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Productively Undoing a Doctoral Study: Ethically Researching Early Childhood Education and Care in the Majority World

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"He often used to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep and every path was its tributary. 'It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,' he used to say. 'You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no telling where you might be swept off to.'"

J.R.R. Tolkien,

Three's Company, The Fellowship of the Ring, Lord of the Rings,

1954

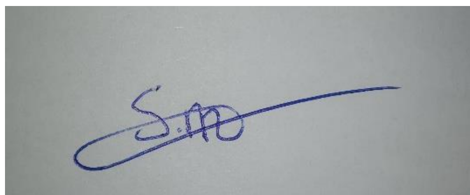
Declaration

I have read and understand the Departmental policy on plagiarism.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree of diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education.

Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Signature:



Sinéad Matson

Date:
2nd March 2021

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[1] Grummell, B. (2017), Love, Care and Solidarity in the Changing Contest of Irish Education. (AISHE-J). P3143

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Eileen and Beattie,

I hope you are having cocktails and dancing wherever you are,

you are certainly missed here.

-x-

…

Prologue

25th November 2010

"You are welcome to visit us anytime. You will do your PhD on our school."

Mr. Bakhtawar Singh

Founder
Care Foundation- Emmanuel Public School

25th November 2010

"No, no. God no! I'm only thinking of doing a Masters in Education. I won't be doing a PhD!

But I will come back.

I promise."

Ms. Sinéad Matson

Volunteer

In 2010, I had just returned from maternity leave after my first child, when the manager of the Montessori teacher training college I worked for asked me to come with her to India with the charity the college supported. The trip was to a school founded three years previously, to work with *'underprivileged children from the slums'* according to the literature I was given. The charity told us it was one of their schools in India[2]. The school had approximately 50 children from two years to eight years of age, at that time. I was told to fundraise the cost of the trip, and fill my suitcase with resources to provide a fun filled week – face paints, toys, arts and craft resources etc. It was promised to be a life changing experience.

I agreed to go.

As I fundraised, I was given literature which emphasised the stark poverty the children lived in. It spoke about children who were trafficked for sex, drugs, and slave trades. Photos depicting dirty, unwashed children in tattered clothes, living in corrugated iron huts and playing in dirt were provided; as well as statistics of how fifty percent of children didn't go to school and were illiterate. Narratives about the children being forced by their parents to work in order to provide income for the family were told to us to inform participants in the fundraising activities and those donating to the cause. *'These children are from a caste so low that they are called untouchable[3] and there are some parks that dogs can go into in the city, but these children cannot.'* Our job was to *'bring the fun into their lives.'* In the midst of an economic depression, I raised nearly three and a half thousand euros for the *'poor children in India'*.

When we arrived in Mumbai airport, we were greeted by some staff from the school who took us to three large cars which were to drive us (for four hours) to our destination. We nervously laughed at the way our bags were being tied with rope to the roof of the cars. We were nervous. *'Are you sure they won't fall off? I think they will. My god, don't they value all the stuff we have brought in our suitcases?'*

'Nobody will believe this at home!''

We took photos.

Because…of course we did.

[2] I later learned that the school did not belong to the charity, they had simply been invited to return to the school after they were introduced by a mutual acquaintance.

[3] This word is unacceptable and highly offensive to the people of Dalit caste membership but is used to illustrate the deficit focused narrative and actual words used by the charity I travelled with.

Some young children tugged at our sleeves as we waited by the cars, but we were prepared. We handed them individually wrapped sweets. *'Don't give them money. They are being used by their parents or other adults for begging. If you give them money, they will never escape the cycle. Bring sweets.'*

I distinctively remember the thunder, the musty smell, and the twinkling lights of Mumbai as we drove through. I was uncomfortable, a young skinny adolescent boy kept falling asleep on my shoulder. I didn't know him. He was in my space. I noticed how incredibly thin he was. As we drove, our attention was directed to the slums - the poverty - the dirt; and also, to the homeless children. We got teary eyed as we passed two naked toddlers playing in the dirt of an empty skip at the side of a busy road as the sun began to rise.

'Who was minding those children?

Anything could happen to them.

Who could live like this?'

Sensory Overload

My introduction to India was an assault on the senses. There was something to see everywhere I looked. Everything seemed to be fighting for my attention at one and the same time. The juxtaposition of the beautiful, colourful saris and flowers with the dirt and poverty struck me immediately. It was (I know now) what I had been conditioned to see; but I didn't know it then.

Everything was loud all of the time.

Beeping. Calls for Prayer. Auto rickshaw engines. Chatting. Shouting. Sweeping. Jingling bells. Dogs barking; howling. Bangers. Fireworks. Singing. Chanting. Doorbells early in the morning. Motorbikes. Music. Political announcements. Snoring. Thunder. Laughing. Praying.

Everything smelled all the time.

Spices. Food. Oils. Cleaning products. Fruit. Animals. Animal waste. Mothballs. Incense sticks. Fresh Jasmine. Insect repellent. Sweat. Coffee. Chai. Aftershave. Deodorant. Dust. Smoke.

Everything tasted overpowering.

Spices. Masala chai. Coffee. Cardamom. Curry leaves. Diet Coke. Breakfast bars. Eggs. Dahl. Red and green chillies. Mango Lassi. Onion. Garlic. Biryani.

Everything demanded to be seen.

Chaotic traffic. Animals wandering the roads. Sari's – Pinks and greens, oranges and blues, purples and reds, golds and whites. Fireworks. Rickshaws driving down the wrong side of the road. Children walking to school. Temples. Flower stalls. Naked babies on the side of the road. Strange and unknown fruits and vegetables on stalls. Women sweeping. Burning rubbish. Water trucks. So many motorbikes.

Everything demanded to be felt.

Thick, hot air. Humidity. Dust. Sun-cream. Beads of sweat. Wind on my face. Synthetic clothing. Cold showers. Hot showers. Period pain. Stomach cramps. Tears. Mosquito spray. Cotton scarves. Children's hands. Children brushing and styling my hair. Hugs. Emotions – exhilaration, fear, sadness, happiness, delight, excitement, shock, uneasiness, hopelessness, hopefulness, giddiness, love.

Oasis

After a thirty-minute rickshaw journey in the rising heat, bustling traffic, and chaotic roads, we found ourselves at the outskirts of the city in an oasis of calm. The sound of children's laughter and singing filled the air. Tall trees offered cool shade, greenery, and a boundary to the outside world. The school was situated at the end of a narrow, quiet, private roadway off the main road. It faced a big playing field filled with dust but surrounded with green bushes and long grasses. Birds sang overhead. Though I could feel fifty sets of inquisitive eyes on me, I felt an immediate calm come over me – a peace. I felt like I had stepped into somewhere quite special.

The school was next to an office for a Christian NGO that rescued girls from prostitution and put them in a home until it was safe for them to return to their villages. They were taught a craft or skill which would explain their absence from the village and allow them to go home and be accepted. There was an Irish woman with red hair working as a legal adviser who greeted us and introduced us to the family who founded and run the school. We were immediately taken to a classroom and given a presentation on the purpose and mission of the school, including its ethos. It was emphasised that no child should be favoured, and every child was to be treated equally. Something, upon reflection, that we seemed to brush off and ignore almost immediately – *sure weren't we there to bring the fun and make the children feel special?*

We were given small cups of chai (tea) during the talk. I distinctly remember looking at each other and looking at the chai suspiciously. We didn't want 'Delhi Belly'. *How can we be sure that this chai isn't going to make us sick? Are the cups washed properly? Is the milk pasteurised? Has the water been boiled properly? Is it dirty? Best not to drink it, just in case.* All but two people left their welcome chai from the school's own stores behind them.

Our bags, cluttering up the school's office, were locked and the keys kept with us at all times. We took over their school with our own agenda and timetable – never asking if it was appropriate or welcomed. We ate a little of the food that they cooked for us with no thought for who was paying for it. We moaned about how spicy it was or spoke about how we longed for food from home during meal-times. We shared baby wipes, hand sanitizer, bottled water, and mozzie spray like it was going

out of fashion. We had favourites – just as we had been asked not to do. We interrupted teachers and classes with our activities, never thinking to ask if it was ok. We took photos of the children and ourselves. We never asked for permission, we just assumed we could. We ignored the cautions of the teachers and handed the children our cameras when they asked to take photos. '*Maria Montessori said to follow the child and that's just what we are doing.*' The children's photos focused on themselves, their friends, us. Our photos focused on us having fun, *the bringing of joy.* We took photos to show the folks back home what their money had paid for. We took photos of lack.

Of torn clothes, of no shoes, of torn shoes, of slum housing, of no teeth, of matted hair, of bare classrooms, of what was thought to be missing. On a trip to the children's communities, we also took photos of lack,

of poverty.

Poverty porn.

you dont realise how lucky you are until you see pics like this.makes you realise that people are a lot worse off good on you and your group sinead x x x [4]

Yup well done chick. We have a lot to be thankful for. You did us proud xxx

Like · Reply · 9y

Well done Sinead! I would say it was hardbreaking but very fulfilling. The photos are amazing x

[4] These are Facebook comments on my photo albums from my first visit. The names have been blocked out for anonymity.

Of course, it wasn't all white saviourism and poverty porn. We played games, painted, crafted, sang together, painted faces, plaited hair, hugged, provided sensory activities, brought sweets and presents. We left resources for the school to use in the future. We made fun of ourselves and had fun with the staff and family members. We went out for dinners and shopping trips. We had chats with Mr Singh while cooking with him in a tiny kitchen about life, dreams, and the future. We – I – made firm friendships. I fell in love. I fell in love with the school, its mission, and its founding family.

I fell in love with the children who attended the school.

I fell in love with a little boy with the saddest eyes called Simon.

Simon was my favourite.

Simon was my first favourite.

Simon died.

On that first trip, we experienced lots of laughter and lots of tears. We tried to make sense of this sensory experience we were having. For me there was a lot of peace and centring myself in the afternoons when school was over and most of the children had gone home. I would sit under the shade of a tree just aside from the circle of chairs where my fellow volunteers sat, having their chai or coffee. More often than not, the older girls from the school would ask if they could brush and plait my hair. I sat in the shade of the sun listening to them chatting together in Hindi or Marathi, giggling now and then. They would talk to me about the school, their friendships, their lives. Some younger children would rest their heads on my shoulder, arms or knees while I traced 'round and round the garden' on the inside of their hands. Or they would ask me for my camera or phone and click photos and selfies.

My favourite child, Simon, died just before my second trip to the school - six months later. I didn't find out until the day I arrived in the school. I had been researching about international adoption with my husband because Simon was an orphan living in an orphanage and we had hoped to adopt him. I faded into the background. I didn't spend so much time with the children – *self-preservation* – so I took photographs instead. I spent more time with the teachers, the founding family, and with Suresh (the skinny adolescent boy from the first trip). I learned more about the inner workings of the school and the local community it served. I observed more than I took part. I didn't know it then, but I had begun to research and document the school.

Suresh became my favourite.

Suresh is still my favourite.

Suresh became my brother.

Suresh became my guide and my interpreter.

Suresh is my co-researcher.

Introduction

Undoing a Doctoral Study: ethics and educational research

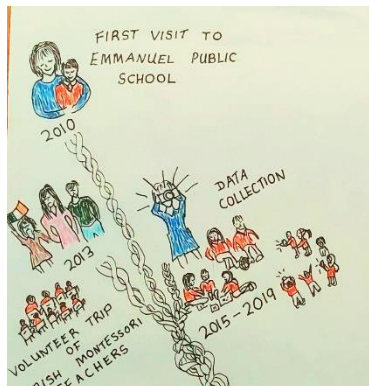
Science is often presented to us as clean, factual, and clinical- free from all human emotions, feelings, reactions, dialogues, and perspectives (Cassell, 2002). However, science is conducted by humans and with humans who have stories, relationships, families, histories, emotions, and intuitions, in dialogue with other humans whether in speech, by text, visually, textually, or aurally (Spretnak, 2011). When we read a theory, the results of a science experiment, or a research study, we engage with another human's thoughts and words (Lange, 2018). The science and theories are not created in a vacuum and to wipe them clean of their traces of humanity only tells half a story or perhaps to put it another way: it leaves a story – or perhaps *someone's* story (Spivak, 1992) – untold …

What of the scientist who came up with the theory, idea, or research study? Surely their story shapes how the theories and knowledge they created and sent out into the world came to be? What brought Sir Isaac Newton to sit under a tree on the day that an apple happened to fall on his head? How was his life lived? What conversations did he have that may have shaped how he lived, learned, and understood the world? What other people did he encounter? How did they influence him? How did his family life and his biology shape him so that in that very moment he decided to sit under a tree, an apple should happen to fall, and he should understand it to be proof of gravity? What if Archimedes had lived a life without access to a bath, perhaps as a person who washed in an ever-flowing river? Would he still have discovered how to measure the displacement of water? If Einstein had been born neurotypical, would we have all the science and theories that he generated, today? And what of Dr. Maria Montessori? If she were not born to a military general and lived instead in the slums of Rome where she opened her first Casa Dei Bambini (Children's House), would the Pope have intervened, and the University have allowed her to study a medical degree (a course only open to men at that time) (Kramer, 1988)? If she had not heard about or read the works of Jean Itard and Edouard Seguin, would she have been inspired to create her own materials for enhancing and refining the senses and in turn her other Montessori materials (ibid)? If she had not graduated as the first female medical doctor during the first wave of European Feminism (ibid), would anyone outside of Rome have come to know who she and her new method of education was?

It is in the very encounter with another's ideas and theories that we encounter an already ongoing dialogical process to which we respond and add our voice – first with our felt bodily emotions (disbelief, shock, awe, surprise, confirmation, agreement, anger etc.) and then with our minds and our words, (Ng,1998; 2005; 2018). We may respond by playing with their ideas and theories. Stretching them to

see how far they can stretch before they rupture. Pushing them together to hear a chorus. Pulling them apart, exposing other, quieter voices. Putting them back together and listening for new harmonies. Observing them from multiple perspectives in multiple lightings (Mazzei, 2014). Thinking about them using the lens of another theorist, or multiple theorists (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; 2013; St. Pierre, 2018). Playing with the ideas or results with other theories: adding something, subtracting something…much like a toddler playing with play-doh. To know the story of how that idea or theory came to be allows us to pull on threads we may not have known were there, then to expose micro-threads, to weave new threads in and out to see how the pattern changes. It allows for playing with environment, temperature, perspectives, and time, creating new understandings from a different point of view. It is with this in mind that I offer you, the reader, the story of how I came to my research study and ultimately decided to productively, and lovingly, take it apart, examine it, play with it, and attempt put it back together.

Once Upon A Time(s):



When I productively, and lovingly, take my research study apart, I realise that my story begins at three distinct points in time. In 2010, when I visited Emmanuel Public School (EPS) in India for the second time and found out Simon, a child I had hoped to adopt, had died from complications of HIV. In 2013, as I finished my Master of Education Degree and observed the landscape of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland and began to think about applying to do a PhD and what that study might look like. The final point in time was in 2015, when I led a volunteer trip comprised of Irish early childhood educators over to EPS in the first term of my doctoral research study. Three distinct points in time that culminated in three different perspectives, and perhaps three different stories.

At all three points in time, the story starts with observing what was happening in my immediate world. In 2010, in order to cope with my grief at the sudden passing of Simon, I took on the role of official photographer of the volunteer group, which brought about distinct advantages. I cultivated more authentic relationships with the people who worked and owned the school. I observed both the behaviours and actions of the volunteers but also of the local teachers and children. I had more time to sit beneath my favourite tree and watch the interactions all around me. I began to see the school for what it really was with all of its strengths and its weakness. I began to see the culture of the school. I

began to hear and understand the story of the school, the stories of its children, and the stories of its teachers. I, in truth, began an ethnographic study, without being aware that I was doing so.

In 2013, I observed the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Ireland at a tumultuous time in the sector. We were just putting our profession back together after the collective trauma caused by an undercover exposé by the National Broadcaster, Radio Teilifís Éireann (RTE). The exposé involved undercover early childhood professionals going into a number of settings with hidden cameras and exposing physical, emotional, psychological abuse and neglect of children by their carers in the most horrifying of ways[5]. It shocked the nation and a profession in its infancy to the core. It caused an onslaught of policy decisions and legislation (Byrne and O'Toole, 2014; Moloney, 2014; Walsh, 2016) that are to this day still having serious ramifications on the sector. It also brought about a professional dialogue about many issues:

(1) Our burgeoning identity: The majority of ECEC professionals wanted to be recognised as the foundation level of education in Ireland and thus wanted to be recognised as Educators. This started a near decade shift to move away from the idea of 'Carer' that is so integral to the concept of Early Childhood Education and Care. It is argued by many that education and care cannot be separated from birth to eight years of age (Bennett, 2003, Hayes, 2007; Hayes and Bradley, 2008; Van Laere, Peeters, and Vandenbroeck, 2012; Nolan, 2020).

(2) Work versus Play: This dichotomy can be characterised as a binary created by the Irish professionals when looking at academics and play. It has its roots in the roll out of *Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) which advocates playful pedagogies and playful learning. To a very young sector, not used to having professional dialogues or engaging on a philosophical level with questions such as the nature of play and learning, it set in motion a gulf and rivalry between services who provided the Montessori curriculum (who rejected Aistear for fear of watering down the method) and services who provided Playful or Emergent Curricula (who felt finally justified, having spent most of their careers in the shadow of the Montessori Method in Ireland) (Matson, 2013).

(3) The Role of Qualifications: A discourse about qualifications and the link between qualifications and high quality provision was perpetuated by the media in the aftermath of the exposés. This rose a call for a minimum qualification to be put in place in the sector and in turn saw the free preschool scheme provided by the government linked to the push for more graduates in the sector (DCYA, 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b). The capitation paid to services was offered at an ordinary rate for professionals qualified to level six and a higher capitation was paid out to services who had a graduate working in the classroom. Services educating children below preschool age were not funded at all, often leaving them

[5] RTE's Primetime Exposé *A Breach of Trust* was taken down from all internet and viewing forums at the request of the parents and guardians of the children involved. However, this in depth article from 29th May, 2013 provides more information: https://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0529/453276-childcare-frances-fitzgerald/

with the least qualified staff. Arguments about high quality education being delivered by graduates backed by research from the United States and Europe were used by the government to defend the spending of public money on a sector that is almost entirely privately run (OECD, 2015).

As the founder of an online community of practice[6], I observed the trickle-down effect of these policy decisions and discourses into the story of the Irish ECEC professional and how they viewed and spoke about their profession. I wondered about how play and early learning might look differently depending on the method used, and I conducted my research study for the Master of Education Degree on examining the instances of fantasy play and imaginative play by children in three ECEC services using the Montessori didactic materials through the lens of Aistear the Curriculum Framework. When I finished this research study, I began to think about how play might look differently depending on the curriculum, culture, and societal values in which it occurred, and how this might solve some of the issues the profession was having in light of the 'play versus academics' discourse. This led me to apply to do a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education.

In September 2015, after a craniotomy to remove a tumour and recovery from partial paralysis, I had started a PhD programme with the Education department in Maynooth University. I won a competitive scholarship, the John and Pat Hume Scholarship, and had designed a research study which theorised that there was a problem with taking many different curricula from other countries and expecting them to have the same results in Ireland that they had showed in their country of origin, despite having an entirely different culture and societal values. This led me to want to understand how the children of Ireland, aged birth to six years, play. So, as I led a volunteer trip of five other Montessori trained ECEC professionals over to Emmanuel Public School for a week-long camp in the first term of my PhD journey, I was already thinking about how play might look differently in different cultures.

Over the years, both being on, and leading, volunteer trips, I have often experienced Minority world volunteers who are trained in education, who see the school, and its practices, with a deficit lens but this trip (in 2015) was different. There was almost a hostility and suspicion towards the educators in the school, particularly in relation to the early childhood classes. One of the first problems to emerge was that of the Irish volunteers suspecting that the school was perhaps a scam. That was based on the fact that although the school is a not-for-profit charity, the children looked clean and healthy. The children, who attend the school from ten slum settlement communities, did not look 'poor' in the eyes of the volunteers. They also argued that the pedagogies of the educators were not age or developmentally appropriate and that there were not enough resources or toys for the children to play with. The practice

[6] Montessori & Early Childhood Professionals Ireland (MECPI)
www.earlychildhoodprofessionalsirl.com

of the early childhood educators was thought to be too academic and too focused on discipline. There were frustrations over the use of a threat of a stick as a discipline technique. Coming from a profession still reeling from a child protection scandal and a culture that has outlawed physical punishment this frustration and criticism was understandable and discussed with the school. However, I was very frustrated and embarrassed on that trip at the way we behaved as a group. I was frustrated that instead of focusing on the good the school was doing, all the Irish ECEC professionals could see was the deficits. When I arrived home, I spoke to my supervisor about changing my topic to a cross cultural study of the culture of play and early learning in a school in Ireland and India. Reflecting back, I was determined to *prove* the existence of play (that perhaps looked culturally different) in the school, but also to learn how it was valued by the children, teachers, parents, community, and wider Indian society. Was it as important in their culture as it now is in ours? This idea eventually became a study examining the culture and perceived value of play and early learning in Emmanuel Public School when I realised that there was a possibility of creating a binary or comparison between the two countries, schools, cultures, pedagogies and so on. I did not want that. I quite quickly realised that even if I did not do it someone else may by reading my research. I can only control how and what I write, I cannot control how it may be interpreted or used. Ethically, this did not sit well with me, so I followed my intuition, and I made the decision to research solely in Emmanuel Public School.

The Original Project

When I originally started to research in the school, my project and its scope were completely different. The overarching aim of the study was twofold: (1) to develop a rich, contextual understanding of children's play and early learning in an early childhood education setting and marginalised community in urban India; and also (2) to problematize the application of dominant Minority world discourses to the lives of young children living in Majority world contexts. This included looking at what types of play and early learning experiences children engaged in? How they played in and outside of school? Where they liked to play, and with whom? I had planned to examine if play activities were impacted by material disadvantage. I also wanted to know if the school, teachers, and parents thought that play had anything of educational value to add to the children's learning? I wondered what meanings were attached to different types of play. If play featured as part of their curriculum and how parents' and educators' beliefs about the value of play influence curriculum and practices in the school? I wondered what each stakeholder's priorities were.

In order to explore the lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, interactions, and the impact of culture and society on the play and early learning experiences of children in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) classes in EPS, I decided to take a case study, qualitative approach. Namely the use of ethnographic and arts-based methods to build up a 'living picture' (Clark & Moss, 2005; 2011) of

the children's experiences of play and early learning, as well as the attitudes of the parents, teachers, school managements, and the wider community. Photographic observations, field notes, and formal interviews were conducted as well as drawing and a photovoice exercise with the children. A guide and interpreter who used to work in the school, accompanied me in the field and during my time in the city. Over the course of three years, I undertook four trips of one to three weeks duration (including a pilot trip).

I decided to use a negotiated process (Bevan, Gutwill, Petrich, and Wilkinson, 2015) because I had interpreted it as a means to empower the children, parents, and teachers coming from marginalised community with marginalised status as equal partners in the research project (Bevan, et al, 2015). This allowed for the methods and decisions to be fluid – changing from trip to trip depending on the needs and daily lives of the participants / research partners. The participants agreed to embark on the project as co-researchers with me. Eight children were chosen by the school management for a more in-depth case study, that is, I observed and worked with them more closely.

There were many ethical issues to consider for this research study. From working with children who came under the category of vulnerable – their age, their marginality, and the economic status, to how they will be portrayed in photographs, child protection, power relations, assent and consent, personal bias, and identifying gatekeepers. I used the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines 2011 to consider all these issues when designing the research project and when applying for institutional ethical approval from Maynooth University, in addition to the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy and their Research Integrity Policy.

I had completed all of my field work and was finishing my literature review to begin analysing the data and writing up when I came across a paper by Spivak entitled *Can the Subaltern Speak?*(1992). That paper interrupted how I thought and interpreted what I was doing and in doing so disrupted the entire course of my research project. Encountering Spivak's thoughts and words ruptured how I saw what I was doing and caused light to shine on a perspective I had never considered. Through thinking with Spivak's arguments, I realised that the culture of play and early learning of play in ECEC in Emmanuel Public School and how it was valued, is not my story to tell.

What is my story to tell?

I came to the realisation that my story to tell is the story of my research process – how the research study came to be and how it was carried out. I wondered if anything valuable could be taken away from examining the process of putting together and conducting this educational research study so that it could possibly offer perspectives on a more ethcial way to conduct such a study in the Majority world in the furture. I began to encounter decolonial theories, anti-racist, and critical race theories. I wondered what

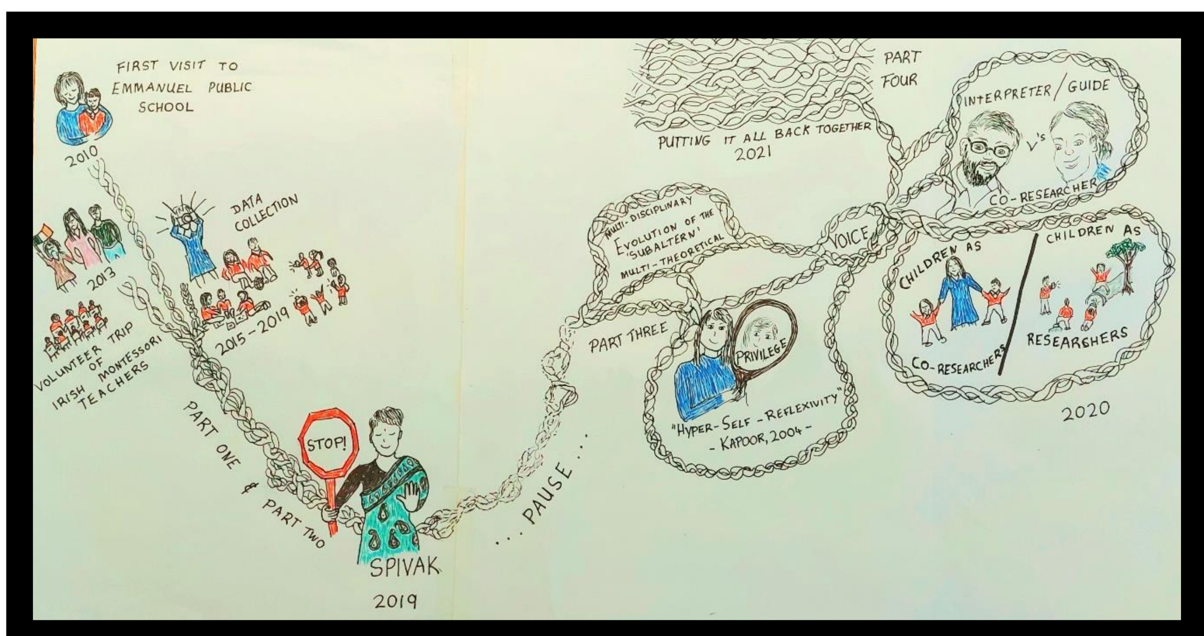
other perspectives I could gain if I played with my research study. What would happen if I pushed it and pulled it to the point of rupture? What would I see if I viewed all its pieces through the lens of other theorists and disciplines and then attempted to put it back together? What would my research study look like then? This led my to productively undo (Spivak, 2012) my research project.

To Productively and Lovingly Undo the Original Research Project:

Spivak speaks of '*productively undoing'* a piece of writing, philosophy, or theory (2012). I have such a bodily response to this phrase and idea that is so positive, and I sometimes catch myself writing or saying *lovingly undo*. Deconstruction (Derrida, 1978) sounds so like destruction to me – although I am aware that this is not what it means, at the same time my body rejects the phrasing. However, to productively undo, or more-over, lovingly undo something, is to gently and graciously take it apart in order to see it in all its nakedness, its vulnerability, and its fragility in a safe environment until all its parts stand alone and can be examined thoroughly yet gently to reveal new truths, new revelations, and new perspectives, to understand it in its entirety and then to gently and lovingly attempt to put it back together in a way that acknowledges both its beauty and its flaws equally with productive intention. In the body of this dissertation, I offer you this act of productively or lovingly undoing my doctoral educational research study in urban India where I examine all its parts and gently attempt to put them back together to make sense of all the stories involved in the carrying out of this research study and work towards a more ethical understanding of educational research in the Majority world.

A Visual Timeline:

I am aware of the messiness of the process, the methodology, and the meta nature of the research study. There are three timelines, an evolving theoretical framework, almost two different projects and perhaps maybe even two methodologies. In order to help create some sort of structure to the research from



conception to finish I offer you a visual timeline (larger version available in Appendix One)…or perhaps a visual representation of my research process… Either way, it is, like the research, not particularly linear, full of intricacies, loops, tangents, messy, busy, and perhaps…slightly incomplete…

A Note on the Language used in the body of this Dissertation:

Spivak argues that labels and categories can be used as a way of controlling the narrative when she warns, "there is always an issue of controlling the other through knowledge production on our terms" (2012, p. 467). It has also been argued that labelling or naming subjects only serves to further colonise them (Gupta, 2013; Viruru, 2005). However, while I acknowledge the power language holds, and am cognisant of that fact throughout this dissertation, I would argue that there are times in which naming ultimately helps – such as for clarity of language and concepts or when attempting to disturb the status quo and rethink power relations. It is with this in mind, that I utilise the terms 'Minority world' and 'Majority world'.

The 'Minority world' is used to mean that which is most commonly referred to as 'The West'; i.e., Europe (or more specifically western Europe). As Gupta (ibid, 2013) demonstrates, labels are problematic in any general sense but more so given the diverse cultures, backgrounds, and fluidity of identity in 'the West'. Presently, 'The West' could be conceptualised geographically (as Europe and North America) or ideologically (in terms of Enlightenment, Democracy, Capitalism, Science). I made a choice not to use it precisely because of the ideological connotations it brings with it; connotations of enlightenment, civilisation, and superiority which would only serve to colonise the language of this dissertation. Similarly, the term 'Majority world' is used to describe all other countries, cultures, and people around the globe considered outside or on the periphery of the Minority world; particularly those that have been 'othered' and / or colonised. I understand that it could be argued that by using this one term I am boxing a lot of nations, people, cultures, and countries into it and thus could be accused of othering them further. I accept that argument and acknowledge the problematic nature of using a universal term, however for now, it is the best way I can think of to push back and open the conversation and I welcome a dialogue about other possible ways of naming or describing for clarity.

The terms 'West' and 'East' are not used because of their seemingly dichotomous language which although is aligned with their geographical positioning it is suggestive of a binary, and because of the former's association with the enlightenment, or the latter's historically negative association with

orientalism. The terms 'First World, Second World, and Third World' quite literally rank countries and populations in terms of most important, civilised, and economically advantaged. Similarly, Global North and Global South have connotations of top and bottom, and Developed World infers deficit connotations of its opposite: the under-developed or developing world (Schneider, 2017; Kloß, 2017). Using Derrida's concept of presence (Derrida, 1978 / 2001), we must acknowledge what is not being said- what is absent (ibid, 1978 /2001) - that which is validating what is present in the text by its conspicuous absence. A developed nation can only exist in relation to an under-developed or developing nation - that is, those nations seen and perceived as not having achieved maturity, enlightenment, or financial independence. The language of these terms is fraught with tensions of power and power relations – all seeking validation. By purposely choosing Minority and Majority as terms to describe the countries, populations, and cultures I intend to flip the linguistic signposting on its head. Suddenly the 'West' is in the minority and the 'Other' (that is the rest of the world) is the majority. The normative binary has been disrupted. I attempt to reframe the conversation and interrupt normative thinking, while acknowledging the problematic nature of categorising.

Voices in, around, between my research:

I am not some disembodied researcher…whatever that is… I cannot thank the conversations of colleagues, acquaintances, family members, and friends merely in the acknowledgement section (although I will). How can I merely acknowledge them when the conversations, the voices, the thoughts, the prompts, the '*tugging on my coat'* (Patel, 2016, p. 8) were an accumulation of voices that guided me and helped me -who cocreated knowledge with me that I just so happened to write from my point of view and my thoughts on their prompts and insights? Yes, at the end of the day I take full responsibility for what I write and what I say. Yes, that is my responsibility. I chose how to frame it. I chose what to see and hear. I am responsible for how I made sense of it and how I report it. I am responsible for the ethical framing, the ethical thinking, and for engaging with the politics of what is being said and reported. But it is also my responsibility to acknowledge I did not create this on my own. This body of knowledge was cocreated by myself and the community that surrounds me as I research, write, reflect, and learn. Thus, these voices, pictures, memories, conversations (and so on) weave in and out of the body of my thesis as whispers - sometimes dissenting from my voice, sometimes adding to it, and sometimes just floating there. Interweaved are also snippets of voices, photographs, pieces of news, narratives, tweets, Facebook posts, and newspaper articles from the world around me at the point of knowledge creation. They also weave in, out, and between my voice as the world moves and vibrates around me as I undo knowledge, attempt to understand knowledge, react to knowledge, and attempt to create new knowledge. They may interrupt you in your reading of my thesis as they interrupted me in my writing of it. Taking inspiration from Dr. Jerry O' Neill, in his very beautiful PhD thesis *Ar lorg na*

slí (2015), I would invite you to add your voice to all these voices. Interrupt me. Disagree with me. Add to me. Scribble above my words, cross out my words, perhaps write a lyric or draw a picture. Add your voice in conversation with mine and the many voices that helped to create this thesis that are weaved in and out. Dialogue with us.

Part One

Mandalogy:

A Method for Thinking

My research has taken me on quite the journey. It made the familiar, new; it challenged my preconceptions of what it was to research, to be a researcher, to think, and to communicate my thinking. It did all of this in a body in which I was re-learning to live and trust again after my craniotomy. It makes sense to me looking back now that my experience and thinking was so embodied, even if I did not recognise it at the time. I had developed methods to learn to talk again, recall thoughts and words again; I used muscle memory to learn to walk, write, use my hand, and move the right-hand side of my body again. It seems quite obvious now that I would have developed a new method to think deeply and analytically again. This method turned out to be what I have termed Mandalogy[7] – the use of drawing mandalas to think through problems, situations, or arguments.

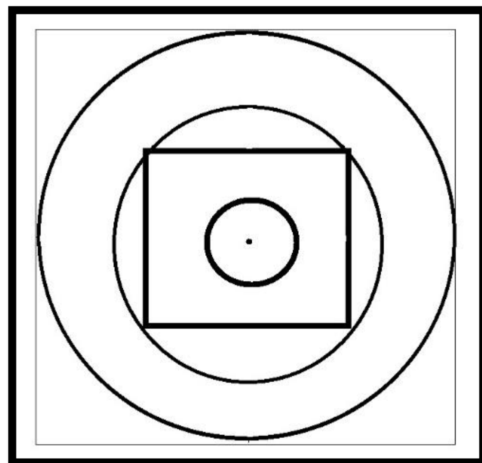
From the very beginning of my research journey, the image of a mandala kept coming to my mind whenever I thought about theoretical frameworks or methodology; given that they are intrinsically linked this makes sense to me now, but it didn't at the time. I am somewhat hesitant to use a mandala as a method for thinking through the research given its post-colonial or decolonial attempts. In fact, at one stage I attempted to outright reject it, at another I thought about not discussing it in the body of the thesis at all. However, as the image and process came to me from my body so strongly and was held there for the entire five years it has taken to complete this journey, I cannot ignore it, or the fact that my body recognises it as something that is important to my thinking and being. It is a tool I used frequently to think through problems, thus it is part of my methodology or thinking – I am still not sure – perhaps it is better explained as a methodology *for and of* my thinking. I am mindful not to colonise or appropriate it as has been done with a lot of Majority world traditions from East Asia particularly in relation to Buddhism and Hinduism and had considered not writing about it, but again, because of the significance to the process of thinking through my research I include it for you, the reader. It should help you to understand how I thought through problems, literature, and methods both in and out of the field. I give some examples of how I used them to think through some parts of the research process that I describe later in the thesis. Please feel free to read them and jump ahead to the relevant section or come back to them after reading the relevant section to understand how I thought and worked through my thinking.

[7] Thank you to Dr. Matthew Fogarty who suggested the name.

The Origin and use of Mandalas:

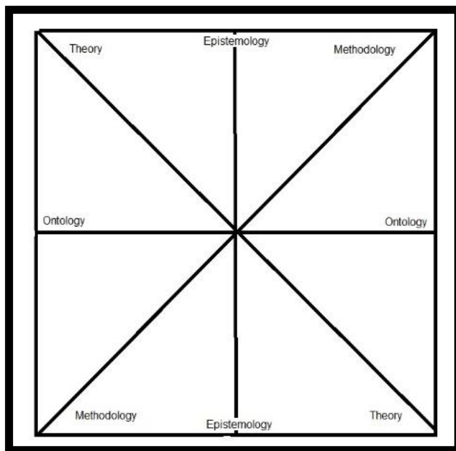
Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning *sacred circle* (Dellios, 2003). A mandala was originally a physical expanse of land laid out in a set geometrical format. As an ancient East Asian geographical space, a mandala is closest in description to a territory or a State in the Minority World (ibid) however it was defined by its centre not by its boundaries and - almost in reverse to a Minority world notion of state or territory - its core or centre leaked out into the land (ibid). Its *boundaries* for want of a better word, were fluid and shifted constantly. During this time, the centre was the holding point of a chief or a king - a performative role, and many versions of, or linked, tribes and villages intertwined together to create the fluidity of member status of the mandala geographical space. Over time the mandala became physical spiritual houses built at first to host Hindu gods (particularly Siva whose power was sought through meditative practices), then slowly they were incorporated into Buddhist and Islamic practices (Dellios, 2003).

Mandala as Space:

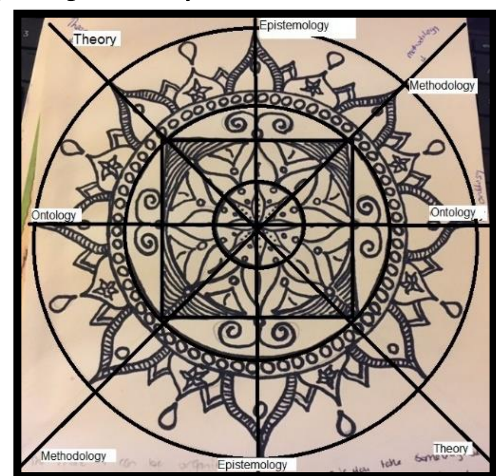


There is a connection with a mandala as a geographical space and my original use of the mandala as a conceptual framework – a conceptual space - to think through my use of literature, which I had forgotten about until I revised earlier editions of my drawings and writings about them. I modelled my framework using Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1981) and linked each system with a part of the globe or land. In the geometrical make-up of the mandala there is a centre point, an inner circle, an inner square, and another inner circle and an outer circle. In my application of Bronfenbrenner's theory to the mandala frame, the centre point represents the researcher in the field. The inner circle (modelled on the Micro system) is the school and its community; the square is the wider society (modelled on the Mesosystem) – it intersects with the square at four points representing: (1) Politics (2) Spiritual Beliefs (religion – caste system / casteism etc) (3) Economics (4) Cultural Beliefs; the third circle (modelled on the Exo system) represents the subcontinent of India; the final circle (modelled on the Macro system) represents the globe as a whole.

Reading Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2013) has made me aware of how important and connected land is to any attempt to decolonise which made me think of my earlier attempts at connecting literature and discourses to the land at several layers and also underlies the significance of using the mandala as a method of thinking and enquiring that is so connected to land, space, and being in that physical space as a learner and / or a potential coloniser – a researcher.



As I first drew a mandala as a conceptual space – my conceptual framework - I became aware of how important it was that my methodology and theory reflect my epistemology and ontology. In fact, I felt that the point of intersection of all four was myself in that moment when I am a researcher in the field and that this should be represented in the framework. I returned to where I had started when I drew the mandala and began to break the Mandala down by geometrical design. In the geometrical make-up of the mandala there is a centre point, an inner circle, an inner square, and another inner circle and an outer circle. There is also a horizontal line, a vertical line and two diagonal lines all intersecting at the centre of the circle. These lines and geometric shapes do not appear in the final mandala but are integral to getting the correct shape on the mandalas at the beginning. The very first line to be drawn is that of the horizontal line which for me represented Ontology line. The second line which intersects vertically with the first is what I have termed the Epistemology line. The third line drawn is a diagonal line from left to right through the centre and is what I have termed the Theory line. The final line drawn is also a diagonal line, this time from right to left - intersecting through the centre - and this, for me, is the Methodology line. These lines centre the mandala and its structure. They support the geometrical shapes and patterns (the arguments and literature) and give them points at which to anchor.



Mandala as a physical manifestation of unconscious thought:

As mentioned previously, the concept of the mandala first came to me as a conceptual framework. It came about organically from reading Indian philosophy and engaging in fieldwork in India. Not unlike Gendlin's focusing theory (1997), the image of the mandala emerged every time I thought about a

conceptual framework for my research study, but I could never articulate why. It was through the process of drawing, revisiting, and re-drawing the mandala itself that I began to be able to articulate my thinking. As I drew, themes emerged, thoughts bubbled up that had always been felt bodily but never articulated and they flowed onto the page. This reminded me of the practice of using the image of the mandala or making / drawing the visualised mandala for meditational purposes. It is often common practice to allow a mandala to 'speak' to you spiritually or bodily before you choose it for meditation as a pathway to a place of higher consciousness. "According to Jung (1973), the circle serves as an important characteristic of the mandala in which abstract (unconscious) drawn manifestations of the psyche (unconscious) are made concrete (conscious)." (Campenni & Hartman, 2019, p. 25). Allowing the mandala to 'speak' to you is another way of saying the mandala is a manifestation of the unconscious as Jung argued. Although this could be argued as alchemy and not science, it does resonate with me in an embodied way as it did with Jung, "Jung acted on the embodied sense of the symbolic. He carved symbols in stone. He drew and painted them. He heard them speak, and he demanded information and immediate help from his dream figures. He materialised his dreams" (Conger, 2012, p. 51). This eventually led me to start using the mandala method as a way of thinking through my research, of that which I could not yet articulate but could feel and *know*.

While I lay no claim to 'materialising my dreams' I do feel a resonance with the work of Jung in the area of mandala creation and tapping into the unconscious mind and that of Gershon's theory of the '*second brain'* independent or neutral to the demands of the brain or spine in the enteric system due to all that is demanded by the gut (ibid, pp51&52)[8] in that I have always believed in following my intuition or gut feeling and did so throughout the research journey. So, this concept of a second brain neutral from the brain that may over think or question what you know bodily in the moment is interesting to me. It allows me to think through my process of drawing and creating different mandalas to help me think through arguments or thoughts I have with my ethics, my methodology, the literature, and my challenges. It mostly emerges firstly from my gut feelings and bodily sensations – my intuition when I encounter a concept, argument, situation and so on. These are things that were counter to my beliefs of what a 'researcher' was or the types of scientific tools a researcher should use when I first started this process, but as an educator and observer of children, I realised quite quickly that I have been doing so, professionally, my entire career. I often checked in with my body to see how it was reacting to whatever it was I was doing, thinking, observing, or encountering. Is it similar to praxis? Or phronesis? Ethical Radar (Skånfors, 2009)? Are these not gut decisions made in the moment informed by theory, ethics, and practice? I am still thinking this through…

Many who use the Mandala for meditation purposes, tend to focus on the outer circle and allow their eyes to make their way into the inner circle, however the creation of the mandala starts from the centre

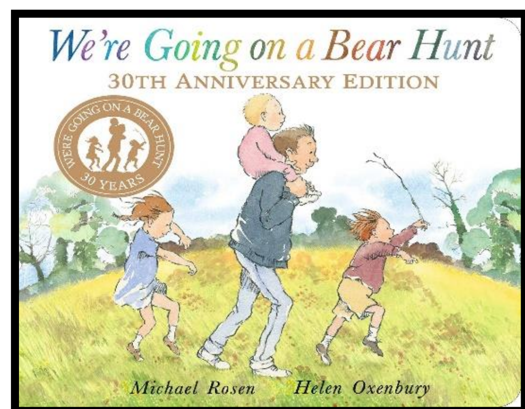
[8] Dr. Michael Gershon, enterologist at Columbia University who worked on the theory of a second brain in primitive man in 1988.

point. Circles and squares within the mandala stem from the centre. The use of a mandala for meditating is to bring you to a plain of higher consciousness that is not of this world. It takes you out of your mundane everyday world and into the spiritual world. That is, it allows you to feel one with the universe. It is a cosmic diagram that reminds us that life never ends. It allows the person their relationship with the universe and can allow them to see the universe within themselves. "A mandala may constitute a world, but it can also be a world within the world" (Strong, 1996, pp.307). For me, it takes me out of my head and onto the page. It also reminds me that education and research are relational and dialogical - and that the conversation never ends – it has endless possibilities at micro and macro level. There can always be another layer added. It simultaneously lets me get to the nitty gritty detail of each argument or challenge and allows me a bird's eye view of the over-all picture.

Mandala as Story:

The mandala can also be used for the purposes of story-telling and teaching. Teaching in Hinduism and Buddhism has a strong oral tradition, *"the more local use of movable mandalas or mandala-like depictions by itinerant story-tellers has a long history throughout Asia…They could be transported across continents or within communities, but in both cases their purpose seems to have been a pedagogic one: they attracted attention and communicated meaning whether at the popular or the esoteric level."* (Strong, 1996, pp. 302-303). This particular aspect of the mandala resonates with me particularly its ability to both tell a story and be representative of someone's story – but also the pedagogical potential. I see the narratives and relationships within a Mandala as intertwined. I have often said, since Spivak interrupted me, that this is not my story to tell (the culture of play and early learning in the school), however my story to tell was my research experience - my telling the story of this research project.

I tell stories; it's what I do. If I am asked to explain something when I am teaching, whether it is young children or adult learners, I always illustrate with a story - an example if you will. I was not aware that I used stories so much as a pedagogical tool until reflecting on this research process. Well, that is, I was not consciously aware of it. I love reading to children, using oral poems and stories with them. I especially love sharing *Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen[9] with preschool children. I love getting them to echo it back, so they have an equal part in the telling of the story. I use action, facial expression, and pitch and tone of voice for added dramatic



[9] Image taken from SimonandSchuster.com https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Were-Going-on-a-Bear-Hunt/Michael-Rosen/9781534454200

effect. I love watching their faces for cues that they know what is coming next – when they get to take ownership of the story and we are partners in the telling. The same story is never told the same way twice – it changes with its context.

Over eighteen years of working with pre-schoolers, I have observed that the more I used familiar oral stories or story books, the more each child will get involved in their own way. They also re-enact them, take ownership of them, in their play, amongst themselves or in their individual play or artwork. There is space for them to weave themselves in and out of a story, observe it, or immerse themselves in it. This too was what I observed in all the classrooms of the early childhood classes in Emmanuel Public School. Not only did the children come to life and say the oral rhymes and stories with vigour and in partnership with their teachers – they became a community of story tellers at play together during each telling. They also repeated them amongst themselves while at play out on the playing field. The teachers re-iterated how important oral stories and rhymes were for the children's independence, language skills, self-confidence, and joy. They knew intuitively the importance of oral play for children as how pedagogical tool for how they come to know themselves. Everyone gets a chance to become the storyteller and tell their version of the story. The same potential is offered in the use of creating a mandala to think through the story of your encounter.

"…TEACHER AS IMAGINATIVE ADVENTURER, AS A STORYTELLER, AS AN ACCOMPLICE OF THE SEDUCTIONS OF SONG AND VERSE, OF DRAMA AND LITERATURE"

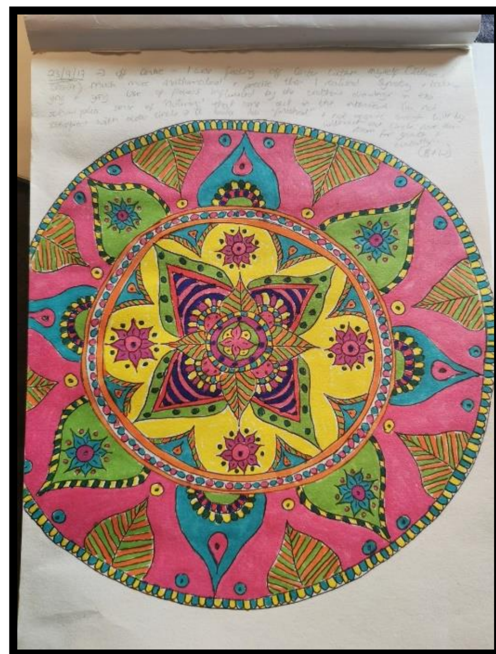
PROFESSOR PÁDRAIG HOGAN, (2000)

I come from a great culture of oral story telling in Ireland (Thuente, 1979). We tell stories all the time. Through Sean Nós songs, folk tales (Lindová, 2014), rebel stories, myths, legends, urban legends, gossip, our history, our poetry, our art, our plays (Lyod, 2011). Story telling is a huge part of our pedagogical history (McGlothlin). Learning through stories and teaching through stories is considered oral play (Englehart, 2011). It is used to teach lessons, cautionary tales, and poke fun (Friedman, 2007). Children often narrate their play especially when engaging in fantasy play. They become the authors, observers, and actors in the stories in a safe world of risk taking. Freedom within limits – a phrase used by Dr. Maria Montessori (1949) to explain her method of giving children freedom that I believe to also apply to children in fantasy play, stories, and drawing or making a mandala. There are limits, rules (if you will) that must be followed but all that sits within those limits or rules is utter freedom. Freedom to play with form, with reality, with lines, shapes….to tell your own story. The mandala offers that freedom to think within limits, within a form of balance and counterbalance, within quiet spaces and rich busy-ness. It offers the freedom to play with my thinking, to stretch it, invert it, pull it, push it; insert and play with spaces, pauses; build intricate, detailed arguments and then lovingly undo them.

Each mandala that I created, was unique to my thinking in that context and time. Each situation, challenge or encounter with a theme was situated in the present events unfolding in the world – my world, India, Pune, the school, globally. Each piece of literature I read, or experience I had, was informed in some way by past and present conversations, news, pop culture and so on. I wondered whether this constituted bias, or tainted thinking. However, reading Strong describe the meaning of mandalas here helped me believe in the process, "One could probably keep going round and round on the meaning of mandalas which themselves are not static entities, and which are in constant interaction with the contexts that inform them" (1996, pp. 312). I have no doubt that if I were to further think through the literature / arguments / encounters etc in the future, having engaged in other experiences, conversations, and contexts that they – and as a result my thinking – would be different. A different story would be told. Thus, my thinking now, the story I am telling, is of this context with these past experiences, relationships, and conversations, and it will, without a doubt change and evolve over time – creating another story – another mandala.

The First Mandalas:

I often do not use rulers and compasses and draw a mandala freehand to see how centred I am in my body and my thinking when I am thinking through a mandala. More often than not the mandalas would show me that I was off centre and my thinking or my body was not balanced. This made me think deeper about the issues I was dealing with and look for more ways of balancing the arguments. The very first mandala I ever worked with was completely off centre but was full of so much rich thinking informed by my bodily and sensory experience of my research trip in India where I had completed the drawing exercises with the children, and I had completed most of the interviews with class teachers from that year. Here is the note I wrote alongside it:

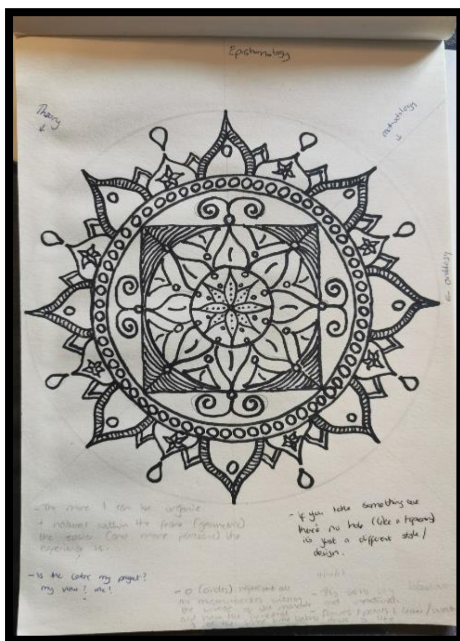


23rd September 2017

Off centre – I was feeling off centre within myself (Eileen & Charlie) much more mathematical and precise than I realised. Symmetry and balance; ying and yang. Use of flowers influenced by the children's drawings in the school plus a sense of 'nurturing' that came out in the interviews.

I'm not satisfied with outer circle -> it looks too "finished" and not organic enough. Will try without outer circle next time. Room for growth and evolution. (B+W)[10]

I thought through the relationships the teachers had with the children and how love and family came through very strongly for me in all of the interviews with teachers who were not volunteers. Their purpose seemed to be to provide love, support, and a secure family for children in the school because they understood that to be what the children were lacking in their communities outside of the school. The children showed me in their drawings that they had a strong connection to the land and flowers, plants, and trees. The nature or land came through consistently in each class' drawings, unprompted. It also later appeared as a feature of the photograph exercise as the youngest classes declared to me that they took photos of the trees overhead because they believe their school is a jungle. My own photographic observations of the children both in class and outside on the playing field revealed an interaction and connection with nature and land at every available opportunity, particularly by the youngest classes in Nursery and Lower Kindergarten. This was a very colourful mandala, full of the vibrant colours I experience when in Pune, the pulsing of the country, and the sensory experience I had.



This was the second mandala I drew, using the starting points from the mandala above. It developed into what I thought was going to be a conceptual framework. I used the set square and compass to draw the lines and geometric shapes and make sure it was centred. I made the following observations after I drew it on the page:

11th October 2017

This seems very laborious and unnatural (the ruling and setting up of the geometric designs)
Circles represent all the micro-universes within the universe of the mandala and how the[y] co-exist and at the same time balance
Is the centre of my project? My view? Me?
Flowers / petals / leaves / water drops = life
The more I can be organic and natural within the frame (geometric) the easier (and more pleasant) the experience is.
If you take something out there's no hole (like a tapestry) it's just a different style / design.

[10] (B+W) means black and white – I was considering whether it would be better in black and white. When I am in India, I am inspired by the bright colours but when I get home to Ireland, I always return to black and white or a dark colour and white. I'm not sure why.

When I finished drawing, I reflected on my work and my thinking whilst completing it, and wrote the following:

The circles and squares – systems from my project in the school to the globe and the designs are the players, the relationships, and the stories.

