have largely been ignored in research about parental deployment, that is generally considered to be stressful for children and families (J. Brooks, 2011; Palmer, 2008). Secondary data, whereby parents have been asked about their child's wellbeing during deployment has made up some larger Australian studies, such as Siebler (2009) and McGuire et al. (2012). More recent studies, involving primary and secondary school staff, parents and ADF School Transition Education Liaison Officers have also been interviewed, but again, children were not directly involved (MacDonald, 2016). Globally, there is a dearth of studies directly involving children from military families as primary sources of data and many researchers are calling for further research

(Chandra & London, 2013). Additionally, the studies involving children have often used a psychological deficit model to assess the parent's and children's wellbeing, rather than a strengths-based resilience model to view the ways children are coping with the family stresses involved in military deployment. Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler (2007) highlighted the need for further research and understanding of the resilience demonstrated by military families. To address these gaps, this research sought to listen to the voices of young children from military families, along with their non-ADF parents and educators. Themes from the research included protective factors and support the families were utilising (Rogers-Baber, 2017) and the strengths they were displaying through managing transitions, along with their use of acculturation, narrative and ritual (Baber, 2016).

WHICH METHODOLOGY WAS EMPLOYED TO PRIVILEGE THE CHILD'S VOICE USING THE ARTS?

Using the framework in Figure 1, Clark and Moss (2011) have investigated many methods of qualitative data collection to stimulate children's perspectives and perceptions for over 15 years. By giving the research tools to the child, Mazzoni and Harcourt (2013) describe the way researchers provide methods for children to validate what is important to them through an array of expressive languages. Clark (2001) outlines:

The Mosaic approach brings together the tools of observation and interviewing with participatory tools to construct a composite picture or 'mosaic' of children's lives (p. 117).

It is not the aim of Mosaic research to 'make children's knowledge unquestionable, but to raise it to such a level that children's knowledge about their lives is central to adult discussions' (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 65).

A mosaic picture is created through the collation of small pieces that should be viewed together as a whole, to make sense. The audience can view patterns or themes when they step back from the mosaic picture. By stepping back again, enough distance and perspective is gained to observe the whole picture unambiguously. Mosaic research creates a combination of physical, verbal, and visual expressions of children as forms of rich data that can be collected and analysed using thematic analysis. The various forms of data collection and the richness of these types of data make the Mosaic research method ideal for examining the understandings and experiences of young children. Additionally, Mosaic researchers are able to examine the phenomenon from the children's multiple perspectives within differing contexts in their lives. These elements, along with the principles outlined below made it an ideal choice for this research project.

THE PRINCIPALS OF THE MOSAIC APPROACH

The Mosaic approach draws on various conceptual frameworks, including narrative and ethnographic principles (Clark & Statham, 2005), social research with disempowered groups and the Reggio Emilia approach (Malaguzzi, 1998). Thus, Mosaic research might seem rather random in its devices at times, but there are underlying principles that are essential philosophical foundations. These include the benefit of eliciting children's voices, relationships and procedures as shown in Figure 2. According to Greenfield (2011) the overarching principles of Mosaic research are that the research should be beneficial for the educators and children. They should also aim to improve our understandings of children's ideas about their world by listening to their voices that have been often

marginalised. Rather than a redistribution of power, I perceive empowerment as a reinforcing of confidence by groups and individuals to exercise their rights and to have a voice (and therefore, responsibility) in their own lives (Oxford University, 2016), a definition expressed in this reference.
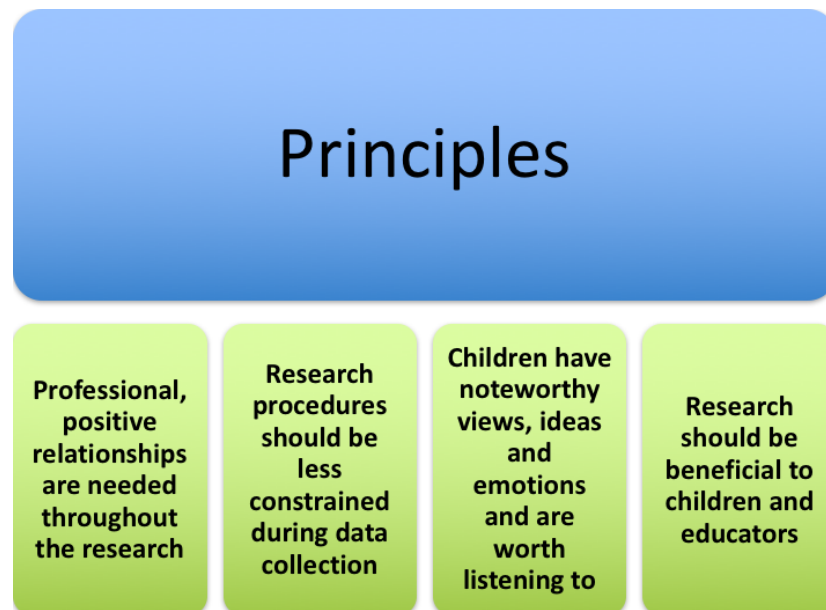

