

Children's perspectives on how teachers listen to their ideas in the early years of school

Dr. Julia Mascadri, Prof. Donna Berthelsen, Prof. Jo Lunn Brownlee,

Dr. Laura Scholes, Prof. Susan Walker: *Queensland University of Technology*

Prof. Eva Johansson: *University of Stavanger*



@JuliaMascadri

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

For more information visit:
[www.qut.edu.au/about/our-university/
acknowledgement-of-traditional-owners](http://www.qut.edu.au/about/our-university/acknowledgement-of-traditional-owners)

Artwork by RJ Stuurman

Acknowledgements

- The Schools:
 - Thanks to the Principals, administration teams, teachers, children and parents who participated in this study.
- The research team:
 - Jo Lunn-Brownlee, Susan Walker, Donna Berthelsen, Eva Johansson, Laura Scholes, Julia Mascadri and Charlotte Cobb-Moore.
- The Australian Research Council (2013-2015)
 - Funded project: *Promoting children's moral thinking*.

The ARC study

- **Promoting Children's Moral Thinking:**
 - Three year longitudinal research project.
- **Aim:**
 - To investigate the nature of social and moral values held by young Australian children.
- **Participants:**
 - 174 children and their teachers from 10 South East Queensland schools.
- **Data Collection:**
 - Children and teachers were individually interviewed on one occasion each year (2013 – 2015).

This Presentation

- Aims to explore children's own perspectives about how and why teachers listen, or do not listen, to their ideas and their recollections of occasions in which teachers had listened to them.
- This analysis draws on data from 157 children in Year 2 (2014).
 - 78 Females & 79 Males
 - Mean age 7 years 8 months

Listening to children's ideas

- An important aspect in the development of citizenship is that children are afforded opportunities for agency and participation, through which they can exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- Listening to children is a key aspect of student/child-centred pedagogy. Research suggests that teachers who use participatory student-centred pedagogies have a substantial impact on students' ability to apply democratic ideals outside the classroom (Vavrus, Thamos & Bartlett, 2011).
- In the UK, the EPPE project found that 'sustained shared thinking' was an important element of high quality practice in early years settings (Sylva et al. 2003).
- Rinaldi ([2005](#)) advocates for a pedagogy of listening which pays attention to young children's own concerns and ideas

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

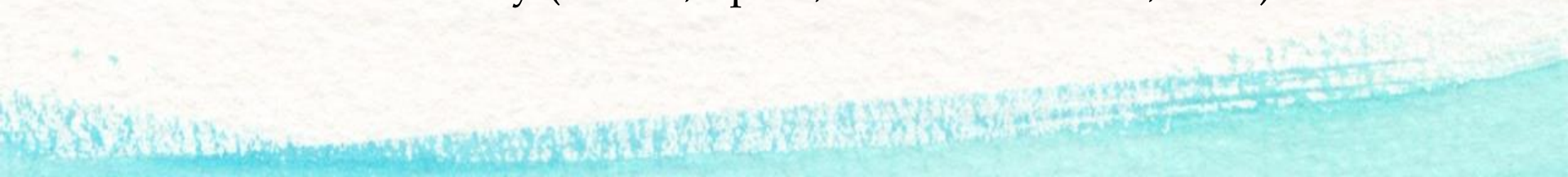
“Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.” (UNICEF, 2006).

Early Years Learning Framework:

“educators who are attuned to children’s thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12).

AITSL Literature review: Student-centred schools make the difference:

Teachers who encourage and listen to students’ voices, enhance student engagement and develop students’ capacities to contribute in a democratic society (Harris, Spina, Ehrich & Smeed, 2013).



Educational settings are important places where children may or may not be afforded opportunities to fully participate.

Shier (2001) defined a number of levels of participation through which children can exercise agency and, for younger children, these levels include that children are listened to and supported to express their views.

Shier's Levels of participation

Start here 

Openings

Opportunities

Obligations

1. Children are listened to

Are you ready to listen to children?

Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

2. Children are supported in expressing their views

Are you ready to support children in expressing their views

Do you have a range of ideas & activities to help children express their views?

It is a policy requirement that children are supporting in expressing their views?

3. Children's views are taken into account

Are you ready to take children's views into account?

This is the minimum to endorse the UN Convention on the rights of the child

Are you ready to take children's views into account?

Is it a policy requirement that children's views are given due weight in decision making?