There are many layers to it, and it is fluid, organic, and can be just me doing my research in the field or it can [unintelligible] up to reveal a beautiful mandala full of stories, relationships, narratives, pictures, and patterns. They are not forced, and they are not fixed but move and grow and unfurl and close in on themselves depending on the perspective, the narrative, and the mood.

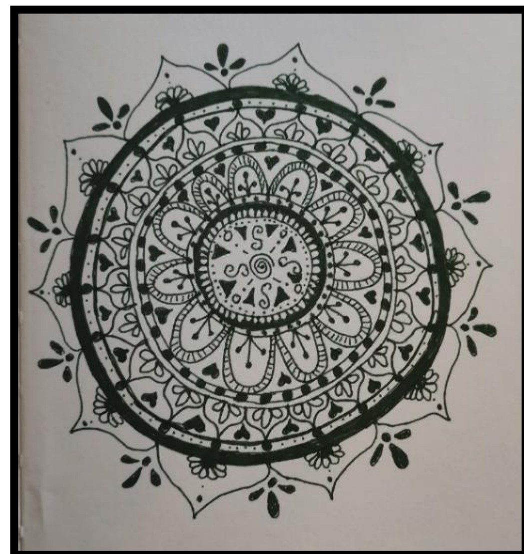
It sits within a rigid framework but if you remove the framework and stand back and look it reveals the beauty of the narratives and their relationship with each other. – If you take away the frame of the study what is left is a beautiful picture – a micro-universe as the Buddhists believe. Each layer, each design, each shape can be removed, examined, and admired for its aesthetic but it doesn't leave a hole or an incomplete mandala – just a different design. It just tells a different story.

Some notes added on to the page at a later unspecified date show I was thinking about weeds that colonise a garden. As I went on to use mandala drawing as a way to think with the literature, data, and experiences, I began to draw more and write less notes. The "notes" were drawn into the mandalas. I will give below a brief idea of the process in some examples.

Examples of using Mandalogy:

Speaking about weeds in a garden and acts of colonisation, I think this is a good point to insert this mandala. As I tried to think about not appropriating in the study, the voices, the mandala, I did exactly that! I started off by trying to draw a mandala with Irish designs and colours. The end result was jarring, garish, and did not work. If anything, it made the appropriation more visible. The colonisation more visible. The inappropriateness more visible. I am glad I attempted it, if only to see how jarring and uncomfortable my thinking was with it.

A mandala drawn with a lot of space is a lot of room for pausing and breathing. This mandala was drawn without the geometric framework to measure how centred I was. There was a lot of pauses and calm in between moment of busyness and complex thoughts. It is a more organic and flower shaped mandala rather than the circular shapes I had been drawing up until then, and it contained a lot of dots where I placed myself around and different arguments. In the process of drawing this mandala I opened myself up to different stances, different identities, and different arguments. I allowed for space to consider and reflect, and I also trailed off out of the mandala because I could not situate myself fully in any one space.



I also drew complex mandalas to think through the exercises which I completed with the children such as the photograph exercise. This one is as example. There were so many layers of complexity to the exercise: ethically, methodologically, theoretically, sensory, bodily, and so on and they stretched across many different places. However, it was also a vibrant experience full of life, play, fluidity, laughter, and fun. It was not completed with a solid preprepared framework or geometric tools because that was the nature of the activity in the field. I had an idea of the methodology – the tools and I had a grasp of the framework – the different shapes and organically myself, Suresh, and the children completed the activity loosely based on the solid framework offered in the mosaic approach and photo voice. There was a lot of love in this exercise at various levels represented by the hearts within the designs at various levels. There were thick layers of Minority world ethics, expectations, and so on that were overcome and broken through or built upon. There was a reversal when I the researcher became researched by the groups of children and had the lens turned back on me – represented by the inverted arrows surrounding, and pointing towards, me at the centre. There was more room to breathe and pause in the centre because I was not doing much – the children had control of the cameras, the research aims, the research methodology and so on. The children, who were authentic co-researchers…or were they? Did they not in fact decolonise my research and take it over in that activity? Did they remove me, and my research aims and objectives from the activity and

carry out their own research? Whichever it was, they allowed me to break through the thick ethical and theoretical line of the Minority world to consider how to research in a Majority context that is fluid and leaky and organic. The boundaries resembled those of the physical states / territories that mandalas originally were in ancient times – more solid at the centre and fluid and seeping beyond the perceived boundaries to blur – boundaries are not important.

Squaring the circle: One of the most complicated, busiest, mandalas I had drawn was when I was thinking through identity, racism, and anti-racism. I was so nervous about this topic that I really thought it through every possible way I could. I read a lot of different arguments, theories, and concepts which accounts for all the details. It is the only mandala I named. I call it 'squaring the circle' because I learned that no matter how much work I had completed and how much I reflected and thought…it was never ending. This negotiated process with myself, and the literature, would go on and on and there didn't seem to be a way to square the circle. Unlike the mandala above I relied heavily on the framework which I drew with the correct tools to make sure it was structurally sound before I began to experiment with design as I filled it in and thought about the arguments and conceptualisations I had read and how I was making sense of them. I added colour because it was too nuanced to be a black and white topic and method. I also feel most comfortable when using one colour when creating mandalas as I think, and I wanted my unease to be represented in my thinking process on the page, thus the use of many colours – but not too many. Although there are flowers and leaves and hearts there are also accusing arrows and oppositional frameworks which intersect at certain points. The framework is solid and very geometrical. It is not fluid or organic. There were many layers of structural racism, classism, sexism to be thought through. Many layers of societal and global entities to be considered. There are purposeful sharp edges that I caught myself on. There are arrows pointing to me, pointing to society, and pointing to structures – accusing at every level. There are individuals, and communities, and micro-universes in each and every layer to be considered, seen, and heard. While I did not square the circle, and never will, I think the 'finished' mandala represents how close I came to settling on being ok with where I am now in myself and in my research on this never-ending journey.

This was one of the last mandalas I was working on before my hand gave way to my brain and stopped working so well to allow my brain to work better. You can see from the pencil lines that I used the geometric tools and drew in a detailed framework for this drawing. I was thinking through what Education, Ethics, and Educational Research were. I wanted a solid framework, just as before, to allow me the freedom to think between the framework and allow my thinking to link to different layers of society and different arguments and even different disciplines. However, you can also tell by the green designs that my hand was shaky and not able to do the job I wanted, so I have left it unfinished. However, I am still reading and thinking through the arguments and conceptualisations I come across. This time I am not at the centre but within the four leaves representing the foundational disciplines that make up teacher education in Anglo-American teacher educator courses according to Biesta (2011) – Psychology, Sociology, History of Education, and Philosophy. However, as I began to think his paper through, I realised that my teacher education as a Montessori Early Childhood Educator did not stand on these four foundational disciplines, and that indeed I had only taken one module of psychology and was only trained in the Montessori philosophy. However, I put myself as little dots around the disciplines because I have encountered them in many formal and informal ways in the course of education and educational research in the course of my career – particularly in the course of my Master of Education Degree and my PhD in Maynooth University. There are many strings of connections to the people whom I have met in Education and those who informed my thinking. This mandala was not meant to be so circular. I had envisioned it being a more organic and natural shape as my instincts and experiences of education and educational research were relational, dialogical, and organic – constantly growing and flourishing. Perhaps this was too romantic a notion for my hand to allow me to finish!?

My body may have momentarily put pause to using mandalogy to think through my research, but only in its physical manifestations and physical outputs. I still continue to visualise the method of thinking rather than draw it. I see the framework in my mind's eye; the pauses, the oppositional arguments, the sharp edges, and organic unfurling shapes – and the spaces in between. I see when boundaries thick and thin are put in place in each layer of society or disciplines and I see my thinking or arguments hit against them, bleed into them, or seep beyond them. I sit in the spaces of quiet and observe the places of busyness: places containing lots of competing or combined voices in the literature I read or lots of conflicting thought in my own head. I simultaneously observe up close and at a bird's eye view. I look

for centredness, for frameworks, for organic shapes or rigidness. I also examine and think about whether it is colourful or not, and why. I check in with my gut, my intuition; and I do all of this as I read and type. While I would rather have the use of my hand and draw the mandalas as I think and read, the framework and method still work for me in more abstract ways.

Final Thoughts:

The mandala for me changed over time, much like my PhD project itself, and my writing style. It started out as a conceptual framework or a metaphor for my research. I was not sure which to be honest, but I knew instinctively it was important to my work because it kept coming back to me repeatedly as I thought about my research and the project. It came back to me even when I rejected it for fear of colonising or appropriating yet another part of Indian culture, yet my body and intuition persisted until I listened. Much like my theoretical framework, it shape-shifted and evolved from my encounters with readings and my reactions to someone else's thoughts and words, or events which happened in the field, and it did so organically and fluidly. It gave me a method to *see* and to *feel* my thinking. It helped me to push myself to find something that pushed beyond barriers, it helped me to be comfortable in the spaces in between, it helped me appreciate the pauses and to be ok with the irreconciliations and binaries. It gave me a way of being happy and content with the '*for now*' – the hint of incompleteness.

In a time when putting forward '*both sides of the argument'* can be seen as platforming ideology or rhetoric that can be damaging or hateful, it allowed me the space to sit between both sides and *be* with the discomfort, comfortably. It allows me a space where I am comfortable not knowing the answer or how to solve a problem, all the while acknowledging the problem is there. Without both sides the mandala would be a completely different picture. Without the spaces between both sides the mandala would be very busy, and the eye and brain would become exhausted very quickly, causing blurring, confusion, and conflation – and again – the mandala would tell a very different story; it would be a very different picture. There is an aesthetic beauty in the oppositional patterns as they flow in and out; up and down. There is a bodily calm in creating opposing, complimentary patterns next to each other. There is a beauty and calm in the blank spots. For me personally, I feel uncomfortable with my mandalas that end with thick circular boundaries. I appreciate the growth of organic leaves and petals or water (tear) drops seeping out, stretching out, growing out - beyond the boundary in search of another level – perhaps looking for a counter pattern? "A mandala's inherent multivalence: as one pole of significance within the mandala is emphasized, there is a tendency for it be counterbalanced and replaced by the opposite pole" (Strong, 1996, pp.309). In those mandalas, I see possibilities, incomplete conversations, arguments not thought of yet – and it is for this reason that they make me feel satisfied.

Theoretical Framework:

I start to unpick and unravel my theoretical framework in order to ask questions of it and see it in all of its individual pieces. I apologise for interrupting you as I productively undo my theoretical framework, you may find it interrupts the flow of your reading and understanding but it is meant to interrupt and consider an alternative perspective. My theoretical framework was developed over many different timelines in my story and as such needs to be interrogated and taken apart in the now for fresh perspectives. Perhaps you might enjoy the interruptions (in italics) or the chances to pause and consider with me. Perhaps you may want to scribble an answer or a further question?

Theories and hypothesises do not materialise in a vacuum. They live as lines of design within a growing mandala – a universe within a universe. The threads of their interconnectedness and evolution unfurl and curl within themselves reacting to the environment within them and around them. They connect with each other to create intricate designs and the leaves spaces of thought – or unthought of. They clash, they connect, the reflect, and the intertwine. Who did the theorist read? Speak with? See? Who did they interact with? Collaborate with? Where did they grow up? In what era? What language do they speak? How did society function at the time their theory came to be formed? Can the story of how a theory came to be, be separated from the story of the person who conceived of it or the systems in which it was conceived? Do we use theories too rigidly? Too purely? Can a theory be separated from its social, cultural, and historical context? *...pulls on the thread...*

My story towards a theoretical framework was not unlike the mandalas I drew. It twisted, turned, and entangled itself as each theory connected with, or reflected, the next. It grew out of my Minority world knowledge of children and child development and my ontology: my centre. How I saw the world. I believed that we each constructed our own reality and we had different beliefs and constructions based on the experiences that life gave us, including the historical era we were living in and how the past shaped our present. I believed that our culture and societal norms influence how we see and interpret the world around us (Goldkuhl, 2012). I also believed that our own biological make-up – sex, age, abilities, health and so on – also influenced how we interpreted the world. I knew that by stepping into the stories of other people to hear those stories, I would become a part of their story and that I could never take myself out of their story (Bassey, 1999) – nor them out of mine. I looked to Vygotsky's socio-cultural-historical theories because of the types of play I had observed on my volunteer trips to the school. I also felt a resonance between Bronfenbrenner's original ecological systems theory that he

developed in 1979, and how I believed we saw the world. I had no idea that Bronfenbrenner had also looked to Vygotsky in the formation of his original theory.

It was only later that when our head of department suggested reading post-colonial and de-colonial theory that I encountered theories that would cause me to question everything I ever knew and everything I was doing in my research. It is the complicated relationship between post-colonial theory and de-colonial theory which led me to critical race theorists. Like a spiral staircase (a liminal space – full of possibility), each theory and application of theory to my literature, methods, data, analysis and so on, led me to a next step, a new question, and a new theory. Looking back, I see connections between the theorists I chose. Unexpected connections that made perfect sense when placed in context, but of which I did not know until I delved into their biographies – their stories. Like a mandala, the connections where each pattern ends becomes a beginning for another pattern – making the end result more ornate, filled with information, that compliments or contradicts the one that came before it. Each pattern inspires or builds on the one before it. The theories speak to each other in constant dialogue. I had to keep going back with each new step in productively and loving undoing this research project to listen to the sometimes competing and sometimes harmonious chatter. The use of multiple theories helped me to see my research project from multiple perspectives giving me a much broader and simultaneously a more nuanced understanding of what my research was doing or aiming to achieve.

As a result of all of the above mentioned, there are questions I now ask myself when I read a theory, research study…anything really: Who is missing? Whose voice or contribution is not recognised, and why? This first cropped up when I began to study Vygotsky's theories in greater detail and was shocked to read that he alone did not develop them but an entire school of researchers and theorists of whom only a small few actually receive credit for developing Vygotsky's work. If I wasn't aware of this, what else wasn't I aware of. When I encountered Spivak's argument about the subaltern who cannot speak I was reminded of these group of scientists recognised only as 'Vygotsky' – one man's name. Perhaps it was naïve of me to not expect this considering how the academy operates. Who else's voice is not heard? Who else had their contribution wiped clean? Does that thinking then apply to the subjects or participants of the research? *I begin to pull at different threads….*

In the following sections, I discuss each theoretical approach as I encountered them and began to make sense of my research:

Socio-Cultural Historical Theory:

Socio-cultural historical theory was conceived by the Soviet Psychologists in post-World War I Russia, particularly the 'Soviet school of socio-historical approach to higher mental functions' (Elhammoumi, 1997) or the 'school of Vygotsky-Leontiev-Luria' (Yasnitsky, 2011) as it was also known. More

commonly, in the Minority World, the socio-cultural historical theory otherwise known as 'socio-cultural theory' is accredited to Lev Vygotsky (Roth & Lee, 2007). Most of Vygotsky's work was published or utilised posthumously. In fact, though he died in 1934 at age thirty-six, it was not until the 1970's, 1990's, and again in the last decade, that his work has been appreciated, expanded upon, and applied.

The 'socio-cultural theory' associated with Vygotsky (Lantolf & Xi, 2019; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; McInerney, Walker, & Liem, 2011; Rogoff, Dahl, & Callanan, 2018; Wertsch, 1989), has also been described as a 'socio-historical theory' (Cole, 1988; Wertsch, 1987), 'cultural-historical theory' (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Sutton, 1988) and 'socio-cultural-historical psychology' (Cole, 1995). It is interesting that multiple versions or iterations of the title used to describe the same theory were submitted by the same authors depending on which audience they were speaking to. This leaves the theory very much open to interpretation, allowing the author or researcher to emphasise whichever part of the theory most applied to their thinking or research. This could be as a result of Vygotsky's multi-disciplinary thinking (Vygotsky, 1978) or of his cryptic writing style (Steiner & Souberman in Vygotsky, 1979) but most likely it is as a result of the theory that is accredited to him actually being the sum of a collaboration across many scientists, many disciplines, and across many decades; but particularly two groups of scholars. The first group of scholars was called the 'trojka' (comprised of Vygotsky, Luria, & Leontiev) and the second group of scholars was called the 'pyaterka' (comprised of Zaporozhets, Bozhovich, Levina, Morozova, & Slavina) (Yasnitsky, 2011). *I wonder what the names of the other scholars are…How many different scholars? What are their disciplines? ...Are they male, female, other…?*

Socio-cultural-historical theory originated with Vygotsky's ideas about language and child development. He drew from the work of Hegel and rooted his theory firmly within Marx's socialist writings. *…building on the work of other scholars…in dialogue with others…if he had not read and encountered these ideas how might his work have been different?...* Using Marx and Engel, he began to expand on dialectical materialism as a solution to the scientific and methodological problems encountered by his psychologist counterparts (Vygotsky, 1978) as described below:

> "The keystone of our method, which I will try to describe analytically in the following sections, follows directly from the contrast Engels drew between naturalistic and dialectical approaches to the understanding of human history. Naturalism in historical analysis, according to Engels, manifests itself in the assumption that only nature affects human beings and only natural conditions determine historical development. The dialectical approach, while admitting the influence of nature on man, asserts that man, in turn, affects nature and creates through his changes in nature new natural conditions for his existence. This position is the keystone of our approach to the study and interpretation of man's higher psychological functions and serves as the basis for the new methods of experimentation and analysis that we advocate." (Vygotsky, 1978 pps 60&61)

Socio-cultural-historical theory posits that the intellectual development of a child is influenced by the culture and time they develop in *...not a universal child...* and from the people with whom they interact with, which in turn shapes their language, thoughts processes, and reasoning skills:

> "Our concept of development implies a rejection of the frequently held view that cognitive development results from the gradual accumulation of separate changes. We believe that child development is a complex dialectical process characterised by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes which overcome impediments that the child encounters. Steeped in the notion of evolutionary changes that are so frequent in the history of child development. To the naïve mind, revolution and evolution seem incompatible and historic development continues only so long as it follows a straight line. Where upheavals occur, where the historical fabric is ruptures, the naive mind sees only catastrophe, gaps, and discontinuity. History seems to stop dead, until it once again takes the direct linear path of development. Scientific thought, on the contrary, sees revolution and evolution, as two forms of development that are mutually related and mutually presuppose each other. Leaps in the child's development are seen by the scientific mind as no more than a moment in the general line of development." (Vygotsky, 1978, pp73)

Through the use of cultural tools and signs the child develops their reasoning skills and interact with the society around them. It is, in its purest, original form[11], a constructivist theory – the child learns to master language and skills through the use of tools and signs through play by himself and through help from his peers or elders. As described by Vygotsky above, it is not a linear, neat process, but a messy, entangled process full of interruption, ruptures, and leaps. Therefore, the development of the child – of the person – is reflective of the society and culture, at the period in which he lives, that has been shaped by the past and the future yet to come. This theory, and methodology, was a departure from the clinical process of stimulus – response used by Vygotsky's contemporaries.

In terms of this research project, the socio-cultural historical theory helped me to think about the world, society, culture, and the time that the children are learning and developing in, as well as the impact of language (signs) and cultural tools. Thinking about cultural tools allowed me to observe and analyse the environments the children learn and play in, in terms of toys, educational resources, games, play partners as well as their development and cultural norms. Vygotsky himself was interested in the impact of material deprivation, poverty, and illiteracy on a person's development and gave me much food for thought with his hypothesis and conclusions as I observed in the field.

Sometimes, during the course of this research project, I used to think that perhaps by using a Minority world theorist (as a white Minority world researcher) to examine the complexities of lived experiences in the Majority world I was further colonising the field. I wondered whether it was an act of colonisation and I wondered if I could defend it? I wondered whether I would be questioned on this – particularly from postcolonial, decolonial, or indigenous scholars and I would find myself getting more entangled

[11] The socio-cultural historical theory evolved into an activity theory – Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) but this was after Vygotsky's death.

in the lines of binaries and either/ ors. My arguments would collapse in on top of themselves because here is a theorist (or more correctly a group of multi-disciplinary scholars and scientists) whose theories not only allowed for different childhoods and cultures but demanded them and demanded the acknowledgment of different childhoods and cultures. It is only when I pull at the thread and untangle what I first encountered in Vygotsky from the entire theoretical framework, examining his theory, it all its parts, that I can see (or re-see) what it is that this theory offers my project and my understandings. It doesn't have to be an either / or – Vygotsky's theories offer a lot for the push back of the universal application of research and 'norms' from the Minority world – used in conjunction with suitable local scholars could only serve to strengthen the arguments.

Vygotsky's use of "we" and "our" all through his writings is an indication of his acknowledgment of his research as a collaborative process (Vygotsky, 1978). He acknowledges the work he has built on and also the people who worked with him. Given that dialectics were very important to him, and his theory itself, this give me cause to wonder if the use of such words was purposeful pointing or signalling? However, I am cautious that everything I read and research from him is a translation and many are collaborative translations and interpretivist projects. I wonder how much this affected the language chosen. I also consider, as I read, the different cultural and historical lenses used by the translators and researchers who put his writings together. I have spoken about the impact of time and culture on translations of theoretical works before in my master of education degree thesis which examined Montessori's writings and consequently demonstrated that two separate editions of the same book proved to have a different emphasis depending on the time and country in which the translator lived (Matson, 2013). I am cognisant of this as I read and apply the theory.

Bio-Ecological Systems Theory

The bio-ecological systems theory was first conceived by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist who was born in the USSR but brought up in America. The theory was revisited and re-worked regularly by him and his colleagues over his lifetime (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) *…Again, here we have a theory that was co-generated and co-created with a group of scholars and that was fluid, developing, and shifting over time…* What started out as a theory about the ecology of human development ultimately became a theory about proximal processes at the heart of bioecological development (ibid). Having grown up in a State psychiatric facility where his father worked, surrounded by three thousand acres of land of varying types of ecological systems (hills, swamps, forests etc), Bronfenbrenner grew up observing what was happening around the in-patients who lived and worked there and the ability to which they were able to recover (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He recounts these experiences of childhood in the foreword to his 1979 book *The Ecology of Human Development:*

Experiments by Nature and Design as the unconscious beginnings of his theory (ibid). What started unconsciously in childhood became a conscious theory as he grew tired of the clinical, positivist methods of Wundt and the descriptive psychology of Dilthey *...had he have not interacted and dialogued with their methods would he have developed a new method for researching...?* and searched for a new, more nuanced way of researching human development (ibid). Building on the works of Vygotsky, Piaget, Freud, Mead, and Lewin, Bronfenbrenner explains how a combination of travelling to different countries and cultures added with his introduction to a wider community of scholars from other disciplines led him to conclude that:

> *"Seen in different contexts, human nature, which I had previously thought of as a singular noun, became plural and pluralistic; for the different environments were producing discernible differences, not only across but also within societies, in talent, temperament, human relations, and particularly in the ways in which the culture, or subculture, brought up its next generation. The process and product of making human being human clearly varied by place and time. Viewed in historical as well as cross-cultural perspective, this diversity suggested the possibility of ecologies as yet untried that held a potential for human nature yet unseen, perhaps possessed of a wider blend of power and compassion than has thus far been manifested."* (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. xiii)

It is here, in the passage above, that we see how complex and nuanced Bronfenbrenner's thinking began and was indeed influenced by other disciplines, as he played with the beginnings of his theory.

The theory started with the concept of the ecological environment which was made of four systems and how they interact with each other. The four systems are: (1) the Microsystem - that is, the immediate environment in which the child lives and develops, such as the home, the creche, the preschool etc. (2) the Meso system which is made up of the inter-connections or interrelationships between the different systems for example the relationship between the parents and the child's preschool educator or the relationship between the child's parent and their boss (3) the Exosystem which is made up of the wider community such as the family's neighbours or community nurse or local councillors, and (4) the Macrosystem which are the cultural norms and traditions – these may be portrayed in the media, wider society, and Government policy documents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner makes an argument for why knowing all the systems within which the child develops and interacts with will help the researcher understand the development of the child more deeply and with more nuance when he writes,

> *"Knowledge and analysis of social policy are essential for progress in developmental research because they alert the investigator to those aspects of the environment, both immediate and more remote, that are most critical for the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the person. Such knowledge and analysis can also lay bare ideological assumptions underlying, and sometimes profoundly limiting, the formulation of research problems and designs and thus the range of possible findings."* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.8)

The above quote serves to highlight the assumptions, biases, and systemic biases the researcher can bring to the table in both a clinical or laboratory setting or during fieldwork. It is also a nod to the work of Lev Vygotsky which examined the impact of the society and culture, of the world in which the child lives and learns, on her development.

Bronfenbrenner placed an emphasis on what he termed *ecological transitions* in his earlier works such as a new sibling entering the family unit, starting school, or moving to a new house. The ecological transitions are shifts that occur during a person's lifespan. He noted that the developmental importance of these ecological transitions lay in the changes in behaviour, or expectations of certain behaviours, that these transitions brought with them. These changes in the person's behaviour affect not only themselves but other people in their lives, that is the affect not only the individual's development but the development of the other people with whom they interact both directly and indirectly.

Bronfenbrenner acknowledges he builds on Lewin's 1935 theory of "a close interconnection and isomorphism between the structure of the person and the situation" (Lewin cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.9) and Piaget's writings in '*The construction of reality of the Child'* when developing his ecological theory. However, he writes, that what he adds to their theories is the idea of the Mesosystem – that is the developing child's awareness of the different settings that lie outside of her immediate setting and the relationships within those settings and how they affect her. For example, she is aware of her Mother's place of work as well as her home. She will recognise that her Mother has a boss in this setting of employment. Bronfenbrenner expands on Vygotsky's theories of language development and imagination when he brings together the increasing capacity to understand firstly spoken, then written language with the child's ability to imagine her Mother working with her boss in her place of work until she reaches a stage in her development that allows her to imagine countries or places far away such as where her uncle (whom she talks to on the phone) lives in Australia, ultimately developing into the ability to imagine the fantasy lands of her favourite stories, fables, and films (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This, he argues, shows the child's development to imagine along a continuum for the microsystem to the macro-system (ibid).

As Bronfenbrenner revisited his theory, in conversation with other scholars it became even more nuanced and sensitive to the factors that he posited as affecting the development of the individual child such as time and proximal processes. It resulted in the final stage of the theory that we have today – that is the Process – Person – Context – Time model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). A Process in this context can be understood to mean the modes of interaction between people maintained by reciprocal relationships between each other and their environment (ibid). The Person in this theory relates to how the individual has their own role to play in their development characteristically, biologically, and psychologically. Context refers to the fours systems (Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro) discussed previously. Time refers to

what Bronfenbrenner called the Chronosystem in his earlier works (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and refers to not only how the individual develops during her life span but also the impact of historical time on the development of a human (for example: the impact of the Covid 19 and the after affects which will affect the development of the child born and developing during this time in history). He used the terms Microtime, Mesotime, and macrotime to further explain the nuances of time on the development on the individual (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Proximal Processes were described by Bronfenbrenner as the driving force of development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). These proximal processes are the interrelationships and interactions between the developing child and their immediate surroundings – people, objects, and symbols (Godwin & O'Neal, 2015) that were regular, and they must increase in complexity (ibid).

It is the final version of the theory: The Process – Person – Context – Time (PPCT) that is used in the theoretical framework for this research project. However, the development of how the theory came to be, how it evolved, and why, was kept to the forefront of my mind during the research process. It allowed to me to think about the evolution of theory and research, cross disciplinary and cross-cultural experiences impacting and affecting that evolution as well as the impact of PPCT on the developing researcher, the developing research project, and the developing research site, as well as the developing child.

…As above with Vygotsky, as one white man's theory from the Minority world joined another one in making sense of my research project…I was worried I could be accused of appealing to white men from the Minority world to validate what I was seeing in Emmanuel Public School in a research study which was supposed to push back on using Minority world research and theories universally in the Majority world…Was I further colonising or contaminating the study? Why reject them just because of where they originated from? Entangled even further, I felt I was being dragged underwater trapped in the nets weaved by myself in my arguments and thinking. I began to suffocate…I frequently left Bronfenbrenner out, then put him back in, only to leave him out again in a game of theoretical Hokey Cokey…One was bad…two must be worse…and yet his theories apply! Both the original and the 2006! … again, was I cutting my nose off to spite my face when the ecological systems theories underscored the importance of the child's local context thus rejecting the existence of a universal child or universal childhood…? Surely, if used in conjunction with an appropriate, local researchers, this would be the best way forward? But why need the addition of a local researcher to validate his argument of context?

… pulling the threads… tangling the threads… seeing holes…gaps… knots… fraying strands….

Post-Colonial Theory:

Post-colonial theory is hard to define (Viruru, 2005) and some suggest that it should not be defined or labelled as its very essence is in its nuance and contradictions - "The idea of definition invokes precisely the kind of images that are challenged by postcolonial critique" (Cannella & Viruru, 2012, p. 13). Further to that, Mongia has also suggested that it is due to the need for classification and labelling of complex ideas that partially led to its emergence (1996). BhaBha describes postcolonial perspectives as something that emerged from "the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South." (1994, p. 245). He goes on to discuss the postcolonial perspective as an interruption to the ideological norms and accepted dominant discourses that would otherwise ultimately favour the Minority world, the coloniser, or others in accepted positions of power – that is to say the postcolonial perspective is that of challenging accepted norms (ibid).

Post-colonial theory has its beginnings in the historical framing of history during the newly post-independent India. Historians began to frame India's history in one of two ways: (1) The British Empire brought civilisation and (2) the elite of India - the indigenous ruling groups - and those associated with the British empire rewrote and reframed the history of India framing themselves in the best light. A group of historians, drawing on Marxist theories and Gramsci's writings, particularly Ranajit Guha formed part of the Subaltern Studies collective (a group of History scholars) that began to examine personhood and active rebellion by lower caste and indigenous peasants. Guha fought for a history which recorded the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny in rebellions and power struggles (Chakarabarty, 2002). Understanding that most peasants were illiterate and did not write their own histories, leaving a vacuum of historical documents / narratives / voices, Guha worked with scholars from other disciplines – namely Sociologists, Anthropologists, Archaeologists, and Geographers - to gather other forms of evidence and artefacts (ibid). *...co-generation of knowledge or collaborative learning is something I witnessed again and again in the field. It is a phenomenon I observed in the classroom, in the playing field...I experienced it with my guide and interpreter and with the children in my cohort.... Collaborative co-generation of knowledge and theories is the process that led to Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural-Historical theory and Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological systems theory...in fact I argue that when taken apart and examined in all its pieces, all knowledge in co-created in dialogue...* This led to shift in subaltern studies or post-colonial thought described by Chakarabarty below:

> "With Guha's work, Indian history took, as it were, the proverbial linguistic turn. From its very beginning, Subaltern Studies positioned itself on the unorthodox territory of the Left. What it inherited from Marxism was already in conversation with other and more recent currents of European thought, particularly structuralism. And there was a discernible sympathy with early Foucault in the way in which Guha's writings posed the knowledge-power question by asking, what are the archives, and how are they produced?" (Chakarabarty, 2002, p. 16)

During the 1970's and 1980's the Subalterns Scholars grew in number and across disciplines, and used terms such as 'Orientalism', 'Post-Colonial Studies', and more recently 'De-colonial Studies' to describe their work. As well as Guha, the most notable among this diverse group of scholars are Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Prakash, Homi BhaBha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Hardiman, Gaile Sloan Cannella, Radhika Viruru, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Starting out as activism against the Empire and colonial powers, post-colonial theory currently offers a critical or alternative way of seeing the world and its structures. Through its academic activism, it offers an alternative reading and / or positioning of the colonial perspectives, negating the existence of universal 'truths' that are within the reach of a privileged few.

The use of post-colonial writings and theories allowed me to think about the question of knowledge production which interrogated the second aim of the research project: to problematize the application of dominant Minority world discourses to the lives of young children living in Majority world contexts. Theorists such as Said, Chakrabarty, and Spivak allowed me to play with questions of power, voice, and status. Whose histories are recorded? Whose stories and perspectives were, and are, valued and represented? Whose voice counts in the research process, the community, the wider society, and the global stage? This led me to grapple with concepts of 'voice' and 'childhood', in particular the idea of a universal child and a universal childhood. What does this universal child look like? How do they play and learn? If we uncritically apply the theories and research from the Minority world while researching with children from the Global Majority, are we creating a deficit model before we even start? Using post-colonial theory in this way is, as Said says, is "more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient" (1978, p6).

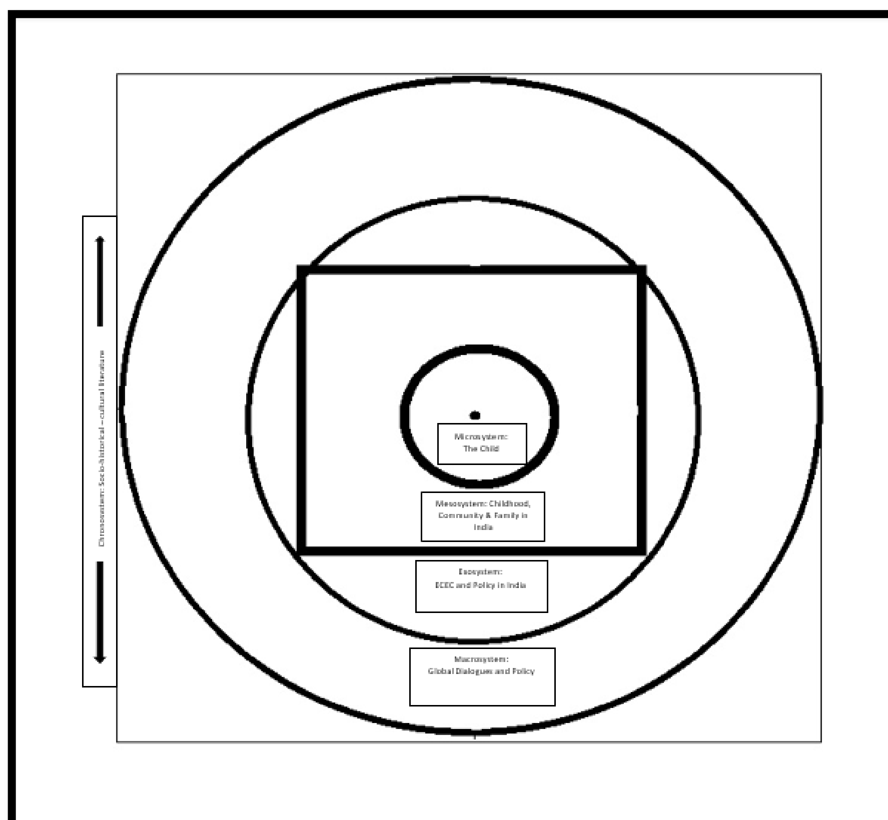
After reading about Spivak's reservations about the term 'post-colonial' (2012), I too am dubious about the term 'post-colonial'. Quite literally, the colonialism is not post! It still continues to be*...rips a stitch...pulls on another thread...* Using the term 'post' gives the impression that it is in the past not something still being dealt with. However, colonialism is still a phenomenon that we are dealing with today. Particularly in terms of colonising childhoods, as evidenced by the works of Cannella, Viruru, Gupta and other contemporary critical early childhood scholars. The legacies of colonial systems live in our institutions such as governments, banking systems, financial services, health services, education systems, housing, social services and so on. At every level of social institution in former colonies lives the legacy not only of a patriarchal, colonial system but of intergenerational trauma. How do we describe the activism against these systems, these legacies, the undoing of past and present wrongs and trauma as 'post'? *...picks at micro thread fraying from the thread that is hanging...* Thinking with Spivak led me to decolonising theories. Again, these seemed to be split into two schools of thought. Using decolonial theory has a strong connection to land but there is a school of thought that decolonising is about quite literally ridding colonisers from colonial lands and giving that land back to indigenous

peoples along with reparations for stealing that land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). They strongly condemn the use of 'decolonising' as a metaphor, philosophical or academic act of resistance and they are quite vocal on social media preferring to use direct channels of communication rather than academic journals…*the thread snaps and rupture*s *leaving an irreconcilable hole*…. Decolonising educational research theorists and scholars led me to engage with critical race theories and anti-racist theories…. *What if I braided them together……?* Thinking with different theorists at different points in my write up of my thesis allowed me to productively, and lovingly, undo the research study, look at all its individual parts and utilise a multi-layered perspective that recognises both the strengths and the weaknesses of the study, but also the strengths and the weaknesses of each theoretical lens I used.

Listening to Conversations

When I was initially reading through the literature, I attempted to use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems as a framework or model for how I read. This was because Bronfenbrenner's theory has the child at its core, and I liked that I could see how different discourses affected the child at each system level. As my research and engagement with post-colonial theories grew, I began to realise that what I was attempting to do, or how I attempted to <u>*read*</u> *and engage with the discourses, was actually very Minority World in its approach and was perhaps leading me to see the ongoing conversations and how they are framed in a particular way. I place it here for you to see as I initially envisioned the template / framework, both to exemplify my thinking at the time but also to expose its flaws.*

I broke the literature into parts: What was happening globally in early childhood education and care – the Macrosystem. Then I interrupted the model (or perhaps interweaved it) with the socio-historical-cultural literature about the historical and cultural overview of India as a subcontinent. However, looking back, I realise it could be interpreted that I offered something in terms of the Chronosystem. I discussed literature about ECEC systems in India including policy initiatives as a representation of the Exosystem, literature about childhood, community, and family in India as a representation of Mesosystem, and finally a comparison of a middle class school in New Delhi which tells us something of the nature of schooling in ECEC in India but really the Microsystem is not represented in the literature it is represented in part two when I introduce the case site, Emmanuel Public School.



The literature is interrupted at various points with whispers from the world around me as I read and wrote. They interrupted me in my reading, my interpretation, and they interrupted me in my writing but sometimes they illuminated the literature for me as real life reacted to the words I read on static pages. Sometimes they shouted in opposition to what I was reading and sometimes in harmony. They will interrupt you in your reading. Some, you may make sense of, in the context of what you are reading but some may not, but because they interrupted me; they will interrupt you. I invite you to make links, think deeply, or just acknowledge and move on. This is your experience of reading my research just as it was my experience in writing it.

Global Childhoods:

What do we mean when we say 'childhood'? Childhood has been considered a social construct by many scholars (Canella & Viruru, 2012; Burman, 2010; Pence & Hix-Small, 2009; James & Prout, 2007; Woodhead, 2006; Qvortrup 1994 cited in Woodhead 2006; Rosenthal, 1999; Cannella, 1997). Woodhead describes early childhood as a concept that has four competing discourses: (1) an age and stage discourse – that is how the child develops (2) human capital discourse – that is if you spend *x* amount in early childhood it will yield *y* amount in return (3) A human rights discourse that recognises children as capable agents (4) Social and cultural discourse – childhood is a social construction and there are multiple ways of being as a child in the world depending on the social and cultural world in which the child lives (Woodhead, 2006). It could be argued that there is a fifth discourse and that is a legal discourse i.e., a legal interpretation of childhood (Burman, 2010). For Pérez and Saavedra, predominance of the historical Minority world psychological gaze in the name of science has created a heteronormative, white, middle class, male construction of what childhood or a *normal* or *universal* child / childhood looks like (2017). This only serves to create a deficit model of children or childhood from the Majority World in children that are economically under-resourced (ibid; Pence, 2011). This view seems to be supported by Alderson, who goes further to suggest that those in the Minority world view contemporary childhood through the lens of their memories of their own childhoods: "Children's echoes are blurred by the echoes of the listening adults' own memories and present values, and by resounding myths about young children's inabilities." (Alderson, 2008, p. 113). Others explored multiple versions of childhood and selfhood as children navigate different environments and relationships (Corsaro, 1997).

The concept of one universal child developed out of a particular discipline that was ultimately used for economic interventionist strategies by the likes of World Bank, UNESCO, OECD, NGO's and INGO's (Pence, 2011; Urban, 2016; Pence & Hill-Small, 2009; Woodhead 2006; Chambers, 2013; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). Pence and Hill-Small note that although ninety per cent of the world's population of children live in the Majority World, over ninety percent of the literature of child development that have been published has been completed in the Minority World (2009). This allows for 'evidenced based'

policy implementations, quality measures, quality tools, certain types of curricula, and pedagogies to dominate, such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and the High Scope Method (Urban, 2016; Pence 2011; Pence & Hill-Small, 2009). This way of researching, evaluating, and intervening not only creates a deficit model from birth (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017) for children and communities, it also creates a false dichotomy of *us* and *them.* Just as there is no one universal childhood, there is also no binary between Minority world and Majority world, just Childhoods – *plural*. This is supported if we reflect back on Alderson's concept and Corsaro's concept of myths of childhoods past and the multiple childhoods occupied by a child in any number of situations at any stage in their lives, respectively (Hogan, 2005).

International Agencies Involvement in ECEC and Post-colonial Responses:

Over the last decade there has been an increased international awareness in early childhood education and the economic benefits it can bring (Pearson, 2011; Heckman, 2006; 2013). Pearson cites a strong commitment to early childhood education access for all which can be found in international publications and reports such as the 2006 *Starting Strong II* report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the 2006 Education for All Global Monitoring Report published by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (ibid). This has led to increased investment from international development agencies in early childhood education leading to local level reforms to improve the lives and educational outcomes of children (Pearson, 2011). Economic arguments for intervention through the medium of ECEC in the Majority world such as the Heckman equation (Heckman, Pinto & Savelyev, 2013) - are based on research from Minority world early intervention projects such 'The Perry Preschool Project' (Heckman et.al, 2013). This is somewhat problematic; Woodhead best describes the problem; "Unfortunately, assumptions about what counts as normal development are frequently applied unqualified within international policy and curriculum development" (Woodhead, 2006, p.17). *......pulling the thread…what works and what counts for whom…?*

It is not just assumptions about what 'normal development' is or looks like that are made when international development agencies get involved with local, majority world practices and provision. Other assumptions are regularly made such as the assumption that Minority world practices are equated with 'modern' practices, which follows the assumption that 'modern' is equated with 'quality'. Pearson describes Hong Kong's rationale for adopting a 'globalised' (which she aligns with European-American) approach to early childhood education was to raise the quality of education or to "bring education in Hong Kong into 'the 21st century' and to complement the government's stated agenda of democratising systems" (2011, p. 214). This critique of 'enlightened' or romanticised views of

childhood and the resulting deficit way INGO's see childhood in Majority world contexts is furthered by many scholars (Pence, 2011; Alderson, 2008; Woodhead, 2006; Bloch, 1992).

Post-colonial scholars in Early Childhood Education and Care such as Gaile S Cannella, Radhika Viruru, and Amita Gupta push back in response to this universal colonisation of childhood and preschool education in India and elsewhere. Cannella and Viruru both look at the dominance of the discipline of psychology – in particular developmental psychology – in the discourses dominating the practices and provision of experiences for children in early childhood education environments (Viruru, 2005; Canella & Viruru 2004). They along with others, critique the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (a United States based organisation) for embracing and promoting Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in early childhood pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Burman, 1994: Cole, 1996). Viruru discusses the 'businessification' of early childhood where one model or one curriculum is held up as the best way, the best return on investment; where an

increase on materials ('things' or resources) are needed in classrooms to perform; where preschools are becoming global franchises like McDonalds or Coca-Cola (Viruru, 2005) .... *What works*.... INGO's are looking to the Head Start model or the High Scope curriculum and seeing the Nobel Prize winning economist make the argument that investing in early childhood using this particular programme has saved the United States money in the long term (Urban, 2016) and increasingly telling countries they invest in to put these programmes into operation with little or no research into social or cultural practice on the ground. Gupta argues that this is despite the fact that "the values, skills, and attitudes that are developmentally and socially appropriate for children growing up in India are likely to be quite different" (2013, p11) and thus the outcomes will be different.

Increasingly, I noticed over the course of my research trips that the 'businessification' of early childhood education and care Viruru spoke of had crept into Pune, as advertisements of (mostly) white smiling children are seen at play with toys or a certain European method. Play is promoted alongside learning. I took photos of posters and billboards just in the Pune area. Branding can be seen on the advertisements for private fee- paying pre-schools. The idea that a child will get ahead and be a 'genius' by attending a preschool using a branded identity and curriculum as in America or Europe is seen as

desirable. Perhaps I had just never noticed on my other trips previous to my research trips but to me it seemed to have exploded in keeping with the rising economy of India and Pune city.

An example from Hong Kong shows how a European model, the Reggio Emilia Approach, is imported and valued but is implemented in a way that is very different of that from its country of origin and practiced in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to the expected norms and societal values in Hong Kong (Pearson, 2011). Classroom practices in modern Hong Kong are described as hand-on while still retaining traditional values of formal academic learning outcomes, having expectations of behaviour which is considerate of the whole groups' good and confirms to traditional respectfulness of hierarchy (ibid). Despite the Reggio Approach (originating in Italy) embracing individual, project-based self-expression, Pearson describes a highly structured environment with ascribed learning outcomes and clearly communicated behavioural expectations (2011).

Ethiopia is an example of a country that was, and in many ways still is, colonised – not by any one empire but by Missionaries and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO's). In Ethiopia, present day education has its roots in past religious orders and missionaries. Modern preschools first served foreign nationals, only serving the needs of Ethiopian children in 1963 as pilot projects operated by foreign nationals. Thus, modern preschools were imported by well-meaning Minority world organisations into the culture of education in Ethiopia (Zewdie & Tefera, 2017). One unintended consequence was an urban-rural education divide. Due to poverty in rural areas, many children could not access ECEC. ECEC provision that does exist today in rural Ethiopia is diverse: (1) pre-natal – three years: parent programmes, health and development programmes; (2) four to six years: pre-schools and community-based services; and (3) non-formal programmes and those operated by Non-Government Organisations (NGO) (ibid).

Despite sibling caretaking (the act of training children and giving them the responsibility to take care of their siblings at a young age in order to transition them into adult caregiver roles) being valued by sub-Saharan African communities (Nsamenang, 2006) it is not valued by development agencies. Under international development agencies children are most likely to learn in silence from an adult who does not speak their language and they are encouraged not to use their own languages to speak to each other (ibid). When it comes to deciding whether or not to adapt Minority world practices and curricula to fit Ethiopian circumstances or enforcing the evolution and conformity of Ethiopia to Minority world practices and curricula, Zewdie & Tefera argue that:

> "rather than seeking to promote "homogenization of the world around Euro-American developmental milestones and educational models" (Marfo, 2011) by trying to fit them to African realities, priority needs to be given in ECDCE curriculum development and practitioner education to African games, music and dances that stimulate cognitive, social and emotional development, promote cooperative learning between children of different ages, and contribute for building pride in cultural heritage and for

demonstrating to sceptical parents that the ECDCE agenda need not alienate young African children from their cultural roots (AECDV, 2014)." (2017, p.118)

The argument above is made because they believe that the four principles of good practice that Serpell (2009) outlined (using children's own spoken language; employing local cultural games that parents / caregivers are already familiar with; mixed age groupings of older and younger children; and inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs) are largely neglected by current ECEC provision in rural Ethiopia. In their research study they researched in case sites which had culturally appropriate, locally developed and developmentally appropriate play and learning materials (2017). Each classroom was divided into learning centres and there was also outside areas, toilets, and dining rooms. One of the case sites had some Montessori materials as well as toys. They found that private preschools were more likely to use imported curricula and not the one provided by the Ministry of Education. Some NGO operated services were more likely to focus on literacy and numeracy using rote learning (ibid). It is an example of how well-intentioned entities can have unintended consequences. It is also an example of how universal application of Minority world curricula into a Majority world country for the sake of economic returns without taking local cultural context into account can at best waste money and at worst causes harm.

A Brief Historical and Cultural Overview of India:

Early India dates back to almost 3000 BCE[12] and was situated in the Indus Valley, which is where it got its name. Hunter gatherer civilisations occupied just a small part of contemporary Western India and what is now known as Pakistan. It was not the vast reaching sub-continent in is today (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012). From approximately, 1500 BCE to 1200 BCE there was what is known as the Vedic Civilisation and Aryan culture which gave rise to the Vedas (a religious text written in Sanskrit) (ibid). Society at this time was divided into four classes, otherwise known as the Varnas which is known as the Caste system and which exists to this day – though it has undergone some changes due to Buddhist revolution and British colonial rule (Deshpande, 2010). These are ranked hierarchically as follows: (1) The Brahmans, usually priests or scholars – they knew the Vedas and were responsible for passing them down. (2) The Kshatriyas, who were the political rulers and warriors. (3) The Vaishya, merchants and farmers- agricultural and trade folk. (4) The Shudra's were at this point in history, the labourers, artists, peasants and servants. The Dalit cast group (although they existed) did not have a name and were not recognised as part of the Vedic system (ibid). It is argued that the Aryan invaders invented the caste system as a sophisticated psychological warfare to keep themselves as rulers alongside the Brahmin

[12] Before Common Era

groups and those *under* them from rebelling against them. They did so with a complicated mixture of colour coding – the whiter you are (skin colour and dress) the purer and higher caste you must be, the darker you were the more impure and lower caste you must be. This was reflected in dress colours, cleanliness – the dirtier the occupation you had the harder it is to be clean, skin colour, hair colour, types of foods that were eaten and offered or shared. Lower caste members were considered to carry germs and sickness with them so they had to stand back from higher caste group members and could not visit their temples or places of worship (Deshpande, 2010). The concept of being born into your cast because of *karma* and the life you led before your birth also was a psychological weapon that rationalised why those group members were born into each caste – the lower your caste group, the worse you were in your former life. Escaping your caste or class group by upward mobility was forbidden. The forbiddance of inter-caste marriage or relationships kept each caste group separate from each other and family lines *unpolluted.* The concept of *contamination* was a powerful one that exists amongst many racialised hate groups to this day such as the Nazi's and Neo-Nazi's. It includes the *contamination* of bloodlines, health, karma, religious ceremonies and so on. The prevention of contamination rationalised the treatment of lower caste group members by higher caste group members for *both* groups.

The further south the Aryans invaded, and the more the Brahmins dominated, the more the indigenous Indians such as the Mahars from Maharashtra, began to rebel against the caste system and Hindu life. This led to a rise in conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism during the 6th century BCE. Buddhism offered an escape from Hindu caste violence. In Buddhism, you are not born into your position because of your past life, you can ascend towards a better place or equality, and it recognised actions or behaviours of the individual over the communal status, giving the individual the opportunity to improve their circumstances. However, as Buddhism began to die out a century later it did incorporate many aspects of Hinduism which led to several shifts – such as Shudras becoming farmers and livestock breeders and the Vaishyas becoming traders and merchants (Deshpande, 2010). Buddhism re-emerged and grew in popularity during the time of BS Ambedkar which will be discussed below (Renjini, 2018).

India has suffered through many an uprising and invasion, the last of which, was colonisation by the British Empire which begin circa 1600 ACE (Tharoor, 2017). One of many legacies of British colonialism is the resurrection and cementation of Hinduism and Hindu practices into laws, including that of the Caste system seen in the systemic hierarchies, identities, and the categorisation of the types of caste into scheduled caste (SC), schedule tribe (ST), other backward castes (OBC) and formulated due to the 1881 decennial census (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012). Others included, a Hindu – Muslim divide (Deshpande, 2010), a sub-continent looted of its riches and plunged into a deep economic divide between the haves and the have-nots (Tharoor, 2017), an English speaking education system, marred with rote learning, British text book focused pedagogies (Gupta, 2013; Tharoor, 2017), and a

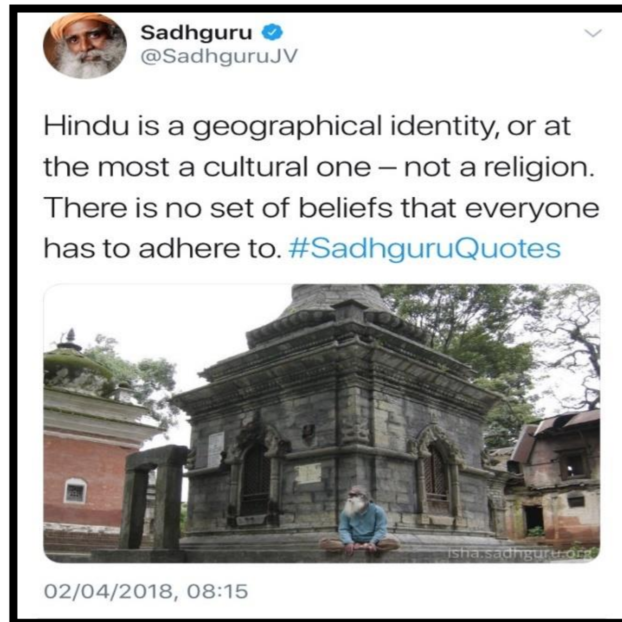
government system modelled on a British system. In Macaulay's famous 'Minute on Education', in 1835, he insisted that the English Education Act was not just to create an English speaking generation capable of ruling with Britain in India but one "English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012, p. 82).

The word *Dalit* is thought to have been created by Jyotiba Phule, a Pune based social reformer, although it was made popular by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (a Mahar, Dalit liberator, and father of the Indian constitution) in the 1932 Poona Pact (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998). It is said to be derived from the word *dal* in Sanskrit which means shattered or in pieces (ibid). Gandhi and Ambedkar clashed over the status of dalit groups in self-government. Gandhi believed in peaceful protests *-civil disobedience-* to work towards independence from the empire and he wanted to apply these same principles to the status of dalit groups. Though he denied being a Hindu, instead proclaiming he was all religions (Tharoor, 2017) his actions were those of a devout Hindu and he insisted that dalit groups become part of the Varna system through changing hearts and minds of Brahmin groups (Dirks, 2001). This frustrated Ambedkar, himself a dalit member with lived experience, who endorsed Buddhism as a way to escape the Varna system and dalit groups, rejected this as the way to create change (Metcalf, & Metcalf, 2013). Due to the Poona Pact, which Ambedkar was compelled to agree to due to Gandhi's prolonged hunger strike – a '*fast to the death'*(ibid) a resolution was adopted outlawing 'untouchability' (Dirks, 2001) which stipulated an end to the discrimination dalit groups faced such as access to education, temples, roads, and public water sources (ibid). It also secured an increase of reserved places[13] on provisional legislatures (increased from 71 to 147) and central legislature (18%) (Tharoor, 2017). Dr. Ambedkar ultimately took this as a defeat and, due in part to his negotiations with Brahmins, became deeply embittered with Hinduism and particularly with Brahmin groups (ibid).