Figure 2: The philosophies of the Mosaic research approach.
(Adapted from Greenfield, 2011)

RESEARCH QUESTION, DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND ETHICS

Using the framework and principles above, I employed the Mosaic approach to answer the research question 'What are young children's understanding and experiences of parental deployment within an Australian Defence Force family'? Mosaic is a qualitative approach that uses small pieces of data created by the children. The data in this study was created through the use of data collection tools such as puppet play, role play, drawing, craft, clay modelling, rhymes, raps, photography, discussions and observations. Most data were created by the children at the centre, individually but most often in small groups with me, and occasionally with an educator present. At home, families also shared or took photographs of their experiences and understandings of parental deployment with the child and gave them to me.

The children's creative responses were elicited after a story book reading, then collated, presented in narrative style and analysed using thematic analysis. This type of research is very useful when listening to young children's voices because children are able to contribute different data according to their strengths and preferences. It also means children who have limited verbal expression are able to choose other methods in which they may be more confident to communicate. Importantly, children can choose which activities they participate in and it does not matter if they are absent for some activities. Within the methodology, the use of creative arts as a medium empowered the children to communicate their experiences and understandings (Rogers, 2017a).

Ethics approval from the University of New England was gained before data collection. Permission from parents and educators was gained and assent from the children occurred for each activity. Pseudonyms have been applied throughout this paper to protect the identity of the participants.

HOW DID THE CHILDREN COMMUNICATE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS THROUGH ART?

When discussing Mosaic research (Clark & Statham, 2005) the 'hundred languages of children' described by Malaguzzi and other Reggio Emilia educators is frequently cited. Less popular, is the need for a hundred ways of listening to children as they use these languages.

To listen to children as they answered the research question in this project, children were invited to communicate their experiences and understandings of parental deployment in a variety of ways after a provocation from story books. I specifically wrote these photo books for the project because they depicted children who were experiencing their parents working away within a military family. This use of narrative provocation was particularly useful. The children were able to connect to the character's experiences as they struggled with certain aspects of military family life as well as the celebrations of a parent returning home after months away. After some book readings, the children were asked to take on the character role through role play and puppet play, that was particularly appealing to some children (see Figure 3 and 4). I did this to allow the children to practice their emotional responses to parental deployment in safe ways and to act out some of their own family experiences through the characters. Thus, these story book narratives provided an opportunity for the children to practice some of the emotions within the story book characters, thereby safely practicing emotional responses as described by Gottschall (2012).

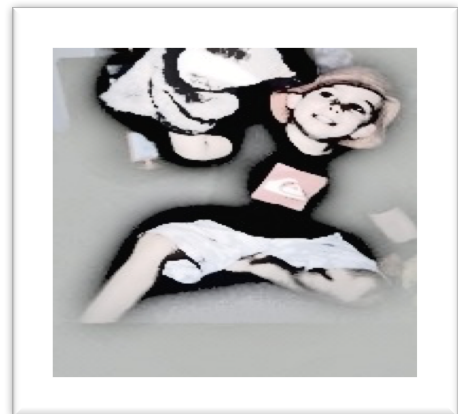Figure 3: Natalie acting out the character's interactions from 'Anthony's Story' through puppet play

Figure 4: Andrew (4) engaged in puppet role-play

WHO WERE THE PARTICIPANTS?