4. Children are involved in decision making processes

Are you ready to let children join in your decision making processes?

Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision making processes?

In it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision making processes?

5. Children share power & responsibility for decision making

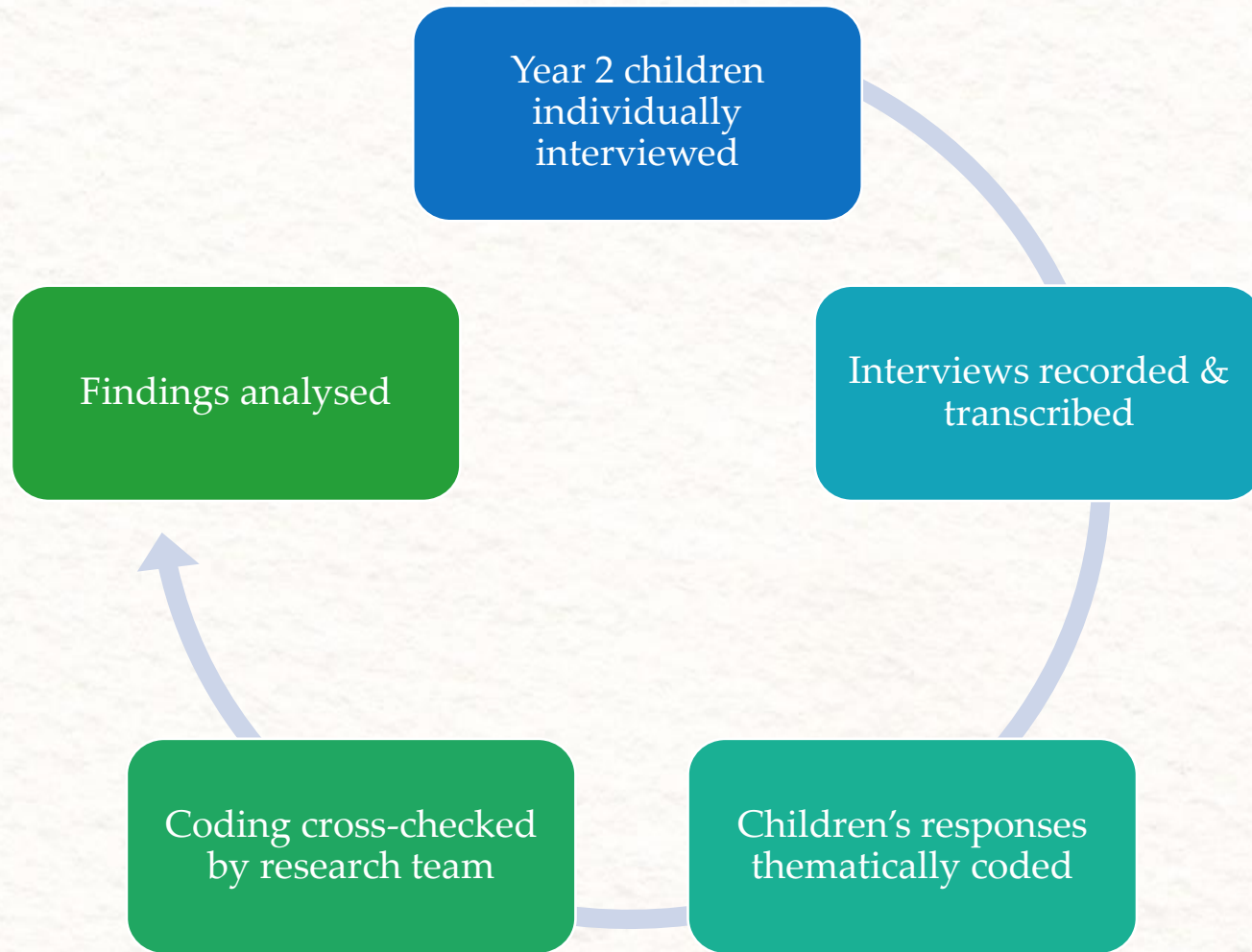
Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?

Is there a procedure that enables children & adults to share power & responsibility for decisions?

It is a policy requirement that children & adults share power & responsibilities for decisions?

(Pathways to participation adapted from Shier, 2001, p.111)

Data Collection & Analysis



Q4a: Do teachers listen to your ideas at school?