A combination of World War 2, the *Quit India*[14] campaign, and the birth of the Indian National Army (INA)[15] and marred by Hindu – Muslim relations, India eventually became independent of the British Empire in 1947 (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2013; Tharoor, 2017). India is to this day still a pluralist society, rich in culture, history, religions but it still carries with it the tensions from its past. Currently, the people of Kashmir are still under lockdown – a lockdown that happened suddenly in January 2020[16] in an escalation of anti-Muslim sentiment by a Hindu led government. Similarly, riots broke out in New Delhi

[13] A quota system
[14] The Quit India Campaign can be read in Metcalf, B. and Metcalf, T. 2013 as well as Tharoor, S. 2017. It is not within the scope of this chapter to give further details.
[15] See above sources for more information on the Indian National Army.
[16] https://time.com/5832256/kashmir-lockdown-coronavirus/

in February 2020, particularly focusing on Muslim populated universities[17]. In 2018 caste riots broke out in Mumbai and Pune, leading to a re-emergence of widespread public *casteism* in the country[18].



Twitter post from Sadhguru on April 2nd, two months after the Maharashtra Cast Riots of 2018 died down. It says, "Hindu is a geographical identity, or at the most a cultural one – not a religion. There is no set of beliefs that everyone has to adhere to." It hints at the revisionist rewriting of the culture of India and what is means to be an Indian. What strikes me here as I pull on the individual threads of the literature to pick them apart and hold them up singularly, one at a time is that from another perspective the same literature could be read, interpreted, and used to make a competing argument to mine. Revisionism and how a piece of literature or research is interpreted is not something the author can control. I could hold up two individual threads of this literature review and entwine them together to re-imagine or re-interpret what that literature is saying to me and my research study…at what point do the threads snap and the tapestry that I have created rips?

Caste Riots in Maharashtra in 2018, a boy of four or five years of age is questioned by a local man. He posts the following video (translated and transcribed below) of the exchange with the young child with the caption: "This little kid is talking & attempting violence. In the name of caste & religion

[17] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/delhis-muslims-despair-justice-police-implicated-hindu-riots

[18] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maharashtra-simmers-after-pune-caste-violence-over-100-protesters-detained-in-mumbai/articleshow/62340578.cms

we are spoiling the beautiful culture of our country. Shocking & Disappointed!"[19] SALMAN KI SENA @Salman_ki_sena

Man: Why have you taken the stone in your hand???

The kid: To hit people with it…

Man: Why do you want to hit the people???

The kid: Because we were attacked that's why…

Man: huh!!!

The kid: Because we were attacked that's why…

Man: Who attacks us???

The kid: Those people…

Man: Who those people???

The kid: The Maratha people

Man: So, what are you going to do now???

The kid: I'm going to kill them…

Man: So where are you going now???

The kid: To kill them…

Man: Why have you come to Pune???

The kid: To see him // To see the sight of him…

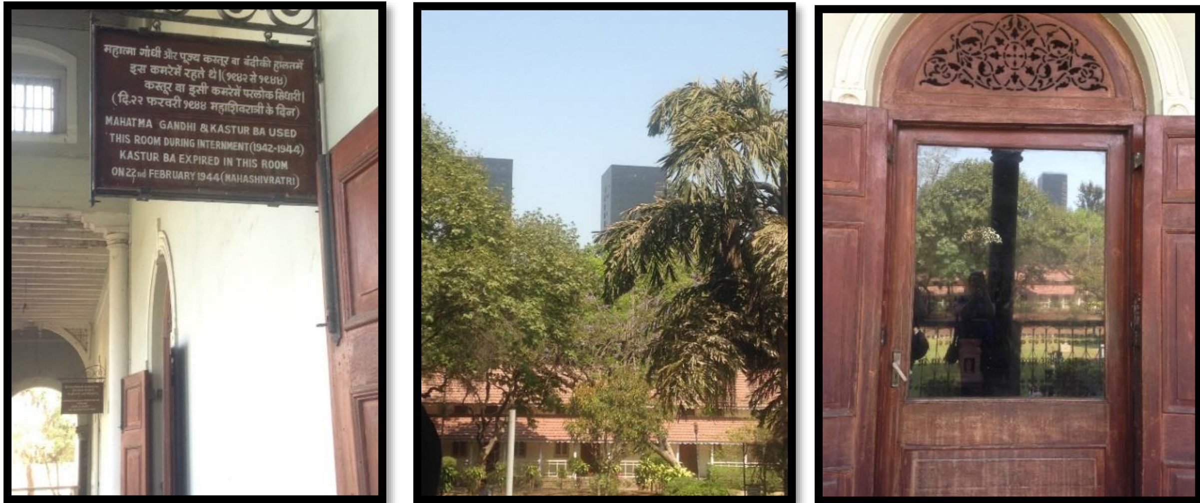
Man: To see who???

The kid: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

Man: Ok…

[19] Translated by Suresh. See the clip here: https://twitter.com/Salman_ki_sena/status/948486470016278528

Pune has always been a site of resistance and historical battles – whether physical or political. It pulses with history, life, resistance, pride… *It's 2017, I stand outside the bedroom where Gandhi was interned in Agha Khan Palace, and I look across the green gardens at the two megalithic black buildings…I notice they are the buildings Pranay very proudly pointed out to me a few days ago: Trump Towers*



…the irony…I take a photo for myself… the juxtaposition, the irony is too powerful, and perhaps too sad, to ignore… I notice the reflection in the window of Gandhi's room. I see myself photographing them. Documenting a physical reaction, a bodily repulsion and resistance I have to them… To ignore Pune's history and culture wars is to ignore who she is now and her inhabitants. To be ignorant of how she came to be such a pulsing site of resistance is to leave out a large part of her story, and thus the story of the children who live there.

…Centuries later the effects of colonialism can be seen in the legacies of the successful divide and conquer techniques used to create disharmony, whether they be religious, financial, colourism, casteism, ableism, sexism… Stories of great battles fought and won are told to children as they grow up learning who they are and where they come from. Each story has three sides: the victors, the losers, and those who were caught in the crossfire. Each different perspective can be reimagined to tell a new story… As far right extremist movements rise up all across the world it is easy to see how revisionism and divisive rhetoric easily stirs emotions and causes riots and violence. These legacies exist at every level of everyday life. It is easy (and clinical) to think of them in terms of systems – systemic injustices … the invisible enemy, the artifacts of colonialism removed of human emotions – but when confronted with them in everyday life, whether on social media or on the streets, the impact, particularly on young children's lives is living, breathing, pulsing, suffocating, and violent. When voices and lived experiences are missing from certain dialogues it is very easy to turn the rhetoric of marginalism and victimisation on its head and to rewrite who the victims are…

Childhood in India:

India has the second largest population in the world at nearly 1.4 billion people (Statista, 2020) with children (aged between birth and 14 years) making up one third of the population (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018), representing the largest population of children in the world (ibid). This figure can be broken down further into birth to six years and seven to fourteen years. Children aged between birth and six years of age make up 13.59% of the total population based on the last available census with children aged between seven and fourteen years making up 30.76% of the total population of India. In the nine years since the last census, it is estimated that these figures may have dropped ever so slightly to children aged birth to fourteen totalling 27% of the population of India (Statista, 2020).

Despite just under one third of India's population being young children, there is little known about their lived experiences of childhood and early childhood education, from their perspective (Bisht, 2008). We do however know quite a bit about their physical health and social lives within India:

Sixty nine percent of the total population of India live in rural areas and seventy four percent of all children from birth to six years of age live in rural areas (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018). There are at least one million Anganwadi centres across rural India educating and caring for twenty-two million children from birth to six years, fifty percent of whom are girls (UNICEF, 2019). The educational nature of the Anganwadis will be discussed further below, however they are also public programmes that also provide vaccination programmes, maternal healthcare, baby and child healthcare, nutrition programmes and health and well-being programmes in rural areas. Thirty eight percent of children under five are under the height that they should be, with that figure rising to forty one percent in urban areas (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018). Twenty one percent of children are malnourished, presenting as too thin for their height, with thirty six percent of under-fives presenting as underweight (ibid). Fifty percent of all children in India have mild to moderate anaemia and sixty two percent of children have received basic vaccinations (ibid). Just over one percent of children age birth to six have been registered with disabilities (Government of India, 2011).

Child labour in the five to fourteen years age group is recorded at five percent, kidnapping and abduction of children was the most reported crime against children in 2016 and twenty four percent of crimes reported against children fell under the category of sexual offences (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018). Literacy in children above seven years was recorded as seventy three percent in the 2011 census. While school enrolment in primary schools was recorded in the 2015 / 2016 academic year at just over ninety-nine percent- attendance is significantly lower (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018).

Family is a key social institution which influences children functions as a social, active hub for children (Tuli, 2012). The mother plays a pivotal role in children's lives, despite the complicated network of familial and community connections and social ties which they both engage in and are a part of (ibid). In urban areas, Fathers are increasingly playing a role in children's lives and caregiving (Roopnarine & Suppal, 2000). Children are not only raised by their parents but their grandparents, siblings and a complicated network of the social community (Chaudhary, 2004; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010; Tuli, 2012). Children who grow up in urban areas, in particular, experience a wide network of relationships particularly with adults (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Parents from lower socio-economic groups and marginalised groups in rural India are reported to see their children's education as avenue away from 'village life' to escape casteism and poverty, in particular those educational opportunities associated with middle class families: English medium education, private pre-schools, and boarding schools (Sriprakash et al 2020).

Casteism and discrimination is described as a major feature of life in rural India, with children from marginalised caste groups not being collected to attend the anganwadi early childhood classes by the centres helpers who were observed to collect children from their own communities instead (Sriprakash, Maithreyi, Kumar, Sinha & Prabha, 2020). In the same research study, which took place in a rural village called Gajwa, in the state of Bihar in North East India, it was noted that children were taught life and social skills by their families such as taking care of siblings, farming activities such as caring for animals and harvesting, cooking, trading, and fishing and weaving as well as playing (ibid).

In a research paper, written in 1999, Oke, Khattar, Pant, and Saraswathi described the childhood and play of children living in two urban areas of India – Bombay (Mumbai) and Baroda (Oke, Khattar, Pant & Saraswathi, 1999). The research study looked in particular at children from middle to lower socio-economic classes. Features of their play included role play that mirrored that of the adults in their life or movies, chasing, gross motor games such as tag, hide and seek, jumping, skipping, dancing, horse play, and playing with sticks and balls. They also made use of the materials from their environments in their play such as plastic bags, empty tins, and discarded paper as well as natural materials such as mud, leaves, sticks, pebbles and stones (Oke et al, 1999). Songs, stories, music, and nursery rhymes were also a feature of their play – in particular children were given roles in a game and they also enacted festival or religious practices in their play. Children in urban areas were seen to have a lack of space to play – particularly a lack of safe spaces, however they made use of the space they had (ibid). In a 2002 unpublished dissertation examining toys in India, the researcher noted that traditional toys were slowly being replaced with plastic barbie dolls and toys with a perceived educational value (Nagar, 2002). The researcher also noted the presence of religious or festival rituals in children's play in addition to role playing the adults in their lives both in the play of the research participants but also in the reflections of his own childhood play (ibid). Both research projects noticed that children's play changed when being

supervised joined by adults. It was more respectful, and more mindful of being careful (Nagar, 2002; Oke et al, 1999). Nagar's research examined children from all socio-economic classes.

Early Childhood Education and Care Systems in India:

Since the passing of the 2009 Right to Education Act, which mandates the compulsory school attendance of children between the ages of 6 and 14 years of age (G.O.I., 2009), increasing political attention has been focused on the economic and social benefits of early childhood education. Under the Indian Constitution article 45 states that "The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children" (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018). The key word here is *endeavour*. A child's right to early childhood care and education is not enshrined in the constitution but they have made the commitment to endeavour to provide it.

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak were pioneers of the early childhood education and care movement in India (Kaul & Sankar, 2009). Tarabar Modak, in particular was a follower of Dr. Maria Montessori. Together Badheka and Modak developed the Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh (NBSS) to develop appropriate teaching methods for ECEC in India. However, Modak soon realised that Montessori education, due to its high costs, was only suitable / available to upper-class children and the vast majority of children were denied a right to education because of their caste or economic position. This led to the founding of the Anganwadi model. Anganwadi meaning 'a village courtyard' for this is where Modak set up her first school for tribal people who would not leave their village for education. (Grammangal.org, 2017). Until India's independence the early childhood education and care programmes fell largely to voluntary groups until 1953 when the government set up a Central Social Welfare Board which gave grant aid to voluntary agencies (Kaul & Sankar, 2009). Anganwadis and other voluntary groups largely concentrated on health, nutrition, development, and care as well as early education.

In 1975 the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) rolled out programmes across the country targeting children, pregnant mothers, and adolescent girls. It offered non-formal preschool education in additions to health and nutrition (Kaul & Sankar, 2009). Since then, a plethora of National policy has supported the care, development, and education of children between birth and six years of age:

- 1986, the National Policy on Education stated that ECEC was an integral support for primary schooling,
- 1992, ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and sets up National Commission for children,
- 1993 the National Nutrition Policy recognised children under six years as high priority because of the high risk to their lives,

- 2001 the National Policy on Empowerment of Women supported provision of childcare schemes and facilities,
- 2005, the National Plan of Action for Children included universal access to ECEC as one of its goals,
- 2005, National Curriculum Framework emphasised two years of pre-schooling as important for school preparation and support from women and girls,
- 2007- 20012 Eleventh Five-Year Plan places child development at its heart, aiming to support ICDS programmes with community involvement from birth to six years.

(Kaul & Sankar, 2009)

A 2009 paper presented to Kusuma Foundation in India, described early childhood education as 'Early Childhood Care and Development' (ECCD) (Sinha & Bhatia, 2009). The absence of the word 'education' is interesting; however, they cite the Government of India in their report as saying "Health, nutrition, and educational/psychosocial development are all synergistically interrelated, which makes a case for the importance of addressing all the needs of children through a holistic approach" (NCERT, 2006) when discussing the significance in investing in ECCD programmes. The Working Group for Children identified three essential components of any successful early childcare programme for children under six years of age: A system of food entitlements; a system of childcare; and a system of health care (Working Group on Children under Six, 2007). Thus, it could be garnered from this report that health care and nutrition are more important than educational experiences for the most vulnerable cohort of people in India (children aged 0-6 years). Sinha & Bhatia caution that successful programmes in ECCE in India must take into account local customs and needs; where "the services provided are moulded to fit the context in which they are working" (Sinha & Bhatia, 2009, p. 74).

Currently in India, there is a uniquely Indian version of the Minority world play based curricula called the *Playway Curriculum*. The educational ideas of Gandhi and Tagore are frequently cited as inspiration for preschool programmes in India (Prochner, 2002). Tagore believed that children learned through natural objects, that they had free and creative minds. He believed schools should focus on art, music, songs, poetry, and happiness (ibid). Gandhi believed the mind and body should be educated as one. He believed children should learn a craft which they then would sell to support their school. He did not emphasise academic type of learning such as numeracy, literacy, and text focused studies. He believed that early childhood education and care should be conducted by parents, the community, and only at preschool age only should teachers be introduced in partnership with parents and community (Prochner, 2002). However, Minority world styles of preschool education such as Montessori, Froebel, High Scope etc. which are mostly private 'for profit' preschools are increasingly being sought by not just upper-class parents but all parents (ibid). Public sector preschools, most of them Anganwadis, offer a more

academic, formal, literacy and numeracy focused curriculum which is supported by teachers, parents, and the wider community. Preschool is seen as a gateway into the formal, authoritarian reality of primary schooling and there is an increasing push down of *school readiness* preparation said to be influencing the implementation of the Playway curriculum (Prochner, 2002). This is supported by Gupta's findings in middle class private schools. She cites large class size, and communal learning as reflective of the society in which the children live (Gupta, 2004) described more below.

ECEC in a Middle-Class School in New Delhi:

Gupta found that ECE educators tended to work in class sizes of approximately 43 children in middle class, private schools in New Delhi, India. She found that educators' practices implicitly incorporated elements of Indian society and culture; behaviour management and order is imperative to teaching large class groups – typical classroom characteristics include quiet or silent classrooms with minimal movement or group projects, strict and orderly turn-taking, and a lack of physical space (ibid). This is comparative with the schools I have visited in Pune, particularly Emmanuel Public School.

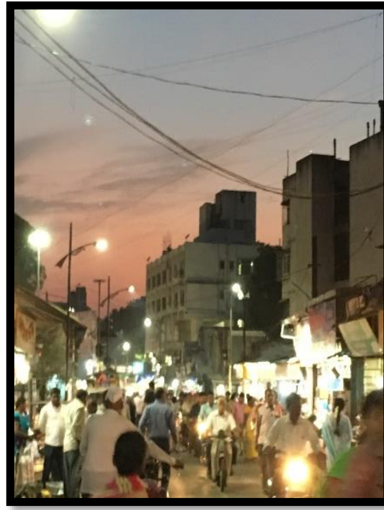
Gupta noted that there were no signs of lack of engagement, fear, or quiet submission but rather engaged children with "a high intensity of energy in the form of enthusiasm" (2004, p 372). Interestingly, Gupta compares her observations of children in ECE classes in New Delhi with her observations of children in "an American progressive early childhood classroom" and noted the high level of verbal and intellectual energy in the Indian contexts that seemed (by her observations) lacking in the progressive American ECE classrooms which were characterised by a "physical energy" (ibid, p 372).

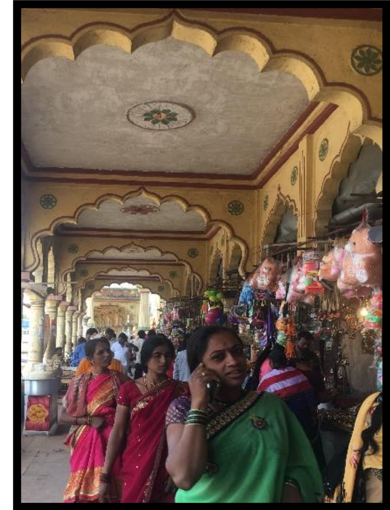
Gupta interrogates the phenomenon of large class sizes in her study and argues that it is reflective of any cohort of humans in wider Indian society (2004). She describes it as:

> "a phenomenon pervasive throughout the country because India is a country with a population of over one billion. In any given situation large numbers of people are seen in close proximity, whether in extended family systems, on the crowded streets, in the huge number of vehicles on the roads, in the markets, bazaars, and department stores, in schools and colleges, competing in the job market, or at the workplace. This appears to be the very nature of human existence in Indian society. A room with a few human bodies would be an atypical feature in India." (Gupta, 2004. P 373)

and goes on to probe if placing children in less dense classrooms with more physical space would be counter-productive to the child's sense of self or productivity in Indian society and culture. She goes on to argue that it could hinder the child's overall development, calling it an unnatural environment when placed in the context of wider Indian society; posing the hypothesis that learning in large group sizes in a small space may build a child's resilience, fostering the skills needed for success in life in India.

…I observed in my time in EPS that on the playing fields at the end of the day when school was over, even if it was above forty degrees Celsius, the children would still sit huddled on top of each other, arms around each other, chatting. The entire playing field would be free for them to play but they choose to sit on top of each other (with little personal space) and quite happily chat and sing and play with mud





or twigs and pebbles…I recognise this in Gupta's writings… I recognise the bodily experience of walking through the streets of Pune and other local villages nearby as the streets throng with people, autos, and motorbikes. It took me many years to be comfortable with the lack of personal space I was used to in public in Ireland. The streets, markets, and temples, particularly in the city of Pune, heave with bodies at all hours of the day. The spaces are alive – pulsing, chattering, moving…. I recognise it in the streets, in the school, and in the classrooms of EPS.

Gupta makes the case that Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (NAEYC, 1997) and the concept of 'emergent curriculum' are Eurocentric conceptions that cannot be readily applied to an ECE classroom in India with a group of 43 children. One teacher could not keep up with the emergent interests and developmental stages of 43 children. This, she argues, makes the use of a pre-prescribed curriculum necessary. Further to that, Gupta states that a lack of resources necessary to aid teaching combined with a lack of basic living conditions (food and clothes) further highlights the "privileged" societies' conceptualisations of ECE education as inappropriate for local Indian contexts (2004, p 375). Again, I find this interesting because although Gupta's research took place in middle class schools in another city in India, it resonates with my experience of classrooms in EPS. I also have experience of working in ECEC settings in various different countries in the Minority world, and although I can only comment from casual observations and experience of working in the settings, I cannot help but echo Gupta's argument about using an emergent curriculum with 43 children.

When I productively undo my literature, I realise that it was not so easy to break the literature down into categories and systems as I had tried to do. I had tried to replicate the typical, linear, literature review in which I am supposed to find a gap – a hole – something worthy of researching more. However, when broken down into all its parts, including the rational for the way I read and wrote, what I realised was that I read to understand what I was already seeing in the field, and experiencing on the volunteer trips. I was reading to perhaps shine a light on those arguments that tangled me and dragged me under the water.

When I productively undo the process, I realise that for a long time I was frozen and terrified that I was not contributing to the field because I hadn't found something that others hadn't addressed. Why did I get so entangled in the words of others that I nearly lost my voice? Why did I allow myself to spend so much time thinking about what gap I was addressing that I did not allow my voice to speak for my research study in and of itself? When I productively undo the process, I lovingly acknowledge that I do add something to the field, even if it is just this thread that can be seen for all its flawed beauty in and of itself, or for the fact that my thread can be weaved in and out of the stories of other similar research studies to create a tapestry, a bigger picture.

Part Two

Methods:

When I first started my research study, I looked for the most ethical ways I could find to collect data. I knew I had only received permission to research in the school because of my relationship with the family who operate it and I wanted to ensure that the trust that was put in me was respected. I chose a negotiated approach with a children's rights lens. I thought by using participatory methods I would empower the school, the teachers, and the children as partners in the research process while navigating ethical issues such as power relations and bias. I also wanted to find a method that would allow me a rich understanding of the cultural and societal values and the lived experiences of children in the school. However, as early as my pilot trip, I began to understand that my understanding of research methods, and what I had thought of as ethical practices and taken for granted norms (such as conceptualisations of identity and the use of pseudonyms) were turned on their head. As I productively and lovingly undo my methods and my experiences in the field, I realise that a lot of phenomena in the Minority world which is considered fixed has been very fluid in my research experience. Attempting to research with, and make sense of, these fixed notions not only created problems for me in my research and the ethical decisions I made, but also at times they created a lot of tension both in the field and afterwards.

*"Well…I came in instalments. Legs first, then stomach, and then head – you know" *laughs**

Suresh discusses how he was born in 1991 or 1993 in response to a discussion about identity.

Case Study Approach:

I decided to use a case study approach, to give me, as a researcher, an opportunity to examine and learn about the lived experiences of the people living and working in the school and its local communities and an opportunity to explore the multiple realities that coexist (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2010). By using multiple data collection methodologies and multimodal methods of collection (Yin, 1993) I had hoped to offer a rich, context laden picture that illuminates the complexities and entanglements of real-life situations in Pune and EPS. Using a case study approach gave me a more nuanced insight into beliefs, attitudes, society, and values of the people with whom I researched because of its interpretivist and collaborative nature, allowing for the study of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Bassey, 1999). *However, consistent with post-colonial academic activism, case study approach can be employed because of its revelatory quality "sometimes an insight into people's lives is what is required for better*

understanding and an improved response or attitude" (Gillham, 2008, p. 102) *so when I undo the process I see elements of white saviourism or a bias creeping in which I justified as "academic activism"...pulls a thread...*

In the design phase I argued that while using a case site approach does not allow me to generate universal truths - which is consistent with my ontological beliefs - it does generate possibilities for discussion of what Bassey termed "fuzzy generalisations" (ibid, p.12). *If I pull on this thread in undoing this decision, it allows me to see that I was not conscious of the irony or the disconnect of using "fuzzy generalisations" to push back on generalisations from the Minority world...* An exploratory case study also allowed for the use of negotiated process and reflexive, reflective behaviours in the field. It gave me the capacity and confidence to follow my "intuitive path" (Yin, 1993, p. 5) during the data collection process while allowing for acknowledgement and the navigation of biases held.

It was planned to use a hybrid of inductive followed by deductive approaches to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013) however, this plan changed over the course of the research study as I realised that it was not my place to make value judgments or quantifications on the play and early learning experiences of children in Emmanuel Public School. I became acutely aware that the research process of recording, transcribing, and interpreting / translating text or images involved acts of interpretivism. These acts lead me to make judgements about what to see and hear which centre my voice and my experience. I productively undo this further in part three to keep pulling on the threads of how centring my voice and interpretations in the original research could be interpreted as acts of colonisation. Instead, I present to you a meta-story. My story of the research process. However, I interrupt my telling, my views, and my interpretations (of which there are many) with the voices, photographs, and images of my research partners. I chose to offer the data alongside and threaded through my story. I aim to allow the voices of the participants to speak for themselves and tell their stories.

Formal Interviews:

I had planned to do informal interviews with both the teachers and the parents. However, the teachers requested the questions in advance, so I had to use scripted questions and formal interviews with those that agreed. The formal interviews with the teachers were also complimented by ethnographic methods as I noted down conversations (and my reflections or observances on conversations) I had with the teachers and volunteers (with their permission) during the school day and in the evenings when I was invited for dinner or drinks.

The formal interviews with parents were also not what I had first envisaged when planning the project. Through working in partnership with the school and listening to their needs and concerns I had to do

four formal interviews because I did not have the capacity to build the type of relationship with parents needed for informal interview. Informal interviews were planned for a more natural, candid type of conversation. Although formal interviews were the only possibility open to me in the field, we (myself and Suresh) did use them to the best of our ability.

…When I examined the interviews…pulled on the thread and ripped it away from the tapestry… I saw how they were envisioned, how they were planned, their purpose, and so on… I realised that they were at best tokenistic. Possibly only thought of in order to argue that I examined the child and their lives holistically…. I hold the thread up to the light and roll it through my fingers…There was no real, authentic partnership from the very beginning. This is most likely why the teachers wanted the questions in advance. If I had gone to them from the very start and talked to them in a more meaningful manner about the research project and what I had hoped to achieve then perhaps they could have told me how they wanted to be a partner and what they hoped to achieve. Perhaps the topic would have changed entirely – I will never know. When I undo the rationale behind the interviews, with productive intention, I realise that I was thinking about how to achieve the best, and fastest way, to get to the information that I thought was necessary or useful to answer my questions. I was thinking in terms of time frames – I only had one to three weeks during each visit and in that time period I had to achieve so much because I had planned all of these multi-modal methods of ***extracting*** *information in my time frame with my aims and objectives in mind. I believed I had to achieve all these methods in order to get the richest data I could in a short timeframe. I wanted to include so many layers of opinions and voice, probably if I am honest to be able to link back to Bronfenbrenner, but also because it would be better to have a lot of different voices to establish themes or linkages.*

When I look back at the word 'extract' that I used above, it dawns on me that I was extracting information and not engaging in true partnership in 'Indian time'. I have often joked with Suresh that 'Indian time' has an elastic band on it because it stretches – and I am reminded of this particularly because I used to use this joke more often when I was researching than any other visit. When we had organised to meet at a certain time to do a task related to the research I would always say "now remember, that's nine o'clock Irish time, not Indian time" to emphasise the fact that I wanted to meet on time. On reflection, I remember the Australian volunteers used to make the same joke.

From this perspective, I can see that the research agenda dominated the process. My way of life (or my way of researching) dominated, or was prioritised by me, rather than the teachers' ways or priotities. I could have asked them how they would like to research. When I think of all the time I took to think through what I wore in order to be respectful in my ethical approval application process, I am gobsmacked that I never thought about how my agenda might impact their voice and their experience of their voice 'being heard'. I simply did not consider, in ethical terms, how important their opinion on how to research was to be valued – or even thought through... Or perhaps not… Ethically, I thought I

was doing the right thing by speaking to teachers and parents, but now I think it would perhaps have been more ethical to take more time to build authentic relationships and learned if the teachers and parents were interested in this project and if not, why not? Perhaps that would have been a richer, more authentic conversation to have first?

Ethnographic Methods:

While this ideally would have been a fully immersion ethnographic research project, I was constrained by having two young children of my own and a husband with no inclination to re-locate to India for a year or two. Thus, I decided to draw on ethnographic methods such as participant observation, photographic observation, and interviews. One of the strengths and one of the weaknesses of ethnographic research is in its reliance on relationships (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015), as they are formed or forming during the research process. As like any human interaction, they are always fluid, subject to misunderstandings, interpretation, and constantly in flux. Relationships rely on communication, expressions, dialogue, and interactions – this is why ethnographic research has been described as interactive research (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2010). One of my biggest concerns while researching was always, in questioning the ways in which the research could potentially change my relationships with my existing friends and chosen family when I was, to quote Van Maanen, "part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member" (2011) in my position as researcher.

…When I pull on the thread of the ethnographic methods I used, I am reminded that as part fan and part member I have biases and I make decisions about where to look, and sometimes even, what to see. I also choose to interpret what I see. I make editing decisions, focusing decisions, biased decisions… Looking at it from another perspective, just because I could go into the classrooms, and wider school space to research and ***capture*** *data does not mean that I* <u>*should have*</u> *done so. I think that the question of whether I should research on play and early learning in EPS should have been a more significant decision and should have taken a longer time to make.*

Examining the decision, and the decision to observe and collect data, in retrospect, particularly from different points of view, disciplines, and theories, is an interesting exercise. There are a lot of vantage points that have ethical implications- depending on how I choose to see them. There is something to be said about power relations and colonising space as a white researcher sitting in a school observing and taking notes and photographs. How comfortable must that be as a teacher or a child to be observed so openly? To have a white gaze cast upon them. Is there a disconnect in the aim of the research to be a participatory study and using ethnographic methods? Do ethnographic methods belong in a participatory research project? ...rips a stitch…

Participatory Methods:

For the participatory methods, I used one-on-one drawing interviews with four children, whole class drawing exercises, and a photovoice exercise with the children. The one-on-one drawing interviews were not successful at all. The children were taken away from their classrooms to another empty class with myself, and the interpreter. They were given markers and paper with which to draw. I gave them a prompt to draw themselves in school and only two children – Mahadev and Ashish responded by drawing and talking about their drawings or answering any questions I asked as they drew. The other children seemed uncomfortable, so we stopped - a lot.

The whole class exercises were a little more successful. Children were given markers and paper and a prompt: *draw a picture of where you play in school.* Children drew their pictures and came to me at the end to explain their picture and I took a photograph of the drawings and wrote what they described. I had to ask Suresh to ask the teachers to stop suggesting things for the children to draw and allow them to draw whatever they wanted even if it was "not what Miss said". The children responded very positively to this exercise and surprised us as they worked in small groups, and not individually as imagined. After class, they were observed pulling out their pictures to continue working on them while they waited on the playing field for their parents or school buses. However, I felt I never captured the story of each of their pictures. I explore this undoing in part three.

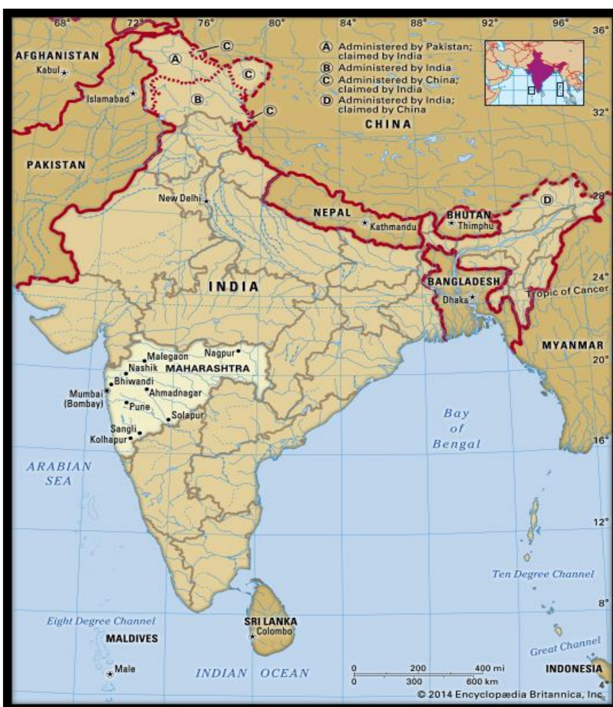
The photovoice session was planned to be a one-on-one. We toyed with the idea of giving just the focus children cameras but the children in all classes developed such an interest in my camera and we reflected not only on the drawing group exercises but also my field notes about how they children played and learned, and we decided to put each class into groups of four and give each group a turn of using the camera with the prompt: take photos of what you love about school. The results of this process were phenomenal. Suresh, and I, went through the photos from each class group over the course of three days and coded them into themes. Then we printed a sample of each theme in A4 size from each class-group. We went into the class-group with the photographs and showed them to the children and consulted with them. We asked questions about the photographs and told them our theories. They were able to tell us who took them, where they took them, and why. They laughed at some of our guesses and clarified their rationale for taking them. In this consultation process (Alderson, 2008), Suresh and myself acknowledged our positions as the learners - those that did not know. The children were acknowledged as the experts - the knowers. It was an amazing group co-generation of knowledge and the most successful of all the participatory methods we tried.

All of the participatory methods are discussed in more detail in the Children as (Co) Researchers chapter in part three. Feel free to skip ahead and come back or to carry on reading from here. This is your experience of my story.

…Children's voices, and the voices of all participants, were very important to me from the very start of the study but when the project was taken apart, I realised I couldn't theme or categorise their voices because I was making decisions and value judgements that were not mine to make. I also realised that myself and the children were researching the school, and each other, side by side in very compatible research stories that interweaved with each other but certainly came from two different lenses. In undoing the process of writing, I present the story of their research project along-side the story of mine. Although this is my research story, and I take full responsibility for how I place the children's voices (acknowledging that I do choose some images above others and where to place them) I provide them here as an interruption, another telling, or a companion to my encounters with people and places. You can choose how you wish to interpret them. You may see them as disrupting the authority of my voice. You may see them as weaving in and out of my story in harmony with my voice. You may see them offering a separate story - as the true authority on the school. Or you may have another way of interpreting their story or stories…

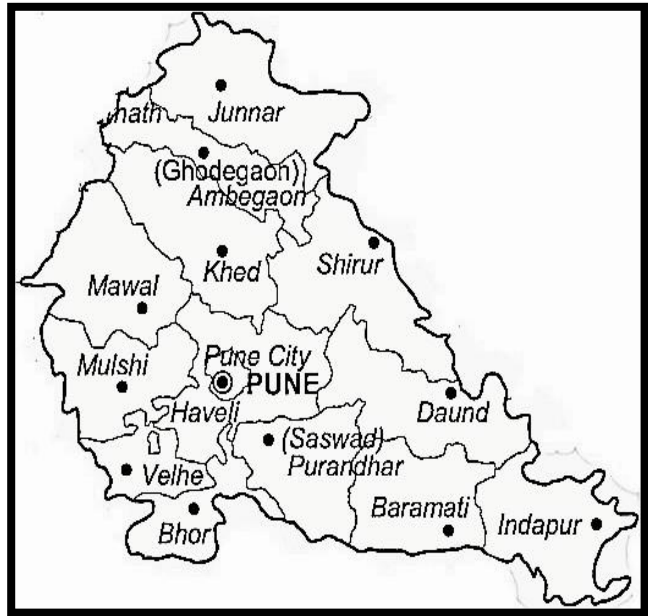
The photos and images I choose to illustrate my story are surrounded in a black frame, as earlier on in the body of this thesis. The children's images are presented in a green frame. The photographs and drawings are from the Nursery, Lower Kindergarten, Upper Kindergarten, and Standard One classes.

Case Site:



India currently has approximately 20% of the world's population under the age of nine years and yet there is little known about their lived experiences of childhood and early childhood education, from their perspective (Bisht, 2008). Since the passing of the 2009 Right to Education Act, which mandates compulsory school attendance of children between the ages of 6 and 14 years of age (G.O.I., 2009), increasing political attention has been focused on the economic and social benefits of early childhood education. The school, Emmanuel Public School, in which the research was carried out is on the West coast of India, in the state of Maharashtra, is a district called Pune.

Pune is a vibrant commercial and technical hub. It is famed for the housing of Gandhi during his internment at Agha Khan Palace as well as a being a mecca for Western Yogi's travelling to its many famous ashrams during the 1970's. Pune has a population of 9.4million which is approximately 8.3% of the population of Maharashtra and .78% of the total population of India (Indian Census, 2011). Its expansion into an IT and commercial hub has brought with it a booming construction industry and as a direct result many labourers have moved from the surrounding villages into the city and rehomed their families into the many permanent and temporary slum settlements. Pune Municipal Corporation has stated that approximately 40% of its population was living in slum settlements in 2011 (World Population Review, 2017). Pune district was recorded as having 1.4 million children between birth and 8 years of age in the 2011 census, it is approximated that that number may have grown to 1.7 million in 2017.



The School:

Emmanuel Public School (EPS) is situated in the town of Kondhwa and caters for children from a five kilometre radius between the tahils of Pune city and Haveli, in the Pune district. The school targets what they term as 'underprivileged' children between nursery and standard X (three – fourteen years of age). The NGO Care Foundation manages EPS and operates on a not-for-profit basis. The school has a Christian ethos but accepts children of any or no faith. The school was founded in 2007 with two pupils and as it has grown to over 500 pupils (it had just 350 pupils in 2016 when I first started researching). It has widened its curricular and holistic scope to what is calls 'Total Quality Education'. It operates the state curriculum through the medium of English language from Lower Kindergarten (LKG) to standard X, and the Playway curriculum in the Nursery class. It provides all children with a hot meal daily (and many pupils bring food to home to their families), free school-books, uniforms and school supplies. It has also secured (and facilitates) free twice weekly dentist check-ups, an immunisation programme and paediatrician visits. For the female population of the school, they offer free self-defence classes and psychological counselling.

Emmanuel Public School from the street with playing field to the left.

The school itself is bottom heavy, with most of its 500 pupils, aged between 3-15 years enrolled in the younger and early childhood classes. Although the catchment area spans 10 official slum communities, almost 50% of the children come from two large communities within 2 kilometres of the school. As larger communities, they are funded by local politicians ensuring electricity to all homes at least for a few hours a day, water (either by tank or a shared tap for a few hours a day); some houses have private toileting facilities, but public toilets are provided. The predominant religion in the school is Hinduism with a very low percentage of children identifying with Muslim or Buddhist faith. Unlike the census data for the area, most of the parents in the school, work. Parents mostly stated that they work in servitude, public service jobs such as sweepers, vegetable vendors or drivers, and on construction sites. Most of the children come to the school knowing Marathi (the state language) or

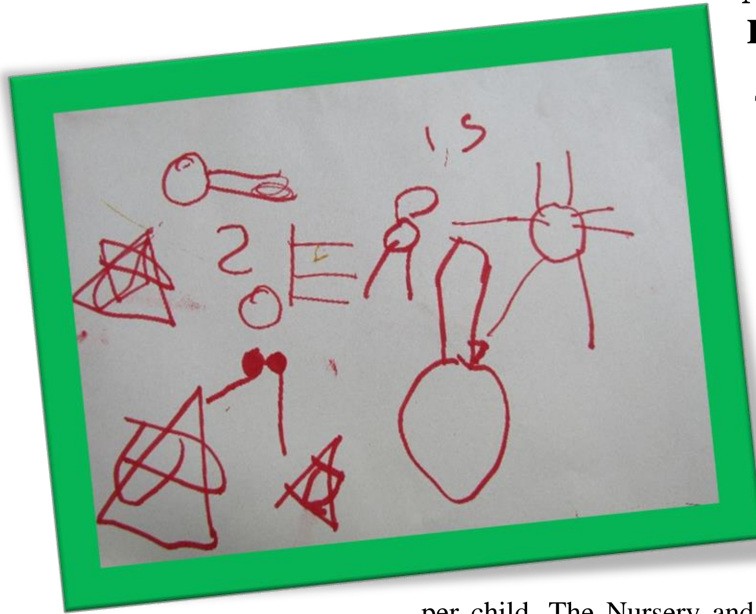
Hindi. There is a high illiteracy rate amongst parents and guardians. The dominant caste in the school is the Mahar caste which is called Dalit.

The Early Childhood Classes:

My research groups in year one consisted of one group made up of the Nursery class and Lower Kindergarten (LKG), and the other group consisted of the Upper Kindergarten (UKG) class. In year two I observed the new Nursery class and followed the LKG and UKG groups up to UKG and Standard One class respectively.

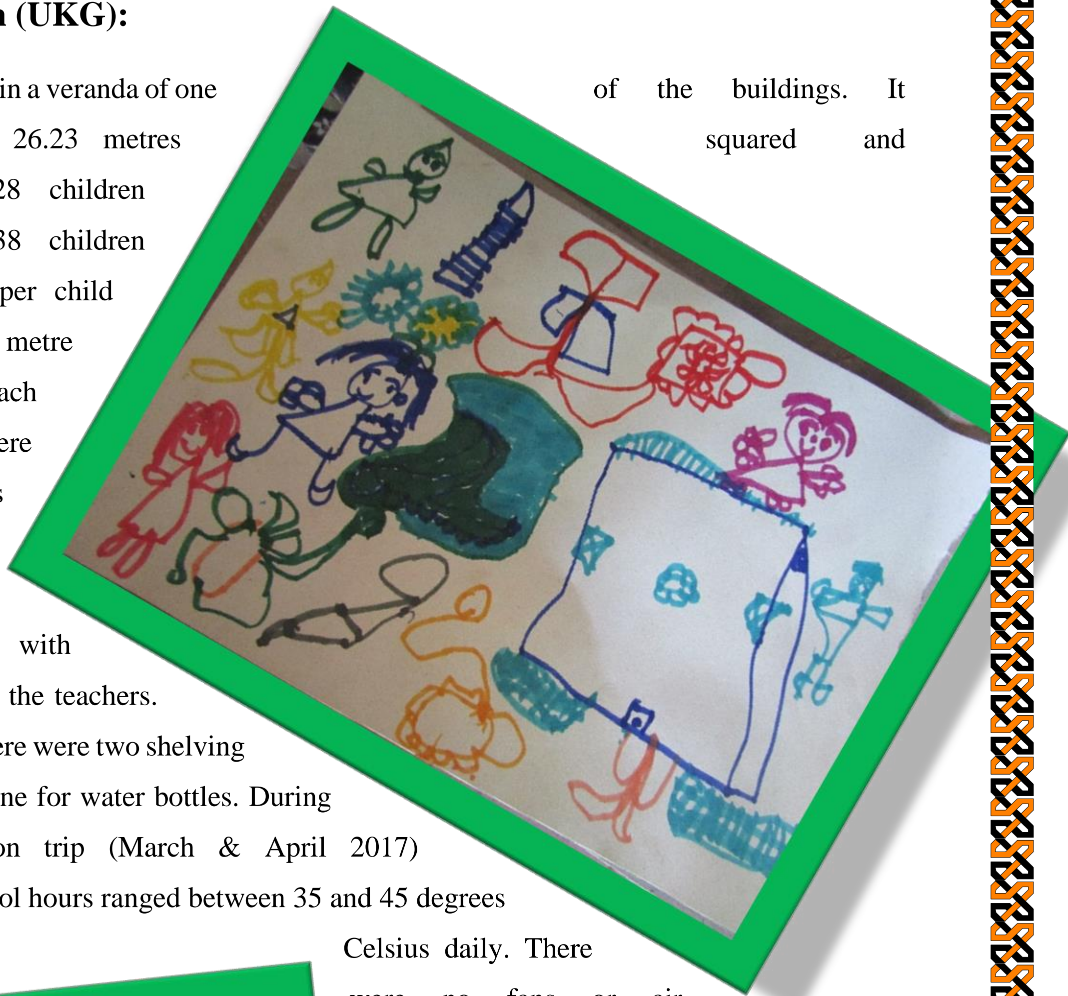
There were 17 Nursery children and 25 LKG children totalling 42 children, and a total of 43 UKG children on the official school register but for many reasons there was never 100% attendance in each class. The children in Nursery range between 3 years and 4 years, the children in LKG between 5 and 6 years, and the children in UKG between 5 and 8 years of age. It should be noted that the pilot trip took place halfway through the academic year and the first official data collection visit took place near the end of the academic year - before two religious holidays and one political festival which could account for some absenteeism.

Nursery and Lower Kindergarten (LKG):



The Nursery and LKG classes took place in a shaded area beside the school office building and turned into a space to eat for other classes at lunchtime. It measured an area of 16.17 metres squared and housed on average 35 children a day during the first data gathering trip. The space per child ratio was .5 metres squared per child. The Nursery and LKG group had two teachers: one female and one male; neither of which were trained in early childhood education, childcare, or education. Both had very good English.

Upper Kindergarten (UKG):



The UKG classroom was in a veranda of one of the buildings. It measured an area of 26.23 metres squared and housed on average 28 children (although there are 38 children registered). The space per child ratio was just below one metre squared per child. In each classroom, there were colourful plastic chairs and a white board at the top for teachers. Workbooks and slates with chalk were stored beside the teachers. In the UKG classroom there were two shelving units: one for bags and one for water bottles. During the first data collection trip (March & April 2017) temperatures during school hours ranged between 35 and 45 degrees Celsius daily. There were no fans or air conditioning in the children's classrooms. There was one female lead teacher who worked Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays and two young female volunteers from Germany who worked five days a week. The class was streamed into three groups by ability on the days the lead teacher was there. Neither lead teacher nor volunteers had qualifications in early childhood education, childcare, or education. All three seemed to have good English speaking skills but the lead teacher spoke in Hindi a lot to the class.

All children in the school start assembly at 9:30am and classes start at 10am. The children in Nursery, LKG, and UKG typically start class at 10am and finish at 12 noon, whereas the older children stay in school until 3pm. The children tend to spend time on the playing field after they have eaten until they are collected by the bus, rickshaw, or their parents (typically between 12:30 and 13:30). The school hours are adjusted in the summer due to the heat of the day; hours are shorter.

Focus Children:

To begin with, when I designed the research project, I had imagined having four focus children from each class, two boys and two girls from Nursery, LKG, and UKG – twelve in total. However, when I arrived in the school, they suggested that because nursery and LKG were housed together it would be too much to have twelve so I would focus on eight instead. The school decided they would like to pick the children to make the process easier and safer. They wanted to pick families with an existing

relationship and trust formed with the school. The rationale was that most parents who had children in the early childhood classes were only forming relationships and bonds with the school. The school did not want to spook the parents and sever these bonds. Most parents were described as cautious of officialdom – particularly paperwork – and so would find me and my permission forms untrustworthy – in fact suspicious. They were afraid the parents would think I was a government official who was assessing their parenting. Due to the school not only educating, but also providing food, health check-ups and vaccinations it was a safe space where children could thrive physically, educationally, and mentally. It did not seem ethical to risk jeopardising this just for the sake of having equal numbers from each class and gender balance represented.

One girl and seven boys were chosen by the school. Of these eight, only four parents were approached by the school for interview and gave permission to speak to me. Of the eight children, two had a natural rapport with me. So, my twelve focus children were narrowed down to two focus children. I still spoke to the parents of the other two children, and I observed them and worked with them, however it felt more authentic to focus on the children who naturally decided to work with me and built a relationship with me: Ashish Mandal (Nursery) and Mahadev Mane (UKG).

The Boys

I've always spent my time around guys. My childhood best friend when we lived in Dublin was called Philip. He was my next door neighbour. Apparently, we were inseparable. When I was six, my parents moved us to Maynooth, in Kildare. We lived on the boarder of Maynooth and Leixlip, in the countryside; surrounded by fields. I grew up with boys. My two brothers, the Lennon lads, and me. I played wars with them. Climbed trees with them. Fought with them. Ken Lennon used to kick the crap out of me whenever we rowed – and why wouldn't he? I was one of the lads!

I didn't take to girls much. Only one, Chelle; and Chelle didn't much take to girls either. We hung around up at the horses. A male dominated environment where they gave us free horse-riding lessons if we mucked out the stables, cleaned the tack, and groomed the horses. It was always lad's banter and being ladylike wasn't much called for.

I worked in the local pub for eleven years. I loved it. I'd still be there now if my parents hadn't drummed it into my head to go to college and get a degree. I loved the craic. I loved the jokes and the banter. I loved the barmen and I especially loved the little old men with their wicked sense of humour. Many of them still roar "how are ya Lilly" at the top of their voices to me in Dunnes – much

to my husband's amusement. I was a staunch Dublin GAA fan, and when they found out that my last name was White – sure that was it - I was Lilly forever[20].

Mostly though, I love the underdogs and the quirky folk. The people who are a little bit left of centre. I identify with people who do things a bit differently and don't really get convention. These people are my people – but particularly the boys.

For eighteen years I was a preschool teacher. You're not supposed to have favourites, but I always loved the loveable rogue. The Ivan's; the Sean's; the Charlie's. The cheeky monkey that always challenged you and wanted to know why. The ones that would crack you up and break your heart with their cheeky grins. As principal, I took them under my wing when they pushed their teacher's buttons. I eagerly took them into the school when other schools kicked them out. They had spirit, and respect but only if they were allowed to be spirited and were given room to be themselves. It was only when I had my daughter that I realised – I must have played with the boys for eighteen years because suddenly there was this little precious girl in my life, and I had no idea how to play with her!!!

It was the same with Suresh. Of the two lads helping in the school, he was the loveable rogue. He is cheeky, funny, and just the right side of left of centre! Same cheeky grin, same curious, playful sense of humour. Always underestimated, but always coming through.

So of course, Ashish and Mahadev would be the boys I researched with. They chose to research me as much as I chose to research them. They are wonderfully quirky and very intelligent. Cheeky grins, curious, mischievous, and with a playful sense of humour. Both not quite part of the gang yet both fully immersed in school life.

[20] The Lilly Whites is the nickname given to the Kildare GAA team and their supporters due to the White County colours.

Ashish:

Ashish Mandal was attending the nursery class when I first began to observe him. He caught my eye because he was slightly shy, and very curious. He was the curious little scientist in class, unbeknownst to everyone. Ashish was sort of aloof from the others in the class – he was interested and had the chats, but he mostly did his own thing. And his own thing was to have adventures in his head (make believe play) and to investigate everything. He had long, glossy hair pulled back into a pony tail every day for the two years I observed him. He would observe me, out of the corner of his eye; interested in what I was doing in his classroom, but he didn't come over and crowd around me and my camera like the others did at first. He would watch me from a distance, eventually warming to me, giving me shy smiles and eventually performing for me and my camera!

Although Ashish spoke about his brothers to me a lot in our first drawing interview, I came to understand that Ashish was in fact an only child. When he described his brothers to me, he was in fact describing his classmates in the school. This was clarified by Suresh when we found out he had no brothers- he was so convincing that he even had him fooled! In the school's database, Ashish's mother, Krantidevi, is recorded as being a housewife and his father, Sitaram, as a cook. Ashish has no recorded birth date, but we estimate that he was around four years of age when I first met him. He is recorded in the school database as being of Hindu faith and his caste is listed as Mandal which is a schedule caste (SC). His birth-place is recorded as Bathnaha, which is a large village in Northern Bihar, near Nepal.

The first year I researched in the school, Ashish used to play by himself a lot of the time or he would parallel play beside others as

they played games in the field. He loved to investigate the inside of the pipe under the tree. He would walk on it like a tight rope, jump from it, sit on it like a horse; always murmuring to himself, narrating his play quietly. He liked to watch the others when they played with clay, water and leaves sometimes joining in. He was rarely interested in classwork, preferring his own discoveries or listening to his classmates chatting. When he was motivated, he used to write large A's on the chalk board. He was always watching me. As he grew, he became more outgoing and joined in the class more and played with his classmates, sometimes leading the play. He never lost his curious, investigative nature.

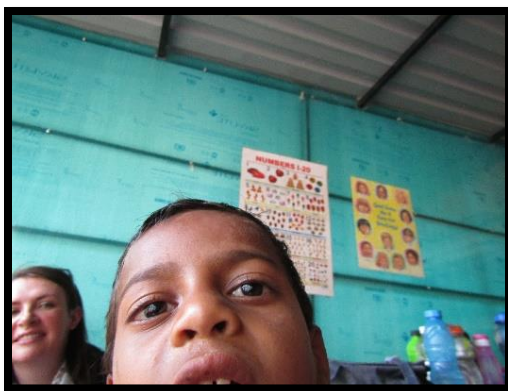
Ashish lives just beside the grounds of the school in the basement of a house owned by a contractor whom his father works for. Despite what it says in the school records, Krantidevi described her husband as a labourer and she was a cook for the contractor's family. Before speaking to us, Krantidevi rang her husband again to make sure that she had his permission. Ashish showed me his toys and experimented with water, plastic, and soil while I was there. He was at first shy, and then excited to see us in his home. Krantidevi and her husband have high hopes for Ashish and want to pay for private education to help him succeed in life. They came to the school because they had heard it was very good from her husband's co-workers.

Mahadev:

Mahadev Mane was in the Upper Kindergarten (UKG) class when I first met him. In fact, it took me a while. The class was a little chaotic. Two young German volunteers, Helena and Cristina, were taking the class. I came to understand later that they were just finished second level education and were completing a year of volunteering with their Church before going on to college. The age range of the children in UKG was between six and eight years. They were an unusual class group; unlike any other I had encountered in the school. In the first year that I observed, they used to physically fight a lot, hurt each other on purpose, and were not as close or happy as all the other classes. On Mondays and Fridays, the volunteers took the class; Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the class teacher Miss Cynthia took the class, and then on Fridays, Helena and Cristina would supervise while the class drew or played. There was no clear consistent timetable, or routine. After lunch each day, they would go back into the veranda space which would be cleared of chairs and they would engage in rough and tumble play and fighting until the school finished. Classes

with Ms Cynthia were militant and silent. Classes with Helena and Cristina were chaotic and loud. I never knew what I was going to encounter each day.