The study involved two sets of data. The initial set was created with fourteen children aged two to five years old from eight families who attended a long daycare service on a military base within Australia. I researched directly with ten of these children, five days a week over four weeks at the centre. Additionally, these families were asked to collect further data at home. Four other children contributed to secondary data via information

gathered from their parents and educators. The second set of data involved secondary data provided by parents from three families from other military bases and geographic states, involving five children.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Thematic analysis yielded a number of research themes, including responses to deployment, managing transitions, risk and protective factors, ADF support, communication, acculturation and ritual and narrative (Figure 5). This paper only highlights some of the findings within the following themes: responses, transitions, protective factors, ADF support, acculturation and ritual, and narrative. It is important to note that these themes are not the focus of this paper, rather the use of creative arts as a vehicle for young children's voices to be heard.

Figure 5: The eight emerging themes from the data

WHAT DID THEY COMMUNICATE THROUGH THE ARTS?

Some responses to storybooks involved drawing activities that yielded rich depictions of life within a military family during the deployment cycle. Cassie's drawing (Figure 6) depicted the sticker calendar her family used to count down the days until her father returned from deployment. Modeling clay was also used to depict emotional responses during the deployment cycle as shown in Blake's composition (Figure 7). The children were also able to display their desires for different experiences, such as Cassie's drawing (Figure 8). These compositions depict the children's right to express their ideas and beliefs about their environment as outlined in the Mosaic approach framework (Figure 1). Bethany was able to create solutions for better outcomes within the family in her drawing (Figure 9) when she depicts what she could do when she was missing her deployed parent, as she explains below.

We are watching television when Dad is away. We are eating blueberries, cherries and lemons. The curtains are closed because we are watching the video of Dad when he is reading us a bedtime story (Rogers, 2017b).
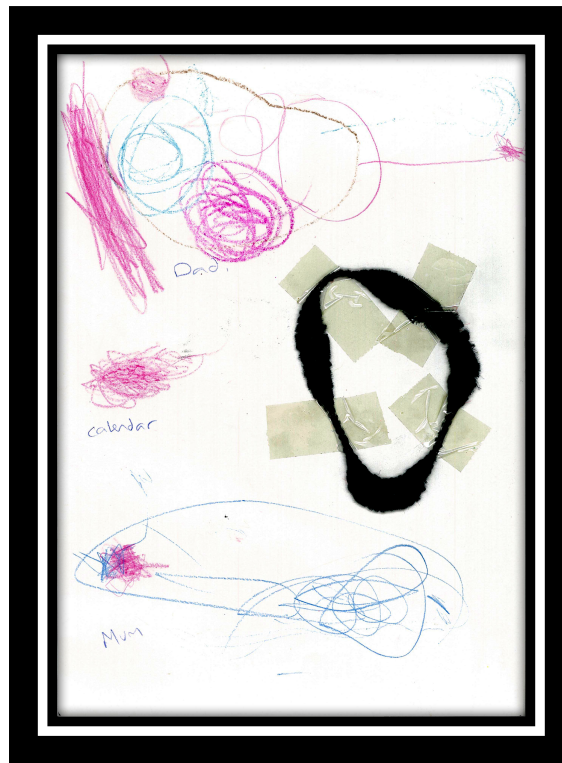

Figure 6: Cassie's (3.5) picture 'D is for Deployment' depicting what happens in her family during deployment or training, including the calendar (centre left)

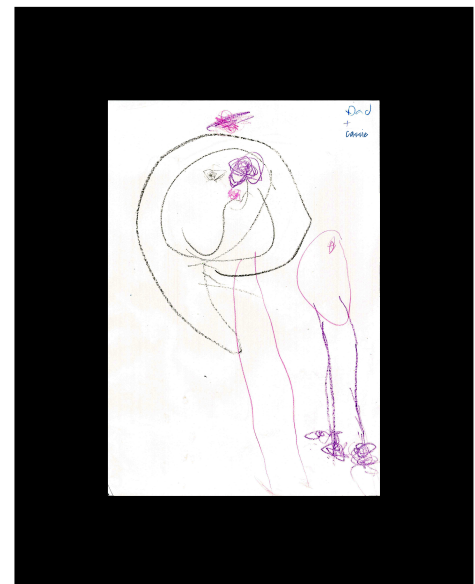*Figure 7: Blake's (5) model: 'My face when Dad goes away; the tears are blue'*

Figure 8: Cassie: I like swimming with Daddy when he is home

Croker and Ebbeck (2010) discuss the way children create their own lives as active meaning makers as Bethany is doing with her imaginings portrayed in her drawing. Further to this, Wright (2012) discusses the way the arts allow expression of envisioned possibilities within the artists' lives. For example, in Bethany's drawing (Figure 9) she is

able to portray a possible future strategy to cope with a problem she had already encountered. This is an example of children's skills in communication and creating sense described in the Mosaic research framework (Figure 1). Some older children were able to portray their existing coping strategies for times when they were missing their deployed parent, such as Blake's drawing (Figure 10). Blake's description of his drawing follows below.