Yes

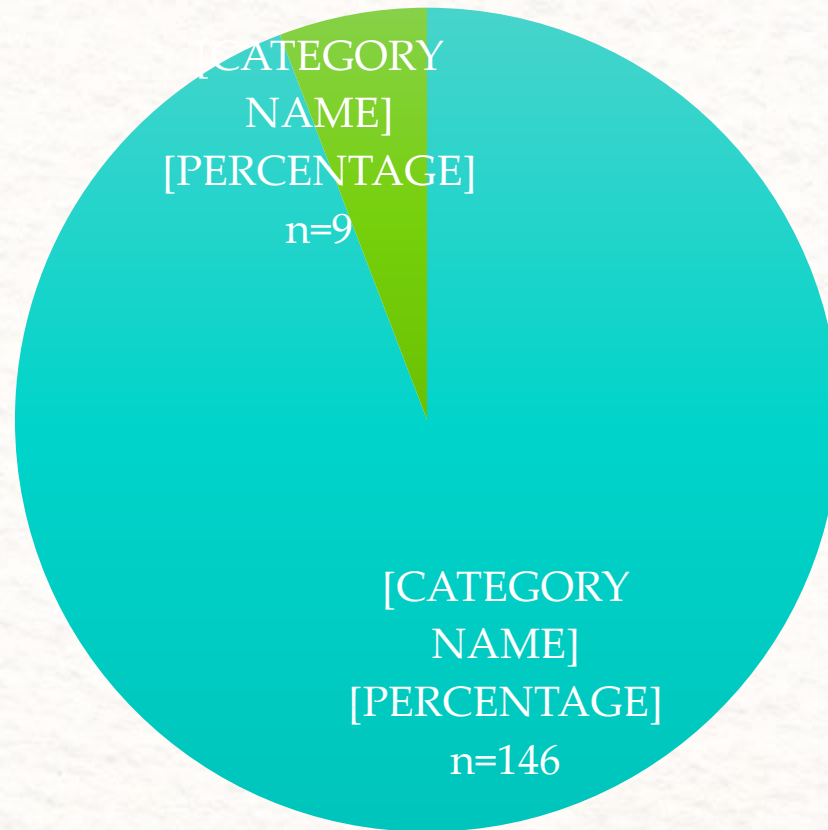
No

Q4b: Tell me about a time when the teacher really listened to your ideas.

Q4c: Tell me about a time when you had a really good idea and the teacher did not listen.

Q4d: Why should teachers listen to children's ideas at school?

Do teachers listen to your ideas at school?

