Conversations between Children and Adults

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Keywords: children; practitioners; communication skills; conversations; child participation;
adult-child relationships; narrative inquiry; critical constructivist theory

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
September 2017
Abstract

Children, as citizens, have a right to be heard. However, an adult’s attempts at talking with and listening to children in order to understand their perspectives is often seen as rhetorical and tokenistic. Current Australian policy connected to working with children places a strong emphasis on listening to children including them in decision-making on matters that affect them. This aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), of which Australia is a signatory. However, there are limited studies examining what shapes an adult’s ability to listen to and hear, children’s perspectives in their everyday interactions.

When preparing practitioners to work with children within this paradigm, it is important to move from a rhetorical understanding of child participation, to one that acknowledges and accepts children as decision-makers with a right to be heard. The literature about practitioners having conversations with children on matters that affect them, suggests that there is a need to redesign curriculum and offer emerging practitioners experience in dialogical work with children. This study helps to address this need by examining the knowledge and skills required by practitioners that work with children across disciplines and professions.

This study is a narrative inquiry into what happens when adults and children converse, and how conversations impact on the adult’s ability to hear and understand a child’s perspective. The narrative accounts of four practitioners and three children have been described, based on their stories about conversations with children and adults respectively. The practitioners worked in a variety of children’s services including early education and care, schools, family support, and child protection services. The children were aged between five and nine years.
Using the three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality and space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this narrative inquiry uncovers how time, relationships and the spaces adults and children occupy, shape the adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective, and what conditions enable or constrain conversations between them. Listening to both adult’s and children’s stories also reveals how metanarratives (Andrews, 2002, 2011) about childhood and adulthood impact on adult-child relationships, and influence the design and management of the spaces both children and adults occupy.

The participant’s stories were analysed using a critical constructivist lens. The metanarratives embedded within participant stories spoke to the marginalisation of children; through historical and generational views held by adults regarding the capacity of children to make decisions, and the continuous use of power by adults to silence children. Despite the many constraints found within the way adults converse with children in the spaces children and adults occupy, this study reveals ways of thinking about shaping an adult’s ability to talk with, and listen to, children for the purpose of understanding children’s perspectives.

The two main themes that emerged in this study were: (a) adult-child relationships that build trust, and (b) power and agency between children and adults. This inquiry exposed the impact of trust as a concept, belief and action needed by practitioners to enable meaningful conversations with children that support their participation in civic society. It also exposed the notion that power and agency is strongly related to how adulthood and childhood have been constructed and reconstructed over time. For adult-child relationships to be reciprocal there needs to be a shift in how adult-child relationships are viewed by practitioners, children and the wider society. Hence, this inquiry sees ethical practice as building reciprocal
relationships between adults and children, where taking the time to get to know each child and understanding how a child’s everyday life experiences are integral to his or her view of the world.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

_____________________________
Marilyn Casley
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Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis was a privilege. My six year research journey allowed me the time and space to inquire into what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective and to uncover how children view their world. It also provided time for reflection on the challenges posed by changing environments in the lives of children, which are often in collision with some of the dominant discourses about children. To all of the people who have come along with me, I would like to give a sincere thank you.

Firstly, thank you to my child participants for agreeing to participate in my inquiry, for what I have learnt from you along the way, and the enjoyment I have gained from being with you. Your openness to share what you know and feel about your lived experiences in the conversations you have, and the places you occupy with adults, have been wonderful gifts for this inquiry.

Thank you to my adult participants for giving me your time and engaging with me to co-construct our understanding of what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. The wonderful conversations we have had over the past few years have contributed to this thesis as well as to my teaching.

I also would like to acknowledge my principal supervisor, Dr Jennifer Cartmel, without her encouragement I would most likely not have entered into this journey. Thank you Jenny for your encouragement, insightful conversations, and friendship during this inquiry. Also to Dr Naomi Sunderland for seeing my ability to write in a meaningful way, and to Associate
Professor Kym Macfarlane for keeping me grounded. All three of you have challenged me, inspired me and laughed with me during these past six years.