My book is on the ground. My recordable picture book is on my desk. I like listening to my Dad's voice when he is away. Sometimes when I am missing him I wake up and look at my album. The lump on the end of the bed is my pet dog Kuta. I like to cuddle him in bed when Dad is away (Rogers, 2017b).

Blake's description included the use of family items that the parents had prepared to assist the children cope with their father's long absence. These included a recordable storybook with the father's voice reading the child a story and the special photo album with pictures of the child and the father together. Additionally, the presence of the dog is significant for the family, because the dog is only allowed inside the house when the father is away, to provide comfort and security. Matthews (2003) describes opportunities for children to express their emotions through art as 'developmentally significant, representational and expressive activity vital to the intellectual and emotional growth of young children' (p. 4). Thus, the use of art activities afforded Blake the opportunity to represent significant understandings and experiences of parental deployment (Figure 10) along with his emotional responses to these (Figure 7). Thus, children are knowledgeable about their own lives as described in the research framework (Figure 1).

Figure 9: Bethany's drawing depicting what she could do when she is missing her Dad.

Figure 10: Blake's (5) drawing of what he does when he is missing his Dad

HOW DID THE CHILDREN INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER DURING THE ARTS EXPERIENCES?

During the creative arts activities that were normally conducted in small groups, the children often commented on each other's work, or critiqued it as shown in the following examples.

She is only two and scribbles, but she tried hard. My brother Toby scribbled too, and he cut his picture up into little pieces. He's two, like Emily. They're in pre-kindy.(Andrew, 4 years).

Blake (5): *'No, you have to put a sad face there'* (Blake, 5 years)(Rogers, 2017b).

Other children looked for each other for guidance and reassurance, as shown by Jack (4) in this example.

Look at my man. I did a person. This is a big house. Yes, yes, yes. I did a person and a house. Leaf, leaf, leaf (as he draws tree). I want to do …. (looking unsure) I need to show Caleb. I need to watch Caleb. (Rogers, 2017b).

Thus, children critiqued each other's work and looked for validation amongst peers which may have led to scaffolding of responses in some instances and possibly a more uniform, group response in other ways. This was acknowledged and discussed in the findings within the project.

Additionally, some children's comments about peer's artworks validated emerging research themes (Figure 5) through their interpretations, thus acting as co-constructors of knowledge and co-researchers as discussed by (Greenfield, 2011). In this way, children revisit, reimagine, mold and redesign their lives (Abbs, 2003) and in this project, those of their peers. They interpreted other's depiction of emotions, happenings and intent and how that fitted with their own experience during parental deployment. This is a significant strength of the Mosaic approach because it empowers children by not only listening to their voice within their rights to be heard, but also utilises their voice.

HOW ELSE DID THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS ACT AS CO-RESEARCHERS USING MEDIA ARTS?

Families were given disposable camera packs to capture what parental deployment meant to them. Dinham and Chalk (2018) assert 3 and 4 year old children are often adept at creating digital artifacts and understand the social practices involved, but this is often unrecognised in educational settings. However, the use of such data collection methods has it's challenges. Fasoli (2003) reminds researchers that photo analysis is both time-consuming and challenging because it is greatly influenced by our own inferences of childhood. Pink (2007) explains that during photo analysis researchers need to avoid misinterpretation due to preconceived notions and be aware of time management and social contexts. In this research, the children were able to communicate to me what significance the photos had. This was done in two ways. Firstly, the parent wrote on a sheet explaining the photo and secondly, the child then had a one-to-one chat with me after the photo was printed the next day.

The results were sometimes surprising and there were times I would have dismissed the photograph without this additional information. This aligns with the research framework's assertions (Figure 1), that children are skillful communicators and meaning makers. The three photographs shown in Figures 11-13, display photographs taken by siblings, Blake and Bella. They show their pet dog that takes on a new role of family security and reassurance when the father is deployed. The photo of the lounge chair is significant because it is the father's lounge and the children are only allowed to sit on it when the father is away, so it becomes a source of comfort when they are missing him.

