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Introduction to the Special Issue "Children's Rights and Extended Education"

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It is with great pleasure that I introduce this Special Issue of the International Journal for Research on Extended Education. This Special Issue presents a curated selection of papers from the 2024 Conference for the World Educational Research Association (WERA) Task Force Global Research in Extended Education, held in Brisbane, Australia in September 2024. The conference was attended by 150 participants from more than 17 different countries who presented 74 papers. Attendees came from a variety of roles including researchers, practitioners, peak body representatives and policy-makers.

The conference was titled *Bricolage: Research Methodologies and Perspectives in Extended Education.* The term *bricolage* captures the diversity that currently characterises research in Extended Education. As described by Bae (2018), Extended Education is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of activities, programs and offerings for children in the hours outside the school classroom. Extended Education takes multiple forms including more formal settings with specific goals like cram schools, private tutoring, extra curricula activities and extended school learning. Other types tend to be less formal with a play, leisure or recreational focus, more general developmental aspirations and often driven by the interests of the children who attend. These multiple forms emerge from diverse cultures, histories and geographies (Bae, 2018). Beyond these varied forms of provision, research into these settings is further complicated by a wide range of methodological approaches and theoretical positionings. This diversity makes it difficult to pin down, particularly for those outside the field, what Extended Education is, and what the research looks like.

The complex assemblage that is Extended Education research is evident in the papers presented in this Special Issue which are authored by researchers from Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Switzerland. A highlight of the Brisbane conference were the significant contributions made by Australian practitioner-researchers. Extended Education is a young research field that whilst growing rapidly, consists of only a small body of research compared to more established fields. In Australia, some of the gaps in Extended Education research are being filled by practitioner-researchers adopting action research methodologies to explore the ruptures and revelations that occur when critical reflection and engagement with theory are deployed to question and re-imagine existing practices (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2008). Whilst this research might come from outside university settings, it adds to the bricolage and enriches the field of Extended Education research.

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In one of the conference keynotes, I was privileged to facilitate a conversation between Professor Laura Lundy from Queens University, Belfast and Professor Kylie Smith from The University of Melbourne. The paper titled *A Rights-Based Approach to Extended Education* presented an exploration of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for researchers and practitioners in Extended Education (Lundy, Smith & Hurst, 2024). Article 12 establishes children's rights to have a voice about matters that affect them (United Nations, 1980) and has informed a growing body of Extended Education research globally, something evidenced by the fact that the majority of papers in this Special Issue focus on children's views about their Extended Education settings. Article 12 is also of great significance for practitioners in contexts like Sweden, Denmark and Australia, where it is considered foundational in how they go about their work with children. However, Laura reminded attendees that Article 12 should be a consideration for anyone who researches or works in Extended Education, because absolutely everything we do affects children, regardless of how we research.

One of the main themes explored in this conversation was the need to think about Article 12 critically as there was sometimes a tendency to view children's rights to a voice romantically and simplistically. Laura pointed out that listening to children is "a multi-faceted rights issue." She and Kylie reminded that the UNCRC is collection of rights that are intended intersect and work together. They highlighted other rights that have resonance in Extended Education, in particular the rights to education, play, leisure and safety.

"It's really important to think about how the articles intersect with each other, complement each other, sometimes brush up against each other" (Smith).

Kylie wondered if for Extended Education, we sometimes see ourselves in comparison to more established education settings like schools, and whether this limits researchers in contemplating the educational importance of the settings we research. Similarly, Laura commented,

"I think people are so surprised, you know, there's certain things we can talk to children in any educational setting about…. but we can't talk about other things" (Lundy).

This is a reminder that when researchers and practitioners consult children, that everything that happens in an Extended Education setting should be open to children's views. I wonder if there are sometimes areas of practice that we deem 'adult business', such as behavioural rules and policy, and keep at arm's length from children.

The speakers suggested that these intersecting rights were also an ethical consideration. Particularly, they proposed that the right to a voice should not trump other rights.

"There are ethical principles around how we enact children's rights and a rights-based approach in research" (Smith). "And the other thing that I think is really important and is that we're often leaning very heavily on participatory rights and we forget about provision and protection rights. If we think about participation, protection and provision and we think about good education and we think about how we talk with children about what's fair and reasonable and how we respect each other is really important" (Smith).