Thank you to my graphic designer, John Garnsworthy and Associates for the design of several conference posters, resources and diagrams that have helped me tell my story in a visual way.

I would also like to thank the executive and my colleagues within the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University for enabling me to complete my thesis. I have been given opportunities to attend workshops and conferences, and time to write as I balanced my other work commitments.

Finally, to my children Shaun and Janelle and my close friends and siblings for listening to my frustrations and for being proud of me for undertaking this journey.
Acronyms

ECA Qld  Early Childhood Australia, Queensland branch
FI      Formal Interview
HOD     Head of Department
IC      Informal Conversation
PhD     Doctor of Philosophy
RD      Research Diary
SAC     School Age Care
Glossary of Terms

**Children:** People aged between birth -18 years.

**Child participation:** A child’s right to express his or her views freely and the opportunity to be heard on all matters affecting him or her.

**Practitioners:** People engaged in working with children (birth-18 years).
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

This thesis asks how conversations shape an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective. In light of the child rights agenda proposed in response to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), governments are considering the voice of children in policy making, where children are seen as citizens that have a right to be heard. With a growing recognition of the invisibility and marginalisation of children, it is important that practitioners and policy makers find ways to hear the perspectives of children to inform thinking and create social change where children are included in civic life (Australian Child Rights Taskforce, 2016; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, 2016; Centre of Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2011). Despite the fact that Australia has legislation and policy with the guiding principle of participation for children in decisions that affect them, there is a growing concern by policy makers, service providers and child rights advocates, that attempts made to give children a voice are inadequate (Australian Child Rights Taskforce, 2016; Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2011; Testro, 2006; Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011). The Australian Child Rights Taskforce’s (2011) *Listen to Children* report reviewed the situation in Australia, recommending the encouragement of genuine participation of children in decision-making. They called for research into participatory processes, to find models of child engagement that facilitate respectful inclusion of children.

Australia has developed multiple structures, policies and frameworks for children and young people’s health, development, learning and wellbeing. This includes the

In this thesis, I explore the underpinning theoretical knowledge and practice skills professionals and practitioners need to better understand the complexity of both the landscapes and the relationships at play when adults converse with children. This
thesis also gives insight into the discourse that surrounds the social construction of childhood and the concerns that this presents for furthering knowledge and ways of thinking from a critical lens about children’s rights to participation, when children continue to occupy a marginal status in society.

The Impetus for this Inquiry

My Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research started with developing a conversational process with children called the Talking Circles (Cartmel & Casley, 2014a, 2014b; Casley & Cartmel, 2010). This happened via a community partnership research project between The Salvation Army Communities for Children Logan, Early Childhood Australia Queensland Branch (ECA Qld) and Griffith University. At the time, I had my own consultancy business called ‘Mindful Conversations’, and was on a part-time teaching contract with Griffith University.

. I managed and developed a number of project activities for ECA Qld including ‘Little Voices Big Noises’ which was funded by The Salvation Army Logan Communities for Children as part of the Australian Government Initiative. The aim of the ‘Little Voices Big Noises’ project was to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of the early and middle years of childhood, and create inclusive environments where diversity of culture, family and experiences were seen as fundamental in supporting a child’s development.

In my role, I worked with parents, practitioners and children to build community capacity from a grassroots level. This included, among a number of other activities, building a child friendly community. The concept of a child friendly community is
grounded in the *United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), mandating the participation of children in civic life. This involved finding a way to engage with children in order for them to develop a sense of identity, belonging and connectedness to their community. In order for this to be realised children need a voice; creating the space and time for this to happen was one of my main concerns. Thus, the idea for the Talking Circles emerged.