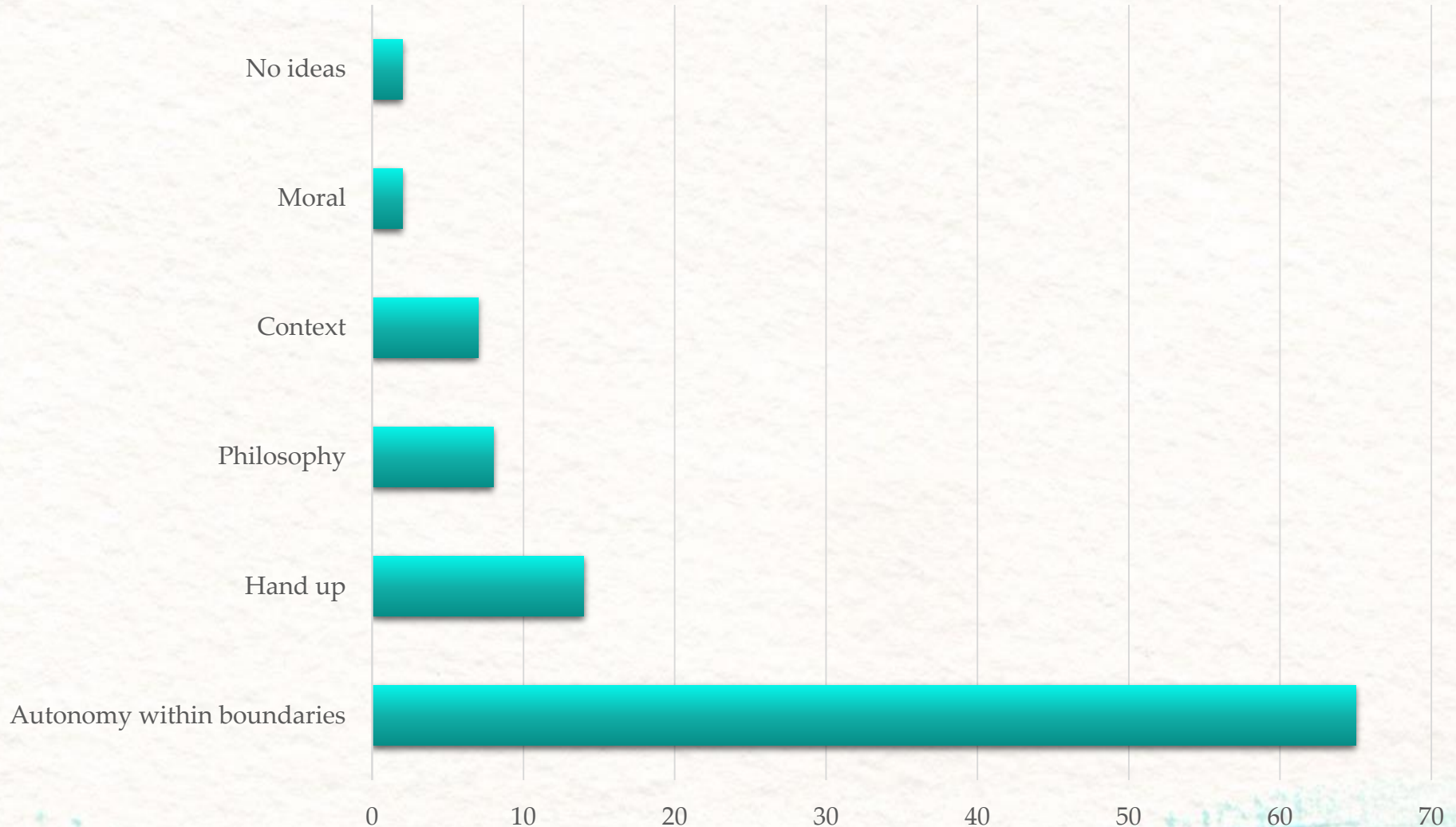


*Don't know, n=2

Tell me about a time when the teacher really listened to your ideas.

Category	Explanation
No ideas	Child responds that they don't have ideas.
Moral	Child shares ideas about moral values with their teacher (e.g., people should be treated equally).
Context	The teacher listens to child's ideas under specific circumstances or in certain contexts.
Philosophy	The teacher listens to child's ideas during philosophy lesson.
Hands up	The teacher listens to child's idea if they put their hand up.
Autonomy within boundaries	Child shares ideas within boundaries set by their teacher (e.g., in response to a question).

Tell me about a time when the teacher really listened to your ideas.



Children's recollections

No ideas (n=2)

*"Well I don't really have ideas much. I just sit in [the] meeting and listen to what the rules are."
(030106)*

Moral (n=2)

*"The time when I had an idea that - about people should be treated equally. So because if people are treated not treated equally then that could cause a giant mess in people's relationship."
(020204)*

Context (n=7)

*"Like the teacher will not listen to your ideas if it's bad but they will listen to the ideas if it's good. If it's bad, the teacher will get you in the detention."
(040110)*

Children's recollections continued. . .

Philosophy (n=8)

"Yes, when we were like doing philosophy and I said and we were thinking about this Bunyip book and I said why was the Bunyip so curious and - and the teacher said that's a good - that's a good question." (080101)

Hands up (n=14)

"When you put your hand up and you've been behaving good." (010203)

"When she asks us questions and we put our hand up." (040223)

Autonomy within boundaries (n=65)