Mahadev had absolutely no interest in me at first. In fact, he had no interest in anything. The teachers gave up on trying to engage him after numerous attempts every day. He would lie back in his chair and sleep, or yawn and look around or out at the playing field. He wrote very little in his copy book. It was clear that the class was divided into three groups (confirmed to me by Ms Cynthia and Helena later). There was a group of quiet children who were doing well academically. They were placed in rows of chairs along the right-hand side of the room facing the board. There was a group of children who were not as academic, but they tried, and they were mostly quiet. They were put in rows on the left-hand side of the room at the top facing the board. Then there were the group of so called 'naughty children', who were perceived as not making an effort and behind the class academically. They were always sitting in a circle at the back left hand side of the room – which just so happened to be the area I picked for myself to observe, before knowing this. This is where Mahadev would sit. There was a very cute, small, smiley boy who used to sit beside Mahadev. He was a loveable rogue and was so cute he would never get into trouble. He was very clever to antagonise the others but not get caught. It was his way of playing with them. Mahadev was often on the receiving end of this antagonism and would react loudly and aggressively and then get 'caught' by his teachers and reprimanded for upsetting or disturbing the class. It used to frustrate me no end when he would be marched up to the top of the room to hold his ears after an incident. He had developed a reputation amongst the children and the teachers for disturbing the class. One day he was even shouted at and given out to for causing a disturbance when he wasn't in!



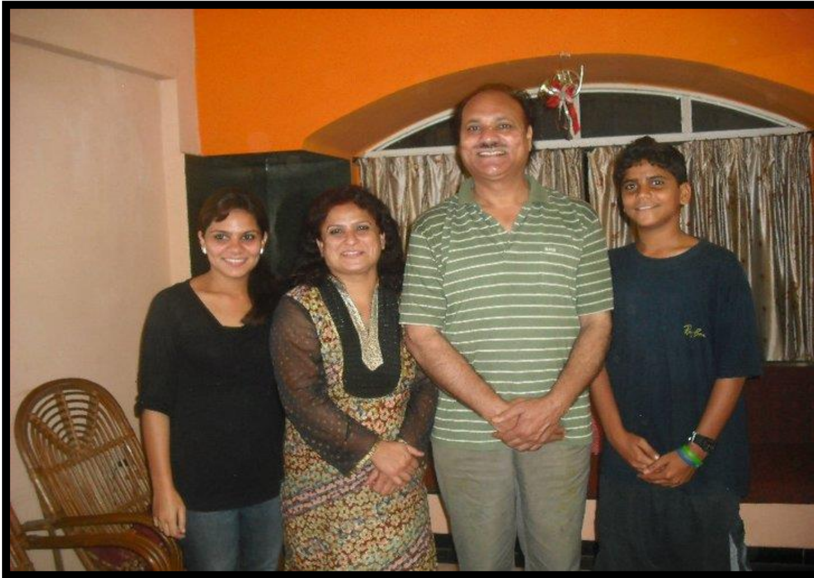
I really struggled with my role as a researcher in Mahadev's class – in particular with regards his treatment and the lack of attention given to the group of boys around me. They had decided I was to be their teacher and started to turn their chairs to face me. They showed me their work in their copy-books, and they asked me to write numbers or words and they would copy them. They noticed my I.D. card around my neck with my name and photo. They would show me theirs and tell me their names. Mahadev grew really

interested in my camera and I used to allow him to explore it. Or I would take photos of him as he requested and posed. Sometimes they would get reprimanded for not doing their work or for disturbing Miss (me) but mostly the teachers left us to it. I found Mahadev really responded to praise and rewards. I used to ask to see his work (set by the teacher) and if he made an attempt or finished it, I would give him my camera to play with. One day Mahadev was working in his copy when he was stabbed in the leg with a really sharp pencil. He screamed in pain and immediately jumped up to hit the boy who had stabbed him. Ms Cynthia came over shouting and went to grab him by the hand and bring him to the office. Inside, I struggled with what to do – the "researcher" would just document – but I failed. I stood up and told her what happened. I told her it happens most days I am there. She looked at me and at both boys and immediately asked the first boy to apologise to Mahadev and then went back to teaching her group. Mahadev ignored the apology and pulled his chair closer to mine.

When I first met Mahadev, he was five years and nine months old. His parents were not chosen for interview by the school and the School Administrator, Poonam, made it clear to me that Mahadev had a "pampered" life with his parents. When I questioned why he was so sleepy all the time I was told that his parents let him stay up late at night watching cartoons. His birth-place is recorded as Undri, in Pune, his recorded religion is Hindu, and his caste is recorded as Kaikadi which is included in the list of scheduled caste (SC) status for Maharashtra. His father, Sivkumar is recorded as being a labourer, and his mother Parvati, is recorded as being a maid servant.

At the end of that particular data gathering trip, Mr Singh had asked me to debrief him, so I told him about my concerns for the class. I recommended that they needed a strong teacher with a good routine for the following school year. When I arrived back, for my next trip, they were in First Standard and had Miss Aruna, who was (at first meeting) very strict, but in fact also very playful with them. I met with a different Mahadev when I observed him in Miss Aruna's class. He was engaged, motivated and much more a part of the class. His eyes were bright and eager, and he worked at his desk near the top of the class. Now and again, he was defiant and stubborn, but mostly he was changed in his behaviour. In fact, most of the class were.

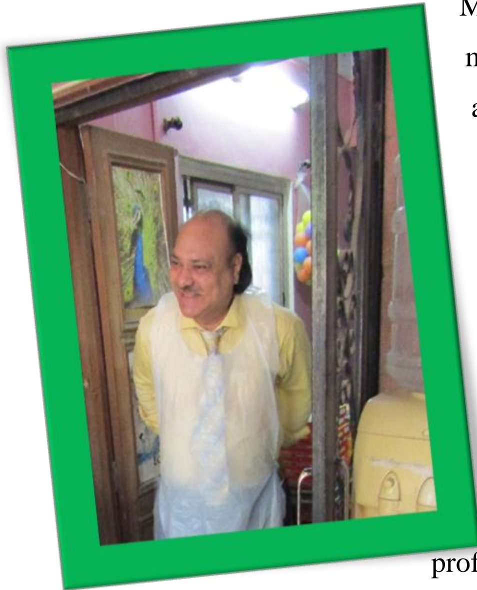
The Singh Family:



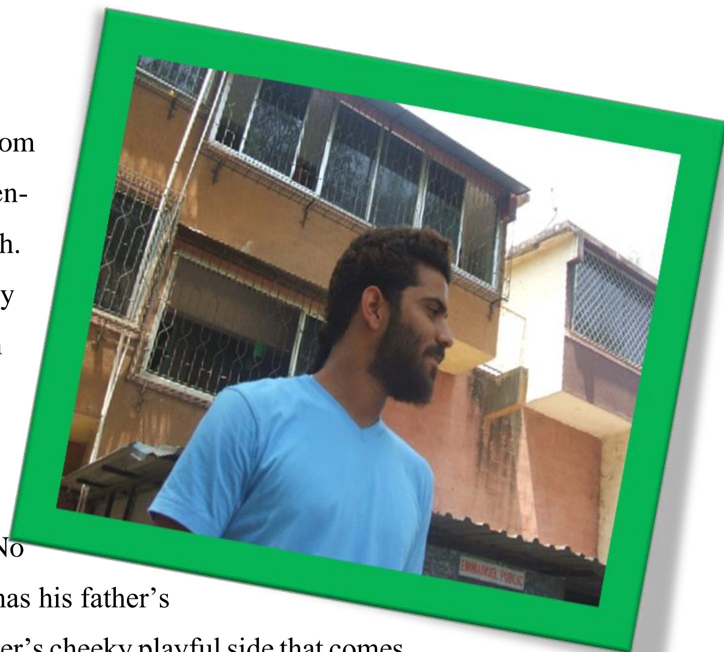
The Singh Family founded the school and its NGO 'Care Foundation'. They are a family of four originally from New Delhi. Having survived hard times during the economic crash in India, they decided to start the school to help children who needed education, food, and a safe place to be. They have a deep Christian faith and are possibly the closest family I have ever encountered. Originally from the pharmaceutical industry, Mr Singh has won many national awards for his work in the Foundation and the school.

My first encounter with the Singh family was on my first voluntourism trip in 2010. Mr Singh and Poonam brought us up to a classroom so that Mr Singh could tell us about the school, its mission, and its ethos of 'Total Quality Education'. They both seemed very professional and very serious. Thinking back now Poonam was wise beyond her years. She must have been only nineteen and yet she had the maturity and professionalism of someone twice her age. She ran the operation of a preschool and primary school on a day-to-day basis and helped us to organise whatever we needed. Every now and then, I would catch her being playful with her friends but always business like and the ultimate professional with volunteers, staff, parents, and children. It was only years later when I took a trip of my own over to the school that I had a realisation that of all the trips I had been on, the charity always took the boys out on nights out and shopping trips, but not Poonam. I made a conscious effort to include Poonam in everything and began to get close to her and see her playful,

loving side. Poonam lives for her family, particularly her dad. She has a passion for the school and her father's vision and works hard to see it come to light.



Mr Singh is very tall and broad. He carries himself very meticulously and is very professional. After his presentation about the school during my first visit, each one of us would be chosen to help him cook food for all the pupils of the school each day in a tiny kitchen. During the cooking lesson, Mr Singh would talk to each of us about our futures and our lives. He would encourage us to return to the school. I still say to this day that Mr Singh has an ability to know what a person is supposed to do. He has a gift for reading people and situations and is one of the wisest people I know. Between his physical presence and his professionalism, it can be easy to mistake him as cold, at first meeting, but I remember him taking out his handkerchief and crying with joy when we presented his wife with an electronic slicer so she would no longer need to prepare food by hand for hours again. This is a truer insight into who he is. Every child that has dropped out of the school, every girl that was taken away by her parents to be married, every child who passed away, every teacher or volunteer who left the school – Mr Singh felt the pain of each one of those deeply, but his faith sustains him. That and the belief in the mission of the school.



In ten years, Pranay Singh has grown from a sweet, chubby cheeked, playful eleven-year-old into a serious, mini Mr Singh. He is just as tall and just as broad at only twenty-one-years of age. He went from a cricket mad, playful helper to a professional cricket player … but still always helping. There is nothing that is too much for Pranay to help with. No crisis too big or request too small. He has his father's calm and collected manner but his mother's cheeky playful side that comes out once in a while! While he doesn't work in the school his presence is always welcomed by teachers and children alike.

Mrs Singh is a joy to behold! She is the Mama of the school. Mama to every child, every teacher, every volunteer, and every helper. She started out as my mama but has now decided that she is my sister. Although she is a lot younger than Mr Singh, she is devoted to him and her family. Mrs Singh takes the older girls under her wing and teaches them how to keep a house, cook, and teaches them about feminine hygiene. She takes them shopping and sometimes invites them to visit her house at the weekends. She counsels them and advises them on life choices. When I first started going to the school, she used to spend Saturday mornings teaching the local mothers how to clean, feed, and care for their babies and toddlers. She identifies children in need and will bring them in and discreetly give them new shoes, bags, period products, deodorants, hair-brushes, clothes, and food to bring home. It is kept discreet to maintain their dignity and the dignity of their families. My fondest memories of Mrs Singh are of her spraying the children and Irish volunteers with cool water from the hose as she cleaned down the pathway after a long hot day of school, throwing her head back and bellowing with laughter. Mrs Singh used to teach the nursery and LKG classes but now she spends her days cooking meals for the 500 children in the school - serving them and the teachers. It is incredible to see her knowledge of what each individual child does and does not like to eat and adjust their plates accordingly, each and every day.

The Teachers:

There were a great number of teachers over the two years in all of the early childhood classrooms due to volunteers, staff moving on, and new staff joining the school. In this section, I focus on three teachers that agreed to be interviewed in the first two observations trips and the pilot study; with whom I spent a lot of time observing in class and chatting to outside of class over lunch or chai.

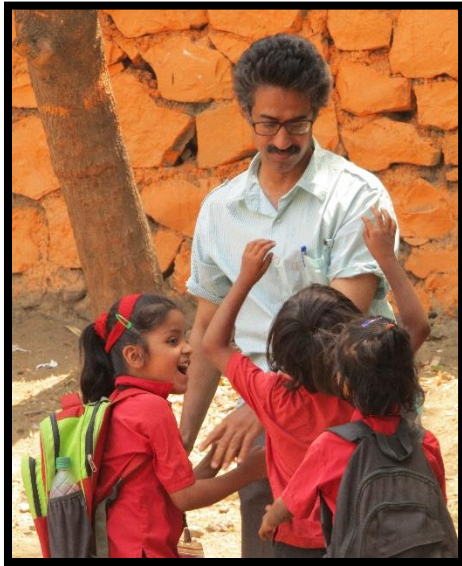
Miss Stella:

I cannot remember Stella Miss ever not being a part of the school. I mean, I know from looking at my photographs that she wasn't there in the earlier years – in fact I remember having fun with Mrs Singh in the nursery class – but Stella Miss seemed so much a part of the school it is hard to imagine it without her.

When you first meet Stella Martin, she looks stern and perhaps a little scary? But then her face breaks out into her wonderful wide smile and it is quite clear she is very friendly and open. She is tiny, perhaps just over five foot and incredibly thin yet her voice booms in the classroom as the children laugh and join her in reciting nursery rhymes and songs. She looks younger than her 57 years and she *is* strict, in that she feels it is very important for children in the early childhood classes to learn how to behave in a school – to listen to their teacher, to be respectful of their classmates, and to be respectful and mindful of the

older classes studying nearby. *Respect* and *love* are the words which sum up Stella Miss's teaching style to me.

Originally from South India, Stella Miss has been living locally for thirty-five years. She was the lead teacher in the Nursery and Lower Kindergarten (LKG) class when I observed her. She has her qualification from finishing schooling – the equivalent to tenth or eleventh standard - but has no qualifications in early childhood education and care. Despite this, from what I observed and from our chats, Stella seemed to know instinctively what it was to be an early childhood educator. She practiced phronesis, she knew each child in her care intimately – their educational needs and their physical, social, emotional, and care needs, she spoke about professional love (Page, 2017; Noddings, 2013), the holistic needs of the child, and the importance of play and following the child's lead. Stella did not believe it was important to have a qualification in early childhood education and care in order to work in the classroom because she has years of experience of working with children. She uses her knowledge of the children's lives at home to inform her teaching activities and utilises oral, imaginative, and active work in her practice. She emphasises the need for nutritious food, security, safety, trust, learning to speak English, and love as the most important part of schooling for the children in her class. Stella goes out of her way to explain to me that the children have troubled lives at home and the school is their place to feel safe and loved. She describes the school as a family and does her best to ensure the children feel part of that family. Stella uses the word 'ministry' to describe her work with the children – a word full of Christian connotations - but also a synonym for 'vocation' which is used in the minority world quite frequently to describe working in early childhood education and care.

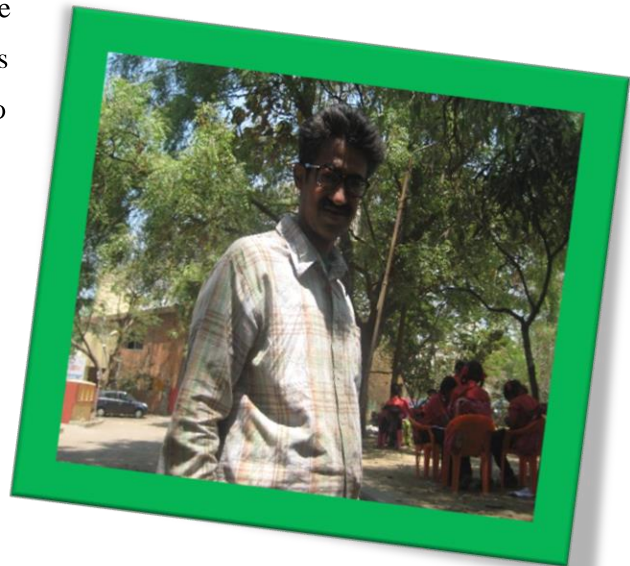


Jeevan Sir:

Jeevan Sir worked with Stella Miss in the Nursery and LKG class during my research trips, although that is not where I first met him. Poor Jeevan found himself of the receiving end of much criticism from the Irish volunteers during the fateful trip that started this whole research project off. At the time he was new to the school and was the lead teacher for a much older class. He looked sad, and almost disinterested, and the older boys in particular took advantage of a new and inexperienced teacher. When we reported our concerns to Mr Singh, he sat in silence, then said "Jeevan has a hard life at the moment – our school is not just for the children." I was very sceptical when I came back to the school and saw Jeevan with the nursery class. I am happy to say I could not have been more wrong, and Mr Singh, in his infinite wisdom had put Jeevan in the perfect place to utilise his talents and personality.

Jeevan Sir is loving, kind, sweet, and playful with the younger children. He was always smiling with them, from my observations. It was incredible to see the patience and kindness he had for them. I feel very honoured to have been given the chance to observe Jeevan in class and out in the field where he was given free rein to interact with the children in his own way and play with them in a way in which the female teachers did not. I cannot not express the humbleness I felt or the feeling of warmth towards him the more I watched his interactions with each child. I would have gladly put my own children in his class and be safe in the knowledge that they would be respected, safe, and have fun.

Jeevan de Souza was 50 years old when I interviewed him. He has two daughters and had recently separated from his wife. He lived nearby the school but is from Mumbai originally. He introduced his daughters to me at the end of my first trip and told me his eldest daughter hopes to study psychology. He also thanked me for asking him to be a part of the research project and said it would make his girls proud of him. While Jeevan Sir has his 12th standard exams, he is also qualified in Commerce. He doesn't think there is a need to have a qualification in the early childhood classes once you can keep the attention of the children. Jeevan told me he much prefers teaching the younger classes and says he employs oral techniques, active techniques, and sometimes holds their hands to help them with letter formation on their slates. Jeevan spoke about the importance of classification and how the children were learning things like fruits, vegetables, and animals from pictures. He was also the only teacher to describe a time-table or routine of the day to me.



Jeevan Sir thinks the children in his class enjoy school by the way they respond to him and thinks it is important that they enjoy class and school life as a whole. He communicated that he thinks there is room for play and academics for the children in the early childhood classes. For example, he told me the children love their oral work and nursery rhymes, but also playing with bubbles and balls. He described early childhood education as important for the children because it gives them the confidence for later schooling, and he feels that poems and drawing, as well as playing, do just that. Jeevan told me that although the classrooms are small, and the children do not have much room to play, having a good, peaceful atmosphere is the most important thing to be provided by the school for play opportunities. He mentioned that in their communities they also do not have much space for play, but the real barrier to the children's play was actually bullying behaviours by others and a lack of peaceful play spaces.

Miss Cynthia:

Cynthia Lee was the lead teacher of the Upper Kindergarten (UKG) class the first year I researched in the school, despite only working three days a week. On the other days, the school had volunteers in the classroom but for the two months previous to my visit Cynthia Miss worked with Cristina and Helena, two volunteers from Germany. Outside of this period she would often have the 38 children alone for the three days a week. Cynthia Miss was sixty-one years of age when I interviewed her. She told me she lived locally but was originally from Goa. An arts graduate, Cynthia did not believe she needed a teaching qualification because her son has dyslexia and she supported him with his learning all through school. She believed it was more important to understand the child. Cynthia described herself as "quite a hard task master" because she believed it was her duty to instil a discipline into the children and teach them academics. She told me she was given a curriculum from school management and does whatever comes naturally to her in the classroom when she is working with children.

Cynthia Miss really enjoys teaching the class. She believes that some of the children enjoy her classes and some do not, but it is because of their backgrounds if they don't. She says she would love to let them play but it takes too long to settle them, and it is easier to get them sitting down and learning straight away. Overall, the benefits Cynthia Miss believes the children get from the school is "healing". She believes the Playway curriculum is very important for children in Nursery and LKG so that they are ready to understand the more advanced classes of UKG and First Standard.

Due to the fact that the children do art and play on Mondays and Fridays, Cynthia was anxious to describe she must do only oral and written academic work for the three days she has them. She says that sometimes if a good child has finished their work and plays quietly during class and she will overlook it, but the children must be able to follow instructions, she thinks, or else they will grow up to be people who don't obey the rules. Although Cynthia Miss speaks about having compassion and empathy for the children because of their backgrounds, she goes on to describe them as emotionally and mentally disturbed because of what that they have witnessed in their homes and communities. This

is partly why she does not like them to play. She describes an aggressive pattern to their play when on the field because of their "mental and emotional state". Cynthia Miss says the most important thing the children need from school is love. She thinks that although the school needs more infrastructure and resources - it makes the best of what it has.

I really felt for Cynthia Miss, I was under the impression from talking to her that she was under a lot of pressure to get the children ready for First standard in three days a week. I knew from being in the classroom that this particular class were like no other I had encountered in the school and were particularly physical in their play. Although she was lovely and pleasant, I sensed a stress from her. She did not want to let the school or the children down, and this was most evident. It was confirmed to me afterwards that she was so stressed she was thinking of leaving. When I came back the following year Cynthia Miss had left to take care of her sick elderly mother.

Miss Cynthia was no longer teaching when we did the photovoice exercise.

The Parents:

Stepan Gavit:

Stepan Gavit, father of Siyon Gavit, agreed to be interviewed for the research study. He and his wife Estere are recorded on the school's database as working in 'Service' and their religion is noted as Hindu, although when I went to speak to Stepan, he told me that he was a Christian worship leader and he and his family were living on the premises of the house where the church pastor and family lived. Siyon was a young boy of three years and nine months when I started researching with him and was in the Nursery class. He is recorded of being born in Kadwan, in Nandurbar, which is in the state of Maharashtra. His caste is recorded as Bhil – a member of a Schedule Tribe (ST). Stephan and his family lived two minutes by foot from the school. Stepan is very encouraging of playing, particularly organised sports activities which his church organises for children, and sent Siyon and his older brother to EPS on the recommendation of his pastor.

Sandip Thorat:

Sandip Thorat, father of Yash Thorat, also agreed to be interview for the research study. Sandip, his wife Sneha, Yash and his younger brother (who was in the nursery class) lived up the hill from the school in the basement of a building for construction workers on a construction site. While they worked

on site, they had permission to live with other families of construction workers. While Sandip worked on the building site as a labourer, his wife Sneha worked as a maidservant. Yash was in UKG when I first met him and was seven years and three months old. He is recorded as being of Hindu faith, a member of Mahar caste group, and was born in Pune. Sandip spoke in Marathi to Suresh and spoke very proudly of contributing towards his brother's education to be a doctor. He sent Yash and his brother to EPS on recommendation of other labourers on the construction site.

Krantidevi Sitaram Mandal:

Ashish's mother, Krantidevi and her husband Sitaram Mandal live in the basement of a house she works in, as a cook. It is a minute walk up the hill from the school. As mentioned in Ashish's introduction above, they are originally North Indian, Hindu, and from the Mandal caste group. Ashish's mother heard about the school from Sitaram's co-workers and they heard it was a very good, English medium school with English speaking teachers working there. She liked the school but thought she should probably put Ashish into a private school with higher fees for a better education. Sitaram was working during the interview but Krantidevi rang him just before we started to make sure it was still ok to do the interview, which he agreed to.

Kareem Shaikh:

Kareem Shaikh was father to Alliyah, and husband to Shabana. He was a watchman and they lived in the basement of the house he worked in. Shabana was a homemaker and stayed at home with Alliyah's two younger siblings. She was also heavily pregnant when I went to their home to conduct the interview. Kareem gave the interview outside while Shabana sat inside with the children and their grandparents. Alliyah was in Nursery and was four and a half years old. She is recorded as being of Muslim faith. They have since left the school and the local area.

The Minority World Volunteers:

The minority world volunteers can be divided into three different categories. Those who came on week-long voluntourism trips over the years with me, those who volunteered to teach in the school in the medium term, and those who formed a core part of the teaching team. Minority world volunteers came from Ireland, England, the US, Australia, and Europe. Apart from Cristina and Helena from Germany, none of the other minority world volunteers wanted to be named or interviewed. However, the long-term minority world volunteers did consent to being in the study, using pseudonyms, forming part of

any field notes, observations, or photographs I and the children took. They also filled out an anonymous online questionnaire which I gave to the short term, week-long volunteers. Their answers to the questionnaire help me to understand and attempt to put my research study back together again at the end of Part Three.

In productively undoing how I present my research participants and the case site to you, the reader, I realise that they are predominantly presented through my eyes and my interpretation – something I aim to avoid. However, in the telling of my research story, I must tell you about the main protagonists, and like any author I describe them as I see them or as I encountered them. Though my descriptions are disrupted by the children's photographs, again it is I who select which photographs to disrupt my telling and where to place them. It is also worth noting at this point, that the participants' real names and locations are used. The decision to use pseudonyms or real identities is discussed shortly below and in more detail in part three.

Pilot Trip:

Beginnings

I yawn as I get into bed. I'm exhausted. It took an eighteen-hour journey to get here, including two flights totalling ten and a half hours and a four hour car journey. I put my hand out to turn off the light. I pause. I look at my suitcase up against the door. *I'll just check it again to make sure.* I get out of bed and check that it is blocking the door. I double check that both locks are locked. I look out through the peephole. There is no one in the hallway outside my room. I go over to the window and check my home-made lock. *Take that patriarchy!* I laugh to myself as I see the two tampons stuck in the gap, jamming the window shut. I make a mental note to tell Nanda and Chelle later. They'll appreciate the humour in it.

I get back into bed and look around my room. This new hotel is much nicer than the Y[21] but I don't know anyone who works here, and so far, I've only encountered male staff. I turn off the light and close my eyes. My head spins with thoughts. I am excited and nervous. I've got that butterfly feeling

[21] The Y was short for the YMCA we used to stay in, in Pune city when I travelled with volunteer groups. It was rundown and shabby but friendly.

in the pit of my stomach. I open my eyes and sit up. I turn back on the light and pull out my medications and pill box. I begin to fill each day.

As I methodically burst each blister pack and place each tablet in its correct place, I reflect on what it has taken to get here. A scholarship. Two pregnancy tests. A whole host of vaccines. Flights. Childminders. Grandparents. A willing husband. A visa. A LOT of medication. Suresh. The Singhs. *I must show Suresh and the Singhs how to administer my emergency epilepsy medication tomorrow*. Money…

Money.

I sigh. I may be feeling vulnerable, but I am actually very privileged.

I put the medications and pill box away. I grab my phone and turn out the light. I keep my phone in my hand. I've made sure it's ready to ring Suresh if I have a seizure or if someone tries to get into my room. I close my eyes and allow myself to sink into a fitful sleep.

On Site:

On Tuesday, 25th of October 2016, I arrived at the school for my first day of researching. I was so excited. I was there for a two-week pilot trip. The first day was uneventful, I sat around and chatted to Suresh and caught up with some of the older children I know. I observed the younger children as they played. One of the older boys, quite gleefully told me he had found me on Facebook! I told him my policy of not accepting friend requests from children because of the adult nature of some of the content on my page, which he understood. Poonam and two other teachers were very busy in the office filling out government documents: a snapshot of a school month during the year. I figured out that it was the equivalent to Ireland's National Education Welfare Board. I was interested to note that the documents are filled out in Marathi and Hindi was noted as a foreign language offered by the school.

Later in the day, I had a chat with Poonam and Mr Singh about the research project and I found out that the school would shut from Friday, 28th October until 3rd November for Diwali; Friday 4th would be a half day, before school returned to its regular routine on Monday 7th November. I was due to leave to return home on Tuesday 8th November. At first, I was very frustrated, I had organised this trip in advance so to arrive and find the school would close for a week was very frustrating. In fact, a lot of the trip was frustrating in terms of thinking and acting like a "researcher" instead of meaningful discussion, partnership and immersion in the world and life of the school. When I found out that one of

the school buildings needed to be packed up and repainted for the landlord, I decided to pitch in. I learned so much from that process of packing the building up and made so many great connections and developed deeper relationships with teachers, volunteers, and the older children. The interruption to my planned schedule actually gave me time to think and reflect and build richer relationships so necessary for the years that followed.

Lessons Learned:

As I spoke to Suresh about plans to work in partnership with parents and hold focus group meetings with them after school hours, it became clear he was very uncomfortable with the idea of giving parents cameras to capture the life of children in their communities. He was worried that they would break the cameras, and he was worried that they might capture something that would be embarrassing for them. I told him it was ok if the cameras got broken and we could delete anything that they felt uncomfortable with. I realise now that I was not really taking Suresh's concerns on board. I was solution focused rather than listening and reflecting on what was being said and, perhaps more importantly, what was not being said. In further discussions it was suggested that perhaps they could capture photos and send them to Poonam on WhatsApp which could be passed on to me. The parents frequently made contact through the school on WhatsApp utilising the verbal note function. This never came to be due to the negotiated research process with the school and their assertion that they, and not the parents, were the real gatekeepers to the children.

The consent forms became an increasing source contention throughout the research trip and the process. Firstly, even though I had them translated and sent on months before I arrived with instructions to disseminate and to have them signed, when I arrived Suresh informed me, he had not printed them out yet. He told me frequently that a majority of parents were illiterate and would not read or understand the documents. I said I could talk to them with him translating and they could use a thumbprint to give consent – a popular way of signing official documents. The lack of signed parental consent forms frustrated me, because to my mind I had no parental consent or children's informed assent. Again, I was solution focused and not actively listening to Suresh.

I did however have consent to be in the school observing and on the playing field which I did. Apart from the last day where I observed from afar, I spent my time observing in the playing field and talking to the teachers and management and Suresh. I soon learned the teachers, while interested in what I was doing and the book of children's drawing I suggested, were not interested in co-researching. They just wanted to be told what to do and what was expected. The school management again wanted to negotiate the parameters of the research – such as who the gatekeepers were, how I should interact with the parents and local community, and how they should be represented – but apart from that they were also not interested in co-researching and were very much happier to leave it up to me to decide what to do.

Negotiating Ethical Dilemmas:

The concepts of consent, personhood, capacity, and gatekeepers cropped up constantly in conversations with Suresh and Poonam, Pranay, and Mr Singh. They also came up with the long-term volunteers as they worked alongside me in emptying and painting the school building and when they invited me for dinner. In fact, the minority world volunteers, and Suresh were both a major force in my coming to understand the clashes of culture and ethics I was negotiating.

Suresh could not understand why I would be named and not name the children, teachers, or School if they wished to be named. The database of children's details was shown to me by one of the volunteers and the highlighted gaps for the date of birth of some children really stood out and confused me. The volunteer, noting my facial expression, said: *"They don't know their date of birth, Sinéad."* I spoke further with Suresh about this:

"I've had two children. I could not forget what time or date they were born."

Silence

"You forget they are illiterate."

"No, I don't forget."

"You do, Sinéad.

You seem to think they have a concept of time that you and I have, of months or days of the week. They understand seasons – Rainy season, Hot season. Not June, July…"

Silence

"Shit, I'm sorry. I…shit…. you're right. I did make that assumption. Sorry".

That is when I came to understand that without a birth certificate, passport, or identification card, the only place at the current moment in time that can verify that the children exist would be my thesis. I understood that the possibility exists for them to apply for documentation in the future, but for now, any record of them existing, outside of the school, will be in my thesis. Reflecting on post-colonial writings, who am I to deny or grant them the right to co-ownership of the research process they engage with. That is when we decided to change it to allow all participants the opportunity to be named or choose a pseudonym in the thesis and all future publications. The school management wanted the school to be named for recognition of the work that they do.

In terms of Gatekeepers, the school argued that some of the parents would be underage themselves, most would not understand my official paperwork and would perhaps think I was brought in by the school to evaluate them and their parenting. With such tentative relationships being formed with new children and families to the school it was more important that we did not spook them and cause them to withdraw their child from the school. Navigating an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) and an ethic of justice (Mortari & Harcourt, 2012), I used my ethical radar (Skånfors, 2009) and decided to carry on with the school as gatekeepers for the classes, while they chose the parents of the children I would focus on – those would be the parents I would get signed consent from.

When I returned home and discussed with my main supervisor the concerns and negotiations, my supervisor said to me, *"At the end of the day Sinéad, you are conducting your research in a Western University, with a Western Ethics Committee, for publication to a Western audience"* and I was; this proved to be the biggest stumbling block in my research, and later on my biggest eye opener.

Solutions:

An old professor helped me to figure out how to get the University Ethics Committee to agree to the school as gatekeepers and the identification of children:

> *"So, tell me Sinéad, what framework are you using?"*
>
> *"Socio-historical and Post-Colonial[22]"*
>
> *"And what ethical guidelines are you using?"*
>
> *"BERA"*
>
> *"And BERA stands for what again?"*
>
> *"British Educa…ah crap!"*
>
> *"Hmmm, indeed. Might there be another ethical framework you could use to validate children's personhood?"*
>
> *"The UNCRC[23] was ratified by India?"*
>
> *"Well, there you go now, problem solved. Drink your coffee!"*

[22] I could never decide whether I was keeping Bronfenbrenner in or not.

[23] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Along Came Spivak

I sit in a comfortable silence with Séan. We are both working on our research projects in the hot desk room for PhD students and associate staff on the third floor of the School of Education Building. He is writing; I am reading. The tapping of the keys on his laptop sound like little heartbeats, sometimes quickening, but mostly keeping a regular rhythmic pace.

It's soothing.

It's the sound of productivity.

We are in our third year now. We should be finished next year.

Our desks look out over the glass wall that serves as a window to the campus below. I sigh as I stop reading, confused. I look at the green trees swaying in the breeze and I think. I look back down at the paper I'm reading.

'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

I don't know why, but I grow increasingly irritated and confused. Something is niggling at my gut. I read on. The hot sun is beaming in through the windows. I start to get hot and bothered. I'm so fed up. Why use such extravagant, confusing language? I don't like the writer's style. It is convoluted. It's irritating. It's confusing…

…oh my god, it's right!

I sit bolt upright. I feel like I'm going to be sick. Séan is still tapping away at his keyboard. I throw the paper away from me and groan aloud.

"What's wrong Sinéad?"

"Nothing"

Silence

"Séan, can I ask you something?"

"Of course,"

"If my name was Pooja SonKamble, and I was doing my PhD in a third level college in Bangalore, would my research and it's results be taken seriously in the West?"

Séan pauses, and considers in a measured way, like only Séan can.

"I don't think so, no. Well, it depends…"

"So, if I were an Indian researcher, assessing play and early learning and pushing back against Western research, theories, methods, and practices I would be taken just as seriously in the West as Sinéad Matson, PhD student, and Hume Scholarship recipient of Maynooth University, in Europe?"

….

"Probably not, no."

Séan looks at me.

I look at him.

I groan.

Inwardly, I panic.

How could I not see this? I'm so stupid. How could I not see that my privilege stacked the odds in my favour? Of course, my privilege. My privilege blinded me. As much as I tried to mitigate it and navigate it, there was an obvious blind spot. I throw my things in my bag and I head home.

What now?

Part Three

My body knew.

My body knew before I knew that I needed a break. A pause. A step back. Time to reflect.

It sent out signals. It started with sore neck and shoulders. Then stiffness, followed by piercing pain. I was sent for an MRI on my neck.

Nothing.

Then the pain creeped from my shoulders and neck to my head. Persistent headaches gave way to intermittent migraines. Intermittent migraines gave way to persistent, debilitating migraines. I was sent for another MRI. There were whispers of the possibility of regrowth of the tumour or possibly a new one. The scanxiety[24] was very real. I was out sick. Most of the time I spent in bed, drained of energy, unable to move, to read, to work. I spent a lot of time thinking and reflecting.

Diagnosis: *No new or recurrent brain tumours*! Relief! They were focal epilepsy seizures not migraines at all.

Treatment*: Rest. Listen to your body! Take the next academic year off. No stress!* So, I took the year off, feeling like a failure. I watched my friends and co-conspirators graduate with pride, and a touch of jealousy. How was I going to explain this pause in my research when I write it up? Yes, the data was collected but it would lie idle for a whole year. Was that even ethical? Yet, as I spoke to my head of department, supervisors, and colleagues - as I handed over my student I.D. to administrative staff – I felt a sense of peace in my body.

I have always been a strong believer in my gut instinct. So, I followed my gut. I listened to my body. I paused. I reflected. I visited the school as a visitor with some friends. I observed. I paused and I reflected.

I breathed for the first time since Spivak interrupted me and caused my body to tense. I breathed and new possibilities started to emerge. I breathed and opened myself up to the learning of the pause.

I breathed.

My body simply knew.

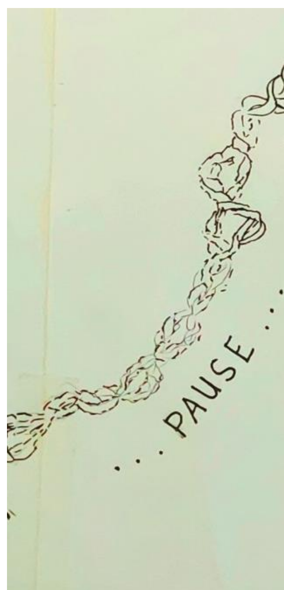
So, I paused.

I breathed.

And my body knew why.

[24] Scanxiety is a term used by people that have had tumours to explain the phenomenon of the anxiety you feel before and during a scan to check for other tumours.

Voices, pauses, and breath.



Todd discusses the possibilities the breath offers education and educational research (2013; 2018) "as a creative life force… connected to: (1) its embodied specificity; (2) its momentary nature in the present; (3) and its intersubjectivity" (2013, p.1). In 2018, she develops this to "creating practices that are life enhancing…As a method, it views breathing as both metaphor and something more literal, something more embodied; it takes breathing, in other words, as a literal inhalation and exhalation of air flowing through a body that it at once singular (it is a body who breathes) and relational (through the air we share)." I would like to extend Todd's thinking into the yogic breath, or the act of becoming aware of the breathing process: pranayama, and more specifically the pauses between inhalation and exhalation. Pranayama is a Sanskrit word made up of two concepts or principles, *prana* which means breath or life force, and *ayama* which means extending, stretching, and controlling.

If we take educational research to be the body that moves, stretches, and bends – it can resist when it first encounters a new pose, twist, or turn. It is the pranayama – the breath - that is harnessed to breathe life into the muscles. Intentional inhalation focuses the breath and directs it to the site of resistance. Bringing the breath – the life force - into research, both literally and metaphorically, can make it more pliable, less resistant to change, twists, and turns. Acknowledging research as an act carried out by bodies occupying the same space and breathing the same air (Todd, 2018) while acknowledging the tensions in the physical body and research process, honours the process, and accepts what the body and research can and cannot do in the present moment, with no judgement. The researcher's body and the research cannot be separated thus the pranayama offers much more than life force – it offers possibility to pause and extend. Exhalation of the breath relaxes the body and allows it to fold deeper into the stretch / pose. It gives the research, and the researcher's body, the chance to release tension it may be holding. Breathing life and air into the body and research allows it to contort, twist, or bend a little further in new ways that were not thought possible.

Pranayama is not a matter of inhalation followed by exhalation. The inhalation is purposeful as the body feels the vibrations of the breath - the cold air - entering through the tip of the nose, down the back of the throat, into the chest cavity before filling the lower stomach. Then it pauses. A stillness settles over the body. The stomach falls pushing out the warm air back through the chest, top of the throat, and rushes out through the nostrils – the heat hitting the upper lip. Then the body is still again. A pause. Followed by the cold, refreshing intake of a new breath. It is in these pauses, when the body is still, that the potential is held. The potential for the body and the research to fold over, twist a little more deeply,

or to say "no, not today" and resist the movement the body wishes to make. The body acknowledges the pauses just as it acknowledges the breath. The inhalation and exhalation - that is the pranayama - cannot function correctly without the pause, thus the research cannot function correctly without the pause. The pause is imperceptible in everyday life because we tend to shallow breathe. We are not aware of its purpose and importance until our attention is drawn to the pause and its function. Then it is almost impossible to forget. Try inhaling and exhaling fully without a pause … after a while you will feel light headed and dizzy ... it is impossible to keep up … the body needs the pause, and so to does the research process.

"I experienced deep pauses that held the corpus of the work at bay. In the constant march of time as understood through Western colonizing frameworks, this is bad. Those pauses meant missing deadlines, and that may have meant that someone elsewhere was writing while I was not. Also bad. But pausing is useful, even necessary, particularly in these modern times in which colonial projects have shaped technology, knowledge, and connection to be a veritable nonstop stimulation of tweets, status updates, and deadlines, all competing for our attention. And, in turn, we compete for each other's attention (Lanham, 2007). Pausing, though, can be a productive interruption to these ways of being, doing, and knowing, and they hold potential learning within them (Shahjahan, 2014)."

Leigh Patel, *Decolonizing Educational Research*, 2016,

"I can't breathe, man.

Please.

I can't breathe.

Please, the knee in my neck –

I can't breathe.

I can't move.

Mama –

Mama –

I can't.

I cannot breathe.

I cannot breathe."[25]

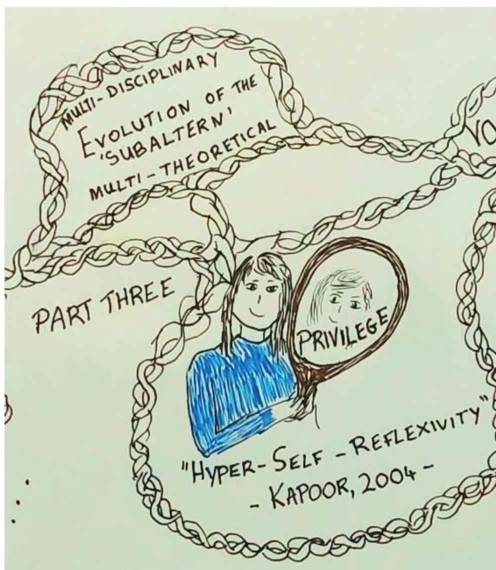
[2525] Transcript from the New York Times video of George Floyd's arrest and murder by three white policemen in Minneapolis, in the United States, on May 25th, 2020. George Floyd was a Black man.

George Floyd, R.I.P.

May 25th 2020[26]

Pausing, breathing, and reflecting are a privilege. A privilege I had access to, and I was able to utilise. I paused because the system was set up to allow me to pause. I paused, rested, and breathed when others were not afforded this luxury, and I acknowledge that.

Realisation – The Unmasking of Privilege



In this section, I discuss Spivak's controversial 1988 presentation and subsequent paper: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* I use her paper and my initial encounter with it, to pull at threads…looking at how it changed the course of my research and my thinking, and why. I explore her evolving thought process through subsequent years, and the response of other academics from some of the various disciplines it spoke to. Following on from that I think with various intersectional feminist, anti-racist, and critical race literature to undo and pull out the micro threads of my identity, positions of power in the research process, and all the privileges that go with it. I finish with a brief examination of the notions of voice, power and partnership that will help me productively and lovingly undo my partnership with the interpreter and the children in the research process.

Tracing the Evolution of Spivak's Subaltern

When Spivak wrote about the subaltern, she had the colonised (Indian) female in mind. At first writing, subalternity was about gender, not about caste or class. She wrote about the concept of "white men saving brown woman from brown men" (Spivak, 1988; 1999; 2012) which unpacked the gendered

[26]https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html

subaltern, the *woman*, trapped, suffocated, and unable to speak between British colonisers who wanted to create a *good*, *enlightened* India and the voices of elite, local Hindu, bourgeois men, who spoke of wifely fidelity, purity, customs, and religious freedom. Elite, Indian men who had the ability to speak with the Empire when discussing the practice of *sati* leaving the woman, herself, unable to enter the conversation thus, Spivak posited, unable to speak. By virtue of their very ability of being able to enter the conversation with British colonisers, the Indian elite were deemed not to be of subaltern status because they were conversation partners and co-collaborators with British forces, thus not at the fringes or marginalised according to Spivak (Bryson, 2016). Two examples were used by Spivak to demonstrate her argument: (1) The controversial outlawing of the Hindu practice of *sati* by British Colonisers in 1829. *Sati* is also known as *widow sacrifice* and involved the practice of a widow lighting herself on fire on top of a pyre consuming her departed husband's body. (2) The suicide by hanging of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, a freedom fighter with the nationalist resistance, in 1926.

The outlawing of the practice of widow sacrifice or *sati* was controversial for two reasons, the first being the fact that it was largely unnecessary because it had already been outlawed and outdated in most parts of India by local laws, except Bengal (which is where Spivak originated from) but it was a largely outdated practice. Thus, an argument has been made that if the Empire wanted to *civilise* and *enlighten* the Indian nation – why not outlaw the caste system which was very prominent at the time rather than a mostly outdated regional religious practice (Green, 2011)? However, as was pointed out in the literature section in part one of this thesis, the caste system was weaponised by the Empire (and those before it) to divide and conquer such a vast amount of people across such a large land mass (Deshpande, 2010; Metcalf and Metcalf, 2012; Tharoor, 2017). If they had chosen to dismantle the caste system it is most likely they would have lost their Indian elite allies, the Brahmins, and thus control of India herself. The second, was that the outlawing of the practice by British colonisers actually caused an upsurge in the practice. There are various reasons why the outlawing of *sati* caused an upsurge: it was considered an act of rebellion against the British (Christian) colonisers and their ability to tell devout Hindu people what to do; it also represented an act of resistance against the Empire. However, *sati* was also encouraged by male relatives of the widow - in the name of *purity and sacrifice* but was actually motivated by inheritance of land, titles, goods, or anything deemed worthy, which under Bengali law could belong to the widow. Either way, the practice of *sati* increased with the outlawing of it by so called *enlightened* colonisers. The subaltern, the widow, who was stuck between both groups of men - representing oppressing powers of colonisation, patriarchy, and capitalism - was voiceless according to Spivak.

It is argued that Spivak's reading, and understanding, of the subaltern (taken from Gramsci's notebooks) was not a close reading of what Gramsci was trying to articulate and was in fact closer to Guha's interpretation of Gramsci's 'subaltern' (Zene, 2011). Green argues that Gramsci developed the concept of subaltern over many years, initially referring to a literal group of non-commissioned military troops

who were subordinate to the authority of higher commanding officers (2011, p68) but then figuratively as positions of lower status or subordination in a non-military sense (ibid). He also argued that Gramsci believed the subaltern no longer held subaltern status when they rise up and rebel against the ruling classes and have secured permanent victory - thereby no longer subject to the rule of the ruling group / class (Green, 2011). Spivak argued that the subaltern no longer exists when they can speak, that is when they are organised and can represent themselves and become an active part of the hegemonic state (ibid; Spivak, 1999). She argued that Gramsci looked at the subaltern merely from a capitalist point of view.

> *"For Gramsci, the development of a new state based on egalitarian social relations can be achieved through a broad alliance of subaltern social groups, who have the capacity to win the struggle for hegemony. Because subaltern groups exist in varying degrees of political organisation, more organised groups have to become intellectual and moral leaders and attempt to create a subaltern class alliance that would be capable of presenting a new set of cultural values, social relations, and a new conception of the state. Therefore, prior to creating a new state, subaltern groups first have to become a counterhegemonic force capable of challenging dominant cultural values and winning control over civil society."* (Green, 2011, p.86)

This passage from Green makes me think of Spivak's later thinking and concept of *essentialism* (Spivak, 1999) where a temporary alliance of solidarity is agreed in order to act as one in achieving a goal. This reminds me of the two biggest cultural reforming referenda that Ireland has had in the last decade – nearly one hundred years since it achieved independence from the same British Empire - the Marriage Equality Referendum and the Referendum to Repeal the 8th Amendment to Ireland's constitution which outlawed abortion. Both referenda came in 2015 and 2018 respectively, and were largely successful due to the notable alliance between traditionally marginalised groups in Irish society: the LGBTQI+ community, the feminist movement, and (particularly in the Repeal the 8th Referendum) the Disability community. The 2018 coalition called *Together for Yes* had its roots firmly in the *Yes Equality* campaign from 2015. All three groups, which traditionally would have been classed as subaltern, marginal, and sometimes vulnerable individually, came together to create an alliance that had a powerful effect on the societal and cultural values of Ireland which in turn caused a huge cultural shift and changed the hegemonic nature of the State (Griffin, O'Connor, Smyth, & O'Connor, 2019; Field, 2018; Elkink, Farrell, Reidy, & Suiter, 2017). This, in my consideration, is an example of what Gramsci meant in the above passage, and of Spivak's concept of *essentialism*.

It is noticeable that Spivak revised her arguments and refined her thinking and understanding of the term *subaltern* and the postcolonial movement over the last two decades, based on her interactions with other scholars from other disciplines and those from within the post-colonial discipline whom she critiques. She first introduces the idea of oppression as she analyses Deleuze's argument that the theorist does not represent or speak for an oppressed group on page 70 of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She goes on to describe how Marx identified a "divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other" going further to describe a "dispersed and dislocated class" (1988, p.71) and

that the addition of 'women' to the hegemonic patriarchal system will not allow them to speak for themselves (ibid). However, she did come to recognise the rural Dalit caste members as the true subalterns of the Republic of India (Spivak, 2012) and went on to write:

> *"In the subsequent years the gendered subaltern, for me, kept moving down the social strata. Class is not the exact word here because we are speaking of an area beside capital logic. Relative autonomy does not apply here, first because autonomy is a marked concept. Secondly, because, in the commonplace agential sense, there is minimal agential autonomy in engendered subalternity…the downward trajectory came to relate to home working, permanent casuals, more orthodox doubts of the Marxist analysis of the female labouring body as the agent of production."* (2012, p. 437-438).

Thus, we can see her thinking and identification of the subaltern became more nuanced. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak is scathing of Deleuze and Foucault for their refusal to acknowledge, that which she also accuses Said of in his admiration of Foucault –the part they play as academics in the academy; in other words, "the critic's responsibility" (ibid, p.75). In 2012, Spivak noted that she understood now that the Subaltern Studies collective were looking at the subaltern in terms of colonialism, nationalism, and Marxist historiography and accused them of being "gender blind" (p.434). She critiques their work as being performative in looking to extend what counted as history (ibid) and argues that it was only through her interdisciplinary work that this (performance) could be seen. Spivak often positions herself again and again in her work for clarity and transparency for the reader. She acknowledges that she as a postcolonial cannot speak on behalf of all post-colonials but by the very nature of her work she does. However, she is very transparent in her positioning and rejects the fact that she is speaking *for* the subaltern. She instead outlines how her position may contaminate the discussion or outlook. "Acknowledging one's contamination, for Spivak, helps temper and contextualise one's claims, reduces the risk of personal arrogance or geoinstitutional imperialism, and moves one toward a non-hierarchical encounter with the Third World/subaltern." (Kapoor, 2004, p.641).

However, the women Spivak originally wrote about were not the Dalit or peasant women. The women Spivak wrote about were potential land-owners (thus indicating a higher status) and Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri was a woman from a high caste family. I find this interesting because she frequently says she writes from what she knows in the absence of what she argues is any formal disciplinary training or research of this particular field (1988; 1999; 2012). In 2012, while critiquing her own work, she describes the scheduled castes, whom she terms as outcastes as "the official subalterns of the Republic of India" (p. 67). However, I would argue that Spivak hints at a collective, inherited trauma of colonisation in Indian people and thus perhaps an unspoken presence of a national subalternity when she writes: "If we think of the postcolonial, figuratively, as the living child of a rape…" (ibid). There is something very raw, and traumatic about this idea of being the child who was conceived through the rape of its parent. One small sentence encompasses so much: the violence, trauma, and powerlessness of being raped, the child borne of a violent, power dominant, hate act, and the inherited biological and psychological identity that child carries with them; and it is all the more powerful when the sentence is

put in context of the story of *The Hunt*, written by Mahasweta Devi and translated by Spivak. The main protagonist is called Mary Oraon who was the child of an Indian indigenous tribal woman (a Dalit caste member) who was raped by a white planter before he left for Australia – thereby making Mary "not a "true" tribal" (Spivak, 2012, p.62). In the telling, Spivak describes how Mary was increasingly being sexually harassed by a revenue collector under the British raj. However, she took control of the situation by arranging to meet him on a day when her tribe held a festival where tribal women hunted the tribal men, once every twelve years. Growing intoxicated on alcohol he brought for her, she lay him down and murdered him with a machete. The act is described as an act of power and rape by Spivak as Mary plunges the phallic shaped weapon into him again and again (ibid). Mary, the child of rape, was empowered by using her sexual, feminine body as bait combined with her tribal, indigenous knowledge to become the powerful perpetrator, not the victim. There is much to think about here in terms of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), the reclaiming of power, and perhaps a (perceived?) identity that I am still unpacking in my thinking.

Using a sexualised feminine body in colonised India to attempt unsuccessfully to speak is something Spivak addresses in her second example: the suicide of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, who was described in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* as a family connection. Spivak revealed years later that she was actually her Grandmother's sister, thus her blood and kin (1999; 2012). Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri is described by as being a member of the national resistance movement who was given a task of assassination to carry out; however she could not fulfil her duty and she decided to commit suicide (Spivak, 2012). Due to her age, Bhubaneshwari knew her suicide would be thought of, and recorded as, an act of hysteria due to being a jilted lover or of carrying a child out of wedlock. Traditionally, women cannot commit sati when menstruating because they are considered to be unclean and have to wait up to four days post bleeding to commit suicide, and only then after a purification ritual (ibid). Bhubaneshwari used her sexual body to send a message that this suicide was an act of rebellion and not the result of a romantic tryst gone wrong, by deliberately waiting until she began to bleed menstrual blood before hanging herself (1988; 1999; 2012). Unfortunately, her act of resistance is not recorded in history because despite her speaking with her sexualised feminine body – her suicide was thought of as being the result of *not* having secured a husband (Spivak, 1988). Thus, she was silenced because of the hegemonic, patriarchal idea of when a woman is supposed to be married and the hysteria attributed to a woman who does not achieve this ideal. The act of resistance - both the suicide and the waiting for the shedding of her womb lining - was silenced by patriarchy.

Spivak reflected on this example over the years and in 2012 she wrote that the story of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri was not the story of a subaltern so to speak but the story of a woman's act of resistance being revised and appropriated by the men and women who did not acknowledge her role in the national resistance movement. What angered her (Spivak) most and, she noted, caused her to include Bhaduri's story in the 1988 paper was her female relatives' reluctance to admit that Bhaduri's death was anything

other than an unfortunate suicide by hysteria caused by the rejection of a man (Spivak, 2012). Perhaps Spivak felt betrayed by family and by sisterhood? Perhaps it frustrated her because if her own family were not going to listen to Bhaduri's act of speech with her body then how could she expect the hegemonic patriarchal system to recognise it? Thus, her grandmother's sister's act of resistance and ultimate sacrifice will never be recorded in the history of India's resistance and thus her message will never be heard. Did Spivak attempt to record her history and is this why she initially distanced herself from the historical act of resistance? Was it Spivak's act of resistance as a postcolonial? Did she, like Mary Oraon, attempt to take back the power belonging to her historical memory?