Prior to developing the Talking Circles project, I attended an Authentic Leadership Conference in Halifax, Canada, as I was interested in designing a program for children aged five to 12 years, to build resilience and leadership skills to enhance their capacity to have a voice, and thus influence matters that affected them. In building resilience and leadership skills, I envisioned the children being given an opportunity to create change for themselves and their community, in partnership with adults.

While attending this conference, I met many people that had been doing some work with children after the tsunami in Sri Lanka. I also met a storyteller who had been doing some work with child soldiers in Somali and children after 9/11 in the United States. I decided to take some of their ideas back with me to Australia, and in collaboration with a colleague (Dr Jennifer Cartmel, now my doctoral supervisor) developed the Talking Circles Action Research Community Partnership Project. This action research project involved our university students studying the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies and children in School Age Care (SAC) services in Logan and Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.
**Talking Circles Project**

The action research project was conducted over a two-year period and involved 20 groups of children on site at SAC services in southeast Queensland and 20 university students (see Cartmel & Casley, 2014a, 2014b; Casley & Cartmel, 2010). The students were each assigned to a SAC service during their field education. In these settings, they facilitated a conversational process with a group of eight to ten children aged between five and 12 years.

The project was formulated to examine how children could be encouraged to ask questions about how they can make a difference for themselves, each other and their community. The Talking Circles were based on thinking about learning as a process of self-awareness and community building, and providing opportunities for communicating with a group of children about their ideas and perspectives. The Talking Circles were designed on the U Theory (Scharmer, 2009) process, underpinned by generative listening, which is listening to oneself, listening to others, and listening to what happens from the group. Scharmer (2009) suggests that you know when you are in generative listening, “When at the end of a conversation you are no longer the same person you were when you started the conversation. You have gone through a subtle but profound change” (p.13). Our intention was to try out this process with a group of children, to build leadership and resilience skills through respectful conversation with an adult and between children.

Dr Cartmel and I developed the prototype of the Talking Circles (see Cartmel & Casley, 2014a, 2014b; Casley & Cartmel, 2010) whilst the university students undertook a similar process with their group of children on field placement. Each
week the students and I would reflect on what had taken place at our Talking Circle for the children and for each of us as a facilitator of the circles. We were very surprised at the outcomes of the Talking Circles for both the children and the student facilitators. I can still remember my first session with the children in my group. We were in the ‘peace room’ on the school ground. I was thinking, “Isn't this a great idea for the school to have a place for the children to go and chill out”. Little did I know that this was the room where children were sent when they had been excluded from class for inappropriate behaviour. A number of the children in my Talking Circle had experienced the ‘peace room’ and it seemed to me that it was not a pleasant experience for them. After the second session in the peace room, I moved our circle to the preschool room using big cushions on which to lay or sit in order for the children to relax. I was amazed at how the dynamics of the group altered, and over a very short period of time the children’s engagement in the process changed.

Creating a safe space for the conversations to take place seemed to be important. The children’s capacity to listen and take notice of others increased. For example, responses from the children included: “It’s calm, it’s peaceful and I feel less stressed and it’s a place to get away from the noise and others” and “We can talk about our problems and we can share our feelings about our families” (Cartmel and Casley, 2014a, p. 76). I think the most profound thing for me was how quickly we connected as a group, and how open the children were in our conversations once a safe place was established. For generative listening to take place, the children needed to feel relaxed, calm and in control of their feelings.
In the first conversation of the Talking Circles, when asked what they [the children] would like to talk about, all of the groups said they would like to talk about their families. During the conversation, in my group, it became apparent that the children perceived a family as consisting of a mum, dad and kids. However, upon further conversation it soon was revealed that within this particular group not one of us was living in a family that consisted of a mum, dad and kids, but rather in various combinations of individuals to form a family. This seemed to be the beginning of the connection between the members of our group.