The photo of Bella being pushed on a swing by her Grandfather is important in their family context because during deployment, they spend more time visiting their grandparents.
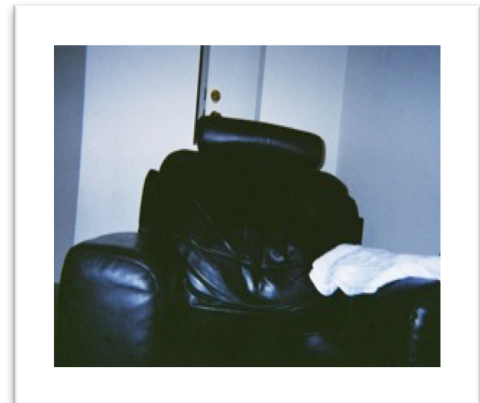

Figure 11: Bella's (2.5) photo of her dog

Figure 12: Blake's (5) picture of his father's couch

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Figure 13: Blake's photo of Bella being pushed on the swing by her grandfather

At times, the parents acted as co-researchers with the child, or were directed by the child to take certain photographs (Figures 11-16). Emily was photographed by her mother (Figure 14), as she nursed the new puppy her father gave her before he deployed. Emily's mother also shared a photo of the family medals (Figures 15 and 16) given to military children by the ADF when their parent is deployed in recognition of their sacrifice. Emily's mother took a photo of Emily and her father at home, just before he deployed (Figure 17). In the photo, Emily's father is seen demonstrating where he is going to go to deploy on the globe, using a marker pen. Utilising a short, age-appropriate narrative that he repeated nightly for a few weeks before the father deployed he tried to prepare Emily for his upcoming deployment of eight months. The photos use various techniques to de-identify the participants for privacy reasons.
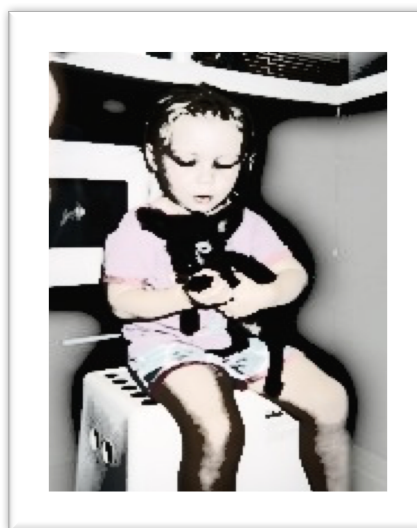
Figure 14: Emily nursing her new puppy

Figure 15: Emily's mother's deployment medal

Figure 16: Emily's deployment medal (front and back view)

Figure 17: Emily's father preparing the family narrative using a globe and marker pen

WHAT ETHICAL CHALLENGES OCCURRED USING ARTS ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN?

Phelan and Kinsella (2012) outline that researchers will encounter a number of significant ethical moments that are difficult to foresee and rely on the researcher being reflexive and ethical to professionally solve conflict dilemmas. Within this study, strong researcher integrity was required for delicate moments involving procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Guided by the Code of Ethics (Early Childhood Australia (ECA), 2016), I aimed to forefront the wellbeing of children by putting their best interests as the primary consideration. A number of ethical challenges occurred within the arts activities during the research. Educators would sometimes write on the children's artwork so their writing could be seen to label what the children had created (Figure 19). Although this was done to assist me as a researcher, sometimes it created issues around identity, but also of preserving the aesthetics of the piece and the child's initial intent.
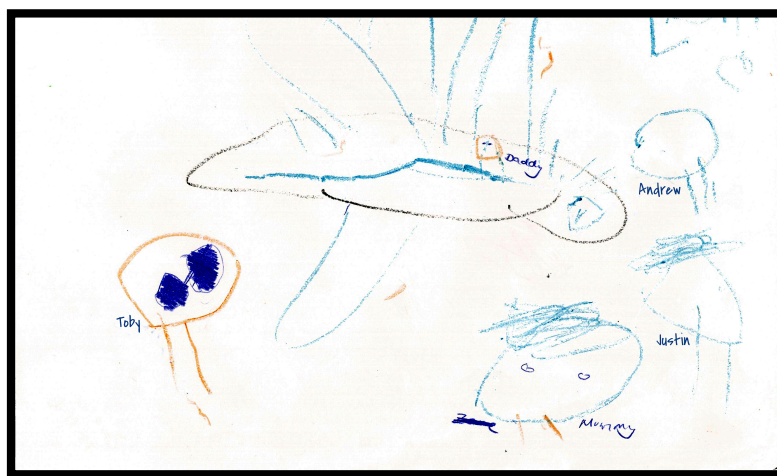