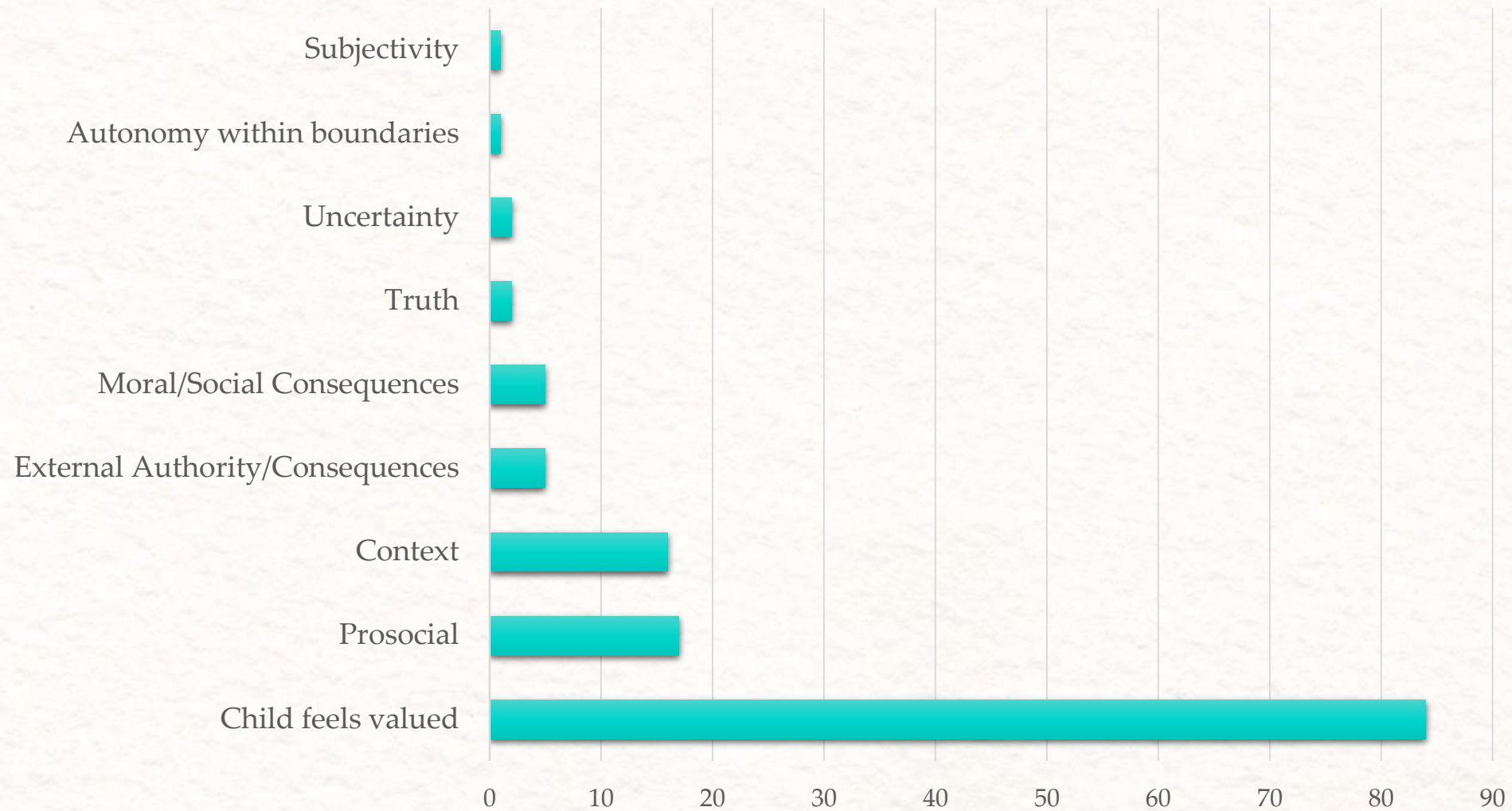
"When he was speaking about space, he said does anybody know what the planets are called and I said Saturn and he believed that Saturn is in there." (050109)

"We were thinking of words in science and I said bubbly." (060102)

*Why should teachers
listen to children's
ideas at school?*

Category	Explanation
Autonomy within boundaries	Ideas are listened to within boundaries set by the teacher.
Child feels valued	The child's thoughts and ideas are perceived as being valued.
Context	Ideas are listened to under specific circumstances or in certain contexts.
External authority / Consequences	Refers to authority figures' influence (principal, teachers, parents); or to the authority of the school or school rules. There are external consequences from particular ideas.
Moral / Social Consequences	Concerned with the principles of right and wrong behaviour. Intentions, decisions, and actions have consequences. A moral consequence is a consequence for an action or idea that is based on the moral views of the child.
Prosocial	Refers to helping others or caring for others with references to their feelings and wellbeing
Subjectivity	Individuals can have different beliefs; people can believe different things and have different opinions or ideas.
Truth	Knowledge is certain; there is a proven or verified principle; there can only be one right answer; child perceives as fact.
Uncertainty	Either belief / idea could be right because there is no certain knowledge; there is not complete agreement / consensus about what is true

Why should teachers listen to children's ideas at school?