Another significant conversation that stands out for me happened after we had talked about our family and friends. I started to become aware of some of the issues the children faced at home and at school. I asked the children if they had someone that helps them in the way they act and knowing what was a ‘good’ thing to do in a difficult situation. Most of the children said they would ask their friends. I was expecting them to say their mother or father or maybe a teacher, as the average age of the children was eight years old. As this puzzled me, I wanted to know why they would be going to a friend for advice at such a young age. To investigate this further, I asked the children if they would like to draw or talk about what a day is like for them, I wanted to understand their everyday experiences. From that conversation I realised that this group of children spent very little time in conversation with an adult, therefore, it seemed to me they would naturally talk to their friends rather than an adult about issues that affected them.

A significant incident that emerged from this particular Talking Circle experience was told to me by one of the SAC staff. As this was a research project, the children were
required to have permission from their parent(s) to attend the circle. The children could attend the first circle to see if they might like to join, and then once this was established, they needed to obtain written permission. One of the girls that came along to the first session was not able to attend as her mother did not want to sign the consent form. The young girl was not happy about this as she really wanted to participate. It was observed by the staff member that the little girl started to ‘play’ Talking Circles at the SAC program. She took a number of chairs out onto the balcony one day and then asked the staff and some of the children to join in. She pretended she was me and started the conversation by saying, “My name is Marilyn Casley and I have two children”, and then proceeded to ask the others about their families. Both the staff member and myself were surprised at how she was processing this concept through her play.

During the term, I visited all of the other Talking Circles that the university students were facilitating. I was amazed by the relationships that had been built between the children and their student facilitator. Two things remain in my mind. One was a group of children that included a little boy with a severe speech impediment. According to the university student, this boy had never spoken at the Talking Circle but came every week with his older sister and she did the talking for him. However, on the day I visited he started talking in the circle. Why did that happen? My thoughts after talking with the university student, was maybe he wanted to show me that Cheryl (the student facilitator) was doing a ‘good’ job, as she had explained to the children I was her teacher from the university. He continued talking at the circles from that day onward; his connection to the group was established and he must have felt comfortable and confident enough to start to talk.
Another significant incident that stands out for me was from another circle I visited, where the children and the student facilitator were meeting in the morning prior to school. We were sitting on chairs outside the SAC program, in a circle, talking. One of the boys was telling us something (I can’t remember the topic), but it was very serious to him and all of the children were listening attentively to him. He was rocking back and forth on his chair as his story unfolded. At that moment two teachers walked by, and without taking any notice of what was going on, one of the teachers said in a very stern voice, “That is not your property so sit on the chair properly”, to the young boy who was speaking. There was silence, we all just looked at each other, and I was feeling very sad for this little boy, so were the other members of the group. Nothing was said, we all just looked at each other knowing (it seemed to me) that what had happened was hurtful and disrespectful, not only to the little boy, but to the whole group. After a few minutes (well it seemed like minutes), the little boy continued with his story. I will never forget that incident. What right did the two adults have to treat another human being in such a manner? What does this say about creating safe places for children and adults alike? There are many more stories that I could tell from visiting each of the Talking Circles. There were times when the student facilitator supported a child in deciding what to do about a particular situation and times when the other children helped each other work out a problem. This influenced me to think deeper about this phenomenon.

**Thinking Deeper**

The insights gained from this action research project led me to many questions about what happens between adults and children in conversation with each other. Questions
that came to mind included: Does the image an adult hold of a child influence the adult interactions with them? If so, how? In relationship with young children, do we [adults] listen to hear what children have to tell us? Can we understand their perspective? As adults, are we listening to children with the intention of changing our views? Can adults distinguish between what children value in their experiences and what the adult values, and learn to privilege the latter? What needs to occur in order to achieve reciprocity of respect and trust, and lessen the power differentials that exist between adults and children? What are the characteristics of building the relationship, and how does conversation fit into the process? Finally, what are the moral and ethical responsibilities of adults; particularly professionals that work with children, to ensure that children are given opportunities to be heard and contribute to matters that affect them. These questions led me to my PhD journey.