Dipesh Chakrabarty defined the subaltern as "the figure of the difference that governmentality all over the world has to subjugate and civilize"" (Spivak, 2012, p. 429) however to Chakrabarty, Spivak counters "Subaltern is to popular as gender is to sex, class to poverty, state to nation….The reasonable and rarefied definition of the word "subaltern" that interests me is: to be removed from all lines of social mobility…Subalternity cannot be generalised according to hegemonic logic. That is what makes it subaltern. Yet it is a category and therefore repeatable." (ibid) She also argues the Guha's earlier writings indicated that subaltern was indistinguishable from *people,* but she would describe the subaltern "as a position without identity" (Spivak, 2012, p.431). In 1999, Spivak, in discussing the idea of multiplicity, described how all Indian women were not subaltern in a change to her 1988 paper. She argued that the urban woman could be politically active and resist the Empire or patriarchy and because of this are not subaltern because of their agency and ability to engage. She acknowledged that the widow of whom she initially wrote, an upper class / caste widow who could own land or commit the act of suicide belonged to this category, however landless female labourers in rural villages who don't have any contact with the Empire and imperialism and who had no knowledge of Indian heritage of history – which she called "historical memory" (Spivak, 1999, p.242) and who accepted their lives as normal were in fact the rural subaltern:

> *"Development studies of Indian women tell us that this group of women, unorganised landless female labour, is one of the targets of super-exploitation where local, national, and international capital intersect…By that route of super-exploitation these women are brought into capital logic, into the possibility of crisis and resistance and, paradoxically, the questioning becomes easier. This much is true. They are not part of any unified "third world women's resistance", an idea based on capital logic."*

We can see from the earlier discussion that Spivak herself perhaps carries this historical memory in her translation of 'The Hunt', her equation of lost language to a lost cultural base, her constant positioning for herself in her writing, her recognition of internal colonialism (2012), and her inclusion of Bhaduri's story in her 1988 paper. In 2012, she describes subalternity as "a position without identity but where the social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action. Both Gramsci and Guha imply this, of course. But I came to it through Marx" (p.431).

Spivak critiques the Subaltern Studies group and the Post-colonialists (of which she is? / was? one) in all of her works, but none so much as her 1999 book: *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason; Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Spivak warned readers to consider who is using postcolonial theory, in what ways, and for what reasons or intentions? She again warns the postcolonial academic of recognising the potential of one's own identity as a contaminator, the need for reflection, and recognition of internalised colonialism. She reminds the Indian elite academic that they cannot invoke the voice of the subaltern or speak on their behalf. She notes, she herself is part of the problem in this regard (Spivak, 2012). She raises concerns about why other academics would be interesting in researching the subaltern and cautions about the ethical responsibility of the academy to use the Other for their own gain and gaze. She admonishes ethnocentric researchers for fetishizing the Other or the subaltern for material, or academic gain. This is an epistemological violence in her eyes, a re-colonisation of the subaltern. She also advocates that researchers should unlearn their privileges, reflect on their prejudices and biases, and learn from below (Kapoor, 2004). This is what Kapoor calls hyper-self-reflexivity (ibid). Spivak holds academics and theorists to a high standard of responsibility in researching the subaltern and with the subaltern, particularly the Subaltern Studies or Post-Colonial theorists. She calls on them to recognise their responsibility and acknowledge themselves as part of the problem. By doing so they are acknowledging the contamination which for Spivak, "helps temper and contextualise one's claims, reduces the risk of personal arrogance or geoinstitutional imperialism, and moves one toward a non-hierarchical encounter with the Third World/subaltern." (Kapoor, 2004, p.641)

Being Part of the Problem

When I encountered '*Can the Subaltern Speak*' I encountered a mirror. An old distorted, unpolished mirror. I could not quite make out what I was seeing clearly but I knew instinctively it was my reflection. What I recognised, as I began to polish the mirror were two inherent, and up to then, unrecognised racist acts by me as a researcher. The first was White Saviour Complex, that is, to paraphrase Spivak, *the white woman saving the brown teachers from the white charities / volunteers / INGO's/ The Academy.* By researching play and early learning and looking at how play and early learning looked in relation to its cultural context as opposed to how Minority volunteers saw it, I was ultimately making a judgement call, assessment, or value statement about the types of play and early learning happening in the school that I had perceived or theorised that the volunteers did not comprehend because of their lack of knowledge or awareness of the culture in which the school and its children were situated. This value judgement could have validated their practice in the Minority world academy by virtue of who and what I am. Who gave me, the white Minority world researcher the authority to do that? The school, and its teachers did not need me to validate their practice, to effectively attempt to *save* them. This creates a

double bind (Spivak, 2012) – by trying to validate or save them, I potentially rob them of their power, their agency, and ultimately their voice*…begins to pull a thread…*

As bad as that first realisation was, the second, was in many ways worse. I realised quite quickly that I disagreed with Spivak's earlier position and agreed with her later position – the subaltern could speak – the problem was the academy would not listen. The academy would defer to a Minority world academic's research, passed by a Minority world ethics committee, supervised by a Minority world academic, in a Minority world – European university, written in the academy's accepted language and format. The academic became the enlightened coloniser and the Minority world academy became the centre. The subaltern could speak, and the subaltern could be heard, if I, the 'enlightened academic' stopped talking for them. Kapoor confirms this as he discusses Spivak's misgivings with knowledge production in academic culture particularly when researching the Majority world when he states, "Western intellectual production mirrors, and is in many ways complicit with, Western imperialism" (2004, p.633). Maggio also argued that it was not that the subaltern cannot speak but that the subaltern cannot be heard in a 2007 paper *"Can the Subaltern Be Heard?": Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.*

However, it is argued that the academy is part of the problem and part of the solution (p.420) which leads to questions about the role of the academy and the academic who is interested in learning about, and observing, the subaltern. Maggio posits that in order to open up communication, the academic must first learn to listen and understand through different formats: "I advocate a reading of culture (s) based on the assumption that all actions, to a certain extent, offer a communicative role." (ibid, p.421). This, it is argued, would lead to an open-ended understanding across cultures of communication and discourses which de-centre the Minority world (Maggio, 2007). This strikes me as a double bind – doesn't the culture you live in, and grow up in, inform how you see the world and thus 'interpret actions' in other cultures? Would you be de-centring your own culture in order to do this, which in turn centres your culture because of its very absence, or the denial of its impact? *…rips the thread…* Is that ultimately an epistemological question? In fact, in 2012 Spivak when writing about translation, wrote "No speech is a speech if it is not heard. It is the act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate." (p.252-253). This would lead me to believe that Spivak believes to speak is not just an utterance but a speech act. That is to speak – be heard – be responded to – and to speak again. Could this be done without words? If Maggio is suggesting that we de-centre the importance of spoken language and look to bodily language and cultural language, is there still the capacity for the speech act to occur? My first instinct is no, and yet, when I sit with this concept, I am left reflecting over my ten years of observing and being in Emmanuel Public School. I often interject in conversations because I understand what is happening despite not understanding the fast-paced Hindi or Marathi that is being spoken. However, I have always put that down to the fact that I am partially deaf and rely on body language and facial expressions to support what I hear. On the other hand, I have become accustomed

to the people and cultural situations over the last decade and I have learned to communicate effectively, so perhaps my lived reality is not as far removed from Maggio's thesis as my initial reaction to it? However, it is a trans-languaging speech act that occurs in my example.

Kapoor suggests that Spivak was in fact an advocate of learning the language of the subaltern and thus able to engage in a conversation where the subaltern can name and identify themselves in a non-exploitative way. "Spivak sometimes likens this process to reading a novel: when we read, we put ourselves in the protagonist's shoes, suspend belief, and let ourselves be surprised by the twists and turns of the plot. In fact, while maintaining that empirical/field work is important, Spivak recommends literature as a way of remembering again how to imagine" (2004, p.642). Again, I am reminded of Spivak's call to unlearn what we have learned to de-centre what we know and also to learn from below. It is a call to de-centre ourselves from the narrative and centre the subaltern. If we de-centre ourselves and what we know, then there is no margin in which the subaltern can reside, just space. If we centre their stories, histories, and voices and accept them for what they are without looking for a 'truth' that we can identify with or are comfortable with, perhaps it may be that the subaltern can speak, be heard, and thus no longer remain subaltern.

The subaltern as child caught between two adults:

It is interesting to me that in explaining the position of the subaltern, Maggio uses the metaphor of the child caught between two divorcing parents (2007, p. 425) – but then goes on to note that the actions of the subaltern are always framed by Spivak as an act of resistance. A petulant child? A strong-willed child? Although it is a powerful and concrete example, I wish Maggio would have explained his use of the metaphor of the child and divorcing parents with more depth and nuance. Why use the example of a child? Is it because of the power structures, or because the child is an easily recognisable subaltern in the Minority world as having no agency and voice yet always resisting? Is the assumption that the divorcing parents are looking out for their own individual interests and not those of the child? There is so much more to this example that I wish to unpack and discuss with the author.

If Spivak considered the gendered female Dalit to be the subaltern, I would, on consideration, consider the gendered female child of Dalit caste membership to be the true subaltern. I would further argue that the most silenced of all is the disabled subaltern female child. Across generations we have had movements for the rights of minorities to be heard – feminist movements – indigenous movements – black movements – disability movements – class movements and only recently children's movements. Except that children's movements are in fact adult led: Children Studies or Children Rights, but no children's movement from the ground up (that is from children). Children cannot engage in political systems – they cannot vote*...pulls thread...* Adults control the narrative even when they **grant** children voice or rights. The intersection of the indigenous, dalit, female, who is disabled, is the voice least likely

to be heard and the person least likely to be asked to speak. I would argue this is why Maggio used the example of the silent child caught between two warring adults. However, scholars such as Clark and Moss, and Lori Malaguzzi, advocate for children's voice and rights in research using arts based, multi-modal forms of communication. They argue that very young children can speak using many forms of communication – one hundred languages (Malaguzzi, 1981) - to create a mosaic of their world (Clark & Moss, 2006). A new-born can communicate, it can speak, it just does not use words. In this respect, Maggio is validated in his theory of reading and learning cultural actions, and Spivak in learning the subaltern's language and learning from below. However, I still, as a Minority world researcher - as part of the problem and as part of the solution - need to unthread the tapestry and unravel each thread to see all the stories I tell. In doing so, I hope to unlearn what I know, and recognise my whiteness, my privilege, and my biases. I productively and lovingly undo this below.

Appropriation:

I am nervous as I enter and navigate the world of Black, indigenous, Minority scholarship in unpacking privilege as a white woman. A lot of what is said resonates with me, particularly Black feminist scholarship. I worry about appropriation. This thin line that I walk, it feels thinner and thinner each time I think of something else. Another word for appropriation is colonisation. This exactly what I aim to avoid. And yet by saying this I am centring myself, something I aim to actively avoid. I want to speak to something that speaks to me, but I have to careful in how I frame my thoughts and words. Particularly my words. Words have so much power and can be weaponised, colonised, or colonising. And yet, the last few lines centre me again. I have no idea how to do this. But I am willing to try – I have no choice. I spoke about these worries to my friend Séan Henry in a WhatsApp message, to which he replied:

"I know, it's really difficult thinking about how to navigate things. I guess it requires us really thinking about what appropriation means. I think appropriation is different from working with, extending, critiquing, or reimagining someone's ideas. I'll have to think about that more, but don't let that risk paralyse you – we honour black scholarship by engaging with and citing it!!" 5th June 2020.

I think there is something to be said about privilege here.

Privilege is having the choice to be to be silent or to speak.

Polishing the Mirror – Attempting hyper-self-reflexivity

As I write this, I am mindful of the role that education has played and continues to play in colonisation, in maintaining systems and structures that are racist, classist, patriarchal, ableist, neurotypical, and heteronormative that reproduce societal narratives and cultural scripts. I am also cognisant that educational research can either reproduce or actively counter that role, and this is an educational research project. Education is a relational, communicative, and social discipline. I would argue that communication, relationships, and dialogue based on equality are fundamental to successful educational experiences and encounters. Margonis makes the argument that both Dewey and Freire recognise education as a social event rather than the handing down of truths and knowledge to passive, unknowing, participants (2012, p7). Biesta (2014) describes education as being concerned with "the transformation of what is *de facto* desired into what can *justifiably* be desired" (emphasis is author's own) which "requires engagement with what or who is other" and is therefore "a dialogical process" (ibid, p3). With this in mind, dialogue, communication, and speech acts are central to this research project, including communicating and dialogue with the self: inner dialogue. In teacher education programmes, we call this critical reflection, and we use it to enhance and evolve our teaching practice. Kapoor urges that as researchers we should use *hyper-self-reflexivity* (2004) to avoid the pitfalls of our constructions or understandings being linked to our positionality and the language we use to shape or address what we encounter, thereby de-centring our roles, and avoiding an us/them binary creating an 'Other' by default. Yancy calls it *white self-interrogation* and describes it as, "a form of *striving*, etymologically, "to quarrel [*straiten*]" which means that one is committed to a life of danger and contestation, one which refuses to make peace with taken for granted "legitimating" white norms and practices that actually perpetuate racial injustice" (2015, p.xii).

I am very cognisant of the risk of naval gazing, the centring of me and my experience at the expense of those I research with, and of doing so while thinking with Black, Feminist, and Anti-Racist scholarship. I also am aware of the arguments against a data set of one in research. There can be no generalisability, no triangulation, and no repetition. This is an argument often levelled against qualitative and autoethnography in particular. McIntosh argues for the power of the autobiographical testimony in the following piece, and uses the lens of privilege to do so:

> *"I think the social sciences in the course of their development have been over-eager to generalize; the sample of one is mistrusted in social science as being merely anecdotal. But it is precisely the sample of one—in singular, autobiographical testimony—that gave my original 1988 work on privilege its power. In that paper I urged others to make their own lists of unearned advantages with regard to race, gender or sexuality—the three factors of privilege that that paper centred on. I think that as time goes on, the social sciences will have more respect for the sample of one, more respect for personal testimony, and more respect for narrative.*

> *The teachers' or scholars' impulse to generalize and to "get on top of the subject" demonstrates an academic habit that comes from privilege—using the protection of the academy's or the school's authority to state more than one can actually know…I think we need to be more self-reflective about our own histories, positionalities, experiences, and questions, as bodies in the body of the social world, and write as though we were thinkers with personal and institutional locations of our own."* (McIntosh, 2012, p.203)

McIntosh empowers me to productively undo my identity, my lived experiences, and my privileges and to untangle the uncomfortable truths, not in a condescending way, not in a white saviour way, but in a way that helps me think through where I am, and who I am. Her thinking helps me to understand that I am shaped by where I come from, and in untangling all the threads and seeing them from different perspectives, I hope I can reimagine how I could have conducted my doctoral research project in a way that was more ethical.

Uncomfortable Truths:

I start my reflection with an uncomfortable truth. I came to know the research site, Emmanuel Public School, through educational voluntourism. Voluntourism is a tourism phenomenon whereby a volunteer travels overseas to conduct charity work. It is recognised as a very contentious practice. This is especially so when it is conducted by predominantly white Minority world volunteers travelling to Majority world countries. Critiques include discourses surrounding the benefits of one party (the volunteer) over the Other (the local employees and community), cultural appropriation, colonial practices, 'poverty porn', and 'White Saviour Complex' (Crossley, 2012; Banki & Schonell, 2016; Jakubiak, 2016; Harng Luh Sin & Shirleen He, 2019; Bandyopadhyay, 2019). It has been documented that Minority world charities (including those who facilitate voluntourism) have caused some harm to the regions and projects they purport to help (Elnawawy, Lee, & Pohl, 2014). Although the school management have told me that they want visitors to the school and actively encourage me to bring groups of people over on such voluntourism trips, I find it increasingly uncomfortable when I reflect and undo the elements of our behaviour on my first trip with a charity; how we were conditioned to see the school, the culture, and country in deficit terms; how we thought we were there to "changes lives" and make a difference in *seven days*, and how we perpetuated stigma and Othering by our practices and our sharing of photographs and stories while there and when we got home. We were so ignorant (in the uneducated sense), we were so unbelievably privileged, and we had no idea how much we were perpetuating White Saviourism and Poverty Porn. We were *Saviour Barbies* (discussed below).

Confronting your privilege and unacknowledged biases is a painful but necessary process. For the past year, I went over and over in my mind how I had missed my privilege, my blind spot, when I was researching when I thought I was being so careful in my designs and reflections. I reflected and I unpacked. A voice in my head argued, "*but it is still a viable research project, if I just ignore the fact that it wasn't my place to research and assess play and early learning in the school. If I could just ignore the fact that my research project may be trusted / validated above that of a local, or indigenous*

researcher just because of my white 'Europeanness' and my attendance at a Minority world university, it would be fine. It has been done before! In all honesty, I could continue to carry on and analyse my data and I would have a perfectly neat, good, solid project on my hands." Except that it is not a good or solid project. It is an act of colonisation and white saviour complex, and I could not in all honesty, not unpack the project, the thought process, and the privilege. I could not unread Spivak. I think about a quote I read from Peggy McIntosh about how research would be inaccurate if it did not include an examination of privilege (2012). There was something to learn in this and it is my responsibility to learn it. I take further advise from McIntosh as she posits "I think we need to be more self-reflective about our own histories, positionalities, experiences, and questions, as bodies in the body of the social world, and write as though we were thinkers with personal and institutional locations of our own" (ibid). I will attempt to do this below.

Seeing Privilege:

Unpacking my privilege means walking a very fine line. That line straddles genuine unpacking, naval gazing, being condescending, and centring myself. It seems to me that it is a very delicate balance to get right and I will fall down and get it wrong at times. However, as bell hooks says, "by fully embracing all the markers that situate and locate me, I know who I am. Writing the truth of what we know is the essence of all great and good literature." (2015, p.21). If I wanted to know who I am I have to identify and embrace all the markers that situate and locate me.

I came to realise that like sexism, homophobia, ableism etc. racism is a spectrum, and I have to unpack where I am on that spectrum and look to where I want to be. This realisation really unsettled me. It started a conversation with myself about my identity and who I was. I was surprised how much of my national identity began to unravel and weave through my work and thinking. I needed help and consulted many books to try to unpack it all. I started with Tiffany Jewell's book *This Book is anti-Racist, 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action and do the Work.* One of the first tasks set is to list all the things that make you who you are. This is what I wrote:

I am:

- Cis female
- Straight
- Disabled
- white
- A Mother
- A Sister
- A Friend
- A Daughter

- A Wife
- A reader
- A first-generation University Student
- A first-generation PhD Candidate
- I grew up working class, but I am now considered middle class
- Chocolate lover
- Music lover
- Concert Goer
- Amateur Photographer
- Writer of Poetry
- A worrier
- A bit weird
- An (un?) conscious misogynist (didn't realise that until productively undoing my research project)
- A big fat nerd!
- A lapsed catholic (forgot about that one)
- An Irish woman

Some of the list surprised me: the order of the list surprised me. Some, I left out and added later. Something I left out which I have not added because by its very omission is a blind spot of privilege: I am a native English speaker. I want to unpack this a bit further down because during the course of the research and during the course of unpacking my identity and privilege, I began to understand that I carry some unconscious resentment and hurt about having lost my native language due to colonialism, and thus in the words of Spivak have lost my "cultural base, [I] no longer compute with it, it is not in [my] software" (2012, p.245). This occurred to me when Jewell described privilege as "the benefits you receive due to how close you are to the dominant culture" (2020, p. 20). Jewell describes the dominant culture as "white, upper middle class, cisgender, male, educated, athletic, neurotypical and / or able bodied" (2020, p.12). She discusses the use of English as part of the dominant culture. This makes sense when it is described as the language of business – the language of capitalism. This reminds me of Macaulay's *Minute on Education* discussed in part one, "We must at present do our best to form…a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (1835, p. 8). In order to read and appreciate English tastes, you have to be a fluent English speaker.

My Education:

Education was very important to my parents, and as such, to me and my brothers. Primary, second level school and third level university were always open to me because of policy decisions taken years

previously. Primary school education was free in the Republic of Ireland, Donogh O' Malley, Minister for Education, announced free secondary school in 1966 and fees for third level colleges and universities were abolished in 1995. However, they were also open to me because I was not needed to bring income into the home or stay at home to mind my siblings. They were open to me because the children who attended looked like me and lived near me. It was just expected that you would go to the local second level school. University was a possibility for me, not just because of free fees, but because the pictures on the brochures looked like me. It was a possibility for me because the students from the university who frequented the pub I worked in, looked like me. The lecturers looked like me. The school guidance counsellor assumed I would go. My parents assumed I would go. My friends were all going. It was 1998, it was free, and I got a place in the university (after I repeated the leaving certificate – again a privilege I was able to access) in my hometown so I did not have to travel. I could keep all my part time jobs. I did not need to look for accommodation or pay rent. Years later, as I worked as the manager of a preschool operated by a private Further Education college, I was encouraged to obtain a Master of Education Degree by my then boss, the owner. She believed in women lifting up women. I then won a scholarship I was encouraged to apply for by my supervisor which enabled me to enrol in a PhD programme. I had family who were willing to support me, look after my children, and a small stipend that I was able to use to research abroad. The system worked in my favour. The area I lived in worked in my favour. There were no odds stacked against me because of who I was or where I came from.

My Family:

My parents are married and own their own house. They were both brought up in inner city Dublin but made the deliberate choice to raise myself and my two brothers in the countryside in Kildare. My dad worked long hours as an electrician in the printing press of the largest national newspaper. My mam was a homemaker who would do all sorts of odd jobs on the side at night when my dad was home from work. She used to volunteer on all sorts of community boards and groups. She ran a youth group for at risk youth for years and she spent the last twenty years working as a professional childminder. I know they made a lot of sacrifices to give us the best life they possibly could. My extended family – both sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins were active in our lives, so we had, and still have, a huge support network. I recognise all the privileges of growing up in a home with two parents and an extended family and tight knit community in our lives. We were never hungry, or cold, or tired. Education, reading, and playing our part in the community was a huge focus in our family. We never experienced violence, deprivation, or trauma. I had an extremely privileged childhood.

I am now married thirteen years and my husband works in the area of pharmaceuticals. We have two children: a boy, Adam, who is ten years old and a girl, Ellie, who is five years old. We live in a university town, in a house we own. My husband's family are close, and we keep in frequent contact. My two brothers and their wives and children are also close by and keep in frequent contact. My children see their extended family regularly. We have a close support network of friends and family and my mam

minds my children while I go to college and work. Again, I recognise that my current family life is very privileged.

My Class:

I grew up in a working-class home to working class parents. Due to economic societal shifts such as the Celtic Tiger, sacrifice on behalf of my parents, and my education, more opportunities were opened up to me and I am now what is considered 'middle class'. It feels weird to acknowledge that and kind of shameful. I am not sure why it would feel shameful to move up in class, I guess I need to sit with those feelings and unpack them when I am ready to.

My Gender:

I subscribe to the school of thought that gender is a social construct. I am a cis-gendered female, which means that I identify with the gender ascribed to me at birth. I am the eldest, and only girl in my family, and I have only ever felt comfortable in the company of boys and men. I made friends with very few women, and grew up with a tribe of boys, as described in part one. I also worked for most of my adolescence and young adulthood in male dominated environments. It is funny, reflecting back, how I ended up in a female dominated profession.

When I was growing up, I was never made to feel like my gender was a problem. I was never made to feel that certain paths were cut off from me. I was always made to feel equal to the boys. In fact, my lasting memory of my childhood is a photograph of Mary Robinson, the first female president of Ireland, which was hung across from my bedroom door in a dark little hallway off the main entrance to the house. Every time I stepped out of my room, I was greeted with the sight of one woman, in a purple jacket, surrounded by a sea of mainly disapproving men as she signed the official paperwork. Whenever I close my eyes, I can see that photograph.

I have always thought of myself as a feminist, but as I reflected over the threads of my research project in its productively undone state, I realise that I may actually hold a lot of unconscious misogyny. I am drawn to men and boys because I feel comfortable around them – I know how to act around them - and as such I researched with boys and chose Suresh as my guide, interpreter, and eventual co-researcher. I suppose, when I reflect, I used the intuitive path of case study approach without interrogating why it was intuitive. I did not do enough work on what I was carrying into the research site with me.

My Disability:

I have two hidden disabilities. I am deaf in one ear from Mumps in childhood, and I have epilepsy as a result of an acquired brain injury. The acquired brain injury was as a result of complications following the successful removal of a brain tumour almost six years ago. I have learned to read body language, facial expressions, and lips which has always been an advantage for me in my life (in research and in teaching) as a result of my deafness. I live in a country with free medical facilities and free medications for a life-long illness, as a result I am privileged that I do not have to source and pay for drugs, operations, scans, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and so on. My epilepsy is controlled by the medication provided free by the State and my neurologist, renowned in Europe for specialising in Epilepsy, is again paid by the State to treat me. My physical and mental recovery has been facilitated and accommodated for by the university I attend and equality legislation that guarantees my rights has been passed by the country I live in. My access to treatments, medication and experts is a privilege I can access without obstacles.

Caught in a riptide:

My mind flickers constantly during the uneasy process of making and unmaking, during the deconstruction and analysis of my identity to understand it in all its parts. I am exhausted and deflated. I can see far away a resting spot; but the resting spot has a signpost to the next resting stop. There is no end in sight. My mind is tired; it flickers to find a spot to stop now. It looks for the place of completion – an end to the journey. It seeks out a port in the storm seas of making and unmaking. It reaches out constantly to the lazy argument – the convenient argument – the argument I have rolled my eyes at others unknown to me for using on social media. *But the Irish were colonised too*. The riptide sucks me in… '*No Dogs No Blacks No Irish'*. My mind constantly reaches, my brain is lazy, tired, exhausted, and wounded. *We were colonised too. We suffered for 800 years. We lost our language, 50% of our population, a lot of our heritage…we suffered too*. It sounds like a toddler tantrum. I stop swimming against the rip and just tread water. I rest. A small, quiet voice inside my gut begins to whisper, "*Image how much more painful it would have been if not for your whiteness?*" When did the Irish become part

of the 'West'? *You were always part of the west by virtue of your skin colour. How much worse would it have been if you were not white? How much worse would it still be if you were not white? Eamon de Valera benefited from the help of the United States. If he were not white, would he have been welcome in the US? If you were not white, would you be independent today*?

The simple truth is that I can get an electronic visa in 48-72 hours to enter India as a visitor. How long does it take to get a visa to Ireland as an Indian visitor? Poonam was refused a visa because she could not demonstrate enough of a case that she would return to India despite a secure, permanent job as principal of a primary school with 500 students. Why have I never thought about that before?

And Yet…

Is it a legitimate question? *When did Ireland / the Irish become part of the 'West'?* Ireland only became a free state in 1922, and officially a republic in 1949. Was it when we became part of the European Economic Community (EEC) formally the European Union (EU)? Was it when we became a republic? When did we become respectable, let alone part of the elite, part of the enlightened part of the world? Was it a capitalist phenomenon? Was it a geographical phenomenon? It couldn't be, could it? We gained our independence from the British Empire only twenty-five years before India, after eight hundred years of occupation. During 'An Gorta Mór' (The Great Hunger / also known as the Famine 1845-1847) one million Irish people died and one million emigrated, causing Ireland to lose twenty five percent of its population. An Gorta Mór was caused by British capitalist policies which redirected every food but one (the potato) to Britain and a natural potato blight which killed off most crops the Irish had to feed themselves. The population declined for decades afterwards as families tried to escape poverty, civil war, unemployment, tenement housing, and sickness. In the next hundred years Ireland lost 50% of its population. Those that emigrated were frequently greeted with signs on doors of shops, publics houses etc "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish". Our native language was nearly eradicated. Our culture nearly diminished. The artefacts of colonisation remain with us today. I believe we hold in our bodies and collective psyche a collective psychological trauma, similar to the one I suspect Spivak alluded to, that has yet to be really unpacked. Due to our geographical location – an island with Britain as our closest neighbours, a land border with Northern Ireland which is a British Territory with a legacy of sectarian violence from a period otherwise known as 'The Troubles' which ended with the power sharing agreement commonly known was The Good Friday Agreement in 1998 – we have to maintain good relations; be the 'good' neighbour. I am not sure we have had the space or opportunity to truly mourn what we have lost or process the trauma our country has survived. Is it not possible to acknowledge it would be a whole lot worse if our skin was not white and still hold this trauma and ask these questions?

"All conflict is about difference, whether the difference is race, religion or nationality The European visionaries decided that difference is not a threat, difference is natural. Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace – respect for diversity."

John Hume

1998 Nobel Peace Prize recipient

I am a Native English Speaker:

I sit here as a woman who was robbed of her native tongue. I put my daughter into an Irish speaking school knowing that I will struggle to help her with her homework. Knowing that there will be a moment when she sees a lack in her mother. A lack of native tongue. Lack of understanding. A lack of shared experience. I wonder if my understanding of lack, that fear of feeling less than, that fear of disappointing my daughter – an evitable loss of a connection – is similar to what the parents of the school I research in feel in sending their children to an English medium school? I never asked them. I asked them why they chose an English medium school, but I never asked them how it made them feel as parents. Why? Was it one of the 'norms' I carried around with me? As I stand in the research site – an English medium school - as a non-native speaker of my own language, I bring that with me. Especially in the moments when I am asked to speak Irish to the teachers or visitors to the school. The older children are also interested in my 'other' language. I bring it into a school that has made the decision to use an English medium curriculum and a fully immersive programme in the early childhood classes. Why? The answer is provided in their mission statement: "*To ensure that children find equal opportunity to pursue a career of their choice and work in a good environment., irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, and social status."* Arguably a colonial legacy but also equally a fact – English is the language of business. By having a working knowledge of English or fluency of English the children who come to the school will have gained an embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). I am a native English speaker - and because I am a native English speaker, I am closer to the dominant culture which is also a privilege I hold. I forgot that I was a native English speaker – half blind to my privilege again! I forgot that my true native tongue is Irish, a language I do not speak fluently or think in. In this respect the research encounter changed me, and it was only afterwards that I put my youngest child into a fully immersive Irish language medium school.

White Privilege:

"It may be ludicrous to non-white readers to read about how white people need to be shown, or tricked into thinking, that they have power they can use toward social change, but such is the invisible nature of white privilege to most white people—that they do not see it." (McIntosh, 2012, p.194)

Even after writing about my whiteness in my ethical evaluation of my research, my submission to the university ethics board, and discussing it in a published paper in 2019, I was still (as McIntosh describes above), blind to my whiteness. It is hard to describe how I was aware but blind at one and the same time. Pratto and Stewart's theory of *half-blindness* allows me to think this through with more clarity (2012). It also underpins to me the power language plays. According to Pratto and Stewart when research groups or individuals are described as under-privileged, marginalised, oppressed, disadvantaged, or vulnerable their social positions are described in problematic language and the contrasting groups are rarely described or acknowledged as privileged, central, oppressor and powerful thus,

> *"this practice of marking the "problematic" group reveals that the unmarked situation of dominant groups is assumed to be normal. Such a stance is only half-blind concerning group privilege, because although it focuses attention on "problematic" groups and may acknowledge group inequality, it does not acknowledge the social position of the referent group as privileged…By taking dominance as normal, superior social positions and greater power do not seem to be privileges."* (ibid, 2012).

This is re-iterated by Feber, "People of colour are confronted with the reality of inequality and oppression on a daily basis, but those who experience privilege are often unaware of it and do not see how it impacts their own lives. Their social location becomes both invisible and assumed as the norm" (Ferber, 2012) So, while I was aware of my whiteness and the privileges it brought me in terms of what it represented for the participants of my study, that is, in terms of what they didn't have – I hadn't actually done enough work on de-centring myself. I went in with a deficit view of what privileges the participants did not have, and not really seeing what I was carrying in my knapsack of privileges (McIntosh, 1988).

There are a lot of definitions of white privilege which I have read in the course of this research project. Some describe the structural and systematic nature of white privilege: "White privilege, which is the expression of whiteness through the maintenance of power, resources, accolades and systems of support through formal and informal structures and procedures, is maintained and often obscured, through white people's rationalisations in using broad (often racist) categorisations of people of colour and a lack of cultural sensitivity" (Bhopal, 2018, p. 19). bell hooks on the other hand describes it as white supremacist thinking and notes how it is ingrained in white people from birth: "despite class difference, as a group, white people (whether consciously or unconsciously) maintain some degree of bonding despite diversities of standpoint. White supremacist thinking continues to be the invisible and visible glue that

keeps white folks connected irrespective of many other differences. Politically, white supremacist thinking was created to serve this purpose. Imprinted on the consciousness of every white child at birth, reinforced by the culture, white supremacist thinking tends to function unconsciously" (hooks, 2009, p. 3). Pratto and Stewart describe white privilege as "not having to be aware of the identity, nor of the privileges that identity brings, nor having to repair either. In fact, because dominant identity [white] is so normative, it may be easier for members of dominant groups to understand their group identity *in contrast to* subordinated groups" (2012). Newell draws on the work of McIntosh as she describes white privilege as "Whites are systematically granted unearned advantages and privileges simply because they are (or appear) white" (2015, p.124). Martinot calls white privilege 'white skin privilege' which I think is less abstract, not easily denied, and more easily grasped. He says, "White skin privilege consists of a long list of things that white people don't have to think twice about doing, things they take for granted without worrying about the structures of power ambushing them or catching them unawares…white skin privilege is the privilege of seeing each instance in its singularity" (2015, p.180). He goes on to describe the idea of giving up white privilege as "a dodge" and "a privileged idea" (ibid). This sentence struck me because I remember being uncomfortable at seeing large groups of white US citizens pledge to give up their white privilege as part of the #BlackLivesMatter protests earlier this year. I thought I was uncomfortable because it felt as though by doing this, they were in fact centring themselves rather than the cause, however Martinot argues that "privilege is something that is given by those who have the power to do so…it reflects a power relation" (ibid, p.181). Reading this passage, I came to understand that it was not the centring I was uncomfortable with but the privilege to renounce privilege. However, Martinot cautions, "the problem is not "white skin privilege" but "white skin coloniality." Privilege is a benign designation. Coloniality on the other hand assumes intention" (ibid, p.181). It is the coloniality that is the problem. White studies could be accused of beginning to colonise critical race theory or Anti-racist spaces. De-colonisation would mean dismantling the system set up for privilege and ending racialisation. However how do we do this without declaring colour-blindness, white guilt, white saviourism, or centring whiteness? Does it come back to dialogue and un-suturing, as Yancy suggests further below (2015)?

The best definition of white privilege I have found is from Reni Eddo-Lodge, in her book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. She says:

> *"How can I define white privilege? It is so difficult to describe an absence. And white privilege is an absence of the negative consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination, an absence of your race being viewed as a problem first and foremost, an absence of 'less likely to succeed because of my race'. It is the absence of funny looks directed at you because you're believed to be in the wrong place, an absence of cultural expectations, an absence of violence enacted on your ancestors because of the colour of their skin, an absence of a lifetime of subtle marginalisation and othering – exclusion from the narrative of being human. Describing and defining this absence means to some extent upsetting the centring of whiteness and reminding white people that their experience is not the norm for the rest of us."* (2018, p. 86)

Each time I read this definition I am speechless. How do you describe an absence? Frequently, in discussions around white privilege (especially in the current, global, political climate) it is talked about in terms of what white people have. The word 'privilege' has connotations of luxury, of financial stability – in fact, I would go as far as to say in my experience in the classroom, today's youths regard privilege as a dirty word. They outright reject it. However, I also thought about privilege as something I had, certainly not something I did not have. Eddo-Lodge's definition caused a rupture in my thinking. It stopped me in my tracks. The first time I encountered it - I gasped. I had a bodily encounter with it. I also felt her anger and frustration pulse off the page. She disrupted my conception of privilege – dare I say she took it away? I almost felt…a loss of something? A loss of knowledge I thought I had. I connected very deeply with this definition and it transformed my thinking. My *half-blindness* (Pratto & Stewart, 2012) made sense when I encountered what Eddo-Lodge had written.

Sara Ahmed cautions about the problematic nature of confessions and white guilt; the white critic of whiteness will never arrive at a point where they are not racist. Confessions of being a *bad white* indirectly read as 'I am actually *a good white'*: "The white subject that is shamed by whiteness is also a white subject that is proud *about* its shame. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'" (Ahmed, 2004). This caution is echoed by Alastair Bonnett, who argues "at its crudest the confessional approach erases all questions relating to the contingent, slippery nature of Whiteness. Instead, a moral narrative is offered based on the presumed value of 'White' 'self-disclosure'" (2015, p. 182). However, Barbara Applebaum counters that anxiety and vulnerability are feelings to be encouraged as long as white people sit with them, try not to transcend them, and create a new relationship with them that is sceptical of a desire for redemption. This she argues will allow for possibilities for dialogue and more important for *hearing* (2015).

Yancy offers a solution: when the white person experiences an ambush when interrogating whiteness, they experience a sense of crisis – a loss of footing that is; they lose their way. This is the moment when they make a decision (or not) to commit to a life of undoing, interrupting, and troubling whiteness repeatedly, "the decision is one that is made over and over again for the rest of one's life. Hence, the concept of crisis is suggestive of an iterative process that is to be preenacted" (2015, p. xiv). He suggested this is done by the process of becoming 'un-sutured' (ibid). To be sutured, is to be closed, an active decision to patch, mend, seal off, and sew together – to remain *pure* and free from infection – to actively close off the knowledge of being exposed for knowing the privileges whites live with while Black and People of Colour's lives are harder, more painful because of the very privileges the system does not grant to them. It is the pain of being complicit. However, for whites to become un-sutured is to live with the pain, pick off the scab and be aware of the pulsing wound, as Yancy describes:

> *"un-suturing is a deeply embodied phenomenon that enables whites to come to terms with the realisation that their embodied existence and embodied identities are always already inextricably linked to a larger white racist social integument or skin which envelops who and what they are. Their white embodied lives have already been claimed: there is no white self that stands above the fray, atomic, hands clean."* (Yancy, 2015, p.xvii)

To become un-sutured is to pick the scab every day. To trouble and interrupt whiteness. Not as a "good white" but as an aware white that actively disrupts suturing. It is more than words, more than confessions or guilt. It is painful, does not allow for closure, but allows for contamination, for infection – hybridity? and it allows for awareness of pulsing, weeping, and heat.

White Saviour Complex:

Rolf Straubhaar references Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he describes white saviour complex as "an inherently problematic lack of recognition of social privilege" in his 2015 discussing the need for critical analysis when working in educational settings in the Majority world (p.382). This is a direct reference to those that benefit from the unjust structures of social inequality not trusting the capabilities and local knowledge and insisting on obtaining positions of leadership. Straubhaar quotes Freire, "Our converts, on the other hand, truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation (1970a, p.60)" (2015, p.382). Looking at the threads all around me of my research study, I do not believe that in the course of my research I imposed my leadership on everything. I did, however, resist the guidance for a long time offered by local informants on signed consent forms, who had the capacity to grant consent, identity, and personhood. I also had many disagreements about how things were executed with my guide and grew frustrated at times that my plans had changed but I believe I used phronesis and an ethical radar most of them time to utilise the negotiated research approach when I reflected and analysed. However, it would be remiss of me not to point out that some of those decisions came out of the advice of other senior educationalists within my department. So, although I used an ethical radar and negotiated research approach in the field, I was not fully reassured until I got the approval or sign off from more senior educators in my institution...*this is a thread that needs further pulling… What counts in terms of knowledge production, who is producing it, and how it validated? This is more than a personal issue of an inexperienced, early career scholar – this is a systemic issue. The academy, and its systems are set up to place certain people as knowers who can validate what is considered appropriate action or appropriate knowledge… Perhaps the word is not appropriate…perhaps the word is legitimate? Who decides what is legitimate knowledge and how it is validated?...or valued?... Partnerships with higher education institutes in the Majority world could certainly help with local ways of knowing and being. However, they still operate within the academic tradition which values certain types of knowledge over others leaving people at the margins unable to dialogue or contribute to the conversation….pulls thread further…could published papers or research projects from projects carried out in the Majority world*

by Minority world academics and researchers be considered the equivalent of those photographs displayed on my social media accounts from my volunteer trips discussed in the prologue? … rips a stitch…

I came to King's concept of *dysconscious racism* (1991) through the writing of Anderson (2017). King describes dysconsciousness as "an uncritical habit of mind" that just accepts the status quo of inequality, injustice, and exploitation as the norm (1991). Dysconscious racism is defined by King as: "a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical conscious-ness" (p.135). Anderson defines white saviour complex as a phenomenon where whites who, disregarding the power and complicity they have in supporting policies and structures that uphold white privilege, have an emotional validation or reward for "saving" people from the Majority world or who are marginalised (2017). She claims it was coined by Teju Cole following the Kony 2012 video, although this has been disputed by those who work in development arguing white saviour complex has been a feature of development for a number of years before Cole. Cole coined the term White Saviour Industrial Complex (WSIC) in a number of tweets and a subsequent article for the Atlantic. He argues that there is more to doing good than "making a difference", notably doing no harm and consulting with the people or communities in matters which concern them (2012). As a writer, he describes how he recognises the all too easy narrative of the bad guy or the simple answer of feeding the starving children or building schools without examining the structural systems in place that contribute to, or directly cause the problem. Complicity in the systems and structures must be acknowledged and addressed before the "big emotional experience that validates privilege" (Cole, 2012). I have interrogated my research design for racism and whiteness. I had not unconsciously or dysconsciously ignored the "norms" or systematic structures of racism and privilege. I had actively unpacked and interrogated before entering the field and when in the field, thus having examined dysconscious racism and white saviour industrial complex, I think they are a lazy, easy answer to what happened in my research, but they are not accurate.

Writing from a human rights perspective, Waldorf describes Cole's *white saviour industrial complex* as "white man's burden" (2012), referring to the burden of human rights being the burden of the white enlightened and superior man. Waldorf argued that "we should be less worried about the white man's burden and more worried about his indifference" adding that there is a "very real trade-off between local voices and global reach" (ibid p.469 & 470). This is interesting to me in terms of interrogating my own research and actions. This idea of trade-off could be described as compromise. However, compromise that is meaningful to my mind, is consultation and partnership as equals. *Is the power differential too great an issue to overcome to create a true partnership as equals?...pulls thread… Is*

equality possible, and if so, what do we mean by equality. Are all stakeholders interpreting equal partnership as the same phenomenon…? The trade-off for development must not be the loss of informed local voice (Spivak, 1988).

Also writing from a human right's perspective Chazal and Pocrnic describe Mutua's savages, victims, and saviours metaphor below:

> *"Mutua (1996, 2001) examines how Eurocentric and western-dominated human rights discourses are reproduced through existing structures and narratives by exploring the metaphor of savages, victims and saviours. The savages, victims, saviours nexus is a three-dimensional metaphor underpinning human rights struggles that pit good against evil, and prompt intervention from the morally superior West. The metaphor is highly racialised and gendered in its construction of subjects: savages are black, masculine and barbaric; victims are vulnerable, black women and children; and saviours are white, rational, Western men."* (Chazal & Pocrnic, 2016, p. 99)

The language is highly charged but the point is well made. However, it is interesting when applying the savages, victims, saviour metaphor to reversed gender. White women are as likely, if not more likely to engage in white saviourism than white men. Voluntourism is made up of 70% women, the so called "Barbie Saviours" (Wearing, Mostafanezhad, Nguyen, & Ha Thanh, 2018) who are more likely to put their Majority world charity work photos up on their social media sites (ibid) to show what good, moral, helpful saviours they are. What type of saviourism is it when there are not rational, militant, masculine men to save the women and children from the black, barbaric savages (Mutua cited in Chazal & Pocrnic, 2016)? Gendered saviourism (which, for full disclosure, I am guilty of when I first started traveling with charities and I make reference to in the prologue) is more likely to be of the '*white women saving brown children from brown women*' type. It is of a more gendered and performative nature. It definitely fits more with Anderson's definition of emotional validation while disregarding complicity with the systems and structure which perpetuates privilege (2017).

As I think through all of these arguments and perspectives, I begin to think that my research was not guilty of white saviour complex as much as it is guilty of telling a story that was not mine to tell, combined with the half-blindness discussed above. In assessing the types of play and early learning in the context of the school and children's cultures and society, I was no more guilty than the OECD and PISA system in colonisation of practice. However, that means the same critiques that are levelled at them apply to what I was attempting to do. I was quantifying something I had no place to quantify. It was quite simply not my story to tell. In addition, using white saviour complex as an excuse for my realisation only adds to the phenomenon known as white guilt which re-centres whiteness. When I lovingly undo my research project with productive intention, I understand that my research was guilty

of what I recognised in Spivak's paper, that is that I was complicit in colonising an educational space with my research which due to my privilege and the structures and systems set up around me to help me succeed, meant that I was perhaps at worst silencing the voice of local researchers or at best, making it harder for local researchers to be heard on a global scale in the academy. I argue that this point is verified by the experiences of bell hooks so I will leave her with the last word on this section and take some time to think before moving on:

> *"As a black woman professor and writer who writes about the politics of representation, I am well aware of the extent to which white women readers are seen by the mainstream media as the only meaningful audience for writing by and about women. As a consequence, if a black woman writer writes work that specifically addresses black female experience, the tacit assumption will be that the work has no appeal for white females. However, it is always assumed that books written by white females specifically about their experience have universal appeal."* (hooks, 2015, p.19)

Being Part of the Solution

Voices, Partnership, and Power:

Perhaps, the solution lies in true, authentic partnership – but what is 'authentic' partnership, and what would that look like? I had thought the negotiated research process was a partnership approach and in fact many issues and practices were negotiated through it so I would argue that it was a *start*. Perhaps the issue was that I went to the school with a research idea and design and asked for permission to research. I wonder now, what the research process and the partnership would have looked like if I had gone to the school and asked, "what would you like me to research?" or better yet: "what would you like **us** to research?" Suddenly, the power dynamics are changed with one or two questions. In not asking those questions I held the power in the relationship. I had the agenda. Thinking through this, it would explain the lack of motivation of behalf of the teachers and the school management in terms of having conversations about research design and so on, as discussed in part two.

Two of the most powerful pieces of the whole research process for me came from authentic partnership and voice. (1) The change in relationship from guide / interpreter to co-researcher and co-generator of knowledge. (2) The change in the children from observed participants to co-researchers, observers, and knowledge makers in the photovoice exercise. Both phenomena and experiences will be discussed further in part three but for now I explore the experience of authentic voice and partnership.

Reflecting back, it is not a coincidence that during the process of both phenomena I was highly reflexive and open to the possibilities of the renegotiation of our relationship with each other. I undertook the type of critical consciousness called for by hooks (1989) and hyper-self-reflexivity called for by Kapoor

(2004). We engaged in a genuine dialogue; an authentic learning from below experience (Spivak, 1999) with the children. The power dynamics were changed, for the better. Although I was learning Hindi with a tutor in Ireland, I did not have the fluency to speak with any of the research participants in their own language, as Spivak argued for, however, I did utilise the hundred languages of children (Malaguzzi, 1981) to speak and listen to them. While Suresh (guide and interpreter) and I tried to interpret the photographs that the children took of the school, we went back to them with the photographs for confirmation, explanation, and clarity. We assumed the position of the learner and the children naturally assumed the position of teacher and knower in relation to the position we adopted. The change in power structures made for a more relaxed, authentic dialogue. The centring of the dialogue and position of the children as knowers renegotiated the power-structures, and as such positioned me outside of the centre.

Mammy, can you see your face?

"Mammy, isn't it funny that you can't see your face?"

Quickly looks at me,

"I can't see my face…

can you see your face?"

"No baby girl, I can't see my face."

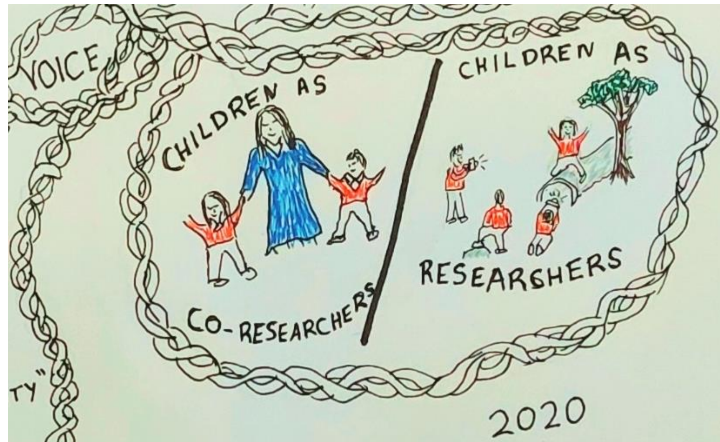
"That's so weird, isn't it?"

"I never thought about it before, it is weird, you're right."

"I can see your face Mammy can you see mine?"

"Yes, I can see yours."

Ellie asks me questions as I am thinking about white privilege, 12th July 2020



Children as Co(?) Researchers

The sun is rising in the sky. It's not yet half ten and already it's hot and dusty. A bead of sweat runs down my back under my dress. Giggles and laughter fill the air as young children dart in and out of the school taking photos. I laugh at one of the boys as he orders his classmates to pose on a rock. He looks so confident. In his element. I snap some shots.

"Sinéad, miss, your chai." I turn around and one of the older girls has a tray of small china cups containing coffee and two large steaming glasses of masala chai. I take one eagerly and take a mouthful before the milk forms a skin on the top. Its spicy sweetness refreshes me. Suresh takes the other glass and walks to the shade under the trees. I follow him and we sit down on the wall and watch the scene unfolding. "It was a good idea to do it in groups, wasn't it?" "Yes, it was." I take

another sip and feel my shoulders start to relax. "How much time left?" I check my phone, "another six minutes." A peal of laughter breaks out at the top of the yard. The older children are laughing and posing for another group of young children with cameras. Suresh takes my camera and begins to take photos, his cup resting on the wall. Two teachers walk by bemused at the scene around them. They smile at me, good morning ma'am." "Morning" I smile back.

We sit in silence, observing the laughter and the fun around us. *This is it. Finally. This is what it should feel like. This isn't forced or hard work. This isn't me leading and them following / obeying?* I feel content. Hot and sticky, but content and for the first time; truly happy. Is happy the right word…truly authentic??? Maybe authentically happy. The sound of children laughing, giggling, squabbling, negotiating, co-operating, talking; directing their research soothes me. I'm sitting down – in the middle of it – and yet not in it at all. They run from room to room. Into the kitchen to take photos of Mrs Singh. Asking teachers and older children to pose for them. My shoulders relax even further. This was what I knew in my gut it should feel like. Like I was irrelevant, and I am.

"What is the greatest sign of success for a teacher thus transformed? It is to be able to say, "The children are now working as if I did not exist.""

Dr. Maria Montessori, 1949, p.250

A car comes slowly up the drive. “It’s Poonam, miss. It’s Poonam, miss!” Two groups of children quickly run to the car and wait for it to stop. Poonam steps out dressed in navy tunic with blue and white dots and a blue scarf. The children surround her. “Miss, miss...photo miss? Photo miss?” “Yes, sure.” Poonam poses for them with endless patience. Suddenly, the children notice Pranay get out of the car. “Photo? Photo?” Pranay fixes his hair, “hey! hey, wait!” He straightens his blue t-shirt, runs his hand over his hair again. “Ok now.” The children take some photos. “ok stop now.” The children follow Poonam into the school to take more photos. “Sinéad, looking very well. Very professional! So nice. How are you today” Pranay looks at me, cheekily. I give him a wry smile, “thanks, I’m good. You?” “Ah, you know…”

“Miss, Miss, smile” I turn around and two girls are pointing their camera at me. I put one hand on my hip, Suresh takes my chai, and I hold my camera up away from my face in an over-exaggerated pose and smile. They giggle to each other and take my photo. “One more, miss.” Another group come running over, four boys this time. I pose again, in a playful pose, laughing. “Now you click?” “Ok,” I take my camera and take a photo as they pose for me. “Show miss?” I show them the display screen. They dissolve into giggles. I laugh. They laugh and run off. Suresh hands my back my glass and we walk back to the tree. My alarm goes off before we get there. “Ok, time to finish up now. Back into your class.” Suresh ushers the children back into their classroom and gathers the cameras. I follow them back in. We call up the next set of four eager groups. I put stickers on them as Suresh explains how to use the digital camera. The groups rush out of the class eager for their turn, and we follow slowly behind. Chai in one hand, camera in the other.

When originally designing my methodology, I had a lot of concerns that I wanted to address when working with children. As I was using a children's rights lens with children as competent actors seen within their cultural contexts, I wanted to use something that "captures children's voices". Looking at this now with a post-colonial /decolonial lens, I realise that words such as capture, elicit, give, grant and so on, are charged with power relations / tensions ??? about who is granting audience or proposing a channel for *voice to be heard*. It is somehow gatekeeping or legitimising who can be heard, who is able to listen, and who can promote or legitimise that voice to a wider audience. As if the voice in and of itself is not enough…. *pulls on thread…*

> "Why is it, then, that—despite the political rhetoric surrounding the commitment to hearing "children's voices" and apparently now also having the theoretical and methodological means to access them—little of what children as social actors say is heard outside of the academy (Roberts 2000)?" (James, 2007, pp. 261-262)

This was very much a lesson for me on how to view my methodology. I had conceived of it in the initial stages of my planning, informed by the initial theoretical frameworks I was using as, I suppose, set in stone almost – although allowing for the use of an ethical radar and the negotiated process to change it slightly but largely remaining the same. I should have seen my methodology, like ethics and consent, as an ongoing process, or a living breathing organism that is fluid and can shapeshift and adapt in the field based on any number of factors (St. Pierre, 2018). I realise that this may have required multiple returns to the ethics committee, unless using grounded theory, and perhaps that is what helped me to think of it as so set in stone? I am not sure. I need to think more deeply on this point. I now realise I should have been constantly re-examining my methodology, interrogating it for its responsiveness to the theories, ethics, and situations I was coming across. It seems strange to me now that I did not think of this, given the fact that I was working in a school, with children, teachers, and parents and I believe education to be dialogical, responsive, and based on developing relationships. I should have been constantly thinking about whether my methodology was responding correctly to the people I was developing relationships with. I understand now that I have interrogated it and productively undone the process that my conceptualisation of methods and methodology was tied to my conceptualisation of a researcher. Thus, because my idea of what a researcher was, was so limited and rigid, my idea of methods and how they should be developed also remained rigid and limited. *…pulls another thread…*

Voice is always there but gatekeeping in the academy means in research it can only be heard through an adult researcher(s) who elicit responses, with a question, method(s), and a theoretical lens in mind. They sift through all data for *meaning* and group them into codes or themes (at which point they are beginning to eliminate some children's voices altogether or choose only part of what they

say…effectively cutting them off), adding their lens, and identifying what responses they think are valuable and add something to the research or literature already in existence.