Kylie highlights that when constructing methodologies seeking children's perspectives, researchers need to also consider protection rights as they relate to children's wellbeing. Both speakers discussed views that others might find offensive or harmful and asked attendees to consider how they might respond to views that harm on matters like gender, culture and race. Balancing different rights can be deeply complex work. Researchers have an obligation to

speak to children about matters like culture and identities, so need to think about 'how' we speak to children about these matters, rather than 'if' we speak to them. This gave me pause to consider, how in the planning phases of research, we have an ethical obligation to plan for the possibility of difficult conversations with children. However, as many researchers will attest, researching with children can be unpredictable, so planning cannot predict every eventuality. Of course, considerations of intersecting rights are not just limited to protection rights. How we consult children in research can also impact on others, such as the rights to play, leisure, education, freedom of association and the right not to participate.

One other provocative idea raised by the speakers relates to what Kylie sometimes calls the "partiality of knowledge". By this, Kylie means that children's views gathered during research do not offer a complete understanding of the topics we research, but are limited in multiple ways. In the session, Kylie argued that power relationships embedded in research are unequal and that research is still fundamentally "adult-driven". I take this to mean, that despite my best intentions to empower children to speak, that I am still, in some way, 'in charge'. This pushes back against any romantic notions that our research is a way of capturing any sort of certainty about what matters to children.

Laura also spoke to the concept of partiality,

> "My bit of that puzzle was a statement, which I really don't like, which is used a lot… that is that children are the experts on their own lives. And I just think that's wrong. You know, children have incredible expertise on their own lives, but they're not the experts. They're not the only experts."

The statement, "children are the experts in their own lives" is one that I have heard many times but now seems to have assumed the status as an unquestioned truth as Laura suggests. She reminds us not to ignore the expertise we have as researchers and practitioners. Children's expertise is important and often ignored, but adults have expertise also. Perhaps what is being suggested here is that it is important to recognise that knowledge about what matters to children is co-constructed, taking in multiple views.

The partiality of truth is also an important theoretical consideration and something I have discussed with Kylie elsewhere. The desire to fully know the Other is emblematic of modernist approaches to research that see children as objects who can be objectively understood (Cannella, 2008). From a poststructural or posthuman perspective, the possibility of fully knowing somebody or something is perhaps more slippery. The implication for researchers and practitioners is that the knowledge we co-construct with children in our various works is incredibly valuable, but it is always incomplete and that there is value in having the humility to recognise this.

I encourage you to consider these provocations from Laura Lundy and Kylie Smith as you read many of the papers included in this Special Issue that draw on the voices of children. Helene Elvstrand and Lena Boström outline how they used art and conversation based methods to ask children what was important to them in Swedish School Age Educare. Their research reveals that the things that make Extended Education good are a complex entanglement of enjoyable play and leisure activities, choice, friendships, learning and reliable routines. Similarly, Jessee Rayner, Lisa Vincze and Lana Mitchell wrote about the kinds of food experiences children have in three Australian outside school hours care services. They write about how children desire opportunities for choices in the meals they are served. The paper by Jasmin Näpfli and Emanuela Chiapparini examine Extended Education in Switzerland from the perspectives of children from two different age cohorts. Their research

suggests that while age differentiates what is important to the two groups, there are many similarities in what they desire and the ways that power relationships between adult and child differ when compared to regular classrooms. Age is also a feature of the paper by JiaJia Fang and Jennifer Cartmel who seek children's perspective on Australian intergenerational programs. Their research provokes reflection on how Extended Education does not sit alone but exists within communities and connections to other age and community groups.

David Thore Gravesen investigates social inclusion from the perspectives of children, an area that is often see as 'adult business' because of its sensitivities. David adopts a participatory methodology that seeks to share power between adults and children and sees all as democratic participants. David's research makes for a welcome blurring of the boundaries between research and education. He demonstrates that action research can contribute can support children to participate in collaborative problem solving in ways that promotes well-being, inclusion and belonging. Martina Bateson and Marilyn Casley work in a similar space, conducting research with vulnerable young people at risk of becoming disenfranchised from school and the adults who support them. They describe how two programs founded on trauma-informed engagement, empowerment and relationality have positive outcomes for young peoples' wellbeing, motivation and school and social engagement.

Together, these papers illustrate much of what was inspiring about the 2024 Conference for the WERA Task Force Global Research in Extended Education. They present an exciting variety of methodologies and remind all researchers of the value of seeking children's and young people's perspectives. I close this editorial by returning to Laura Lundy and Kylie Smith and their provocation that children's voices offer an invaluable but only partial understanding of Extended Education. It's an idea that sits neatly with the conference theme, bricolage. It is hoped that these articles will find a place in the bricolage, the rich mosaic of different contexts, methodologies, theories and perspectives that make up Extended Education research.

Enjoy this Special Issue.
Dr Bruce Hurst, University of Melbourne

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