In summary, my professional experience working with children and practitioners across children’s service landscapes is my portal into the world of conversations with children. Through my diverse experiences as a practitioner, an educator, and most recently undertaking the Talking Circles research project, I have noticed a number of contexts that enable or constrain conversations between practitioners and children. These include: (1) how does the adult’s image of the child affect their ability to converse with and listen to children, (2) what are the features of the adult-child relationship that impacts on conversations between adults and children, and (3) how do social contexts enable and constrain adult-child conversation. In examining these research questions, I hope to shed some new light on how to prepare practitioners to converse with children in a way that enables children to have their perspectives heard and contributions respected, especially in relation to matters that affect them.
Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is presented in seven chapters. Chapter One is this introduction, including how I position myself in this inquiry. I have begun with my own story of having conversations with children and preparing emerging practitioners to work with children. I will return to, and extend on, my story throughout this dissertation, as part of the reflexive nature of a narrative approach.

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature. This includes information about communication in general, conversations between adults and children, historical and current discourse on children and childhood, adult-child relationships, the context of the workforce in children’s services, and current Australian policies and practices on child participation and consulting with children. It is amid these narratives and metanarratives that the inquiry takes place.

Chapter Three explains the theoretical framework of this study. A critical constructivist narrative approach is used as theoretical framework, drawing primarily on the Narrative Inquiry work of Jean Clandinin and Molly Andrews. Three common places of a conceptual narrative inquiry framework—temporarily, sociality and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pusher & Orr, 2007)—are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents the methodology chosen for this inquiry into how conversations shape an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective. This includes study design, participant selection and ethical considerations.
In chapter Five, the narrative accounts of the participants are presented. These narrative accounts honour each participant’s voice, along with my voice in the co-constructive nature of this inquiry. Three common places of a conceptual narrative inquiry framework—temporarily, sociality and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pusher & Orr, 2007)—will be simultaneously explored, with the accounts of the participants referring to these three common places.

Chapters Six and Seven include the resonant themes revealed through the thematic analysis of the stories of the participants. Resonant themes, according to Clandinin (2013), are not only what is similar across the stories, but also refer to the intersections, differences, overlaps, gaps and tension that exist within and across the stories. The main themes that emerged were: (a) adult-child relationships that build trust, and (b) power and agency between children and adults. The features of the adult-child relationship that builds trust, as told by the adult participants included:

- how the conversations adults have with children build trust and respect,
- the safety of the space for conversations to happen,
- playful behaviours, and
- interpersonal skills of being open and honest through talking with, and listening to, children.

The children expressed their understanding of a trusting adult-child relationship by how they felt about the interactions and conversations they had with the adults in their everyday lives. The components discussed by the children included:

- the nature of the conversation and attitudes of the adult towards them,
- safe environments, and
- play and playful behaviours.
The resonant theme of power and agency from the children’s stories included talking with adults that were: (a) interested in them, (b) respectful to them, (c) listened to them, and (d) helped them to be successful in the social contexts they shared with them. Identified in the participants’ stories were: (a) building equitable relationships with children, (b) children as active agents, and (c) silencing children’s voices through labelling. Interwoven into all of the resonant themes was the notion of identity and self-awareness. This theme was identified by the links made between the past, present and implied future within each of the participant’s stories, as well as how each of the participants saw themselves across time, and within and across landscapes.

Finally, chapter Eight concludes the inquiry, reflecting upon what has been learnt, limitations, and gaps for further research. This chapter will also present possibilities for future professional practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a narrative review (see Grant & Booth, 2009) of current literature relevant to an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective in conversations between them. First, I examined communication between adults and children, and conversation as a tool for meaning making in adult-child conversations. Second, I reviewed the current discourse on practice and pedagogical understandings of how practitioners converse with children in organisational settings in Australia and wider contexts as it relates to using conversational approaches to practice. Third, I provide the contextual background into how adulthood and childhood is produced and gives insight into how societal images of the child influence conversations between adults and children, the nature of adult-child relationships, and ways of thinking about adult-child relationships including the influence of power and agency in adult-child conversations. Finally, I explored the current discourse on child rights and Australian policy, practice and legislation on child participation. Current workforce issues faced by practitioners working with children in this context were also examined.