James describes the researcher as editor who positions the children's words, "As writers of texts, it is adults who retain control over which children's voices are given prominence and over which parts of what children have to say are to be presented" (2007, p.265). They do so in their name only (publishing) keeping children's identities anonymous in the name of 'good practice'. This research is then submitted for peer review which adds another layer and lens of at least two other adults with their own research agendas and their own way of seeing and quantifying which participation or voice is important or *needs to be heard* which also, as a consequence, silences other children's views or voices which may not be considered as desirable or necessary. As Punch notes, "the choice of which data to include and the interpretation of the data is in the power of the adult researcher. Particular care must be taken when interpreting children's views, because, as Mayall points out, ultimately adult researchers analyse children's perspectives" (2002, p.329). Another lens which must be acknowledged in this process is the ethics committee (Horgan, 2017), comprised of adults, who come together and decide that a research project and its methods are, in their opinion, ethical and fit to proceed. Or, they suggest edits, or deny ethical approval entirely. It gets to the point where the child's voice is so watered down under the weight of so many lenses that it begs the question, does it really offer any light at all on children's perspective in the research process? This is by no means a phenomenon exclusive to researching with children but when the research holds up its results to be *representing* children's voices or *giving voice* to children, the process of production must be taken into account and examined further simply because of its possible / likely distortion of those voices by adult lenses or agendas, particularly when the children as co-researchers are not identified or given the opportunity to respond.

Another concern is the idea of *granting* or *giving* voice. As Spivak argues, voice is always there; there problem is: who is listening? The power structure of granting voice or eliciting voice when researching within a children's rights paradigm is interesting and problematic. It is evident when researching within a children's rights framework, that a researcher wants to be an advocate for children's voice and children's rights however, just like educational volunteering by Minority World educators to Majority World schools, at what point do advocacy and colonisation collide? Why does the act of emancipation lie with the researcher to effectively save the children by advocating for their voice to be included in research? Who gives the authority to researchers to *grant* voice or *elicit* voice (which is an entirely more problematic idea)? Would it not be more ethical to change the structures in place in order to hear children's voices rather than mining children for their participation and voice and effectively build a career on the back of their unacknowledged labour? *…threads begin to tangle…*

Balancing children's rights, particularly in light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and seeing children as competent *beings* and not as *becomings* collides with the Minority world, romanticised idea of childhood as innocent and in need of protecting (Hart, 1992; Woodhead, 2006; Alderson, 1995; James, 2007), allowing for, in my opinion, the possibly unethical practice of anonymising children or worse, violently graffitiing or blacking out their bodies and faces in photographs in the research they carried out and not granting them their identity as (co) authors and (co) researchers by the usual practice of using pseudonyms. Morrow remarks, "the question of pseudonyms is not straightforward, and needs careful thought. Sometimes children want to be recognised for the data they produce – their views or experiences – but I explained that reluctantly to protect their identity, I would use pseudonyms." (2008. p58). It is interesting that it is assumed by the researcher that pseudonyms automatically SHOULD be used, because they are supposed to protect the child, rather than engaging with questions of why the erasure of identity is necessary for the protection of the child. The very identity protected under article 8 of the UNCRC. If we are to see children as agentic then they too must own the results of their knowledge production, surely? Or at least they are owed the choice to decide if they want to recognise their right to identity (article 8) or if they want to exercise their right to be anonymous (article 16), either way article 17 (the access to appropriate information) should be honoured by researchers and guardians / parents.

We must consider if it is ethical to endorse free labour, without intellectual ownership, with credit given to the adult researcher in terms of notoriety and publishing credits in the academy, most often behind academic pay walls, and accept that as the trade-off for allowing voice? Granting Voice? Eliciting Voice? Or simply listening? Is this the trade-off children must agree to in order to be heard? Thinking through this rationale, the argument for anonymity to protect children, by using their physical labour, intellectual labour, and emotional labour - then eliminating their identity - for our academic gain, in the world of publish or perish to secure a career in academia is deeply flawed. *…tapestry begins to rip and rupture….* Particularly when children are placed in a vulnerable or marginalised category. Again, this argument could be made for any research participants, but it is made here because of the nature of using a children's rights lens. I am not suggesting there are any easy answers, nor am I suggesting that all research with anonymous children as co-researchers is unethical. What I am suggesting is that there is more to be unpacked and analysed here than originally thought. Using a children's rights lens, such as the UNCRC, involves examining ALL the rights that children hold under international law. As I think deeply, finding myself drawn to the idea of children as researchers in and of themselves, I weigh up the pros and cons, the rights and responsibilities, the clash of Minority World ideas of best practice and post-colonial or decolonial theories of ownership and power, I am drawn to the following quote from James:

> *"More recently, however, there has been a movement toward regarding children as researchers themselves, as people who can carry out their own research projects into areas that are pertinent to their everyday lives. Linked to*

the children's rights agenda (Alderson 2000), the participation by children as coresearchers, or even sole researchers, in the research process represents, therefore, an interesting challenge for childhood studies, raising a variety of questions about the ***purpose and intentions*** *of childhood research" (James, 2007, p.262)*

I have highlighted the words 'purpose and intentions' purposely. Written more than a decade ago, and yet still I am not sure we have reached a consensus on the purpose and intentions of childhood research – for whom and why? If children are locked out by the academy to completed research, with no way to respond or see / hear themselves in it, for whom and why do we research with them?

Participatory Methods:

When working in Emmanuel Public School with the children, I employed the use of art-based participatory methods as designed in my research project. As Alderson describes, participation means taking part but is a broad concept, which in the past has been reduced to children having the chance to consult and make decisions (2008). A more meaningful way of participating was considered to actively *do* with children; to be informed by their activities. I employed the use of *talking* and *doing* methods i.e., consultation and actively constructing knowledge, in an attempt to offer more meaningful ways to create knowledge together and to acknowledge and maximise the use of the *hundred languages of children* (Malaguzzi, 1981) through one-on-one drawing interviews, group drawing exercises and a photo voice exercise. There is no one best method when researching with children (Hill, 2006) so it made sense to use a number of approaches and methods. The use of more than one participatory method is promoted in Clark and Moss' 'mosaic approach' which builds up a rich picture of children's lives and gives them multiple modes of expressing themselves to communicate what is important to them (2011). Not-withstanding the above critique after productively undoing my methods, I started off thinking from a children's rights lens and the concept of listening to children and co-creating, in partnership, a picture of play and early learning in their school. I found Hart's framework, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (1992) to be very interesting in terms of community, citizenship, and the range of consultation that can be adapted depending on the projects needs and the children's needs.

Hart outlined children's participation in the public realm and not the private realm, it did not examine preschool children, which, it could be argued, was a missed opportunity, however it was conducted with children from the Majority World as well as children from the Minority World in mind. He was commissioned to go to spend time with organisations from what he termed *street and working children* in Brazil, India, Kenya, and the Philippines in the late seventies, thus he brought with him to his research a particular lens which he termed as "valuable exchange of experiences between nations of 'the North' and 'the South'"(1992, p3).

I think it is important to understand Hart's definition of 'participation' before moving forward. He defines it as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built, and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship" (1992, p.5). It is interesting that Hart equates participation with oneself and one's community, also in a political sense, as part of a functional democracy, as a right of citizenship. Democracy is one of those concepts held up as a shining light in terms of civilisation and being civilised – particularly by Minority World countries. Often, the discourse of children's rights and voice can (to my mind) focus on the individual child and not on the community. Rights also come with responsibilities; this can be overlooked in terms of Minority world ways of being which are increasingly individualised.

Further to that, in a political sense, children cannot vote in a functioning democracy and have very little say – what they do have to say has been allowed by adults or facilitated by adults – as such, one could question if they are full citizens in the political and legal sense. It is worth noting here that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a hotly contested and critiqued document. Some, including Hart himself, have argued that it is very 'Western' in its nature, idealistic, with an emphasis on rights and no equal emphasis on responsibilities (Alderson, 1995; Horgan, 2017; Tisdall and Punch 2012). Although, Hart himself noted the conflicting ideologies on childhoods and children's competencies, his definition could still be described as idealistic.

Hart's ladder of participation was an adaptation of Arnstein's *Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation* developed in 1969 (Shier, 2001) and has eight steps, of which the first three (1. Manipulation 2. Decoration and 3. Tokenism) are classed as 'Non Participation' (1992, p.6). The next five (4. Assigned but Informed, 5. Consulted and Informed, 6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children, 7. Child-initiated and directed, and 8. Child-Initiated, shared decisions with adults) are classed as 'degrees of participation' (ibid). As the steps ascend in number, the degree to which the participation is true participation is increases. Hart emphasises the importance of respecting children's agency by noting that children may choose to opt in at any stage on the ladder:

> *"Different children at different times might prefer to perform with varying degrees of involvement or responsibility. The important principle again is one of choice: programmes should be designed which maximize the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his ability."* (1992, p.11)

However, I would add that preference would be more suitable than ability. A child that wants to participate can always be facilitated at any level along the ladder, with creative thinking.

Hart's ladder of participation has received a lot of critique over the years; however, I see a resonance in some of his thinking with my own. As I tentatively argued above, using a child's labour to further an adult's career could be considered exploitation; however joint authorship or co-ownership of the labour and recognition as such would be a more ethical partnership. A similar argument was put forward

by Hart in 1992 when he argued that "while children's and youths' participation does occur in different degrees around the world, it is often exploitative or frivolous" (p.4). He does not expand on how it is exploitive and frivolous, but I would argue it is for the very reasons I argued above.

Quite radically for the time, Hart said, in relation to Participatory Action Research (PAR) that, "some describe this as a de-professionalization of research. I see it as a 're-professionalization', with new roles for the researcher as a democratic participant." (1992, p.16). This 're-professionalisation' of the researcher by using participatory research practices and methods with children which allow them a say and the opportunity to change or take action on something that affects their lives is quite a concept. It suggests that it further professionalises the researcher or lifts them out of outdated practices. This resonates well with me, even though I did not use participatory action research techniques, I feel the children to took over and de-colonised my research, at times turning the research gaze on me in the photography exercise. I feel this idea of re-professionalising offers the opportunity to think of different ways to reimagine the role of the researcher, particularly when working in partnership with under-represented groups.

Lundy (2007) makes the argument that article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) which pertains to the "*voice of the child*" in much research should not be seen in isolation, more over it should be read in the context of other articles, in particular, "Article 2 (non-discrimination); Article 3 (best interests); Article 5 (right to guidance); Article 13 (right to seek, receive and impart information); and Article 19 (protection from abuse)" (p.933). It is in this context that she developed a model with four distinct elements:

> "Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view.
>
> Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
>
> Audience: The view must be listened to.
>
> Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate." (ibid)

The model is fluid and interrelated, each article supports and requires more than the right to express a view in isolation for the child. Lundy emphasises the importance of coming back to children to show them in what way their participation helped the outcome of the research (2007; 2018).

I see Lundy's framework as building on Hart's but with a more Minority world lens. I would argue that Hart's framework has more resonance with Majority world ways of being, that is, cultural and societal values. Both work in very different contexts towards a framework of authentic participation but perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are really there yet? Perhaps it begs the question, what is 'authentic' partnership? What happens if we try to rupture our conceptualisation of partnership and participation through the lens of children's rights? *...begins to rip...*

Individual Drawing Exercise

I walk into the school yard and I hear the sounds of children singing. I look to my left to see assembly is taking place on the field today. I stop to watch, sitting in a sunny spot. It's 31 degrees already and it is only 9:30am. I wonder what it will creep up to? I have never been to the school this late in the year before.

The older children bring the younger classes into class and they sit quietly, chatting, to wait for their teacher. I am with the Nursery and LKG group today. I count; there are twelve nursery pupils and eighteen LKG pupils – far less than should be here according to the database I received. It is coming up to the end of the school year (April) and this is when pupils start to taper off as their families return to their villages for the summer Monsoon season.

It's almost quarter to ten before the teachers arrive. The children in LKG are quietly chatting and reading books and the Nursery children are yawning, chatting, and squirming in their chairs. Miss Stella leads the class as a whole group. She mentions that today is the last day of the month of March and tomorrow will be the month of April. This leads into a class about days of the week and months of the year. The children are less engaged today, lots of rocking and squirming in their chairs. I am less engaged too as it grows hotter. I am still waiting on word from Poonam about who she has decided to be my focus children so that I can start the focus group exercises today. At ten to ten Miss Stella calls the roll while Jeevan, Sir plays a slapping game with the Nursery children at the top of the space. Stella, Miss leaves and Jeevan, Sir watches the group while continuing the slapping game with the younger children. I reflect on what I had written a few days earlier about the physicality between the teachers and children that was rougher than I was used to:

27th March 2017

Reflection:

I noticed again today how physically tactile the children are with each other – how their games between peers and between teachers (including interactions) are very physical in a way which seemed quite rough to me at the beginning until I read the reactions and facial expressions and realised that these are both physical and **tender** moments. Also, again today I noticed the trend of older children helping and teaching the younger ones. It was particularly hot today 38-40 degrees. The school as a whole was less active but engaged and chatty. Groups of children sit in groups and chat to each other or play a clapping / slapping / tickling game.

I noticed the moments of physical roughness followed by peals of laughter and tenderness. Jeevan, Sir looks at the small group of children clamouring for their turn with shouts of "Me Sir!" "Me, Sir" He gently rubs a finger across a young boy's cheek. The child flashes a look of glee and turns his back laughing. Jeevan, Sir slaps his back, laughing. He gets pushed out of the way by a little girl. "My turn, me Sir!" He follows the same routine, he rubs her cheek tenderly, she turns her back laughing, and he slaps her between the shoulder blades gently. She bursts out laughing and turns around "hard!!!" she turns back around and Jeevan laughs. He gets distracted as another two boys pretend to slap his legs and he laughs at them and pretends to swat them away. This is the most alive and engaged I have seen the children today. The LKG children are chatting amongst themselves, some are copying the game, others are examining books in groups of two and three.

At 10:01 Suresh comes in to tell me Poonam has text him the name of the children. One of the children, a girl is absent, so we collect Sion, Suraj, and Ashish individually from the class and explain we are going to another classroom to do a drawing activity. Each seems eager when it is their turn to walk upstairs to the classroom. Sion and Ashish had already engaged with me themselves during class-time and out in the yard but Suraj hadn't. He seems unsure but happy to come. When it is Sion's turn, he immediately begins to look uncomfortable when we get to the upstairs classroom. I ask him if he wants to draw, he says no. I then ask him if he wants to return to his class and he says yes and walks with Suresh down the stairs.

Suresh comes back with Suraj. I explain about the audio voice recorder and ask if I can use it. Suraj says no. He doesn't like it. I show him that I've turned it off. He begins to draw a picture of himself in the school. He finishes the drawing and begins to draw circles. Then he asks to go. Suresh brings him downstairs to class. I sit in the hot room and think. *This is painful! It shouldn't be this unnatural or hard. Maybe I need to rethink my methodology – the individual activities are just not working. Maybe it is two adults with one child, maybe it's taking them out of their classroom to bring them to an empty unfamiliar classroom. Probably, both.*

Suresh walks up with Ashish. He gives me a shy but cheeky smile. "Hello Ashish!" "Hi Miss" "Do you want to draw some pictures?"

He is normally shy and quiet, but he comes into his own when it is just the three of us.

"How do I draw?" he asks …

The Notion of Children's 'Voice':

Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is often taken to mean the child's right to voice. However, the article actually states:

> Article 12:
>
> "1. 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.
>
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law." (UNCRC, 1989)

The word "voice" does not actually appear at all. In fact, it says that the child has the right to freely express their views (1989). Looking back to Malaguzzi's 100 languages or Clark and Moss's Mosaic approach there are many ways in which children can express their views that are not vocal or 'voice'. This makes it less troublesome when considering the views of younger children, they do not have to speak. In fact, article 13 re-enforces that the expression of views can be multi-faceted and multi-modal, "either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" (UNCRC, 1989, p.15). Lundy suggests, "Training in 'listening' skills should take appropriate account of the range of non-verbal 'cues' which children deploy when they are expressing themselves" (2007, p.937). This was very true of Sion and Suraj's body language in our interactions during the one-on-one

drawing interviews. I used my educator's knowledge of body language in pre-schoolers to see and 'hear' their discomfort. Although this was not something I was formally trained in, it very much formed part of my informal training on the job.

Often, the problem of capacity it discussed when designing research that optimises the child's 'voice'. Lundy remarks, "Children's right to express their views is not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not" (2007, p.935). As discussed above, it is the adult's or researcher's 'listening' skills that need training in order to 'hear' what is being 'said' by the child. However, as James points out, is there a danger that children's voice "will be conflated to children as a homogenous group and as a result the child's voice protected in article 12 will be lost? As such how might researchers 'hear' the individual child and at one and the same time a collective of actors who take up space in or form part of the phenomenon that is recognised as 'childhood'?" (James, 2007, p.262). This is an interesting point, and one I hadn't thought of even though I researched with approximately one hundred and twenty children! Each child has something different and unique to say but this can get lost in the groups and overall group – particularly if I thematically organise their drawings, photographs, play, or body language. I cannot think of a solution to the problem that James poses. However, Kellet counters that, "individual voices are not neutral; they are layered with other people's voices, and the social practices and contexts they invoke (Maybin 2001). Voice is a social construct operating in a cultural context where shared meaning is negotiated" (2010, p.196). This makes me think; do we ever have one individual voice in research or are there always whispers of other voices as Kellet suggest. Certainly, it is how I present my research to you the reader in the story of my research project… Perhaps that is another study entirely, requiring much more thought, nuance, and dialogue with children, much beyond the scope of this particular study.

When I think about the point James makes, I also begin to extend it and stretch it … I think about the concept of voice for voices sake – not in terms of tokenism but more as a gatekeeping device? Is it more accurate or authentic if you are deciphering, coding, and representing children and their views, as an adult if you are working in partnership with them? Could we apply this thinking to women's studies, post-colonial studies, or indigenous studies? Is it more acceptable for me to research with children or an NGO in India because it is a participatory partnership? Is it more authentic? Or would it be more authentic and accurate for the children to research themselves without me? *…I unpick more threads….* What does the inclusion of children's voices accomplish in my research? If the data is presented as the product of a "responder-researcher interaction" and not held up as authentic, untainted, pure voice on behalf of children as Hill (2006) puts forth, then the reader can be in no doubt that it is not a "truth" from a child's perspective as put forward by me, the adult researcher which James warns about here:

> *"there is a fine line between presenting children's accounts of the world and the claim to be able to see the world from the child's perspective as a new kind of "truth.""* (2007, p.263)

James critiques Hart's ladder of participation as a moral yardstick and warns of participation for the sake of participation – he posits the methods must match what is being researched (2007). However, Punch counters, "If children are competent social actors, why are special 'child-friendly' methods needed to communicate with them?" (2002, p. 321). This is worth thinking about and unpacking. Do we spend too much time thinking of special methods and ways of eliciting children's voice and granting children's participation? Or is it more a matter of equity, in giving children tailor made methods in order to give them the best chance of co-researching on an equal footing?

Least-Adult Role:

When I initially explored the idea of the least-adult role (Mandell, 1988) I did not really dwell on the concept or how it was explained. On the surface, it seemed like common sense – in order to get to know children well, we become almost like one of them and play with them. So, I took the concept and ran with it. I used it in my ethical approval application and my approach to my methodology. However, when productively undoing my research, and reflecting back I began to realise that just like my initial idea to dress attuned to local custom and culture, I abandoned the concept almost immediately in the field without knowing. In fact, if I was pushed to admit it, I'd say I probably thought I was conducting myself in the least-adult role but in truth I was just being my authentic self around the children. I am playful and I love a bit of mischief. I love working with young children. I did not interact with the children any differently than I would in any of my previous teaching roles, or indeed in my volunteering role. In fact, it was this very way of being in the research site that caused me much confliction in my role as a researcher.

When it came to productively undoing the original project, I returned to this concept of the least-adult role and I interrogated my conceptualisation of the term, how I conducted myself, and the paper in which it first appeared. My conceptualisation of the term is discussed above. Unfortunately, I did not interrogate closely enough, and did not return to the concept and examine it through the lens of post-colonial theory when I decided to apply it to my research. This was in part because when I was designing the initial methodology, I was using a socio-cultural, children's rights lens, not a post-colonial lens, and in part because it seemed to fit with the idea of playfulness and seemed a good way to navigate power relations and build relationships with the children. I should have returned to my methodology when I started to apply post-colonial theory, to examine power relations, acts of colonisation in the research site or methodology, and ethical ways of researching - this was a mistake on my part. However, it did inform my thinking in the field, in my reflections, and in how I viewed the data.

In terms of how I conducted myself – again I describe this above – I was very playful with the children and tried to build natural and reciprocal relationships. As I recount during the body of this thesis, I was always uncomfortable with the idea of *researcher* and what that identity or role looked like or embodied. I naturally leaned towards playfulness with children in the research site because this seemed natural to me and I was following my intuition. I battled constantly with my conceptions of what a researcher was and my actual experiences in the field. I admit it was a little lazy(?) use the concept of the least-adult role without really interrogating it, however when I reflect back and interrogate my actions in the field, I think I named it the 'least-adult role', but I actually conducted myself as a playful researcher. I discuss the concept of playful researcher below in the next section.

To interrogate the concept of the least-adult role as described by Nancy Mandell in her paper written in 1988, I first examined the time and context it in which it was conceived. 1988 was a year before the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was published and Mandell was from Toronto in Canada. She carried out the research in which she conceptualised the least-adult role in the United States. Thus, it is a very North American concept and very much of its time and context. Developmental psychology – particularly Montessori's *sensitive periods* and Piaget's *ages and stages*[27] ways of seeing children dominate the early childhood education and care teaching philosophies and practices in North America. Seeing the concept in this way allowed me to be generous in my interrogation. A lot of my critique of the least-adult role can be rationalised by the time and context it was developed in. However, for the purposes of productively undoing this research project, I will offer those critiques here.

The least-adult role when interrogated through a child rights lens is a very deficit focused model, as displayed in the following quote:

> "*My role as least-adult included undertaking a responsive, interactive, fully involved participant observer role with the children in as least an adult role as possible. This entailed neither directing or correcting children's actions. While my size dictated that I could never physically pass for a child, I endeavoured to put aside ordinary forms of adult status and interaction – authority, verbal competency, cognitive, and social mastery – in order to follow their ways closely."* (Mandell, 1988, p.428)

A "responsive, interactive, fully involved participant observer" appeals to me greatly. It is what I first loved about the concept. However, moving on the "neither directing or correcting children's actions" is a part I find strange. In children's play there are always rules (mostly unspoken, agreed rules) and in my experience children are often quick to point out when another child is not following the perceived rules of the game or acting in the correct manner; even more so, children tend to direct the play

[27] This term is used in the ECEC sector to describe Piaget's Developmentally Appropriate Approach and the NAEYC's subsequent subscription to it as an appropriate method of working with children. They advocate that children should only be introduced to experiences and materials / toys etc when it is developmentally appropriate for their mind and body and not before. It is thought that children develop in a linear fashion that aligns with their age.

participants as part of their play. Thus, I find it strange that the concept would involve deliberately not getting involved in correcting or directing the other children in play. I would argue that it is even contradictory to declaring oneself to being "a *responsive, interactive, fully involved participant observer*." Surely to be fully involved and responsive the researcher would have to direct, or correct? However, the deficit focused model becomes clear to me in the phrase "*I endeavoured to put aside ordinary forms of adult status and interaction – authority, verbal competency, cognitive, and social mastery.*" It is here that the child is not described as being competent or capable – in order to *fit in* the researcher felt she needed to, for want of a better phrase, dumb herself down. I find this troubling. Not only is it a deficit view of children's capabilities but it could be argued that it is also unethical in the manner in which the researcher changes her mannerisms and capabilities in order to deceive the children to infiltrate their group. However, I am mindful that it was not written in a time or context in which I formed my own culturally informed beliefs about children and their competencies.

Spivak's advocated approach of *learning from below* (2012) is evident in the following sentence from Mandell, it is also a reason why I initially connected with it, "Since I initially had little understanding of children's interactional entry patterns, I assumed the role of learner, and allowed the children to teach me their ways" (ibid). This sentence sees the children as capable and competent in and of themselves, even if perceived that they are less capable than adults, Mandell evidences here that she believes children are experts of their own worlds. However, there are many incidents mentioned of blurring lines and confusion for the children as to the exact nature of the role of the researcher. For instance, allow me to explore the first statement: "As an active participant I committed many mistakes by acting in nonchildlike ways that the children either did not comprehend or mistook for adult responses" (1988, p.439). As an adult, the researcher asserts that acting in a non-childlike manner i.e., an adult manner, is a mistake, thus leading me to conclude that being seen for her authentic self – an adult – is a mistake, and further to this that the children were somehow wrong for comprehending these acts as adult responses or for not comprehending them at all. The power differentials and ethical implications of pretending to be something other than who you are to infiltrate a marginalised group collide here in this sentence. It troubles me somewhat that this is viewed by the researcher to be a mistake or lack of comprehension on the part of the children for believing what they are seeing. That is, they see an adult behave as an adult, and are deemed confused or mistaken for believing it is an adult acting as an adult.

Another instance is mentioned here:

> "The least-adult role demanded that I demonstrate to children the boundaries of my role. Since I did not want to be treated as a teacher, I had to show children that I could not be called on to perform adult tasks such as tying shoes, pushing them on the swings, holding them in my lap, or changing diapers. Children's requests for these types of activities I rebuffed by stating, "I am not a teacher. You'll have to ask the teacher to do that." As I discovered, in the beginning, the children protested my refusals…The main reason children have difficulty in accepting an adult as

> nondirective stems from their inexperience of adults as participatory, enjoyable, and non-judgmental." (p.441-442)

When I examine this excerpt, what immediately comes to my mind is the way the researcher has conflated the roles and identities of 'adult' and 'teacher'. There is no real explanation for why these roles are conflated or treated as one and the same. I do wonder if it is because the researcher is coming from a sociological tradition rather than an educational discipline. However, I would hesitate to suggest it is simply a matter of disciplinary traditions and not more nuanced than that. I am also confused as to why tying shoes, pushing the swing, or holding a child on their lap are considered 'adult' roles? Yes, I concede that in the Minority world, in particular in North America, the norm for changing diapers would be considered an adult's role but that is not the same in other parts of the world, nor is it the case in every home in North America. However, pushing a swing, holding a child on their lap, and tying shoes laces are things that older children do for younger children all the time. Again, the researcher does not give a rationale for why these tasks are considered 'adult' tasks. Due to education, and in turn educational research being relational, I cannot comprehend refusing a child who has reached out for help, particularly in tasks that help build a more tactile, stronger relationship. I understand, and empathise, with the young children's protests and refusal to accept these imposed boundaries but again, I am frustrated with the researcher's tendency to focus on these reactions in deficit terms: "*their inexperience* of adults as participatory, enjoyable, and non-judgmental" (ibid).

There are many more episodes noted by the researcher of the children resisting or not comprehending her role (as do the educators). Some, in my view, are problematic, such as "by not approaching the children with comforting or nurturing tasks and by responding unenthusiastically on the few occasions I was approached, the children rarely solicited my adult-like behaviour" (1988, p.446). Yes, I can concede that it could be possible that the children rarely solicited what I would term as caring behaviours rather than adult behaviours because they understood the researcher to not be an adult – at least not a carer adult. However, it is more plausible to me that the children did not approach the researcher for caring behaviours because they had been rejected previously and had learned that the researcher would not offer these behaviours. I disagree that these caring behaviours sit purely in the realm of the adult, children are often comforting and caring towards each other, particularly in early childhood and it does cause me to wonder about the ethical implications of this behaviour on such young children (the children in both research sites were two and three years of age) and their ability to form future relationships with carers, adults, and educators.

As problematic as the concept of the least-adult can be, I do believe that Mandell had the bones of something rather innovative and much more productive in accessing children's worlds and ways of being. Responsive, interactive, fully involved as well as assuming the role of learner and allowing children to teach their ways (Mandell, 1988) are all relationship building, partnership behaviours. This

relationship and rapport building is pivotal to building up a relationship of trust which depends on the skills of the adult researcher (Punch, 2002). They could also be considered the behaviours of a playful researcher. It seems obvious to me that play would be used as a medium through which to build genuine rapport and relationships. It also seems obvious to me that play, by its very explorative and inquisitive nature, should be used as a research tool with children and thus, in turn, it makes sense to assume the role of a playful researcher.

> *"Children's behaviour in schools is very much affected by the expectations and customs of that institution, which shape how they perceive an external researcher or consultant…Outsiders are often treated like teachers (e.g. being called 'sir' or 'miss') and communication patterned on the classroom (e.g. putting hands up to be 'allowed' to speak). On the other hand, a researcher may be welcomed just because they are not a teacher (Morrow, 1999a). Much will depend on how the researcher seeks to locate themselves within the school environment." (Hill, 2006, p.83)*

Group Drawing Exercises

Suresh parks up the bike, and I walk up the drive and see the children standing in lines in morning assembly. As they sing the national anthem I stop and watch them. The older classes are standing tall, shoulders back singing; the younger classes, particularly the nursery and LKG sneak a look at me from the corner of their eyes. Some wave or give me cheeky smiles. I smile, wink, then nod my head in the direction of the head boy at the top of their line who is frowning at them. They glance at the head boy, quickly lose their smiles, stand up straight, and continue singing.

When assembly is over the children go to their classrooms led by their head boy or girl. The teachers assemble in the veranda outside their office chatting, collecting their roll-book. Mrs Singh joins with Poonam. "Morning, my princess," Mrs Singh pinches my cheek before I give

her a hug. “Morning” I smile back at her. “Good morning, Sinéad” Poonam smiles brightly before leaning in for a hug. “Morning, Poonam.” A chorus of morning greetings rises from the teachers as Mrs Singh walks towards them. We all stand in a circle. I put my hands, and camera, behind my back. “Miss will lead us in prayer.” Mrs Singh and all the teachers close their eyes. “Lord Jesus, we thank you for this day that you have given us and for this weather that is so good. Please we ask you Jesus, not to make it too hot for Sinéad, thank you Jesus. We also ask that you guide her in her research and guide all of the teachers in their teachings today. We also thank you for continued health for Sir and ask your blessings over all our health and the school today. Thank you, Jesus, Amen.” The teachers all chime in, “Amen.”

The teachers disperse to the classrooms. Mrs Singh bustles into the kitchen and I put my bag in the office. I take out my notepad, my camera, the sketchpads, and the plastic bag of markers. I sigh as I know we are working with UKG today and Cynthia Miss is not in. *This could be a disaster.* I dread researching in UKG. It is boring and rigid when Miss Cynthia is there and chaotic and out of control when she is not. My only joy is my little gang of boys that have anointed me as their personal teacher. They are so cheeky in the funniest sense of the word; I get so much joy from them in such a grim class. I am so conflicted. In all the research papers and literature on researching I have ever read I have never read about the researcher not liking the process or the environment. I suppose it shouldn’t matter, should it?

I walk out to the veranda, “where to today. Sinéad?” “UKG, Suresh” I give a wry smile. “We are going to do the drawing exercise with them.” “Ok, what do you want me to do?” “Same as last time, just translate what I’m saying, take photos if I put my camera down, and if you catch the teachers telling them what to draw tell them to back off!” We laugh. We walk into the classroom and quickly set up. I tell the children that I am going to give them a piece of paper and some felt tip markers and I ask them to draw a picture of what they love to play in school. I tell them they can draw who they love to play with, where they love to play, and what they love to play. Suresh translates; and then myself, Suresh, Christina, and Helena hand out one sheet of paper to each child and place the markers of many colours on the floor between a few groups that have naturally formed and ask them to share.

What followed was a wonderful sense of calm busyness, chatting, bargaining, and negotiating over markers; chatting and collaborating about the drawings with each other; laughter, smiles, and a few tense exchanges about the yellow or orange markers[28]. I walked around taking photos, listening, smiling, and making notes. Helena and Christina stood back and allowed myself and Suresh to take control of the situation – a welcome change from the helpfulness of the other class teachers who would constantly prompt the children in their drawings. As in the younger classes, I saw groups of friends discuss their drawings and agree to draw similar if not exactly the same drawings – checking in with each other noting progress and making suggestions. *I am missing the conversations! I'm missing the story of their drawings.* I think about all the years I have worked in the early childhood education classrooms, and even watching my own two children at home – the drawing is always the end result of a narration process. A drawing at this age, in my experience, is never a static end result but always a story that is built upon as the story is imagined. I go to the top of the room and ask Suresh to tell the children when they are finished to come up and let me take a photograph of their drawings and explain to me what they drew.

That request turned the class from a busy calm to chaotic as one by one the children finish and clamour around me to tell me about their picture and get it photographed. I write down what they tell me about their drawings (assigning them by number to correspond to the number of the photo on the camera) translated by Suresh when needed. They requested to see their

[28] These were the two most popular colours.

drawing photographed and sometimes asked for photographs with their drawings – which I obliged. By the time we had finished the chaos had kicked off again and Christina and Helena were doing their best to bring the class under control. The children saw that it was time to line up and go to lunch and started shoving and hitting each other to get into the line. Crying and shouting broke out. The volunteer teachers try everything to gain control – they threaten the stick, they threaten Harbinder, miss, they shout. Eventually, I can't take anymore and the researcher in me leaves my body and the teacher takes over.

"Ok class, let's get lined up." I clap my hands and move myself to stand at the top of the line, calling on certain children as I go. I take the hand of a smaller child who is being pushed out and crying and bring him with me to the top of the line. I start singing, "Line up, line up, one to three, I like you and you like me" the jostling stops as the children turn to look at me singing. I sing it again and the children stand quietly. I lower my voice and speak quietly. The children become silent. "We are going to stand in a straight line, very quietly, with all of our friends because Wendy Miss's class is still working on their math beside us. Put up your hand very quietly if you are hungry?" All the children put up their hands. "Oh!" I exclaim in an over-exaggerated manner. "we must all walk on our tiptoes to get our lunch before our bellies growl. Let's go!" and we walk on our tiptoes, using exaggerated movements and giggles, and slowly make our way over to the lunch-room. Suresh follows behind me with my camera, bag of markers, sketchpads, and notebook.

When the children have settled at the tables and are eating their lunch, Christina and Helena come over to join me in the veranda. I am busy writing up my notes and looking at the photographs. “Sinéad,” “Yes, Christina?” “How did you do that? How did you get them so calm and obedient without a stick or shouting? I hate shouting and using the stick but if I don’t, they don’t listen to me, and when our class gets noisy all the teachers complain to Mr Singh.” I look at Christina and Helena, looking at me with expectation. They cannot be more than twenty years of age. I think back to my first year or two of teaching after I qualified. I was in a Montessori Primary school which had about seventy children aged between three and twelve years of age. I had thirty children from three to six years in my room with an assistant teacher. It was the largest room in a very small school. The teachers would always complain to me or the principal whenever my class got loud or unruly. I remember distinctly the knot of dread in my stomach if the children got excited or loud at any time. I was always trying to shout over them or keep them still and quiet – and I was twenty-four, with a post graduate diploma in Montessori teaching with only two years of experience under my belt. I empathised. “I am afraid it is twenty-five percent teacher training, and seventy-five per cent experience. I have been working with early childhood classes for eighteen years now. I made a lot of mistakes over the years and I have a lot of regrets, so you are not always going to get it right and that is ok.” “But what you did there…how did it work?” Christina looked at me expectantly. She wanted the bag of tricks: the quick fix.

"Well, in my experience children love music and singing. They respond immediately to it. Especially short easy rhymes. That song I sang? The tune is from Barney, a kids tv show – but any tune like that will work. Twinkle twinkle little star is another one I use. I just make up short rhyming lyrics and sing them to a tune that is familiar. Also, once you have their attention, talking quietly will normally cause them to stop moving, lean in, and listen carefully to what you are saying, particularly if you make it fun. If you try to shout over them, they will shout over you. The power of touch also cannot be underestimated. And by that I don't mean physically moving and dragging them into position, but an outstretched hand will normally lead them to take yours, or a quick, soft touch on their cheek will bring their eyes to you. The key is to be gentle and appropriate." "Ok, good" Helena starts to write down what I've said. "Ladies, it is important to know how children are developing, what is happening in the home environment, diet…all these things and more will affect how they behave in class. They will also test you to see if you will follow through with your new approach or if you will fall back into shouting and using the stick. There is no bag of tricks that will work. In my opinion, it is trial and error along with building real relationships with each child in your care." "Ok, but the Twinkle Twinkle, are there any more of these songs? On YouTube maybe?" Christina looks at me expectantly. "Yes, there are lots of songs on YouTube. I'm off to drink my chai under my tree for a while" I walk away. I think I am feeling…disappointed…?

As I walk to the tree, I see the children sitting on the wall at the side of the playing field. A lot of them have taken their drawings back out of their bags and are adding to them using pens and pencils in partnership with each other. They are adding to the story and I am not able to hear them or take note. I take a few photographs. One or two call me over to show me that they have added more flowers or rainbows to their picture. "Yes, me too. Miss? Me too!" Other children begin to show me their additions. The school

bus arrives and many of the children clamber in to go home. Others run to their parents walking up the drive showing them their pictures and pointing to me. I wave and smile and they wave shyly back. I walk back to my spot under the tree.

I can't believe I missed that opportunity to see what they added when I wasn't instructing them or guiding them!

I don't have the full story...

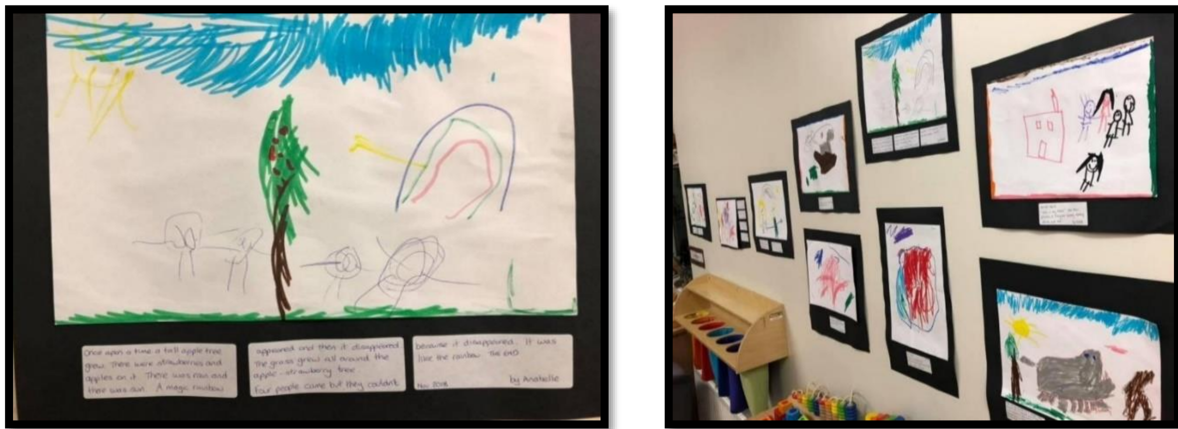
Methods:

Although it is not the methods, but the relationships involved in the co-production of knowledge which make participatory research (Horgan, 2017) the methods themselves have been the focus of much discussion and critique (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Punch, 2002; Clark & Moss, 2006; James, 2007; Mitchel & Elwood, 2012; Koch, 2019). Punch argues that using methods which suit children's competencies can help them feel more at ease with the researcher (2002) which balance the focus on methods as a means to fostering a good social relationship. Dahlberg and Moss posit that the increasing transdisciplinary focus and partnerships in recent research is instigating an escape from "the dominant discourse's insular pre-occupation with developmental psychology to open up a myriad of new and provocative perspectives that introduce movement and experimentation into the field" (2013, p. xi). Having read research from Early Childhood Education and Care, Psychology, Philosophy, Children's Geography, Childhoods, Anthropology, Sociology, and Education over the past five years, I tend to agree with Dahlberg and Moss. Each disciplinary tradition's philosophies, methods, and theories have weaved together to offer different ways to reconceptualise childhood, children, and researching with children, at least for me. Re-examining my research through all these disciplinary lenses afforded me a perspective I just did not have while doing it. It allowed me to re-imagine. I had always thought of my research project as a pregnancy – I had all these hopes, dreams, and expectations but it had a mind, body, and personality of its own – although I could guide it, it would manifest and develop in its own time and to its own tune. I think that my conceptualisation of what a researcher was and how a researcher conducted themselves in the field was very rigid and clashed with my conceptualisation of the research project itself. However, using different disciplines through which to un-do and re-imagine the original research project allowed me to re-imagine how a researcher could be and what they could do in the field – this includes of course methodology.

Drawing as Story Telling:

I used three methods of researching with children with varying degrees of participation, the first of which was drawing. I conducted one-on-one drawing interviews and I also conducted whole-class drawing exercises. Each offered different results, and each was differing in its level of partnership.

From my experience of working as an early childhood educator, I have witnessed again and again how drawings are the visual output of an oral story the child is telling. I have watched as children narrate the process as they draw, telling themselves, myself, or another adult the story of their drawing and adding to it at every twist and turn. There is a form of documentation used in the Reggio Emilia approach where the adult educator sits with the child or a group of children as they work at drawing or painting, or indeed creating something from junk art, and as they narrate the story of their creation, the early childhood educator writes down what the child is saying. This is then written up and placed beside the artwork to allow other adults to read the story of the piece. This way of documentation has grown very popular in Ireland in recent years and has developed my thinking on storytelling and drawing.



Anabelle's Drawing & a display of children's art from Horizon's Montessori School, Bishopstown, Co. Cork, November 2018[29]

Children may collaborate on a drawing in a group drawing or individual drawing (when using their own sheets and drawings) but they work together to build an interweaved narrative – a form of dialogue working in synergy - which they each take ownership of, both individually, and as a group. They co-create their story together. I felt that I missed this element by doing it as a whole class drawing exercise. Generally, the children spoke to themselves and each other in Hindi or Marathi during the drawing activities. Only answering me in English if I asked for a description – I asked every individual child for a description in order to prevent the type of insult or perceived lack of technical skill Punch (2002) spoke about in her research – however, when I examine it now and undo the process, I realise that a description is not a story. By asking for descriptions, was I not also asking the children for an easier way to code or thematically analyse? By asking for a description, I think I may have reduced their representation – the story- to a set of static images and not a fluid, messy, living story. I now think about this piece from Punch as she describes the advantages of using drawing with children:

> *"The advantage of using drawing with children is that it can be creative, fun and can encourage children to be more actively involved in the research. The use of drawing gives children time to think about what they wish to*

[29] Reproduced with permission from the proprietor of Horizon's Montessori School, Lee Herlihy.

portray. The image can be changed and added to, which gives children more control over their form of expression, unlike an interview situation where responses tend to be quicker and more immediate" (2001, p331)

and I consider exactly how much control it actually gives children over their expression if we then go on to ask them to reduce the story down to a description, and even more so if we choose to see a theme in a number of similar descriptions. It seems to me that we keep coming back to the question of power, authority, and editing as James mentioned above. This reinforces for me just how much the story of play and early learning in Emmanuel Public School, which I tried to *capture*, was not my story to tell.

Like Punch, I wasn't too worried about the drawings being seen or copied by other children in the class because they did represent their ideas as a group (ibid) but mostly because I observed that the children in Emmanuel Public School were more likely to (and more frequently) collaborate and co-create knowledge than any other children I have worked with as an educator. It was a phenomenon I witnessed over and over again, not just in the early childhood classrooms in which I was researching, but in the school as a whole. In fact, it was the observance of this phenomenon that caused me to change my approach for the photography exercise from individual to group.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words:

I first settled on the idea of using photography with the children, having read Clark and Moss' *Listening to Young Children, The Mosaic Approach* and how they were used as one piece of the mosaic. I like how it was framed as listening to children as part of an ongoing conversation rather than capturing,

eliciting, or granting voice: "Listening then becomes embedded in relationships based on 'an ethic of encounter' (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p156). Children are respected as is difference; so, we are not trying to seek 'the voice of the child', nor trying to make children's voices echo adult voices, nor requiring consensus" (2011, p. 6). This speaks to both my conceptualisation of educational research as a relational dialogue and to Spivak in terms of learning from below and in the act of listening. The fact that the original method (2001) was changed to add a final stage intended to "make explicit the intended link between listening and action" (2011, p.7) speaks to Lundy's participation framework that demands a response for children in participatory research. The method was also tweaked in 2005 from a method that was designed to listen to only one individual child's voice to groups of children which I felt left it open to being used in Majority world contexts were the individual is not considered as important as the collective.

Using photography with children in the school is also something I am very comfortable with; stretching back to that initial volunteer trip when we ignored the pleas of the teachers and allowed the children to use our cameras to capture images. The children in Emmanuel Public School love the camera! I have watched them perform for the camera, especially for volunteer trips and visitors to the school. This time I wanted them to have control of the camera and ask someone or something else to do the performing. During the multiple research trips, I immediately handed over my camera used for photographic observation, to individual children who asked for it in class or in the yard / playing field. They immediately turned it back on me or my things (identification badge, notebooks etc) and then on their friends and classroom. For me, this was an important part of sharing power with them. Who am I to take photos of them and not allow the gaze to be returned? I speak about this further in a section below when I began to wonder if the children attempted to de-colonise the research project.

I had brought four battery-powered, digital cameras with me which were borrowed from friends and family. Each camera had a large screen on the back in which the children could see what they were capturing. In conversation with Suresh, and after my observations in the classroom and outdoors on the playing field of children co-creating knowledge together and seeming uncomfortable when they had to complete an activity individually (such as the drawing interviews), we decided to change from the original plan of just having the focus children in each class take the cameras. We also decided not to send them home, because it

seemed perhaps a type of invasion that really was not necessary when researching play and early learning in the school. Suresh was particularly anxious about what could be captured that might cause regret or embarrassment in the home environments. Suresh's concerns were juxtaposed with Punch's rationale for sending individual children home with cameras over-night – because they were less likely to copy their friend (2002). I wonder does this take an element of communal learning away and focus on the Minority world's obsession with individuality? Although, I also consider James' warning about collective voice erasing the individual child's right to a voice (2007). It is an interesting comparison, both with legitimate concerns. As Suresh is a local, who has lived experience of being a child in one of the communities in which the children in the research project live, I chose to listen to his local, culturally situated knowledge and expertise.

On the days of the group photography exercise, we took the four cameras in with empty memory cards. We told the class that we would like them to capture what they like about the school, where they play, and who they play with. We grouped them in groups of four children to one camera and put a sticker on them before giving them the camera to indicate that they had had an opportunity to use it. The class were told how to use the camera and that they had ten minutes to capture the photographs they wanted together. We didn't take notice of where each group started and ended with their photographs because we wanted to capture the whole group experience. At the end of the day, we loaded the classes photographs from the cameras onto the computer (with a back-up on a USB key) and erased the photographs for the next day and class. Each day, the children spilled out onto the yard, took photos in their classroom, went to other classrooms, and onto the playing field. They also went into the office and kitchen in search of Miss Harbinder and Mr Singh. Suresh and I followed them, took photos of their interactions, chatted with other adults, or had our chai. We weren't needed – unless called upon to pose for the camera! When my alarm on my phone rang to indicate the ten minutes were up, we returned to the class with the children and set up the next group of four. There was so much excitement and fun in this activity. The whole school seemed to buzz as everyone got involved. I soon realised the children had their own research agenda and what I wanted was of no concern to them. Reflecting back, I think their research was more fascinating than mine. The photography exercise was a lived experience for the children. It pulsated with life, enthusiasm, and control.

When all four early childhood education classes had completed their turn at the exercise, Suresh and I spent the following day locked up in forty degrees heat in a classroom with one fan and no air conditioning sorting through the photographs from each class looking for themes. Suresh got a crash course in thematic analysis. We completed two rounds of analysis over two days on each class' photographs. On the third day we chose a number of photographs from each class on each theme and got three colour copies of each printed in A4 size. We then went back into each class armed with our photographs and showed them to the children and asked them what they were and why they took them. This was a very popular exercise with the children who got very excited to see their photographs printed, identifying who took what photograph, and laughing at us when we told them what we thought the photos represented if we were wrong.

Suresh led those discussions and there was much laughter and joking. I took notes, photographs, and also laughed at our wrong guesses. The children were delighted that they received a copy of their photographs to put on the wall of their classroom and explain to their teachers. Some asked to take a particular photograph home which we allowed. The third set was given to the class teacher and the board of management to use as they saw fit. A lot of the teachers took home photographs the children had taken of them and marvelled at the skill the children demonstrated.

A Playful Researcher:

"Playfulness can be seen as the disposition to frame or reframe a situation to include possibilities for enjoyment, exploration and choice" (Mardell, Wilson, Ryan, Ertel, Krechevsky & Baker, 2016, p. 3). While playfulness as an approach to researching and play as a method of inquiry or learning is being discussed and utilised more formally or explicitly in contemporary research (Mardell et al, 2016; Baker et al, 2016; Baker & Davila, 2018; Koch, 2019) I suspect it has been an approach of qualitative researchers with children (particularly younger children) for many years. "Play is both objective and subjective, comprising qualities of observable behaviour as well as qualities of felt experience" (ibid). It is this idea of felt experience that leads me to believe that it has been utilised in the field but not named – at least until Mandell tried to articulate it and put some sort of shape on it in the conceptualisation of the least-adult role. However, I would argue that Mandell fell victim to what

Sutton-Smith calls the ambiguity of play (2007) which Wineberg & Chicquette in describing their attempts to define play said it was, "as difficult as nailing smoke to a wall" (2009). When it is difficult to articulate and agree on what you are trying to research it is almost impossible to put appropriate (and agreeable) boundaries on your approach. I suspect that Mandell was trying to be a playful researcher and perhaps overthought it in the name of research and rigour.

For Wood, play itself is:

> "ambiguous and highly complex, in terms of content, social interactions, symbolic meaning, communicative languages, and the environmental affordances that mediate play and playfulness. Meanings are produced dynamically, drawing on the socio-cultural-historical resources of the players, according to the perspectives of educators and children (Rogers and Evans, 2008), and across dimensions of diversity (Fassler and Levin, 2008; Mac Noughton 2009). From children's perspectives, play is also about subversion and inversion, which is where issues of power, agency and control are played out. Thus, play incorporates political and ethical issues …" (2010)

Taking Wood's definition of play and likening it to a playful researcher role would also name the complexities of the role, the responsibilities, the power relations, and make explicit the ethical and political issues, as well as ambiguities. However, I agree it is also a disposition and an embodied or 'felt' role. While the Pedagogy of Play Research Team (Baker et.al 2016; 2018) use Playful Participatory Research (PPR) as a playful methodology for researching in school and researching play as learning and or pedagogy, I would like to build on the notion of a playful researcher to be broader than that – as an extension of Mandell's concept of least-adult role.

I have searched – not exhaustively, but rigorously across many disciplines, and the explicit mention of 'a playful researcher' is something I have only found in recent research around using Playful Participatory Research (PPR) (Baker & Davila, 2018). Plenty of research papers and studies name play as a method of inquiry, pedagogy, or learning but not playful as a disposition or role of a researcher. Is being playful somehow the opposite of research or science? Considering play is our very first, instinctive mode of inquiry as humans should play and playfulness not be central to inquisitiveness in researching. Of my inquiries, Koch comes closest when she speaks about playful interactions and negotiations between the researcher and the child (2019).

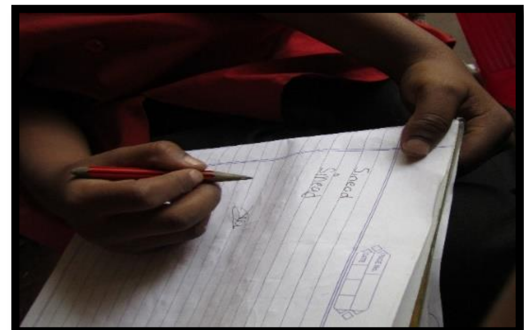
Koch used Hart's ladder of participation to negotiate her research with three to five year olds, she argues that because children do not share the same theoretical interests as adults "their participation might easily change the focus of a study" (2019, p.2). However, these differences in focus are not right or wrong, they are not fraught with tension or at odds with each other, they are simply different lens through which the study is experienced and told. This is interesting to me in my research in Emmanuel Public School. Particularly during the photographic exercise which we did with the children. Thinking with Koch, the children's focus on relationships and physical environment of their school does not compete with my focus on play and early learning or the culture of play and early learning – they are just two different lenses to what we experienced, valued, and looked for in that moment of research together.

Koch cautions that “by flexing back and forth between her own and the children’s perspective” (2019, p.5) the adult researcher understands that they are not seeing things from the child’s point of view as a playful researcher but that what they are seeing are, in fact, adult representations and approximations of the children’s views (ibid). This caution echoes James caution of claiming to see the world from a child’s perspective as a new kind of truth (2007) when research uses participatory research with children. However, Koch states that in order to include a child’s perspectives from this view the playful researcher must be prepared to let go of their adult control, accept an invitation to play in order to develop relationships and “encounter the children with an open and curious mind and acknowledge, join, and engage in play with children on their terms” (2019, p5).

‘Playful’ is a broad term, just like play; and just like play it has many different variations, mannerisms, and manifestations. That is, how it is embodied and enacted can change based on the situation, the age of the child, the sense of humour, or types of play invitations opened up to the adult researcher. The researcher’s own experiences, personality, play mannerisms, and skillsets will be important. A lot of my experience in recognising play behaviours, play signals, and play invitations goes back to my training as a Montessori pre-school educator and my many years working with preschool children. Over the ten years I visited Emmanuel Public School as a volunteer (who went specifically to play with children and offer an playful, sensory experience for a week), and in my research process over the last five years, I have learned a lot about the variances in cultural play behaviours (such as the physicality and roughness of their play which turned out to be tender exchanges), play invitations, and manifestations of play that were different to those I was used to in Ireland. I certainly learned when children performed rather than played (mostly to charities, visitors, and volunteers – particularly those from the Minority world). In some cases, a wink and a smile at a child in class was enough to show a shared funny moment – a shared experience of something happening; handing over my camera and posing as asked or making funny faces was also a type of playful behaviour that built relationships and trust in the early days. It echoed Koch’s argument that a sense of freedom that helps to overcome some power relations exists in a co-constructed shared world between the children and the playful adult researcher (2019). This leads me to think about training in play and being playful as a methodology, approach, and role that would be important for a researcher who has not had the training or experience that I had. Certainly, I would need some training in play behaviours, signals, and invitations if I was researching with teenagers or youths, I suspect. While some researchers discuss capacity building for children when participating in co-researching projects (Lundy & McEvoy, 2018; Kellet, 2010) in order to manage power relations, I think there is a deeper, more urgent need to discuss disposition, approach, personality, and roles with adult researchers first - rather than focusing on methods and assuming the adult has the capacity simply because they are an adult.