Figure 18: Andrew's (4) drawing 'Daddy is going to Afghanistan' (the educator drew the plane on his instruction)

The ownership of data also initially presented ethical dilemmas as revealed in this conversation between Andrew (4) and myself after one of the arts activity when I was collecting the drawings

Andrew: *No, I want to take mine home.*

Marg: *Yes, you can Andrew, but I will photocopy it and give it back to you because I need a copy.*

Andrew: *No, I want it. It's mine!*

Marg: *I will give it back to you, Andrew.*

Bethany: *But, I want to show Mum.*

Bettina: *Here I will take a picture of it and we can print it out later.*

Bethany: *OK (leaving to go and play)*

Andrew: *Let me take the photo.*

Bettina: *No, I will.*

Andrew: *No, let me* (Rogers, 2017b)

After reflection, and a conversation with an educator, it was suggested that I colour photocopy all of the drawings each afternoon and put the copy into the pigeon-hole of the child ready for them to take home and show their parents. I chose to keep the original so I had a clearer copy for analysis.

The management of activities and data collection also created ethical challenges for a number of reasons. The numbers of children wanting to be involved, including participants and non-participants, required thought and careful management to ensure all children who wanted to participate had a turn. Data from non-participant children was not used for the project, but often the non-participants wanted to share their experiences within their military family and some of their contributions were significant and interesting. During the first days of data collection I observed and played with the children and chatted to educators, seeking to establish relationships.

The use of photographs presented other ethical challenges, reflection and decision making. Flannery Quinn and Manning (2013) discuss the ethical implications of using photos with young children in regards to ethics, power and assent that influenced me as a researcher. Although full permission to use the children's images was gained in this study, I chose to partially de-identify the photos after discussion with colleagues and studying the literature.

When I started the data collection activities, the educators initially withdrew some of the children into the inside learning environment with other educators present so that I could conduct activities. This proved to be a strain on the educator/child ratio and staffing and also meant I had a large number of children engaging in arts activities that required high levels of researcher and educator input. Often I was not given time to discuss the activity with the educator, so their adaptations of the activity were often quite different to what I was doing within the same group of children. To solve this dilemma, I established a routine of conducting the activities at multiple times during the day in a separate fenced playground, adjacent to the main playground and the preschool room, during the day. Children were either asked, or volunteered to be involved in an activity in small groups of 3-5 children. This way, the educators had visibility of the children regardless of whether the rest of the children were in the playground or in the classroom. It also meant I could do the activities more often with smaller groups of children making the management of arts experiences easier. Additionally, I was not reliant on the availability of educators, so could spend most of the day collecting rich data. Conversely, high visibility meant children who were not involved would sometimes wait on the fence outside the small playground, calling out to be included. This meant that audio recordings of the data collection activities were sometimes rendered useless.

During data analysis, selecting artworks was problematic. Age differences meant that some works, which may have been significant for the child, may not have captured my adult sense of the activity, depiction of the event or discussion the child had with me about the work. Therefore, I included as many artworks as I could in my thesis in order to show the significant contribution of the children and their enjoyment and prolific production of arts communication. Additionally, it meant the audience had access to children's meaning making for their own interpretation. As meaning-makers, children have a lot to share, but as adults, sometimes we cannot always comprehend the child's intent. Additionally, some children like to please the educator or researcher and try to produce data that they think is correct. Punch (2002) explains that children are limited in

their ability to express themselves freely within an adult dominated world, for fear they will not be taken seriously. Furthermore, children, like adults, may lie to researchers for several reasons: to avoid talking about a painful subject; to say what they think the researcher wants to hear; or through fear, shame or a desire to create favourable impressions (Punch, 2002, p. 325).

I tried to counteract this to some extent by ensuring I praised different types of arts and verbal responses. I was also aware, that others reading about my research and viewing the creative arts data may have other interpretations, which is to be encouraged, so I tended to include more, rather than less in the presentation of the data.