Context (n=16)

Ideas are listened to under specific circumstances or in certain contexts.

“If they’re very good ideas, yes.” (050106)

“Because they could be really good ones and sometimes in the middle ones.”

Facilitator: Okay, and if they're really good ones what happens?

“You sometimes get respect tickets and, you know the tickets that you get when you’re really good. Yeah, you get some more stickers.” (090107)

Prosocial (n=17)

Refers to helping others or caring for others with references to their feelings and wellbeing

“The teacher should listen to the kids at school because if they don’t - sometimes when you don’t listen to people’s ideas their feelings will get hurt and they get very upset and sometimes they get very angry.” (100309)

“Because if they wouldn’t listen to our ideas, they would be like, you tell me an idea and I’m the teacher - blah, blah, blah, and teachers would be ignoring people.” (070101)

Child feels valued (n=84)

The child's thoughts and ideas are perceived as being valued.

"Because then if the teacher didn't think of something that another child did then the child is sharing their knowledge with the teacher." (090117)

"Because sometimes they [children] might have a good idea to just make things organised for the teachers, to just calm down instead of telling everybody what to do, what she can think of. So sometimes they have to listen to children ideas to just help." (060103)

"Because they can build on children's ideas too."

Facilitator: Oh right. Then what happens?

"They can build on them, make them even better." (090230)

Main Findings

The majority (94%) of children in our study stated that their teachers listened to their ideas.

When asked to recount a time when their teacher really listened to their ideas:

- Most children discussed occasions where they shared their ideas in response to a teacher's question or specific learning experience (e.g., when asked to name a planet).
- Approximately one third of children (n=54) did not provide a recount (e.g., I don't know / can't remember / other responses).

Children's reasoning for why teachers should listen to their ideas was mainly based on the notion that their thoughts and ideas are valued by their teacher. Some indication of co-construction of knowledge.

Implications for Practice

Our findings have highlighted the importance of listening to children's ideas to ensure children feel like valued classroom citizens.

Children's recounts indicated a need to move beyond listening to children's "correct answers / good ideas" to start to share power and responsibility for decision making with children (Shier, 2001).

Need to consider the openings and opportunities in teachers' practice, and the obligations within educational settings (Shier, 2001).

Philosophy for Children (P4C) can provide an opening and opportunity for children's active participation:

- Promotes citizenship by allowing children to share, value and listen to ideas through participation in meaningful discussions. Children and teachers engage in critical dialogue about the meaning of concepts and ideas (Daniel, & Auriac, 2011; Di Masi, & Santi, 2016).

"If we believe that children possess their own theories, interpretations, and questions, and are protagonists in the knowledge-building processes, then the most important verbs in education practice are no longer 'to talk; 'to explain' or 'to transmit' but 'to listen'."

(Rinaldi, in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 971.)

So why should teachers listen to children's ideas?

*"Because sometimes the kids
teach the teachers things."*

*Questions or
Comments?*

Dr. Julia Mascadri

School of Early Childhood, QUT

julia.mascadri@qut.edu.au



@JuliaMascadri

References

- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: Routledge Falmer
- Daniel, M., & Auriac, E. (2011). Philosophy, critical thinking and philosophy for children. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(5), 415-435. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00483.xLink
- Di Masi, D., & Santi, M. (2016). Learning democratic thinking: A curriculum to philosophy for children as citizens. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(1), 136. doi:10.1080/00220272.2015.1088064
- DEEWR. (2009). *Belonging, being, & becoming: Early years learning framework*. Retrieved from http://foi.deewr.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf.
- Harris, J, Spina, N, Ehrich, L., & Smeed, J. (2013). *Literature review: Student-centred schools make the difference*, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Melbourne. Prepared in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology.
- UNICEF (2006). A simplified version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from: <http://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf>
- Rinaldi, C., (2005). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia*. London: Routledge
- Shier, H. (2001) Pathways to participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations. *Children & Society*, 15, 107-117. doi: 10.1002/CHI.617
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2003). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project: Findings from the pre-school period*. London: DfES.
- Vavrus, F, Thomas, M., & Bartlett, L. (2011). *Ensuring quality by attending to inquiry: Learner-centered pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa*, International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, UNESCO, Addis Ababa. Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002160/216063e.pdf>