Children as Researchers or De-colonising Participatory Research:

I have previously described how I was chosen to be a sort of teacher to a small group of boys at the back left hand side of the Upper Kindergarten classroom during my first official research trip in 2017. This little gang of mischievous, inquisitive boys, all aged between five and six years of age decided over time, increasingly, that they would research me just as I was researching them. Nobody articulated it but I soon realised they were modelling my research behaviours. It started out as playful behaviours, invitations to play, giggling, smiling, cheekily requesting my camera and then it would grow serious as they seemed to concentrate on their research of me. I would find them looking in my notebook and copying words I had written into their own copy books. They confidently asked me for my / our (?) camera and at first, they took photos of each other and the classroom, but soon they grew to take photographs of me (posed then unsuspecting!).

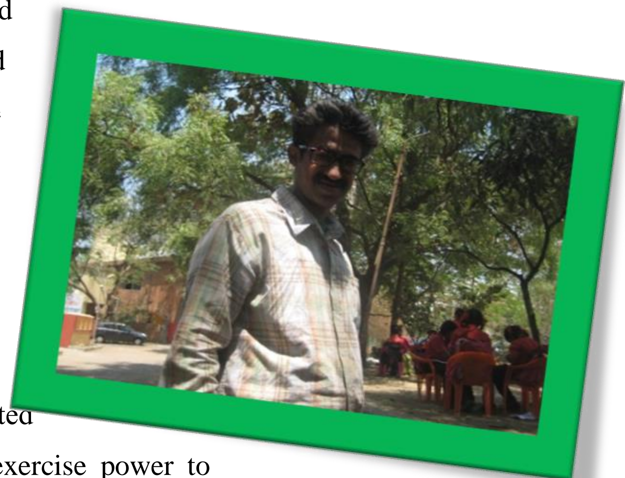


They asked about my identification around my neck and showed me theirs in return. They diligently copied my name into their copy books from my ID card, checking to see if they pronounced it correctly, as I did with them. Soon, they took photographs of my I.D. card and my notebook as I took photos of theirs.

They met me outside in the yard after lunch and observed me taking photos of different type of play behaviours and games. After a few days they had figured out what I was looking for and started to perform those types of play behaviours for the camera or ask me

to watch as they played chasing. They researched my facial expressions and body language as I withdrew from this play (because I knew it was a performance and was perhaps directing my attention away from some *real* or *authentic* data (or at least the notions I had in my head of what I was looking for – I now suspect the real and authentic data was happening in front of me). They then stopped and started to observe the field and identified their friends or younger children playing the types of play I had previously photographed and would alert me to them to photograph and observe them. Sometimes they called me if there was a new play behaviour that I had not witnessed which (I assume) they thought would be of interest to me to observe. I would see them discuss amongst themselves, sometime laughing sometimes more seriously before they chose someone to approach me "Miss! Miss!" before pointing to whatever it was that they wanted me to see. Then they would accompany me over and stand in silence or in discussion with each other as I took photos or observed.

In 2018, after four trips, when it came time for the groups to take the digital cameras out into the school to take photographs of where they like to play, who they like to play with, and what they like about their school, all the children – from Nursery right through to First Standard, worked in groups to research their school. What they chose to research was relationships and environment: their school and their school family. Thinking with Koch, in her 2019 paper, this was not two dual research projects fighting and jostling for which is real or right because it answered my research questions, and which is a waste of time and wrong because it didn't answer my research questions – they were both just different perspectives on the same research project and could co-exist together adding more depth and nuance to the project. I think about this line from Lundy: "Gallagher (2008), drawing on Foucault, has suggested that we should instead be asking how children 'exercise power to



comply with, resist, evade, colonise, appropriate or reproduce the power exercised over them' (p. 403)" 2018, p.346). I don't agree that they colonise or appropriate, in fact the opposite - I think they de-colonise the adult researcher's agenda and research, and reclaim it as theirs, in their space, completed with their time. I do agree that they exercise power and agency but in a positive manner. They research in their natural mode, which it could be argued is more embodied, intuitive, and in the moment – a lived experience.

The Researchers Becomes the Researched!

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Rights, Capacity, and Dialoguing with the Academy

We spend so much time building children's capacities (Lundy & McEvoy, 2018; Kellet, 2010), and thinking about child-friendly methods of inquiry (Clark & Moss, 2001; 2006; 2011; Punch, 2008; Horgan, 2017) that matches their capacities and competencies that we can forget that children are natural researchers. I would argue that we train them out of their natural modes of inquiry and research when we teach them how to research like adults. Kellet writes that the debate about children's competencies to engage in rigorous research emerged from early developmental psychology but she counters that social experience is a more reliable indication of maturity and competence, "children's competence is ''different from'' not ''lesser than'' adults' competence" (Kellet, 2010, p.197). This point is reiterated by Lundy who views a child's right to express their view as depending only on their ability to form a view not on their capacity to express a mature view (2007). It strikes me as odd that both researchers then go on to either build skills or capacities in the research process. They seem to mean to research only in the *adult* sense of what it means to research, to be a researcher, and to disseminate research. Making children change the way they naturally research is like asking a woman to change how she naturally behaves to fit into a patriarchal organisation. I think there is a lot to unravel here in terms of citizenship, rights holders, colonisation of children's childhoods and voice, and how their voice or views (and certainly their labour) is treated and disseminated in the academy.

"The dissemination of research carried out by them and, crucially, owned by them, is an important vehicle for child voice" (Kellet, 2010 p197). I fully agree with this statement made by Kellet, but I would question how it could be owned and disseminated, allowing for engagement in a dialogue with the academy if the children themselves are not identified as co-researchers and are in fact, scrubbed from the data? Kellet goes on to state, "Reflecting on the skills needed to undertake research, it is apparent that these are not synonymous with being an adult; they are synonymous with being a researcher, and most researchers have undergone some form of training" (2010, p.197-198). This is used as a rationale for her training programme that children underwent before the co-research process. Could we consider that this is training children out of their natural modes of inquiry and into those that "fit" with the academy? Children have been researching from birth - just not in the adult sense nor in the academic sense of what it means to research. Thus, academia is closed off to them unless they learn the language, tools, capacities, and scientific methods of the adult Minority world researcher. If we allowed children to research naturally and recognise it as another way of knowing and being, it holds the potential for children to truly research and engage with the academy in their own way and with their own voice with no need for translation or edits from adults. This would radically change how we see children as researchers and would offer us a powerful insight into their worlds.

In 2011, Lundy and McEvoy wrote that children are not just capable of co-researching but as rights-holders are entitled to engage in the process. However, one of those rights is article 19, which states:

> "1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation…" (UNCRC, 1989)

Lundy describes article 19 as the provision of protection from abuse and thus able to express their views without fear of reprisal. However, article 19 also provides for the protection from *exploitation*. Contributing their voice and time without recognition for that contribution, to a research project could be considered as exploitative on the part of the researcher as discussed earlier. It should be the child's choice (advised by those who care for and are responsible for them) to remain anonymous or be named as a contributor or co-researcher that offers a protection from exploitation. It also offers the potential to protect the child from the epistemological violence of having to conform to the adult world and adult ways in order to be allowed to take part at all. "Children, as a powerless group in society, are not in a position to challenge the ways in which research findings about them are presented" (Morrow, 2008, p.58). If children are unable to read, respond to, or challenge the research findings about themselves then they are unable to speak in the Spivakian sense.

It is another erasure of the identities of a marginalised and under-represented group, which is again protected under articles 8 and 30 of the UNCRC. We need to ask ourselves, at what point does anonymisation of data perpetuate the problem of being marginalised, being Othered, or being voiceless? That is, at what point do the scales tip towards acts of colonisation of children's identities, information, and knowledge for the betterment of our academic careers or for the *advancement of knowledge* in the Minority world? Who decides whom to protect, and who does the 'protecting'? Allowing the participants to choose identity or anonymisation, empowers them to correct the record, or respond to the researchers' interpretations of their lives, their childhoods, their views, their data in the present or in the future.

I acknowledge that there may be other risks to disclosing identity, and I am not arguing the children should automatically be identified in any or every research project in which they participate, however when using a children's rights lens combined with postcolonial theory it would be remiss of me not to explore other possible implications, ethical risks, and perhaps even breaches of international law. I do not offer any solutions other than perhaps to give children informed choices, and possibilities in partnership with trusted adults. I do not think there are any easy answers, but I do think there needs to be a bigger conversation around all of the rights that children hold and all the risks involved to children who research in participation with academics, particularly when from an under-represented or equally, an over-represented background. Lundy (2007) and Horgan (2017) both mention research fatigue on behalf of the children who responded to the research.

We could use this conversation to embrace what social science and qualitative research can truly offer – the opportunity for research participants to respond to your interpretation of the data and offer their

feedback on your interpretation – not as part of the research project – but in real time, as part of the academic dialogue. Thus, as well as de-colonising academia, an authentic engagement with research can prompt dialogue and dissemination beyond the walls of the academy. I acknowledge bringing initial findings back to participants has already formed part of the research process in much research for verification purposes or dissemination. However, how research findings are actually framed within the entire research project, subsequent publications, and dissemination, as discussed at the outset of this chapter, may alter the reading of the findings. By offering research participants the option to remain anonymous, use pseudonyms, or use their true identities we could potentially offer an authentic, equal partnership. They can engage in the conversation after the fact, with the original researcher but also those other researchers who respond. By having their name in and on the research, they have helped to create, they already stepped into the world of academia and can respond; that is their voice is already in play – they are part of the conversation thus not so much at the margins.

In Conversation with Suresh: The Evolution of an Interpreter and Guide to Co-Researcher and Co-creator of Knowledge

When I thought about productively undoing my research and the evolution of Suresh and the children as co-researchers, it became apparent very quickly that their voice should appear in the body of this thesis. In the chapters previous to this, I interrupt my voice with the children's photographs and drawings. In truth, thinking about it now, I cannot tell for sure who took all of the photographs I presented as mine in the black frames (as is discussed below) so it is possible that Suresh also interrupted my voice with photographs. When thinking about his role, it made sense that Suresh's voice as interpreter, guide, and co-researcher was also represented in the research. I decided to look at how other researchers represented them in their studies. Finding how interpreters were made visible in the research process proved hard; finding interpreter's voice in a published text proved even harder. Save a few instances in feminist and medical research (Turner, 2010). *…there is a lot to think about here in terms of power structures, voice, and agency…who is considered a researcher or co-constructor of knowledge? What lens are we seeing interpreted studies through if those lenses are not made visible or the co-construction of knowledge during the research process is unacknowledged?... Is interpreting a form of knowledge creation or does it require more…pulls on thread…* Examples of how a dialogue between researcher and research participant as co-creators of knowledge can be presented in a unique way that I have found came from adult and community education, in Ireland (Madden, 2020; O'Neill, 2015). However, I have chosen to follow a simpler transcription format that illustrates the natural ebb and flow of conversation as it happens between myself and Suresh.

Suresh was already known to me and is the chosen brother I spoke about in the prologue. We already had a relationship I could trust and a playful rapport. He helped me to understand the many phenomena I encountered with the children in the school and wider Indian society in Pune during the research process. After the data collection was finished, during the lockdown phases of the Covid 19 pandemic,

myself and Suresh sat down a few times and video-taped our conversations reflecting on the research process, how it evolved, how his position of interpreter and guide changed to co-researcher, and what I (or another researcher) might do to engage an interpreter in any future research projects in the Majority world. We usually video chat once a week, so when I could not get back over to India to talk about it in person as we had done throughout the research process, Suresh agreed to record our conversations by video. It should be noted however, that myself and Suresh are very playful in our exchanges with each other and often tease and laugh at each other and ourselves – the conversation should be read with this in mind. The conversation that is presented here was not the result of one conversation but multiple conversations, and certainly was not as linear as presented. I have placed headings to indicate a change in topic in what we discussed as we untangled the threads. Pull up a chair and join us - as we are already deep in conversation, trying to make sense of how Suresh's position of interpreter evolved into that of a co-researcher. Help us make sense of it.

Becoming an Interpreter

Suresh: Well, I decided to help you with the research because I knew you. Yeah, em…plus I was working with the kids the first time you came over. I was working with the kids at that point in time, so I knew the kids as well. I knew you as well so... It is like a common factor between the school, the kids, and you. Yeah, so that was the primary reason I actually chose to do the research with you or work for you. Because I knew you and them and also because as the years passed by, em we actually had like mutual thoughts. We agreed and disagreed on the same things. And whenever we disagreed, we had an explanation for that - it always ended up with agreeing with the other…most the times!

Sinéad: yeah *laughs* And do you think if I had done the research with somebody else that it would have gone different?

Suresh: Yes, it would have gone a lot differently em, because um, a third person involved in the research who you don't know, the school doesn't know, the kids don't know – kids will not open up that freely – they wouldn't have been that playful as they were by knowing that it is someone who they know that is with them, rather than a complete stranger. And at the same time, you actually wouldn't know as to if or not he would be interested in the research. Or he would give – he or she would give you any inputs about…on what you were researching. I was just saying that he would have been just working there as a translator and eh he would have just thought that it's just my job to translate not for added inputs or something em, you know…

Evolution to Co-Researcher:

Sinéad: yeah, because that's what the job was. The job was originally to just translate. But it changed because I think of our relationship. It changed because you were interested in what I was doing, and you became sort of my research partner – well not sort of – you became one of my research partners!

Suresh: yeah. And that is the reason…eh…if you were to have someone else you did not know – a complete stranger- or neither did the school or the kids - the research would have been much different as it has been till now. Because em, there will always be doubts stating whether or not that particular translator would be able to provide his or her inputs to the research and eh and agree or disagree to the facts that we debated on.

Sinéad: mmmhmmm *nods in agreement*…but actually, I don't think I would have completed…so, we thematically organised photographs and I don't think I would have done that with somebody who was just translating because I … I wouldn't have allowed the …. the position that they held to change whereas I trusted where it was going with you because I trusted you. So, we naturally formed a research partnership, so I taught…I showed you how I was theming the photographs - so you began to theme them with me. I definitely know I wouldn't have done that with, with somebody else…because I would have considered…that's my job not theirs. Em, but also, I wonder, like you are very playful and I'm very playful, like we are playful people, and even going back to the photographs…going back to the classes with the photographs and telling them what we thought and the kids like laughing and saying, "no that's not what it was, it was this!" You know, and having the craic with them, em, I think that they were very open to that because we were playful. And I'm wondering 'cause culturally, I think, em Indian people are very serious and work very professionally…

Suresh: Yeah, well, it's basically the mentality of the Indian education system itself, em, you may call it school ethics or work ethics…not work ethics but just like work ethic…school ethics or education ethics or classroom ethics is what I can say. Whereby if you are in the class you have to be serious about your studies see…you cannot do any fooling around. It's like you know…the mentality is that you cannot learn if you are fooling around or if you are playing around. You have to sit in one place you have to have the book in front of you; you have to have your head in the book; and that's the only way to learn. And there no other way to learn so em, well….so, your approach and when I was teaching in the school as well, you did see how I used to teach?

Sinéad: yeah

Suresh: I had never had them seated in one place. I had them all around me or all over me. I was never strict with them. I always had something or the other going on with the few kids here and there and

some kids just sitting down writing or drawing or painting or colouring. You know. Or some kids just trying to comb my hair or playing with my beard or something. You know it's like the more playful you are with the kids the more kids love you and um they're more comfortable learning from you. They tend to make you their idol. They idolise you. In many ways that you can possibly imagine.

Sinéad: …so there was the thing when I was writing the thesis when I realised that actually, quite casually during the photograph exercise where myself and yourself…one of the older girls brought out our masala chai and we were sitting down under the tree and it was in glasses and we were drinking it and then you saw something, and you took my camera and just started taking photos which was a regular occurrence. You know, we used to swap the camera back and forth. Or you'd call me over to take photos of something that you'd seen, eh, em…and I was just kind of thinking about that, going…if you had said that to me at the start when I had this idea in my head of what a researcher was…I would have been like: Oh no! It wouldn't have been Suresh's job to take photos or I wouldn't have let him take my camera, but we almost became a team – a partnership where you were taking the camera - not just me…and I trusted you and trusted whatever you were capturing was going to be good. Em…and I don't even remember a shift. I think it just organically grew that way. That we started to just, do it together. I don't remember. Do you remember???? A moment??? Or was there … do you remember when we started to research together? Like, do you remember the first *laughs* the first visit? I got so annoyed with you over the map *laughs* I was going to kill you!!! *laughs*

Suresh: *laughs*

On the first trip – the pilot trip - I had designed and sent over a timetable and activities or tasks that we were to achieve. I had asked for a map of Pune for the start of the trip because I wanted it to mark where the school was and all of the children's communities, how far they travelled and all of the other school options available to them nearer their home. The first day I arrived I asked for the map and Suresh said he had forgotten but would get one. We had planned to drive around the children's communities, so I asked him to have the map for then. When that day arrived, we were in the car with Pranay driving. I immediately asked for the map so I could start marking and write corresponding notes in my notebook. Suresh had not gotten it. I got so cross and frustrated. I spoke to him about the responsibility he had taken on and how I had trusted him. I told him how disappointed I was. We carried about our day without the map and I managed to create a system to keep records. That night Mr Singh heard about what had happened and sent Suresh immediately to the local train station and told him not to come back without a map, which he brought back. I was so worried that night that my research would change things in our relationship and actually thought about not carrying on. I prioritised my relationship with my Indian brother over my research. However, after a talk about it the next day we apologised to each other and started again. After that I learned to trust the process and just roll with

it. I decided I would trust that between us we could come up with a solution in the moment that would work.

Sinéad: …and now when you think back to the last visit where you know, you're taking my camera and you know…we're just doing things together, and it was so comfortable, and it was so trusting…eh…and it was like two completely ends of the spectrum.

Suresh: *laugh* eh yeah. I mean….it, it…never was like I actually had to ask permission off you to actually use your camera to capture pictures – we just went out and used it whenever we wanted to. Um, and eh...that would have been something that you wouldn't have been able to do with the translator, if it was someone else.

Sinéad: *nods* yeah. For sure! Yeah, I was definitely thinking about that. I was like, I wouldn't have trusted anyone else with my camera. Em, not the camera itself but the job of taking photos – I'd be like, what are they doing? Why are they taking photos; and I would have made them explain to me exactly what they were doing. Whereas… you would just take photos, and I would just be like, hmm *laughs* I'd look at it later and be like "oh that was a good photo!" *laughs* I didn't even need…because we had so many conversations in the evening times, or during the day or … I just knew that you were looking at what I was looking at…d'you know?

Suresh: Mmmhmmm *nods* yeah.

Sinéad: or I knew that you were capturing something that I never thought of which would be good.

Suresh: *nods* It was, eh, kind of eh…so we always spoke about the entire day at the end of the day when the kids went home.

Sinéad: *nods* Mmmmmm

Suresh: …trying to figure out what you thought about the day or what you thought about the eh what happened in the school with some kids and then em…I mean…it was kind of eh, when it was something was happening - we were always together so…we know what part we were talking about…

Sinéad: yeah

Suresh: …and eh it was…it just became easier for me to… you know, get into your shoes and you know and start thinking like you. Which I think that it always has been that way. Um, but then, yeah it mostly because our mindset and not mindset but our thoughts match about eh…a lot of things.

Sinéad: *nods* Mmmhmmm

Suresh: um, you trusted me with your camera and eh, you did not eh, you just had a free mindset about thinking as to what I was doing with the camera or what kind of pictures I was clicking.

Sinead: …yeah…

Suresh: …you were just…you can just leave it up to me and you know…you can just go home and take a look it later because you trusted that I wouldn't do something that wasn't necessary for the research.

Sinéad: Mmmmmm *nods*…but it's really funny…could you imagine doing that on the first trip *laughs* where I had lost my mind over the map!

Suresh: *laughs*

Sinéad: …would you…like…could you imagine that would have been the case? *laughs* I remember thinking that night, oh my god, have I made a huge mistake? Have I just…am I going to ruin our friendship because of this stupid research? I remember being so scared that I was going to ruin everything. Em, because eh…it just went so horribly wrong and eh… It was this idea in my head that I had of what a researcher should be…

Suresh: Mmmhmmm

Sinéad: and it's something that's pushed…we…we…I didn't lick it off the ground! I didn't create it in my head. It was something that I was always told that a researcher is a scientist, that they should be…. objective: that there's research tools that they should be measured – everything should be spot on. Then when I started too…

Suresh: ...yeah…

Sinéad: …to trust the messiness of the pro…because… I…I…couldn't work like that because I never worked like that. And it was going against...it was causing me stress and it was causing…you know…stress between us and when I started trusting the "look let's just see where this goes - let's just let go of the reins and if it's bad science so be it – it's on my head" …em…but the feedback I've gotten so far is that it's actually really rich and it's really good, but I didn't…I was never trained like that. I was never told that that was an option. Em…and I guess for me an interpreter would have been an interpreter and that's it…

Suresh: Mmmmmm*nods*

Sinéad: ...in your box! *laughs*No blurring of the lines! Whereas when you became my partner, what we got was so much richer! It was so much better. It worked better; it was better for the kids. It was better for the project.

Suresh: yep…and eh…well thank God eh…that fight did not happen on the first day that you came down! Because that entire week would have been totally different…

Sinéad: …yeah

Suresh: it was on the second … the last or the second last day or something.

Sinéad: yeah

On Choosing an Interpreter and / or Co-Researcher

Sinéad: So, if you…so say a perfect stranger is reading my thesis they've learned all about the process of how we became research partners, they've learned em, why you decided to research with me…em … what else would you like them to know?

Suresh: em…it's ah…not about knowing but it's kind of …eh…kind of something that you can...to suggest. It's like, you know, instead of hiring a total stranger to work with just go and hire someone you…you might know already you might have become friends with mutual …eh ...mutual…interest. It is eh, that's going to end up with you know both of you working together and you enjoying doing your research. Rather than you being bossy or your translator…

Sinéad: …sorry, so even if you don't know them, make sure you're …that you kind of are compatible? Is that what you're saying?

Suresh: eh…*takes time to think* …em to some extent. Even if you don't know them make sure you're compatible but then em, to some extent…but then… I would mostly prefer…so if I was doing a PhD or research or something I would eh, I would actually go ahead and makes friends with some persons who's actually in the same field or you know with someone who em, who already knows that thing. Rather than you know, just go ahead and work with a total stranger.

Sinéad: yeah…I … I mean I pretty much am saying the same thing only I'm very aware that…for me … for… my situation is unique. I got to know the school through the volunteer trips …

Suresh: yeah…

Sinéad: and I'm thinking about if I was going to …em…say I was doing a research in… I don't know...Goa, or I don't know Kolkata …em, and if I was to go there, I wouldn't know anybody, so I'd have to hire em…an interpreter … I'm kind of thinking … would I advise spending a few weeks there and getting to know people and then choosing an interpreter that matches my personality or do I just hire the cheapest or… You know there's all constraints…but my situation was unique. I'm also actually wondering should I be …em…researching in this school to start with. You know?

Suresh: ... Mmmhmmm *nods*

Sinéad: Shouldn't ...so say for instance you would be better at researching in the school or Poonam or you know or one of the parents em, or one of the teachers because you're from there… who am I to come and research there?

Suresh: yeah *nods*

Sinéad: …but if I am going to research there knowing someone who intimately knows the community the school em...and who I have a good relationship with… is… I think, is the only way it could be fruitful.

Suresh: Yeah…I mean knowing…and knowing that you can actually trust that person…with…with your work...em, that's ...that's the most important aspect of em…

Sinéad: … go on…

Suresh: I feel like trust is the most important aspect of life, eh, no matter what you're doing, be it research or personal life. Well trusting someone with eh with what you are doing or what you want them to help you with is kind of really important and then you can move to the other aspect where in you know you have an understanding – you have the same understanding – towards the subject that you're working on. If I would have been in your place and I would have been doing the PhD em…I would eh… I would actually eh…work with a teacher… I mean I would have actually, like you, came down to Emmanuel School and then em… EPS …and eh, you spoke with all the teachers, right?

Sinéad: Yeah

Suresh: I would have done the same thing and I would have made my choice from those teachers that I feel compatible working with.

Sinéad: ahhhh ok, that's a good idea. So, you would have gone down, interviewed all the teachers and then picked the teacher that you felt was most compatible?

Suresh: yeah, then who was most comfortable working with me. I would have picked that teacher to work with

Sinéad: Yeah, and would you have asked them what they would like to research, or would you have your own research agenda in mind?

Suresh: I mean, em, it is something that eh…I wouldn't have had eh my own research agenda in my mind. I mean to some extent yes, but not entirely. Eh…but then it's like … like you did… like you and I did before you started the research you told me what you are going to research on you set your intentions…

Sinéad: yeah

Suresh: and eh you …so that is something I would have done as well, I set my expectations but then eh as time passes by and eh basically as time passes by - you're just going to forget about those expectations …eh…if you are enjoying researching or co-researching with that person that's all that matters.

Sinéad: yeah

Suresh: the expectations at the start of the research is not really going to matter to you anymore.

Sinéad: …you know, thinking now, I realise I never considered Tuhin and actually I think she's quite like me in that she looks…when I'm observing her…she looks quite comfortable in the company of guys and she has the same sense of humour that we have.

Suresh: Mmmhmmm

Sinéad: so actually…I think that although she's not trained as a teacher, I think I would have worked well with her.

Suresh: *nods*…You would have actually...but then Tuhin, I guess, joined later.

Sinéad: Yeah

Suresh: …after your first or your second trip is when she joined the school so…maybe that is the reason why you did not think of it.

Sinéad: Yeah. Yeah, but in terms of wider research – like if I was to go to Kolkata and apply to do this research project there, you know and have to start from scratch emmmm and not have anybody that I know there – I would think about my gender having an impact in that regards emmmm I probably would have looked for someone … I probably would have looked instinctively for a guy that I got on well with because I get on well with guys…but there is an awful lot of internalised misogyny there *laughs*

Suresh: Huh *laughs*

Sinéad: that I had to unpack in the last chapter… but I was thinking like with Arun[30]? So, I spent a lot of time with Arun. I got on really well with him, same sarcastic sense of humour, you know. Same age as you, maybe a bit younger emmmm…but comes from quite a privileged background.

Suresh: *nods*

Sinéad: Eh, high caste, eh loads of money. Em… when I tell him about the school…the way he speaks about the teachers he calls them "these people" and when I talk about the children, he calls them "these people" and one night after he loosened up he began to become quite prejudiced and go "and why do

[30] Pseudonym

you go to that school?" and "you shouldn't be mixing with these people" and I realised quite quickly that he had a prejudice so I can imagine if I had met him in Mumbai, got on really well with him, thought "you know he's quite playful – the kids will love him – I will work well with him – he's the same age as you…Em… I'll ask him to be my interpreter. His English is good, his Hindi is good. So…" I'd be thinking "Yeah, he's perfect" but then when I'm thinking reflexively, I'm like, no you know what his caste, his religion…he hides it really well but then it comes to the fore and I wonder if in hot, tense situations…you know…if it would break through or if he would be dismissive or ... I do think it would affect the research…do you understand?

Suresh: yeah…well, ah…I would think the same based on the things that you've told me. But then, eh, to be honest em, the…eh…what I think or what I would disagree on is eh, would be the caste of a person or the wealth of a person does not really matter. What matters is the person's behaviours towards another person.

Sinéad: Mmmhmmm *nods* yeah…so how would I identify this? So, I keep coming back to the problem of if I was to go somewhere else and start from scratch how would I choose an interpreter?

Suresh: Yeah…so um, as I said eh… It's eh, it's more like you know, you being friends with that person wherein you actually share your thoughts with that particular person and that's how you gauge a person and understand as to what he or she feels about what you are doing. Like, em, when you shared the stuff with me since I was working in the school and since I did know the kids in the school, and I did think I mean based on my background something like that I could corelate to your background in terms of education where in its only me and my sister who were educated in my family. The rest of them are not educated at all.

Sinéad: Oh! I didn't know that.

Suresh: yeah. So, it's kind of the same thing. So, I know how much … how important education is especially in India.

Sinéad: Mmmhmmm, yeah.

Suresh: so that's the reason I was like ok that does look interesting and that was the reason I was like that I'd go for it, plus the second thing was because it was you, and I was like…I wouldn't mind.

Sinéad: Mmmhmmm, yeah. Yes…yeah…still not helping me with trying to figure out …not that it has to…the thing is…the beauty of it is that there doesn't have to be an answer! I can just say- look this is a problem, I was really lucky that I had an existing relationship …em…so I don't have an answer – someone else can have an answer in the future… I don't have to have an answer - but I can say this is a problem, but I have to identify it. … ok, so you don't think these things matter and have an effect on

the research as long as the research team - me and the interpreter or guide em, are compatible and are working off the same mindset?

Suresh: Yep

Sinéad: Em, do you think it's important that the interpreter or guide is made visible for the reader? And by that, I mean, in a lot of research papers I've read I know it's an American or English or an Irish person that's gone over to you know India, or a country in Africa – Zambia, Zimbabwe, eh China and they've used interpreters and guides and they don't mention them. They might say, "I used a guide" and then that's it. So, do you think it's important for the guide or interpreter to be mentioned and spoken about properly?

Suresh: *thinks* Ummm…I mean…I don't think so.

Sinéad: Why not?

Suresh: I mean…I wouldn't say so. But then, if it's eh…well it actually depends upon the actual relationship that you share with the interpreter.

Sinéad: Ok

Suresh: em, if it's just an interpreter that you've hired just to do your job – to interpret- that person is actually not going to share any insights about the research that you're working on with you. You're just going to be there to you know just interpret between you and the kids, the teachers and the school. Eh, but then if you know the interpreter well, and the interpreter also shares the same interest as your research and you, it is going to be – eh, it is kind of eh…it's basically both of you working together to get something good.

Sinéad: Mmmhmmm

Suresh: so, at that point in time you can mention the interpreter and mention what the interpreter thought about it. And eh, what were his or her thoughts about the work that you were doing.

Sinéad: yeah

Suresh: and over there I would say that yes, you can. I would not say that it's mandatory for you to mention the interpreter, but you can actually and if you do its going to be like you know, it's basically going to be a good thing because in the future when researchers actually want to do some research they are actually going to go ahead and look for an interpreter who actually shares the same interest in the subject he or she is researching on and which is going to be helpful for them as well.

Sinéad: ok, so that brings me to another question but I'm actually going to come back to it because I'm thinking about this and I'm talk to you about that point as well. Em, so I have a question, remind me. Em, so what I want to clarify…so you're saying that if the interpreter is just solely interpreting

and they clock in at 9 o'clock, they clock out at 5 o'clock and they don't discuss the research, they just interpret to the researcher, and that's it – then you just say, "I used an interpreter" and that's it. But if they had conversations with you, helped you produce … became a research partner maybe…did a lot of work with you – had conversations with you about the research that help form your thinking that then because they've become some sort of partner in the research process - then you should mention them and mention what they contributed. Is that what you are saying?

Suresh: Em, not exactly.

Sinéad: ok

Suresh: eh, *thinks*…just not sure how to put it across. Em, well…it's not exactly that what I'm trying to say…it's a little different.

Sinéad: ok

Suresh: um…I'm just not able to put it across.

Sinéad: ok, well, have a think about it…Em, so that was the other thing for me. The other question I was going to ask is: if you feel like you've done all this work with me, is it important for your voice to be heard?

Suresh: No, I don't think that.

Sinéad: but if you're saying that other researchers are going to know that you're interested in researching and interpreting and you know can help them with these sorts of projects then how are they going to know that if your voice isn't heard, if I don't tell them what you did and how you helped?

Suresh: Well, em, as I said it's not mandatory for you to mention the interpreter even if both of you shared the common thoughts, common interest and yeah, the interpreter helping you and stuff and all that…it's not mandatory or necessary for you to go ahead and mention that you can just go ahead and mention your own thing. Well then, I'm just saying that if you do it's kind of a good thing wherein if you come alone and if you are working here and you just hire an interpreter who is just doing his job of just nine to five coming in and nine and going home by five…it's like you know, em, at the end of the day you are just going to sit by yourself and you know just work and stress yourself out like eh there is so many pictures that we sat and we eh…

Sinéad: *nods and smiles*

Suresh: so, with that - if I had only been the nine to five guy, it would have been all up to you - you would have had to sit and just do that and by doing that, if you were going to do it when you were in

India and researching the following day you would be tired and you wouldn't know…I mean you wouldn't …eh, it would be really difficult for you to think…

Sinéad: what I'm hearing, is that …so the nine to five guy – I know you're saying it's not mandatory – so it's not expected – I don't have to mention him because …or her … because they didn't do any work - well they did they interpret, but they didn't add anything extra and… that it's not mandatory or expected for me to … to mention about interpreter who does … who goes the extra mile and talk about the research with me but that it would be nice if they were acknowledged? That's what I'm hearing from you. That's it's not expected – it's not necessary, but that it would be nice to acknowledge all the work they've done.

Suresh: Yes.

Sinéad: *nods* ok … you're saying that…I'm not hearing a strong yes…or am I closer to it… or am I…?

Suresh: …well *laughs* that is actually what I'm trying to em, trying to say.

*discussion turns into a discussion where the interpreter changes his mind and decides he doesn't want to use his real name but wants the following part to be entered into transcripts:

Sinéad: …Is identity important to you?

Suresh: Not really.

Sinéad: In what way?

Suresh: …that's...that's what I was going to eh, tell you. Like eh, even if you do not mention my name or anything and you mention a pseudonym for me *shakes head and smiles* that's alright. I would not mind. I'm completely fine if you use a pseudonym because in the end all that matters to me is not me being identified as myself, but the thought or the idea about you know, you co-researching with someone – with an interpreter who shared the same knowledge and who shared the eh, not the knowledge but who shared the same interest in what you were researching – that goes across in the world.

Reflections:

As I noted earlier, after considering, and productively undoing, the research project, it made sense to me to include Suresh's voice in order to highlight his role as partner and co-creator. Arguably, if I chose to just acknowledge him as an interpreter and not critically examine what he brought to the research study, it would be silencing him (Turner, 2010), making him invisible (Vara & Patel, 2012) – or

whitewashing him out of the research – despite his integral role for the sake of ‘clean’ or ‘rigorous’ data collection. It made sense to me that the role of interpreter and how that evolved into co-researcher should be presented in conversation with Suresh. We both made sense (in many conversations after the data gathering had finished) of the evolution of the role and how that role may have changed, or not, if I had not known the interpreter previously to the study. We also tried to undo the process of finding an appropriate interpreter and co-researcher and a way of acknowledging what they add to the study.

There is a very real paucity of research about the role of interpreter as co-producer or co-creator of knowledge during a research study (Turner, 2010), notable exceptions are Edwards, Temple, Shklarov, and Berman. Those that did discuss or unpack the role of interpreter as co-creator or co-researcher came predominantly from a feminist perspective (Edwards, 1998; Temple, 1997; Edwards & Temple, 2002). Considering how many research studies have been carried out in the Majority world by Minority world researchers, this underpins, for me at least, the erasure of voices – the wiping clean of knowledge co-creators from the data – in a further colonisation of research in the academy and of gatekeeping. Even in the research articles debating the role of interpreter or guide / co-researcher, there are very few examples of the interpreter’s voice (Turner, 2010). This brings me back to an ever-present question in the productive undoing of my research process and thinking – who speaks for whom? and why? Is there a space for all participants in the research process to speak in the academy? Not to be heard, to be represented, spoken for, or have their voice elicited – but a genuine opportunity to speak and engage in a dialogue.

I was incredibly privileged to have Suresh as an interpreter, guide, and co-researcher. He seemed the natural choice when I was considering how I would conduct the study. I did consider hiring an interpreter and spent a long time considering the pros and cons of using somebody close to me. Personality was a factor I had to consider. I knew I was going to be working very closely with the interpreter and guide and that they would be in a classroom full of young children with me. I realised the children would have to develop a relationship with me but also with my guide / interpreter. I also thought about working so closely with a stranger, would they disagree and challenge me, as I needed them to? Would they tell me when I was being culturally insensitive? How would I take that from someone I am not familiar with?

I thought about my health and my disabilities. Part of the role of guide would also include helping me monitor my epilepsy and recovery from a craniotomy. Suresh can read me like a book and will insist I sit down when he sees me pushing myself. I would feel at ease ringing him in the middle of the night if I had seizure activity. I trusted him to understand and watch out for me as well as guide me. I would also need the guide to have their own transport and a willingness to go out and explore the local city and its culture. Suresh had a local knowledge, and we shared a journey together discovering the

historical and cultural knowledge when we visited temples, historical buildings, and forts. On the pilot trip, I sat down, and I explained the role, the rate of pay, my expectations, and the research. I asked him to consider taking on the job. He said yes immediately but I asked him to think about it in more detail. Each trip would require a leave of absence from his own job and there was the potential for conflict or a change in our relationship. He took some time but never changed his mind.

"People have particular histories and occupy social positions, which means that they do not see the world from another's standpoint — although they may understand each other across difference through dialogue" (Temple & Edwards, 2002, p.2)

I think about this quote in relation to my still ongoing discussions with Suresh. Despite knowing each other for over a decade we still continue to surprise each other with our understandings and world views that are different from each other. Often, when I reflect on our casual conversations, I am confronted with my privilege laid bare for me to see. I am not sure if I could have these casual, playful conversations about such important topics quite so easily with others which allows me a privileged point of entry into understanding my interpreter's history, and social position. It is not only through dialogue that we may understand each other, but playful dialogue. There is something about the playful nature of our relationship that allows for such conversations that are not quite so intrusive and formal.

Through our ongoing conversations, Suresh and myself made sense of the world and community we researched together. We co-generated knowledge together coming from different positions and understandings of the world. For instance, when asked what he would research if he had the choice, Suresh said he would like to know why the children come to the school – return to the school every day of their own free will – even though they have the opportunity to stay at home and play together because there is no one to tell them otherwise. I have thought about this deeply because, from my standpoint of how I see the world and how I interpreted the children's drawings, interactions, play, and their photographs during the research process – I would hazard a guess that they have already given us an answer to that particular research question.

I still do not have an answer to how I would work with and choose an interpreter if I were to do another study in another Majority world location. I know for me, because of the role of playful researcher that I played, on a practical level I needed a playful interpreter. However, for both Suresh and I, there was a sense of an existing relationship which gave us a foundation of **trust** which was so important throughout the whole process – not just the data collection phase. I trusted Suresh to guide me, I trusted him with my health and well-being, my physical safety. I trusted him to work with me for my doctoral project. I trusted him to represent me and the university I research with when we were in the school. I trusted him to help me gain the trust of the children and teachers with whom we worked. I trusted his

interpretations and his guidance. I trusted him to just take my camera and know it would be something worth having. I trusted him to co-create our research together. However, Suresh trusts me with his name[31]. His identity. He trusts me to recognise him. He trusts me to recognise his hard work and name it. He trusts I will honour the fact that the knowledge I gained from this research project was a co-creation of knowledge between us. He trusts how I present him, his identity, his thoughts, and his work to you – an audience he does not know, or trust. He trusts me to give him my trust and to always do the right thing. The trust Suresh places in me to respect him, and to make his contributions as a co-researcher visible is humbling to me. It strikes me that this is the same trust the school, the Singhs, the teachers, and the children have also put in me and in our relationships. So, while trust and relationships are a vital part of the interpreter and co-researcher process, the same can be said for the research participants who also trust me with their names, their identities, and their visibility.

Suresh gives many thought-provoking answers for how he would advise someone conducting a study using an interpreter, including the level of recognition he feels they should receive for their contribution. On reflection, at the end of the day, there are too many individual threads that need to be considered so perhaps the answer is different for every research study conducted. However, I think Suresh's advice is a good guide or starting point. I would also reiterate what Suresh said about trust and relationships, without a trusting relationship and an ethical responsiveness, we certainly would not have co-created the knowledge we did.

[31] At the end of the research process, after thinking about it for a few months and reading over different drafts of this chapter, Suresh decided he would like to use his real name in the thesis but declined to use his full name.

Part Four

The Last Mile

I am exhausted.

No.

More than exhausted…bone tired. My body is so tired. My brain is running on empty. My emotions are on high alert. I'm always one second away from crying thick, hot tears. There is a permanent heaviness sitting on my chest waiting to be unleashed in a wave of sobs. My eyes are dry from staring at a screen. My body is bursting out of my clothes, tight from not stretching or exercising in so long. Coffee runs through my veins. Strawberry cables give me false sugary energy. My right hand starts to tremor; signalling the inevitable crash that will happen later.

The last time I honestly felt so bone tired was when I was recovering from brain surgery. When I was piecing myself back together again while dealing with immense trauma.

Or the first twelve weeks after each of my babies were born.

Both ripped from the womb by surgical instruments. My body was healing from trauma. The life I had birthed was healing from trauma. Nobody slept…ever! The nervous system of each child developed as it adjusted from the warmth of my belly, thrown into the cold harsh world. Handed to a new Mammy and Daddy who were in equal parts traumatised and over-joyed.

In a way, I birthed a piece of research, tore it apart to play with it, and now I am trying to piece it back together. With a brain and a body that just wants to give up, no less! The research kicks and screams, protesting against my play – no matter how gentle I try to be with it. It does not appreciate being poked no matter how gentle I am.

I get frustrated.

I am doing all this for your own good and I am being as gentle and loving as I can. I am doing this for us both. We need to live with each other, but it's time for you to leave me soon. We need to learn to co-exist. We will grow independent of each other, but we will still be entangled with each other. It is my job right now to do what I can to allow you to co-exist with me but become independent of me.

And I am exhausted.

I just want to sleep and not think anymore.

I want to close my eyes, slip off to a restful sleep, and dream peacefully.

I want to recover from this trauma.

I want to heal and put myself back together.

I…I…I…I…

This process is so all encompassing and makes me so selfish, tired, and moody. It makes me take up all the oxygen in any conversation I have lately, because all I've had is you and me for the last five years.

I've been living in my bedroom with you since this once in a lifetime pandemic descended on us.

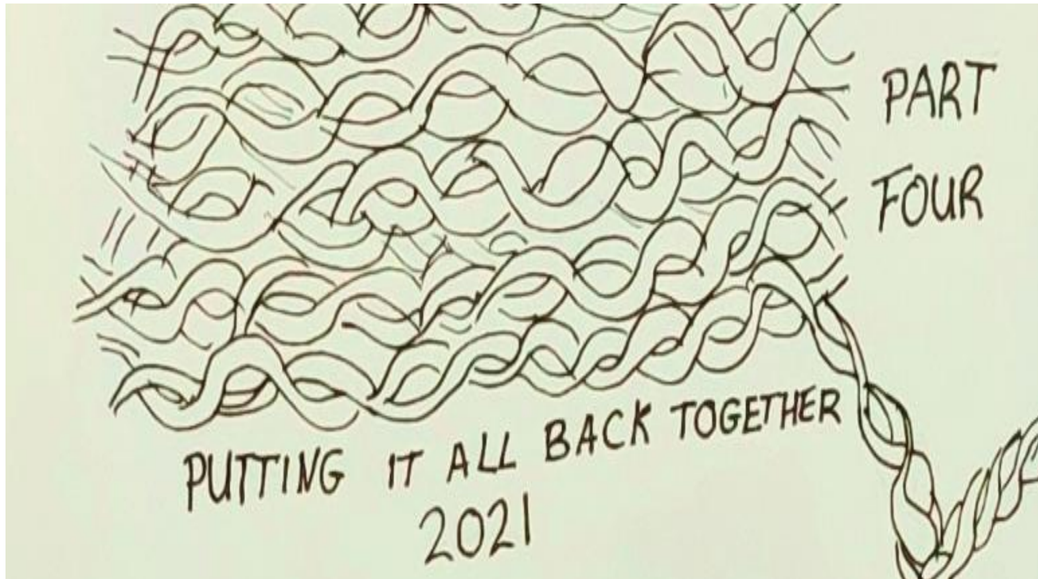
Who on earth does a PhD during a bloody pandemic?!!!

Is it not enough just to survive? No, you demand I un-suture myself. You demand that I pour my inner most thoughts and feelings into you; that I take myself apart to examine my thinking – my biases? You demand my private experience? my private sphere?

You demand that I do more than just survive.

I must create.

And I'm so, so tired.



Finishing Where I (Really) Started

Sinéad 2021: So, tell me how it started.

Sinéad 2015: What the entire thing? Or … I don't really know what you mean.

Sinéad 2021: What caused you to change from focusing on the culture of play in Ireland to looking at play and early learning in EPS? Specifically.

Sinéad 2015: Well, there was this volunteer trip that I led, and it was a complete disaster. Honestly, it was one of the worst experiences of my life.

Sinéad 2021: So, tell me about it.

Sinéad 2015: What, the whole thing?

Sinéad 2021: Well, yeah…the parts that are important at least.

Sinéad 2015: Well, I mean you know how it goes with the art activities and all that…. but the team were all Montessori teachers and they found fault everywhere. I found myself constantly defending the school and what we were doing there. There was this one day in the middle where I had had enough. The trip had been a nightmare up until then. The team thought the school might be a scam because the children didn't look poor. There was the issue with the stick…

Sinéad 2021: well, you can understa….

Sinéad 2015: …are you going to let me tell my story or not?

Sinéad 2021: ok ok! Go on.

Sinéad 2015: ok so anyway. The team were being really rude and dismissive of the teachers and the Singh's. I was taken aside the night before and told how the team were really frustrated and upset. I got really upset. I spent the whole night crying and then I decided that I had to talk to them at breakfast before we left for the school the next day.

Sinéad 2021: and how did that go?

Sinéad 2015: They were all there when I got down, planning the activity for the day. We were going to do identity in the classroom and had all the little cardboard people to colour and decorate and big pieces of paper to stick each class on to display in their classrooms. I had my breakfast and when they were ready to go, I said I had to talk to them.

Sinéad 2021: What did you say?

Sinéad 2015: I said that we needed to talk and that what happened the night before and ever since we arrived in the school. I told them that they had been invited in for a week to spend time with the children and team that run the school, not to stand in judgement of their teaching practices and what they do or do not have.

Sinéad 2021: How did they take that?

Sinéad 2015: What?

Sinéad 2021: What did they say when you said that to them?

Sinéad 2015: I don't know I kept talking...

Sinéad 2021: ok…I mean, did you really think you were going to take a bunch of Irish Montessori teachers to EPS and not expect them to react to the extremely different teaching styles??? Was that not a bit naive of you? I mean…it's only natural to compare, no?

Sinéad 2015: …maybe…

Sinéad 2021: So, go on, what else did you say?

Sinéad 2015: I acknowledged our disagreements about how the school disciplines the children and told them I agreed with them and I spoke about the stick with Poonam, and that the school agreed not to use it when we are there…

Sinéad 2021: You hate that bloody stick!!!

Sinéad 2015: I know I do but it's not our place to tell them how to run their school!

Sinéad 2021: Sinéad…out of sight is not out of mind! Did you not consider that the volunteers might be wondering what else happens with the stick when they aren't there? Did you not consider the threat of the stick itself to be a form of violence?

Sinéad 2015: I do! You know I do!

Sinéad 2021: Then why would you dismiss their concerns out of hand so easily?

Sinéad 2015: I didn't think I had. I told them that I had spoken to Poonam about it! I was also walking the line between sharing my discomfort with the school and trying to tell them how to run their school. It's not my place!

Sinéad 2021: Perhaps it might have been more fruitful to have the volunteers sit down with the teachers and Poonam to discuss behaviour management and the stick. Do you not think?

Sinéad 2015: But that is not what we were there to do. We were there to have a fun week with the children and to do arts and crafts and resources. That was the purpose of our visit.

Sinéad 2021: Perhaps, therein lies your problem … and your answer?

…

Sinéad 2021: So, tell me what happened then?

Sinéad 2015: I told them that we had acted ungraciously as guests to the school. I asked them if they would have appreciated their teachers coming to our school and behaving the same way. Telling us to change our teaching practices even though they did not know our children like we do.

Sinéad 2021: and how did that go down?

Sinéad 2015: Actually, that point resonated. Probably because it could be related to something concrete like the children in their classes and their individual needs.

Sinéad 2021: So, everyone agreed?

Sinéad 2015: No, no. There were still some questions.

Sinéad 2021: Like?

Sinéad 2015: Like, "But the preschool children should be out playing not cooped up in chairs in a classroom."

Sinéad 2021: What did you say?

Sinéad 2015: I told them that it was their summer, and it was too hot for children to play in the direct sunlight – particularly children who may not have eaten since their school lunch the day before.

Sinéad 2021: and what did they say?

Sinéad 2015: They asked more questions. They said, "But they should have toys. There are toys up in the top classroom why don't they just give them all out? Why do they store things in the top classroom?" and I said, "Don't we have a storeroom with resources for when they are needed? And aren't we here this week with the sole purpose of play and art activities?" Then they said, "they should be playing not sitting. The research tells us children learn through play." I answered that they were playing with us. To which they asked, "why are they not playing with their teachers?" And I said, "I don't know but I would think my point about not having food in their stomach for twenty-four hours still stands. Their teachers know them best, why would you not defer to their knowledge of their class?"

Sinéad 2021: Yikes, how did they respond to that?!

Sinéad 2015: They said that the teachers are not trained. That they don't have teaching qualifications, and they did, so they could teach them.

Sinéad 2021: Ok, how did you respond?

Sinéad 2015: I said, "So, you would rather train their teachers in a four-year degree programme in the space of a week than spend time playing with the children?" and they argued that they could explain the benefits of play – that it's not developmentally appropriate to have the pre-schoolers writing on blackboards and in copy books and sitting still all day…

Sinéad 2021: Yikes, Sinéad! That was brutal. It sounds like you shut down all of their concerns and queries instead of engaging in a professional dialogue with them.

Sinéad 2015: No, I didn't!

Sinéad 2021: Sinéad, you definitely did. I do not understand why you didn't organise for all the teachers to come together for an hour or two and have a discussion about it.

Sinéad 2015: I told you! That's not what we were there to do!! Anyway, why couldn't they just see what I saw?

Sinéad 2021: hmmmm … the question I would ask you is this: Why didn't you hear their concerns?

Reflections:

I will never forget that volunteer trip as long as I live. It changed the entire course of my PhD research project. I could not understand why these educators, many of whom I had worked with for years, could not see the types of play I could see and more importantly, why they were so critical of the teaching styles and resources of an NGO run school that was "*helping to lift underprivileged children out of poverty*"[32] through the medium of holistic education. It was also the first time I began to realise the bigger effects of voluntourism and how it had the potential to have a negative impact.

Voluntourism is a tourism phenomenon, like the ones undertaken and led by me to Emmanuel Public School in India, whereby a volunteer travels overseas to conduct charity work. The literature I have read recognises it as a very contentious practice. This is especially so when it is conducted by predominantly white Minority world volunteers travelling to Majority world countries. Critiques include discourses surrounding the benefits of one party (the volunteer) over the other (the local employees and community), cultural appropriation, colonial practices, 'poverty porn', and 'White Saviour Complex' (Banki & Schonell, 2016; Crossley, 2012; Jakubiak, 2016; Harng Luh Sin & Shirleen He, 2019; Bandyopadhyay, 2019). It has been documented that Minority world charities (including those who facilitate voluntourism) have caused some harm to the regions and projects they purport to help (Elnawawy, Lee, & Pohl, 2014), this is definitely something I have witnessed multiple times in the school's engagement with some Minority world charities – including the one I first travelled with. Having experienced this particular trip and having knowledge of the other charities or charitable endeavours have caused harm to the school I acknowledge that criticisms and critiques of such voluntourism are valid. However, I do feel that there are some benefits to it when done correctly (or appropriately is probably a better way to phrase it). How to do that appropriately, alludes me. There are so many factors to consider, perhaps a project for another time, but certainly outside of the scope of this PhD study.

I do think that perhaps if we had more time and observed and communicated with the teachers and management of Emmanuel Public School (EPS), we would have learned quite a lot. We would have learned about ourselves, and our ways of doing things, our perceptions, our misconceptions, and we would have learned how to work and teach in a community such as the one with which EPS are working. Reflecting back, we did not put enough time into developing relationships with the teachers and management – we took over their classes with our own agenda, worked with the children, and then we headed off. Even the lunch that was provided for us was not spent talking with the teachers much.

I believe education to be a relational, communicative, and social discipline. I argue that communication, relationships, and dialogue based on equality are fundamental to successful educational experiences and

[32] Taken from original mission statement of Emmanuel Public School

encounters. Had we sat down with the teachers in the ECEC classes in EPS and explained how children learn through play and how important it is for a child's development as was suggested it would have been an act of handing down truths and knowledge to passive, unknowing participants. Had we entered into a professional dialogue where we saw each other as equals, we might have left the encounter with a better understanding, and they with a better understanding of us.

Education could be described as demanding communication in order to achieve its telos or purpose. If we do not envision ourselves as having anything to learn from the teachers or management of EPS how would it be possible to enter into any sort of professional dialogue or educational encounter that might inform us better? I wondered back then, what it was that made the Irish volunteers so determined that they could educate the local, existing teachers in the school about how to *better* educate the young children in the school; what it was that made them see only deficits in the education of these children and the teaching practice of the local educators? I understand now that the thread I pulled out from that story and held up as a something to be examined, was actually made up of many interweaving micro-threads. What I thought of as one simple issue was a complex system of interweaving stories, beliefs, timelines, ways of being, and ways of learning.