Presenting the data in thesis form involved cropping, scanning and compressing images that I found time consuming and at times, distressing. I wanted to preserve the richness of detail, the colours and full images, but I needed to conform to university thesis rules about file size and thesis presentation for the ease of examiners and future readers.

HOW WERE THE DRAWINGS ANALYSED?

The drawings were mostly analysed with the assistance of the child, who described their drawings to me as researcher or to an educator during the activity. Sometimes gathering this information was hampered due to the child's age and ability to verbally express themselves with clarity or when the groups of children were large. My research journaling and audio recordings provided additional sources of information. Coates and Coates (2006) state that children's talk during drawing activities as well as their communication about the drawing after the activity can produce rich information about the drawing and the child's depictions. In fact, it is virtually impossible to separate drawing and talking with children (Coates & Coates, 2006). Children compose drawings in a deliberate way and they understand the power of drawing to represent themselves, others and events as part of their meaning-making (Cox, 2005). As they actively construct their representations they express reality (Cox, 2005) as humans within a socio-cultural context and their own community. Additionally, Vygotsky and Cole (1978) state children are 'active participants in their own learning within the supportive contexts of community and family' (p. 132). The children's drawings were considered as a vital additional language, voicing their ideas and experiences, as described by (Whimmer, 2014). In addition, the drawings were viewed as a powerful meaning-making tool because they were created in a communicative and collaborative way as asserted by Brooks, (2009).

WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS OF THE ARTS ACTIVITIES TO THE CHILDREN?

The arts activities provided not only an enjoyable immersion in the arts but they also proved useful to the children, their families and educators as revealed in the comments below. Some parents viewed the research activities as a program, hence the description:

Educator: This 'program' should be in centres where there are defence children because it helps them express their emotions verbally. Before Emily could only show her emotions about Dad deploying through tears and tantrums, now she has just started saying it's because she misses her Dad.

Parent: This program should be in all the schools where there are military kids to help them and other children understand what defence kids go through. My child has really benefited by being able to do this program. She can finally verbalise what is happening and how that makes her feel (Rogers, 2017b).

The children displayed pride and confidence as they expressed their experiences and understandings using the creative arts during the activities (Rogers, 2017a) and acted as co-constructors of knowledge and co-researchers. Creative arts activities take patience, time and often involve a lot of mess for educators and researchers to clean up. Clearly, the activities were viewed as worthwhile for the participants, their educators and parents. Therefore well worth the effort.

WHICH AREAS REQUIRE FURTHER RESEARCH?

This paper has sought to discuss my experiences as a researcher using the Mosaic research approach, as I encountered both predictable and unpredictable dilemmas and successes. More research is needed in the field of participatory research, because although the last two decades have produced many interesting studies with young children, the research topics seem to be concentrated in popular researcher (Gallagher 2008) or educator directed areas. Gallagher, (2008) notes: 'whilst participatory approaches are increasingly commonplace in data collection, children's involvement in the planning, analysis and dissemination of research is usually more limited. However, a growing literature has begun to explore the possibilities of involving children in designing and carrying out their own research projects' (p. 139).

Expanding the areas children are able to communicate about may yield rich and interesting results. Children from military families have been under researched worldwide (Chandra & London, 2013). However, there are many other areas where children's opinions and experiences should be sought to further increase adult's knowledge before decisions, resources, curriculum frameworks and policies are made. My thesis recommendations chapter is being used by the Defence Community Organisation to help inform their decision-making in supporting military families. Furthermore, this organisation is using it to lever change within the ADF in how they support manage and support families during their career and deployment cycles. This aligns with Mosaic research goals to ensure children's voices are heard in matters that affect them.

CONCLUSION

Providing a platform to discuss their ideas, understandings and experiences, Mosaic research aims to listen to marginalised voices such as those of young children in an Australian military family context. The use of creative arts as data collection tools, enabled very young children to communicate their experiences and understandings of parental deployment within military families. They were also able to express their emotional responses to their experiences and problem solve strategies to cope with separation anxiety. During the research activities, some of the children's interactions with peers scaffolded their responses and research findings. The use of varied, arts-based data collection tools enabled development of emotional and verbal skills to assist them with parental deployment. This type of knowledge about children's understandings and experiences with deployment may be useful for the parents, educators and professionals who work with these children and for early childhood arts educators.

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Biography

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