Initially during 2011 to 2012, databases CINAHL, SCOPUS, ProQuest Education Journals, EBSCO HOST, were searched for literature published throughout 2000-2012 using the following terms or combination of terms: ‘communication’, ‘communication processes’, ‘effective communication’, ‘meaning-making in communication’, ‘communication with children’, ‘conversations’, ‘conversations with children’, and ‘listening to children’. The literature review around the social construction of childhood and adulthood used the terms or combination of terms: ‘childhood’, ‘adulthood’, ‘social construction of childhood’ and ‘social construction
of adulthood’, and ‘adult-child relations’. Finally, the review included a search terms of ‘working with children’, and ‘pedagogical understandings of working with children’.

In December 2016, a further search was undertaken to update the literature review and to include other sources of information relating to a more focused view on a number of similar topics conducted in the previous review. CINAHL, SCOPUS, ProQuest Education Journals, EBSCO HOST, Google Scholar, ProQuest Education Journals, and ProQuest Social Science Journals were searched for literature published between 2000-2016 using the following combination of terms: ‘parent-child conversations’, ‘teacher-child conversations’ ‘children as citizens’, ‘child’s rights’ and ‘child participation’, ‘methods of consulting with children’ and ‘researching with children’. Further literature was sourced on ‘child development’ and ‘brain research’. Hand searching was also included to identify research-based books, government and research reports and documents, and organisational resources relating to children’s services, policies and practice frameworks in Australia and other countries.

**Communication between Adults and Children**

Human development is a dialogical and transactional process with both children and adults taking an active role. According to van Nijnatten (2013, p. 18), “language forms the basis of human development; it is the core of personal and social identity”. Van Nijnatten (2013) argues that human development has a narrative character, where a child is talked to and presented with knowledge of themselves and their environment from birth. It is through these interactions that a child’s personal and social identity is formed.
Children learn about their place in society from what others say about them, and how they listen and respond to them. The social meanings about a person’s status in society, and the identity that it produces are conveyed through a child’s relationships and interchanges with others (Petrie, 2011; Smith, 2010; van Nijnatten, 2013). Therefore, the value that the larger society places on the position of children will greatly influence the way in which adults communicate with them.

Children’s stories are the result of the dialogical and transactional processes he or she has encountered through their everyday lived experiences. As the child develops, he or she learns to use communication to represent his or her identity, and to make sense of his or her social world (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015; van Nijnatten, 2013). It is through communication that a child’s feelings are verbalised and identities revealed. Hence, talking with and listening to children’s stories are a way of making meaning in communication with them.

The language we use in communication is a tool for meaning-making. van Nijnatten (2013, p. 12) states that “it is the exchange of meanings rather than language per se that counts”. van Nijnatten (2013, p. 12) also argues “a person’s experience of reality has both cognitive and affective components”, with the affective component based on a person’s prior knowledge and experiences. Thus, for communication between an adult and a child to be meaningful, the adult needs to move away from a defined technical way of communicating with children to one where attention is given to the ‘context’ or ‘lived experience’ of the child. Hence, to gain a richer conception of a child through communication, adults must not only listen to what a child has to say, but also to listen to the child as a participant in the social world.
Communication with Children in Professional Practice

Communication with children has been recognised as an important aspect for professional practice across many disciplines and in different contexts. In reviewing the literature on communication between practitioners and children, there is an interest in how practitioners communicate with children, as well as an interest in listening to children’s voice (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2011; Lundy, 2007; Mannion, 2007; Mason & Danby, 2011; Storo, 2013; Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). The literature about communication between practitioners and children, however, is much more limited and often refers to how a practitioner talks to a child about something (e.g., how to talk to a child about death). This kind of communication with a child places more emphasis on the adult telling the child about something rather than an exchange of meaning in a conversation between the practitioner and a child.