Un-weaving the thread:

When I start to un-weave the thread and pull out all the individual strands, I look at them closely, from many perspectives. I see that it cannot simply be reduced to the Irish educators not seeing the play and valuable work Emmanuel Public School and its teachers were doing. It also cannot simple be reduced to the fact that I could. Just as I was conditioned by the first charity I travelled with, to see poverty and deficit, the Irish educators were a product of the time they lived in and the narratives that surrounded them. I was seeing from a period of time – a timeline of the evolution of the school. I was also surrounded by narratives, the stories of the children who the school had helped, the narratives of how charities had impacted the school. The teachers of EPS were also a product of their time and their lives. They had narratives and cultural scripts surrounding them also. All of the micro-threads entwined and created a moment of tension that can be understood from examining them individually.

The normative 'truths' Minority world educators believe, and why

It was my encounter with Biesta that offered me an understanding in relation to the Minority world educator when he discusses how the field of Anglo-American and Continental Education came to be, the teacher training of Minority World Educators – particularly those from the United Kingdom and Ireland (Biesta, 2011). The paper allowed me to think through how the political system and current educational discourses have shaped their identities, what they value, and what they are told to achieve (Biesta, 2010; 2013; 2017). It offers me the opportunity to really reflect on teacher education courses,

the discourses surrounding Education – particularly Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland since 2010, and the concept of education as a path out of poverty. I do so in more detail below.

Dominance of Psychology:

I can only speak to the volunteers I have enountered, worked with, and travelled with to a Majority world country, so this argument is made with these limitations in mind and with a conscious attempt not to generalise. I disseminated a short anonymous survey to all of the volunteers I have ever travelled to EPS with and those with whom I have met in EPS, however only nine filled it in – five of which were trained as educators. I weave their answers in and out of the discussion to illustrate points made. In the main, my fellow volunteers were Irish and Australasian educators. Most of them had trained in constructivist methods such as play-based, developmental approaches, Montessorian, Piagetian and so on. All were trained in education courses which combined the four foundational disciplines of Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, and History of Education and not solely in Education as a dicipline in its own right. This is reflective of Biesta's comparative analysis of Anglo-American and Contintental constructions of the field of education and in turn teacher education (Biesta, 2011). This helps me make sense of my reflections on our discussions around activities or resources while volunteering, which were always underpinned by the lens of a particular discipline (psychology) and articulated in terms of child development, particularly developmentally appropriate practices[33]:

Is play important for the children in the early childhood classes?

"Yes [play is] how children learn & develop. It allows educators to meet the child where they are at developmentally, tailoring activities to meet the child's needs. Play develops every aspect of the child."

"Yes. Allows for creativity and discovery and development various skills."

"Yes indeed I believe play is of the upmost importance for a child['s] development"

These answers typify my experience of Minority world trained educators that I have come across in Emmanuel Public School and it also echoes back to the literature review I conducted. However, despite the wealth of literature from Minority world researchers cautioning the blanket application of what is considered developmentally appropriate along with dispelling the myth of a universal child and the notion of a universal childhood (Hayes, 2007; Urban, 2019; Moss & Pence, 1999; Burman, 1994; Woodhead, 2006; Pence, 2011; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Alderson, 2008) the Minority world

[33] Otherwise known by the acronym DAP, which originated from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) an US based organisation.

volunteers trained as educators applied what they knew from their training (predominantly developmental psychology) without taking context into account, bar two:

"I do think it is important but I also know I know very little about the culture and society these children are living in."

"As stated previously the class sizes were large with the emphasis being on creating a structure for the children. A structured environment is needed by the children as they can come from chaotic family situations where there is no structure & where they have to fend for themselves from a young age."

What we see in the comments above, is a socio-cultural view of the school, the child, and how they develop. Given the current prevelance of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner (who advocate for the idea of different children and differing childhoods) in discourses surrounding early childhood education and care, it is evident to see that it is beginning to have an impact on how some Minority world educators see the settings in which they volunteer. However, it is noted as a point of interest that they are developmental psychologists so although the view of the Minority volunteers is changing and is influenced by developmental psychologists that do not believe in the concept of a universal child or childhoods, it is still noteworthy that the professional language indicates that Irish ECEC educators are still thinking with (and evaluating with) developmental psychology and not sociological, historical, or philososphical lenses. Also, we can see that although the impact of an alternative developmental psychological approach is beginning to trickle down, the above comments are still framed within a deficit model. To summarise my point, the influence of other developmental psychologists who use a more holistic lens in their thinking is beginning to be evidenced in the professional language of the Irish ECEC educators. However, it is interesting that they are still drawing from developmental psychology to evaluate what they are seeing.

A Pre-occupation with Stuff: toys, resources, materials:

"Very poor lack of materials to play with"

In a similar reflection of the literature review on postcolonial research in early childhood education and care, I noticed that while on the research trips and in the surveys the Minority world volunteers who were trained as educators noticed and put an emphasis on lack or deficit – what was not there. Those that were there longer than a week were astonished by the level of educational attainment by the children in the whole school and what the teachers achieved despite not having resources or qualifications.

> *"EPS is an amazing school, working under very difficult conditions - lack of finance, lack of space, lack of resources, lack of trained teachers, lack of educational background at the executive level but it is a happy environment where students are achieving and hopefully will be able to step out of the poverty cycle that their families have been in for generations and provide stable homes for their own children."*

Reafirming Viruru's argument about the 'businessification' of Early Childhood Education (Viruru, 2005) the Minority world volunteers seem to look for what they are used to seeing as the best model of practice of the materials that identify the "best" curriculum such as toys, resources, bigger classrooms, tables and so on. Signifiers that this is an early childhood education and care environment with materials or resources that are developmentally appropriate for children of a certain age. All Irish and Australian trained educators would have practical classroom experience (or supervised placement) as a significant part of their educator training course. Most would have kept a placement diary or portfolio evidencing classroom experiences, reflections on practice, methods, photographs and lesson plans. An emphasis on resources – particularly for Montessori, Play based methods, or constructivist methods. Samples and examples of resources, toys, classroom layouts, classroom furniture and so can be found on multiple online fora like pinterest and Twinkl.ie, communities of professional practice, and teacher blogs. Everywhere educators look they are bombarded with resource rich environments and lots of beautifully decorated play spaces for children to play in. There is an expectation for an early childhood education and care environment to have a certain aesthetic with certain expected 'interest areas' such as a block corner, a home corner, a literacy or mark making corner, an art station, a sand and water station, and so on. Early childhood educators know what method or curricula is used by seeing what resources the children are playing with. In Ireland regulation 19 states:

> "(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that— (a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child" (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2016, p. 18)

The above demonstrates what inspectors are looking for when they are inspecting the services. It is noted that the regulations are learned by those ECEC trainee educators in Ireland during their educator training. Thus, from the first day an Irish ECEC educator steps into a training course they are told to look out for materials, equipment, and interaction that is appropriate to the age and stage of development of the children. This leads me to consider that the discourses surrounding things, materials, and resources surrounds the Irish educator constantly, creating a lens like the lens created for me on my first volunteer trip to EPS with a charity. This lens is not a lens that is applied solely to their experiences in EPS but to their practice and experiences in Ireland also.

Certainly, the Irish ECEC educators would be used to children to teacher ratios of a much lower number and more classroom space for children to move around in. For example, in sessional[34] early childhood education and care classes in Ireland the ratio is set at eleven children aged between thirty months and six years to one suitably qualified[35] adult (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2016). However, Gupta pointed out that high numbers of quiet, obedient middle class children in early childhood education classrooms in New Dehli were relatively normal and reflective of Indian culture and society (2004). Indeed in the space that was occupied by the integrated Nursery (preschool) and LowerKindergarten classes (equivilant to Junior infants / first year of primary school) when measured was two metres and 10 cms in width and seven meters and seventy centimetres in length giving it an area of approximately sixteen meters squared. The regulations (DCEDIY, 2016) in Ireland would state that a maximum of eight children can be facilitated in a space of this size. In EPS, approximately forty five children occupy this space. There are two teachers with these forty five children, where Irish regulations would demand five. Certainly, this is reflective of the early childhood eduction classes I viewed in a private fee paying school which I had the opportunity to visit in Pune. Crowded classrooms of seemingly quiet, passive children is certainly something I would not be used to in Ireland, England, Italy, Australia, or any Anglo-European country I have ever visited or worked in, so I was not surprised to read the following comments of the conditions the children were playing and learning in:

"Crowded, poor furniture, very few resources, little creativity but definitely loved and cared for by the staff"

"They were very basic. Children were on the veranda/porch outside of the school building. They were sitting on the floor or on chairs. They didn't have desks or free access to resources. They waited to be told what to do"

"Conditions were very primitive compared to [Minority World Country] schools. Children did not have much space, they were cramped, had no desks to use, were not in an enclosed room hence easily distracted by anyone who passed by. children sat on plastic chairs and used their laps as desks. The youngest used slate boards which were in need of repainting and often the slate pencils were very small. Having painted this bleak picture, the children were happy and the teachers are to be congratulated for the outcomes obtained."

Reflecting back now, perhaps arranging for Minority world educators to view different types of schools in Pune would allow them to get a feel for the cultural norms in the city. A wider conversation could be facilitated around this, perhaps allowing for opportunities to observe and take note of the public spaces

[34] Three hours a day, five days a week for thirty-eight weeks of an academic year.
[35] Minimum of Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework in Early Childhood Education and Care or Montessori.

around them and see how wider society occupies space. I wonder what the early childhood educators in EPS would think about the amount of space Irish early childhood educators have, the methods they use, the resources offered to the children and hearing about how quickly practice and regulations have changed over the last twenty years? Again, examples should be offered of how wider society moves about in public spaces – the cultural norms and expectations. There is so much to be gained from a professional dialogue and exchange of knowledge. It would be interesting to have the opportunity, as Minority world educators, to co-teach in partnership with the local teachers; including planning, observing, and reflecting afterwards. However, it would have to be in genuine, authentic partnership where both educators are equals. I wonder how much would be gained by both parties?

Another element that I found interesting, was that although relationships, care, community, and love is commended and spoken about by some of the Minority world educators surveyed, they still (in my reading of the data) held up material resources as being more important. This is despite the professional discourses around the importance of relationships and care in early childhood for development, attachments, physical brain development, mental health, and well-being (Noddings, 1992; NCCA 2009; Kernan, 2007; Hayes, 2007; Page, 2011; Gerber 1984) and increasingly the concept of professional love, care, and relationships as a core part of the identity of an early childhood educator (Page, 2011; 2019; Hayes, 2013). However, as I have noted before, professional conversations about identity, in particular taking a professional title, have centred around education in Ireland in the last ten years. A lot of Irish ECEC professionals are seemingly moving away from the word care because it is associated with "childcare" the term the media and wider society is most familiar with. The rationale is that if they are seen as educators then they will receive respect and salaries commensurate with other educators in the system. This could explain their acknowledgement of the care the children receive while still seemingly valuing material resources more. Here are two of the comments about the relationships and care the children in the early childhood education and care classes receive in EPS in the eyes of the Minority world volunteers trained as educators:

"I felt that the family who ran the school had a genuine love for the children atttending[sic]. The children were well fed & happy. There was a great sense of community within the school."

"The school seemed to give me an impression of love and respect towards the children and a want to help them learn"

This gives me pause for thought – is it really appropriate **practice** (with a deliberate emphasis on practice) that the Minority world volunteers were looking for, and found wanting? Or is it the signifiers of curricula and methods they are used to?

“[Play is]Incidental to "structured" activity. More a case of play when nothing else to do. Play mainly occurred on the empty plot of land (dust bowl) adjacent to the school property.”

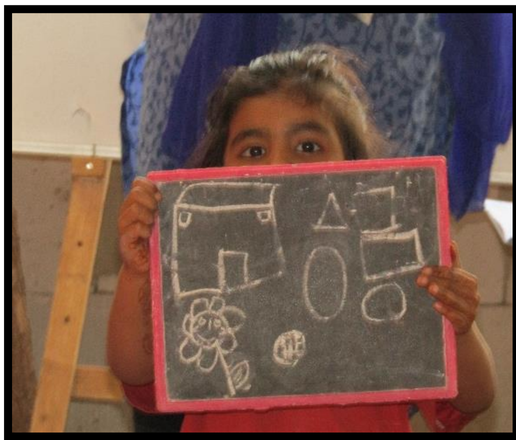
Were they looking for evidence in the classroom of gross motor play, space, montessori materials, plastic dolls, plastic kitchens, blocks, Lego and so on? From my observations in the classrooms and on the playing field I found evidence of a lot of oral play, finger and hand play, tactile play, fine motor play, co-operative play, gross motor play, small world play- not with traditional Minority world toys – but with tiny sticks, mud, leaves, stones, water bottles, pencil shavings, pieces of chalk, small rolled up pieces of paper- whatever was around and free. I believe we would call this loose parts play in Minority world early childhood practices but they would be displayed on a shelf, in a basket, perhaps colour coded, or categorised by texture. They would be there to see when the children are there and when the children are gone. I observed many a small stone or leaf disappear into a pocket and reappear the next day. I noted over my research trips that formal teaching of academics - mark-making, literacy, numeracy, identity and communication, classification, nursery rhymes etc started any time between ten and ten thirty and finished any time between eleven thirty and eleven forty five with a fifiteen minute break at ten thirty making actual direct ‘teaching time’ approximately ninty minutes a day.

I also wondered about the idea of what a ‘classroom’ was and how it is so fixed as a notion of where learning happens? During my time researching I have witnessed classes conducted outside because there was no classroom available, verandas used as classrooms, garden spaces used as classrooms and so on. The notion of any class having a fixed classroom indefinitely for an academic year is not something I could say I have observed in EPS. From my observations, play did occour in the classrooms but also in the spaces of inbetween like stairwells, toilets, hallways, pathways, the playing field, walls etc. and so did learning. It would appear as I

productively undo this survey that perhaps it would be more helpful to use the concept of *learning / play space* as opposed to the binary of classroom and non-classroom. Along with the notion that classtime is when learning happens or play should happen in the eyes of Minority world volunteers who were trained as educators. When did our concepts of when and how learning happens become so fixed,so universal? I understand from my conversations from Suresh why oral play and learning rhymes etc are so important in an English medium school for children and families who would other wise not be afforded the opportunity to attend an English medium school and learn the international language of business.

"you'll get a government job if you just talk Hindi or Marathi – a regional language…but then eh…if you want to go abroad or if you want to work in eh an International company you have to know it: English."

Prioritising learning English and learning how the school works in the early childhood classes would explain to me why the teachers at EPS would focus on oral language such as finger rhymes, nursery rhymes, classification, echoing lessons and learning the identity of the school through oral lessons such as I have observed. I also can understand why those Minority world volunteers who are trained as educators and are used to seeing children in large classes full of toys, noise, and gross motor movement would perceive that what is happening in the preschool classes in particular as academic and too disciplined.



"Physical conditions poor and not intentionally provided. Not considered purposeful and so not designed into the curriculum"

When asked what the most important thing that children in Nursery, Lower Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper Kindergerten (UKG) could get from their schooling in Emmanuel Public school their teachers had this to say:

"Basically, like eh, they so small age, they cannot learn so much early – writing and all that you know? So, nursery, they learn poems that gives them a confidence…"

"poems are good, they can be doing, like drawing activity…sometimes they can just play with some bubbles and all or just play with some elders."

Jeevan, Sir (Nursery)

"First the child should learn to talk. Most important. More important then abcd on the board…Not interested only in teaching, teaching. I just call them. I like to talk to them. If any children, they sit quietly and don't move kind of, I like to call them and speak to them. Usually, I tell them, "These are your friends, you have to make friends with them." And I'll call other children, talk to them about which they know. Then I make personal attention and I just ask them, "what is your name? How many brother …sister?" all that kind of thing."

"before they come to school they have to have confidence in the teacher. Then only, we start teaching them. Oral, mostly oral…First we start with pattern work. This in LKG, in Nursery they just use slate"

" every child like to get our attention. They like to be given attention. They are like my own children. That connection is there. You have to take their trust. You have to gain their trust."

"security…they are safe in the school…it's very safe here. They get discipline.[36] Teach them speak English. Then of course the food. It's good food, healthy food. EPS is like a family. It's not study, study. There has to be discipline for the children. They very closer to us…grow part of the family."

Miss Stella (Lower Kindergarten)

"I think the playway method is something that is very important. I think they understand better, but then they come to upper KG because playway is for the little ones…The syllabus of the curriculum there is (UKG) and standard one is quite high. So they need to know things. One has to be a little more focused, one has to be a little more concentrating on the academic side of upper KG so they are fully prepared to step into standard one."

Miss Cynthia (Upper Kindergarten)

Relationships:

The relationships I observed, the professional love, and care evidenced and spoken about in formal interviews with teachers and in informal chats and conversations with other local volunteers and the family that run the school, was what stood out to me above all. The teacher-pupil relationships and the relationships as peers both stood out to me as something rather powerful in Emmanuel Public School.

I had always described the school since my first visit as a Montessori school without the Montessori materials. By that I mean the following: (1) the freedom given to children to be themselves within

[36] I have noticed in my time observing in EPS that the teachers use the word discipline differently to the way Irish educators tend to use it. We might mean behaviour management or punishment but the teachers in EPS mean discipline in a sense that is nearly akin to the military or martial arts – encouraging internal discipline, self-discipline by using a daily routine, teaching social skills and manners, instilling a sense of pride and decorum. Sometimes I draw parallels between what Miss Stella says and Dr. Maria Montessori's Grace and Courtesy exercises.

their classrooms – which I realised can only be seen if you sit in those classrooms and watch very carefully. It is not the *freedom within limits* I have seen in any Irish Montessori school with a lot of gross motor movement but it is a different type of freedom – more fitting with the local culure and society. The children were allowed to play quietly by themselves or with each other in small groups while a whole class activity was going on - as long as they didn't disturb those children who wanted to do the activity. I observed children playing with the sink, with water, water bottles, leaves, twigs, stones, small pieces of papers, they drew pictures on their slates together; they were very tactile with each other and played with each other's hair, they played clapping games or finger rhymes. Sometimes, I would observe them in groups reciting the poems (action rhymes) they would later do together in class. All of this micro-play looked very still to a casual glance. It was only when I sat in the class and began to really observe the children that I realised how much freedom they had as long as they were respectful of each other. (2) the relationships and mixed age groupings – older children frequently are in the classes of younger children and they play with them in the field or during breaks or even during classtime as they pass on the way to the washroom. They also keep them in check and teach them the ways of the school. (3) respectful relationships, communication, and holistic education is prioritised above all else. In each class group there are responsibilities which the children learn such as showing younger children where the bathroom is and how to use it, how to use a spoon, how to scrape your plate and put it in the wash pile. Older children are involved in the preparations, cooking, serving, and cleaning up of the hot meal for the whole school. The children are taught how to care for their environment and indeed came in on their holidays to help with painting the new school buildings when I was there. Children are taught from the early childhood education classes to respect their elders, look out for each other, communicate effectively, work together, and to respect the learning going on around them. I have never observed a teacher or adult get involved in a dispute or conflict on the playing field or in the classroom between children unless asked. Other, older children tend to hear both sides of the argument and settle it between them. Most of the time, the teachers would all have their lunch in the veranda together while the children played. Miss Stella informed me that the teacher's priority in the Nursery class or Lower Kindergarten class was to gain the trust of the child. She mentioned that their home lives could be chaotic and sometimes dangerous (this was echoed by both Jeevan and Stella). The ECEC teacher's priority was to establish a relationship of trust, a routine the child could trust, and rules that the child could trust. The school operated as a family, and everybody was expected to play their role.

What works:

The other phenomenon I encountered with the Minority world volunteers with which I worked was a firm belief in what Biesta terms as 'what works' (2010). The practices and resources of the host teachers and host school were viewed with a deficit model. In defense of their critiques, I was frequently presented with the arguments that varied from "research tells us…." to "But the research says…" even sometimes "This is wrong. The children should not be…" It is interesting to me that of the four disciplines that informed their training, psychology – particularly development psychology, was their 'go to' when assessing and evaluating the practices and resources of their fellow (local) educators. I used sociological arguments, historical arguments and philosophical arguments in response with no avail. This confused me for a long time. However, thinking with Biesta has allowed me to see the impact of the normative values and the seeming validity of evidenced-based practice steeped in the teacher educator programmes they attended, but more importantly, the impact on their thinking and beliefs of the current discourses surrounding 'what works' co-opted by the OECD, PISA, and so on (Biesta, 2010). Even the media, which educators are listening to and reading every day, have picked up on the idea of 'the latest research' telling us how to get the best developmental performance out of children. Everything can be quantified through developmental indicators into social and economic outcomes. For example, the Nobel prize winning economist James Heckman calculated an equation based on the longitudinal research studies carried out on the Perry Preschool Program in the United States, which is often used to convince policy makers, governments, and even parents of the economic value of early childhood education (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavitz, 2010).

With socio-economic arguments quanitifying evidence-based practices into what works and what doesn't work such as the one below:

> *"High quality early childhood programs can boost the upward mobility of two generations by freeing working parents to build their careers and increase wages over time while their child develops a broad range of foundational skills that lead to lifelong success"* James Heckman[37]

it makes sense that educators volunteering in Majority world countries, in schools run by INGO's or NGO's, in economically deprived areas (with the mission statements like "endeavoring to raise children out of poverty" or "to give children a better start in life") would use what they believe to be 'truths' about evidence-based pedagogies and practices to argue for a change in practice in the school. However, what is not asked in the types of discourses so prevalant in their lives is: what works for whom (Biesta, 2010)? Who carried out the research; when; where; on what type of children; with what agendas, and so on? The idea of a universal childhood and a universal child is created by these dominant discourses that are so prevalent in the lives of Minority world educators in their every day working lives before they travel to volunteer their time and professional skills.

The Heckman equation is highly contested because it focuses on one type of curriculum used in a school for predominantly African American children in low income areas in Philadelphia in the United States known as the Perry Preschool Project and yet is it is the most persuasive argument used to get buy in from policy makers, governments, and INGO's for spending on Early Childhood Education. Using the equation to encourage policy decisions with regards to spending on early childhood education and care universally does not acknowledge the priorities, the cultures, the societies, and the histories of the lives led by children and their families and communitites in the Majority world. The Heckman equation ultimately reduces children and their experiences to indicators and numbers. Children's rights and the diversity of their lived experiences are not honoured when the equation is used to justify why ECEC is important in their lives.

What works in Emmanuel Public School:

Interestingly, the country in which the local educators I worked with are from and the countries which the Minority world educators are from have all been colonised by the British empire. Therefore, colonial legacies and articfacts remain in the psyche, the education system, the culture, and the society. There is an interesting overlap in world views and training despite the very different culture and lifestyles. When asked if educators working in the early childhood classes should hold a teaching qualification, all five Minority world volunteers trained as teachers said yes. This is again linked back to the Heckman equation that argues high quality experiences in ECEC will lead to better outcomes for children, familes,

[37] James Heckman quoted on Human Capital and Economic Opportunity Global Working Group webpage accessed here: https://hceconomics.uchicago.edu/news/research-spotlight-life-cycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program

and the economy. A highly qualified graduate workforce is cited as a big factor in providing high quality experiences. So it follows that in order to rasie children out of poverty and improve their life experiences you need highly trained graduate qualified educators. It is completely understandable when thinking from this perspective that the Minority world volunteers would look for qualified staff.

When I posed the same question to the educators working in the early childhood classes in EPS, they all answered no. They did not think it was important to hold a teaching qualification as long as you have experience with children and can hold their attention. Most of the educators in the EPS that I met do not hold any formal qualifications in education but from my conversations with them they 'buy in' to the same rhetoric and discourses of economic advantages, evidence-based, and effective practices. They want to learn 'what works' from the Minority world educators. They want to know the research and evidence behind the effective practices that promise children will be raised out of poverty and communities will be more enlightened and function better as a society. The only difference I have observed is that they aren't so interested in developmental psychology.

The priorities of the teachers in the early childhood classes in EPS, that is 'what works' in EPS, are: (1) the children are safe (2) the children know discipline (3) the children experience a family experience in the school (4) the children are fed healthy, nutritious food, (5) the children learn English. As Miss Stella said, their priorities are not about study or academics so much as they are about settling the children and earning their trust. From what I've observed in the classroom, they do make value-based judgements naturally and use phronesis (that is practical wisdom) in the moment that is **situated** and **local**. To me, it appears that although they wish to know about the evidence and 'what works' (Biesta, 2010) they seem to be immune to outside pressures of evaluation and quantification that their Minority world colleagues are subjected to and instinctively use their professional judgements based on intimate knowledge of the child's family life or life in the community seemingly more frequently than their counterparts. That is, the teachers in EPS apply a knowledge that is local – they seem to know the children's lives at home and in their communities more intimately and make their decisions based on that knowledge. This observation is not meant to romanticise, or to infer that the Minority world teachers don't have the children's best interests at heart. It is more about applying local, intimate knowledge rather than pedagogical knowledge.

From my obervances, the local educators I have worked with have a deeper understanding of the purposes of education within the context of EPS and the community they serve than my Minority world collegues seem to have. It is important here that I emphasise "within the context of EPS". From my observances I think that the purpose of education in Emmanuel Public School is different to what I and others may think the purpose of education is. That is, the purpose of education is not universal but changes based on the context. They also make decisions based on their knowledge of the child (the being) not the development of the child (the becoming). I wish to note that these are casual observances

made during the course of ten years of volunteering as well as in the process of data gathering for my research and only apply to the educators in the one school I have volunteered and researched in and are by no means meant to be representative. However, I mention it because the presence of a seemingly more natural, instinctive ethical radar (or phronesis) informed by local social and cultural knowledge does make me think deeply about the teacher education process and the demands under which educators work in the Minority world. I wonder, considering all these threads and perspectives, if the pressures Minority world educators are under to quantify their practices, results, observations, planning etc. limits what they would do and how they would think or see if they could just educate and not quantify?

In the formal interviews I conducted with the early childhood educators in EPS they all mentioned the lives the children lead outside of the school. They speak about children coming to school having eaten nothing but the hot meal from the day before, the violence they witness or are subjected to in their communities, the need for love and stability in the form of familial attachments, and the need for discipline to make them feel safe – the setting of boundaries or freedom within limits. I was struck by the manner in which these priorities set out their teaching agenda rather than any formal curriculum. Grummell discusses how every educator and learner brings "their own biographies of love, care and solidatrity to bear on the learning relationship" (2017, p.3145). I use this to think through the conversations I had with the educators of EPS. How they prioritise love and relationships with the children in their conversations with me. I'm brought back to the words of Miss Stella, "*EPS is like a family. It's not study, study. There has to be discipline for the children. They very closer to us…grow part of the family."* This was the "total quality education" that Mr. Singh envisioned when founding the school. A holistic model which meets the needs of the child in front of the teacher whether it be food, English, life skills, boundaries, dental and health care, counselling, self defence, or the need for love, care and colidarity. Miss Stella and her colleagues are commiting a deeply political act (ibid) of love and care that puts the children (and their relationship with the children) at the heart of the educational relationship not the quanitification of indicators and numbers. This is a radically different way of conceptualising educational relationship than the neoliberalistic presence of the market model that Minority world educators are working in / against. *... perhaps if Irish ECEC professionals were to reconceptualise their caring roles as polictical acts of resistance against the market model of ECEC they would embrace the concepts of profressional love (Page, 2017) and the responsibility of the caring role which cannot be separated from education…. unravels thread….* Perhaps, if I had spent some time really evaluating whether I should research in the school and asked talked to the management and the teachers, I wonder would we have considered researching what "total quality education" is?

What works in Ireland:

Across the world, the early childhood education and care systems have been, or are being, formalised relatively recently. As most of my Minority world volunteers asked to remain anonymous I will focus on Ireland – my country of origin and where the majority of the volunteers I experienced travelled from. As the Irish ECEC sector formalises it has stumbled from national crisis to policy implications and back again to national crisis. This has brought the discourses surrounding 'what works' and 'best practice' in early childhood education and care not only into the professional arena but into the mainstream media too. In trying to understand the disconnect between what I was seeing and what other Minority world volunteers trained as educators (particularly those trained in Ireland) were seeing I am reminded by Nóirín's Hayes words, "As with any conversation, it is important that participants know what values, beliefs, and understandings inform different perspectives" (Hayes, 2013 p.1). After productively undoing my observations, my professional and personal identity, and the interviews and survey responses from all educators, I would argue that participants of the conversation need to first be aware of the values, beliefs, and understandings that inform their own perspectives before attempting to understand the other perspectives. Below I will attempt to unpack the predominant discourses in early childhood education and care in Ireland since the formal formalisation of the sector began in 2010.

Dominant dicourses include: (1) Qualifications bring about higher quality services – particularly minimum qualifications and a move towards degrees and post graduate qualifications. (2) The introduction of national curriculum and quality frameworks brought the binary of play versus academics to the fore. (3) This led to discussions around (and sharing of) practice including the resources used with children, age appropriate currciula and materials, and prepared environments. These all feed back into the economic arguments put forward by the Heckamn equation, discussed above.

The discourse surrounding qualifications included of course the notion of a professional identity and a collective professional identity. This brought about about an unfortunate preference to be known as educators, dropping the notion of care almost entirely. While relationships are acknowledged as important, it is noteworthy that they aren't core to a professional identity. Outdoor Play is currently a 'hot topic' with examples from the Nordic countries in Europe used as high quality indicators of best practice. This would explain, to my mind, why the volunteers were precoccupied with having children play outdoors and also their frustrations at the local educators reluctance to do so. So 'what works' for Irish educators are qualified staff, with a developmentally appropriate curriculum and materials, and lots of play in a specially prepared environment, with access to outdoor play.

The purpose of Education:

Unpacking all these different perspectives, beliefs, values and understandings leads me back to a question: What is the purpose of education? Is the purpose of education different depending on where

you live in the world? Education is a telelogical practice, “a practice that is not only *framed* but is actually *constituted* by its purpose” (Biesta, 2015 p.6) going further he describes what he calls the three domains or functions of education: (1) qualification – the way students aquire skills, dispositions and knowledge (2) Socialisation - students become part of existing traditions, ways of being in a society, and culture (3) subjectification – the emergence of the student as an independent person with possibility to begin or become something unique (Biesta, 2016). While I do not want to make any claims or value judgements on the practice and education I observed in Emmanuel Public School, I will say that after productively undoing both the perspective of the Minority world volunteers who identified as educators and productively undoing the perspectives of the early childhood education and care teachers in EPS and I see how both perspectives and ways of doing would satisfy all three functions as Biesta defines of education for the children in their classrooms. I also see how they would each think the other may not fulfill these criteria which brings me back to Hayes’ rationale that to have a professional dialogue we have to know the values, beliefs, and understandings informing the different perspectives. Perhaps, as I have suggested above, the purpose of education changes with the context it occurs in?

If things had gone differently:

If, during that fateful trip in 2015, we had decided to talk to the educators and school about how to teach through play, to teach them ‘what works’ for us – as many Minority world charities in Majority world countries do - it begs the question, what are we teaching the children and educators by training them in how we teach – how we educate? What is it that we are essentially saying to them? If play is indeed the work of the child, why are we educating them out of their normal – natural ways of playing - just because it doesn’t look like what we think it should? If playing is how a child learns their culture and the society – it’s rules, how it works, it’s tools etc – what are we telling them by teaching them how to play in our culture with our cultural tools? Are we saying our culture is better than yours? Are we asking them to abandon their culture and to take on our cultural habits, world views, beliefs, and ways in order to fit into a capitalist world that works (?) for us? Because, at the end of the day – by encouraging them to play differently and learn in a way which works for a different culture - that is what we are doing. We are colonising their childhood, their play, and their learning. We are telling them – you and your ways of being are not good enough. Here is our more enlightened, better way to do it…

Attempting to put my Study Back Together:

Traditionally, this would be the conclusion, I suppose, however this is not a conclusion. I could keep examining from other theoretical perspectives, other disciplinary perspectives, playing with the data, and writing about the process indefinitely. I am not really sure if I have a conclusion, but I do have learnings. There are so many different threads within the story of my research project that could be doctoral studies in their own right, and I am sad that I could not give them more attention or dive into them more deeply. I am confined by time, life, and a brain that cannot give any more to this, at this moment in time. However, I am going to try to put my research project back together after productively and lovingly undoing it to see what could be gleamed in terms of lessons for a more ethical educational research study in the Majority world.

When I think of attempting to put this study back together, images of broken bowls mended through the Japanese art of kintsugi come to mind. It may have been taken apart, but it was with productive intention (Spivak, 2012), and it was lovingly done and now I will lovingly, with productive intention, attempt to put it back together so that it is something that is appreciated for its flaws.

"The philosophy behind Kintsugi is similar to wabi-sabi, which teaches appreciation of the imperfect in the world."[38]

[38] https://mai-ko.com/tour/kintsugi-experience-kyoto/

As a doctoral student there was so much rich learning to be taken both from my research experience and from productively undoing the research project. As this thesis ends, my thinking and understanding does not. It grows as I continually reflect on the process. As I put it back together the cracks that glisten with gold illuminate my learning and this is how I choose to write about the process: the learning. I choose to focus on the gold shining out of the project as each piece is glued back into place.

Overall, the biggest lesson I have learned from this doctoral research project is to think deeply and inform myself before stepping into the lives of people and children living in the Majority world to conduct an educational research study. The old adage, "Just because you can, doesn't mean you should" comes to mind. The first question I think I should ask myself to make sure the research study is as ethical as it can be is: **Will I occupy a space that could be filled by a local researcher?** Is it my place to research this topic, or any topic in this space, at in this time? Using a combination of post-colonial, de-colonial, and critical race theoretical lenses, the question of occupying somebody else's space or telling somebody else's story needs to be thought through. I am not saying I should never research in the Majority world just because I do not live there, by any means. I am saying that I should think more deeply and more critically about the space I would occupy and the stories I would tell before I make my decision. When I reflect on this, I think that that question really could apply to any research, in any community that is not my own.

I have learned that having made the decision to research, particularly in the Majority world, a period of hyper self-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004) is called for. This exercise should have been carried out by me before I ever entered the field, before I ever researched the literature, before deciding on methods, and certainly before going through the procedure of applying for ethical approval. How can I truly know what lenses I am using, what unconscious biases I hold, unless I attempt an exercise in hyper self-reflexivity which could only be carried out after reading extensive literature pertaining to the self, race, ethnicity, intersectionality and so on? I really need to examine who I am and what my world view is before I can conduct any sort of ethically sound research, particularly when working with any marginalised, under-represented, or over-represented groups whether in the Majority world or not. In the future, I will attempt to revisit and continue the process of hyper self-reflexivity before entering the field in order to check for biases, lenses, and world views that I may not be aware I hold in order to understand my research questions and interests. This process should be carried on in the research design and while in the field.

This leads me quite nicely to the lessons I learned in how a literature review can really say anything you want it to. Your world view will determine how you interpret a piece of literature or a research study and how you choose to frame it. Acknowledging your ontological stance and your theoretical framework should make it clear to the reader how you are interpreting the literature. However, as we

have witnessed in the rise of far-right extremist movements and far-left movements across the world in recent years, words can be weaponised and re-imagined or re-contextualised. Being aware of that while conducting a literature review is important. There were times when I was not aware that I had framed something the opposite way as it was intended. There were also times when the literature led me down paths where I could not see a way to ethically research in a Majority world context at all. Understanding the literature as an ongoing conversation allowed me to add my voice and seeing the same piece of literature from a number of different perspectives (disciplinary, socially, historically, situationally, and theoretically) helps. Knowing the context of the author and the study helped me in piecing it all together. It allowed me a generous reading of something I may have reacted quite strongly to because of the time and context in which it was written, and whose arguments it built on or responded to. It made me careful in looking over the literature I presented and how I presented it, and to acknowledge it was too fluid and messy to fit into the nice little formula I had developed using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979).

As I reflected on the pieces of my research study as they lay bare, I often thought that I would have benefitted from a module that focused exclusively on ethics and ethical research. I would love to have critically examined (along with a community of inquirers) ethics and ethical guidelines for educational research. Placing this discussion alongside human rights charters such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and critically examining the ruptures, the clashes, the ideologies, and the lenses with which they were written and updated would have made for many interesting conversations that certainly would have led to rigorous, critical examination of research studies involving other people and children.

I would have benefited from completing a risk-benefits analysis on my research, with peer review in order to defend my analysis and its results. A question I have learned to ask myself is: **What is to be gained from this research study for the participants?** Also important is the question of what it will cost them. Although I was lucky (and grateful) to have a wonderfully generous community that surrounded me in the Education Department in Maynooth University that were always open to having conversations and debates about ethical research and ethics in general, I often wonder if it were not for this community would I have just gone ahead and evaluated or quantified the levels of play and early learning in Emmanuel Public School to satisfy a Minority world audience? The current pandemic situation brings this thought to bare on me a lot of late. If I were starting out my doctoral journey in a pandemic and I was not afforded the conversations in the corridor, after a guest lecture, during a module, just dropping into my supervisors' offices as I passed, waiting for the photocopying machine and so on… would I have really realised my ethical mistake(s) / better ways of researching and analysing?

Allowing my methodologies to be fluid and responsive in the field (St. Pierre, 2018) would have allowed for a much more ethical study. I am not sure where or when I developed such a fixed notion of what it was to be a researcher and how rigorous research is carried out. I do know that my misconceptions stopped me from allowing my methodologies to respond to the situations with the adult research partners. Discovering decolonising methodologies and post qualitative methods opened up a whole new world for me where my embodied sense is valid and valued. It is interesting to me that I allowed my methodologies to be fluid and respond to the children's needs. I suppose eighteen years of working with children and reflexively changing what I was doing to suit their needs helped me to do it naturally in the field, in a way I did not even consider until I laid my methodology bare. I also wonder if completing the ethical approval form and getting approval for a certain kind of study made me confident that the chosen methodology was the 'right' way to conduct the research ethically (with adults in particular), and caused me to just push ahead with it in the field when really, I knew it was not working and only served to extract information? I have learned to be more fluid in my methodology, and let it respond to the situation and the participants, even if it means going back numerous times to refine my ethical approval with evidence and arguments about why it is needed. I've realised that ethical reflexivity is equally important as an ethical radar (Skanfors, 2009) when researching in the field.

Critically examining what it means to be ethical in your institution and what it means to be ethical in the field follows on from my learning about allowing my methods to respond to the situation. Using an ethical radar (Skånfors, 2009) allowed for a lot of this in the field. However, when productively undoing my study, I realised that a lot of taken for granted concepts like biographies, identities, time frames, consent, who can give consent, gatekeepers, capacity etc. meant different things in my research site in the Majority world as they did in my institution in the Minority world, or in any professional conferences with researchers coming from similar institutions and traditions. I have learned that I really need to justify my decisions, even if it means looking to other disciplines or offering other perspectives. My decision to offer the use of their own identity to children in the field and the school have already caused some controversy in conferences I have presented at. However, I justify using them from an understanding of human rights and offer another perspective to my colleagues. Some agree following justification and other do not. I have had to learn that not everyone will agree with the ethical decisions I make in the field, particularly in an environment completely different to the world of academia in the Minority world. I have also had to learn that as long as I can justify it ethically using an ethical radar (Skanfors, 2009), justification based on situated knowledge and local advice, and an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) to myself, and can stand over it, then I have to take the criticism from people who do not see it from my perspective as something to think about rather than a failure to research ethically.

Allowing children to decolonise the research process and trusting them to show me what they want to find out about, talk about, and what they want me to know has been one of the largest nuggets of gold

from this process. Allowing them to research me and then to remove me entirely from the research was the most like an authentic researcher I have ever felt. It was freeing, and it felt entirely, ethically correct. I did not come to a sudden realisation – it was the children in Emmanuel Public School who told me in an embodied way, that they are perfectly capable of researching and will research what they want and how they want. It was my job to respect their decision, step aside, and remove myself from their research process. It has emboldened me to be courageous and to see (and value) children's research methods – their natural modes of inquiry (including play) to be much more valuable and justifiable than an adult led or co-researched project. I have so much more to learn about this, and I hope that future children will allow me to learn from them. It will be messy, and hard to make sense of. In many ways, it is a form of resistance to the accepted ways of creating knowledge within the academy and what is counted as valid research methods and valid knowledge. However, I have learned that children do research in their own, natural, embodied way, and it is not my place to step into their world and insist they use my methods (methods approved of by the academy) in order to be granted the privilege of hearing their views or understanding their worlds. Their ways of knowing, exploring, learning, and being – their ways of researching – that may not be the same as an adult's ways of researching are still valuable, and worthwhile. Instead of teaching children our adult ways of researching we should learn from below (Spivak, 2012) and recognise and validate *...do they need our validation???...* their ways of researching. I have realised that to then code or theme their outputs – their data – is an act of colonisation, indeed it may be considered as an act of epistemic violence.

Working with an interpreter whose position evolved into that as co-researcher and co-creator of knowledge was another large piece of gold that shines out of the research as it stands together now. When I employed an interpreter, I thought about practical things like pay, logistics, interpretations, guiding and how that would work. I even thought about the extra lens an interpreter would bring to the process and I wondered how I could diminish that. Reflecting back, I just did not think of an interpreter as offering anything more than a service and that I should be mindful of managing interpretation of language in the data and write up. I never considered that an interpreter would co-generate knowledge in the process of researching and in doing so become a co-researcher. I now consider this a form of silencing a research partner and laying claim to information and understandings (that I would not have gained without him) unethical practice, particularly given my privilege. It seems completely unethical to me now to wipe the interpreter out of the process or to consider them anything less than a co-creator of knowledge. Relationship and trust were two factors that allowed us to really acknowledge and allow for the role of interpreter to evolve into one of co-researcher. Without trust, the relationship would not have evolved quite so easily. I admit, not having considered interpretation as anything more than a service I would not have allowed somebody else to take my research tools or to create their own data that passed seamlessly between us both. I would be more mindful of what was mine and theirs. I had a very individualistic sense of knowledge creation and learning that changed into a relational, dialogical

one by the end of the research study. I want to spend more time in the future examining the role of interpreter and guide in research in partnership with Suresh. I think this is something overlooked too easily by researchers and is something worth considering in more depth.

In terms of early childhood education and care, whether it involved researching with children or working an ECEC environment with children, the greatest learning for me was to use as many different perspectives as possible (whether they be disciplinary, theoretical, methodological etc.) to examine the practices of early childhood professionals, the experiences and childhoods of children, and particularly to examine the notion of voice and children's rights. What struck me most was that by taking a practice apart, and examining it in all it's pieces though multiple lenses, you might end up making an argument that completely contradicts everything you thought you knew about good practice, ethics, or 'quality'. The example that comes to mind most, is that of applying all of the rights afforded to children through different lenses creating different results. I genuinely gasped at my argument when I realised by thinking with post-colonial and de-colonial lenses, I was ultimately being led to question whether anonymising children in a co-research or partnership process could be interpreted as an act of exploitation rather than that of protection. Is anonymising an act of protection or an act of silencing? My head raced with the thoughts of contradicting or indeed implying that all of the most renowned researchers I have ever looked up to may be considered to have unknowingly, potentially exploited children. My gut, however, knew I had to follow the theory to where it was leading me. I am still so uncomfortable with this, but as I said, using different theories and different disciplines to critically examine data, practices, and methods, caused me to draw very different conclusions to those I had felt safe and comfortable with in my own discipline. So, this brings me to my learning, we need to look at (and interrogate) children's rights and quality practice from a range of different disciplines and theoretical traditions in order to fully understand all the different perspectives, opportunities, and implications of how we conduct ourselves.

Second to this, but making a similar point, I learned that although we have been taught to see children in early childhood education and care as agentic (beings not becomings), and although we now recognise them as the authority on their own worlds and experiences, we still expect them to learn how to use our adult research tools and accepted academic practices to research and to disseminate their information and knowledge to us. Yes, a lot of effort, innovation, and thought has gone in to creating child-friendly methods of 'hearing' or 'capturing' their voices, however, using a post-colonial or decolonial lens to explore and interrogate this practice leads me down a road where this could also be considered an act of epistemic violence. Children have their own methods to explore and express their worlds that we must learn (from below (Spivak, 2012)) and recognise as valid methods of researching and communicating even if it is messy or doesn't make much sense to us at first. It is up to us to make sense of their communications - it is not up to them to learn our ways to help us understand. I have also

learned the need to be brave and learn when I was not wanted or needed. Allowing children to decolonise our agendas with their own is something that we already do in practice in ECEC services using an emergent curriculum – this is something researchers in ECEC could learn from.

Perhaps my biggest learning from this doctoral study was to research in authentic partnership and co-creation of knowledge. A question I still continue to grapple with is: **What does authentic research partnership look like?** I continue to grapple with it because of the norms of academia. What do participant research partners or interpreter co-researchers gain from the process? There were many concepts I have learned and understandings that I have gained form working in partnership with Suresh and the children, but at the end of the day, even though they are research partners, they do not share the gains I will (hopefully) receive from the academy. They will not receive a PhD. They are not considered as co-authors or co-researchers in terms of ownership of the knowledge we created together unless I put their names as co-authors and co-presenters in papers and at conferences. Really, I struggle with the idea of research partner which is modelled on silent partner; and this is the point I return to again and again. This is what Spivak interrupted me to ask. The notion of voice. Voice, power, and being heard or seen. Whose voice matters in research? Whose ways of knowing matter in the academy? Whose ways are validated and accepted as research, as valid methods, and valid forms of dissemination? Who gains and who loses when the researcher is the authoritative voice in a study with multiple research participants and partners? Who is silenced? I am afraid I have no answers to give here. I have ruptured the idea of children as research partners and research participants through a children's rights lens and I am not sure that I can put it back together…or that I want to. I had taken so much information out of this thesis that offers great insight into the lives and education of the children and communities using Emmanuel Public School because of the deeply personal, almost confessional nature of what Suresh told me about his life by way of explaining the phenomena I was seeing or grappling with. It really helped me to understand a lot of what I was grappling with and I understand it leaves some questions unanswered within this thesis, which will confuse you as a reader. However, I was not willing, at the end of the day to put so much personal information for our gain when Suresh gains nothing from the process. Either the research partners co-own the knowledge they helped create or they do not.

I have no answers,

I offer you no solutions.

I keep that thread unstitched, hanging from the tapestry.

You

may

continue

to

pull

on

that

thread

with

me

if

you

wish.

Epilogue

I walk into the drive to see the younger children playing structured sports games with some adults I am not familiar with on the field. “Suresh, who are they?” “Not sure Sinéad, I think I heard Poonam say something about volunteers from their Church so that might be them.” I watched with interest. I was always on the other side of this; one of the volunteers. This was my pilot trip, so I decided to sit and watch. I admit, I was interested to see what they would do that would be similar or different from our trips given that they were a local group. It might give me a sense of the types of play they use and value; maybe there will be cultural differences.

I saw Poonam walk from the veranda out into the drive. I walk towards her, “Poonam, what’s going on in the field?” “They are volunteers from my Church. They have come to spent time with the children. They have donated a packed lunch for all the children in the school. Very generous is it not?” “It is!” “Mom won’t have to cook today.” “That’s great. Would it be ok if I took photographs?” “Yes, I’m sure. Let me check. I’ll send up your chai.”

I went back to sit under my favourite tree where Suresh was sitting. “Yes, it’s volunteers from the Church.” “Mmmhmmm.” We sit in silence watching. I check the temperature, it’s 37 degrees. I bake in the heat of the sun, lifting my face towards it. “You are going pink Sinéad!” Suresh laughs at me. “Sir, your chai. Sinéad, Miss, your chai,” “Thank you” I say with a big smile to one of the older girls with the tray of chai and coffees for the teachers. “Most welcome, ma’am,” she smiles and walks along the path to building number three, china cups clinking as she goes.

“Well, hello there! How’s your research going?” I look up to see two of the long term volunteers walking by me towards the office. I smile, I have really grown to enjoy their company. As retired secondary teachers from the Minority world they have brought a lot of structure to the school and are a big help to Poonam and Mr Singh. I also really enjoy their dry wit over dinner with a glass of wine. They stop. “It’s paused” I nod my head in the direction of the field “but at just the right time” I take a sip from my chai and smile. “Good to hear. We are away into himself; we’ll see you in a bit.” They walk on towards the office greeting different children as they pass.

I watch with interest as the day gets hotter and the children run on the playing field with the volunteers. The dust kicks up everywhere. Dirtying the children’s uniforms and shoes. They are

playing formal ball games and trying desperately to teach the children the rules. They end up passing and throwing the ball for them. The dust continues to rise up all around them. I take photos when I get the nod from Poonam. Suddenly, I stop. I have a growing sense of unease. I think back to my first two or three times volunteering. I hated the outdoor games. The children were too young for formal games, yet we were not used to having forty to eighty children in one group at a time (our ratios back home were ten children to one adult) so we tried desperately to control them with games that were not suitable for their age group. *I cringe. That's not child centred or developmentally appropriate. It was simply about control…forced fun???? God, I wonder did those kids really have fun at all?*

I know I didn't have fun! I remember the dust sticking to my clothes, damp with sweat, that seemed to come from everywhere. My throat was always dry and thirsty from running in the heat with no shade or breeze and dust kicked up everywhere. We always had our bottles of water beside us which we drank from liberally. *We never thought that the children would be thirsty, tired, dusty, and hot. Why did we not think of that?* After each activity, the children's uniforms and shoes would be dirty with dust, mud, paint etc…*My goodness, we never gave a thought to how the children or their parents would clean the children's uniforms in their communities. One or two of the communities only had a communal tap that gave them running water for an hour or two a day.* I groan as I think of the painting activities we did that would intentionally descend into paint fights with paint all over everyone's clothes and faces. *Did we really not think about that? Were we so preoccupied with "having fun" that we didn't think to consider the lived realities of the children and their families? And we call ourselves child centred educators…?* I shake my head to myself, look on, and reflect.

By my third volunteer trip, I had learned from experience. I knew what activities worked and what didn't: Bubbles and stickers…lots and lots of stickers. Face paints. Art and crafts – paint and gems always went down a treat! But stickers…now there is a resource that you can watch bought and sold right in front of you. Stickers were a currency for the children, no matter what age they were. They traded, and "borrowed", they took some for home, for their families. To this day I am still astounded how much joy, play, and practicing of real life skills can be gotten from something as simple as stickers. I always fill my suitcases with stickers and leave lots behind for Poonam to use with the children when we were gone.

Formal large group games do NOT work. They are work for everyone involved. Even the older children prefer to sit and chat and perform for us. Reading doesn't work. Singing doesn't work. Just being with the children works… *Hmmm just being with the children doesn't make for such good photographs does it?...* Any activity that requires touch or other sensory experiences works. Still, it is amazing, how many times you can explain this to Minority world volunteers, and they insist on bringing equipment and attempting to play formal group sports games on the field in the middle of the hot day with children. It always ends up with sweaty, dusty, exhausted, and stressed volunteers and slightly bemused, hot, tired children! I'm not sure I understand why we are obsessed with getting children out to play on a field. I suppose the importance of outdoor play for children's development in Ireland, and the Minority World more broadly, is drilled into us at the moment. It is one of the most dominate discourses in Early Childhood Education and Care. In fact, it has kind of been the hot topic for a number of years now! There is a huge move towards getting children to connect with nature again. The term *nature deficit disorder* is discussed a lot. I reflect on my observations so far… *despite living in an urban area, I don't think these children can be any more connected to nature. They are always playing with soil, leaves, grasses, pebbles, water, twigs, trees, sticks, stones inside and outside of their formal classes…*

…

My attention is drawn back to the children as they are lined up. I hear a lot of bustling and I look towards the veranda outside the office. The older children are putting the colourful plastic chairs belonging to the younger classes in a line outside on the drive. Two of the Church volunteers are setting up a sound system. Suddenly a Rhianna song blasts out and all the children begin to play musical chairs. I sit up straight. I look at Suresh and look back at Poonam who is laughing and taking photos. I look back at Suresh again, bewildered. "What Sinéad?" "Eh, they are playing Rhianna songs???!" "Yeah" "Since when have we been allowed to play Rhianna songs with the children???!" "Don't know, Sinéad." … I sit in shock and watch. I scribble notes and observations in my note pad as the game continues. Then I finish my chai and sit with my back against the tree. I'm still in shock. When we first came over, we couldn't even sing nursery rhymes that were deemed scary for impressionable children such as Incy Wincey Spider… mind you… that was almost ten years ago… mind you… it was a minority world charity that told us that. I had always assumed that the school had decided this and not the charity…what if it was the charity's attempt to protect the 'vulnerable' children? Why on earth had I never thought to ask???

The music ends and a child is named the winner. Everybody cheers and claps. The volunteers and the older children put all the plastic chairs back into the middle of the drive. I watch with interest. "Hi Sinéad, Miss", an older girl of about fourteen years of age, came over to show me a picture she drew. She is new to the school and over the last few visits I have taken a keen interest in her art. "This is beautiful, did you draw this?" "Yes, ma'am." I look at the page. She has traced the outline of her hand and arm and drew Mehndi patterns all over the fingers, palm, and arm. The design is intricate and exquisite. Wendy[39], the retired secondary school teacher, suddenly re-joins me. She sits down and takes the page from me, "That's beautiful!" "Isn't it?" I look back to the older girl, "Would you like me to bring back a sketchpad and pencils for you next time?" She looks puzzled. "A book of drawing paper" Wendy explained to her. "Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. For you, ma'am." She runs back to her classroom, leaving me with the drawing. I put it in my notebook and write: *don't forget to bring sketchpad and drawing pencils for next visit*. Wendy takes my note pad and beside it writes *For Aarchal*. "Thanks" I smile at her.

I look up and the volunteers have nearly finished handing out a sandwich, a banana, and a bun to each child. The other volunteers are taking photos of them handing out the food. My stomach lurches. The children are sitting holding them. "Eat, eat" Poonam says. Most of the children begin to eat. The volunteers begin to walk up and down the line of children eating the food taking photos of them as they eat. I do a double take at what I am seeing. I look at Wendy uncomfortably. She looks at me and silently shrugs her shoulders and purses her lips. It feels forced and performed. It is a performance. The giving of charity show – the final part of all volunteer trips. *Oh my god. This was us. This **is** us. We always do the giving of charity performance and photograph it. This is 'to show the folks back home what their money paid for'… This is me, and I do not like what I am seeing*. I don't like seeing the performance from the outside. I look around me, at Suresh, Wendy, the older children, the young children performing the eating ceremony. I feel sick. *There is absolutely no need to do this in such a manner. **There is no dignity here**.* I am ashamed that it has taken this moment, right here, to realise how our volunteering was…

…all about us.

[39] Pseudonym

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Appendix One:

Visual Timetable of Events / Research