Professional practice that uses ‘result’ or ‘goal’ driven communication gives rise to some voices not being heard or being marginalised in the communication process. For example, a conversation between a practitioner and a child that are differently positioned, one with the holder of expertise knowledge and one in need of support or assistance, constitutes a ‘power relation’ so the question arises as to how conversation is meaningful if the practitioner does not consider his or her positioning in the communication process (Mannion, 2007; Ulvik, 2014). This ‘expert’ model of communication is based on the ‘willingness’ of a person, in this case the child, to follow those that have been accredited with power derived from cultural norms on how adulthood and childhood is produced (Qvortrup, 1999, 2011). It could be argued
this ‘power relation’ reduces the likelihood of mutual understanding between an adult and a child being achieved.

There is a better chance that meaning-making can occur between practitioners and children if importance is placed on meaning-making rather on technical, hierarchical communication processes. When language and communication are embedded and embodied in time and place and are based on the meanings that populate an individual’s social world, there is a better chance that meaning making between practitioners and children can occur (Habermas, 1987; Holman, 2000; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). Ulvick & Gulbrandsen (2015) in their examination of professional practice in Norway argue:

…that everyday life, both as a concept and as an object of study, may help frame professional practices in ways that expand the professional’s attentiveness to a great variation of inputs from the child. (p. 213)

This type of communication places children in a different position, one where they are credited with the competencies to co-construct meaning with adults about their identity and their social world.

**Conversation as a Meaning-Making Process**

A dialogical or conversational approach to practice is reflected in a person’s ability to engage in conversation with others where meaning-making is made possible by the joint construction of meaning. This entails one’s ability to reflexively listen to oneself and to others, in their language use and the exploration of the ongoing embedded social construction of how meaning is made (Barge & Little, 2008; Holman, 2000). Hence, for meaning making to occur in conversation with children, practitioners must
first go beyond their habitual ways of thinking and predetermined scripts to a place where they are attuned to what the world is like for the child.

If meaning making relies on a cooperative process of interpretation, how do we enter into and successfully co-construct meaning with children? According to van Nijnatten (2013) “what we know of the inner worlds of children and parents is what we learn by listening to them” (p. 13). He argues that we can only make sense of others if we look at them as having a sense of agency; where people construct their interpretations of the world through their daily interactions and from the relationships they have experienced (van Nijnatten, 2013. This can happen in a conversational approach if the practitioner has the ability to talk and listen in a critically self-reflexive way, and use communication processes that open up the possibility to hear what children have to say (Benzein, Hagberg, & Saveman, 2008; Morgan, 2013; Rinaldi, 2001).

However, conversations between practitioners and children are often seen as a tool for professional assessment or intervention. These conversations are planned, scheduled, and located in places with a specific purpose, for example, in child welfare and therapeutic practice (Ulvik, 2014). Whereas, in conversations in other professional contexts, the practitioner may take part in conversations with children in more spontaneous exchanges as part of their everyday activities, or more purposeful conversations with clear objectives, for example in schools or child care programs (Ruch, 2014; Storo, 2013; Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Furthermore, conversations practitioners have with children are often defined by the professions’ framework or mandate, where practitioners develop their communication skills in a technical way with an intended outcome in mind (Ruch, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen,
2015). For example, in the literature on teacher-child dialogue in the classroom, it was discovered that talk in the classroom is largely adult directed towards the children with limited contribution from the children (Blatchford, Pellegrini, & Baines, 2016). Blatchford et al. (2016) described classroom talk as, “teacher dominated, where the teacher selects the participants, elaboration by the pupil is not encouraged, and the pupils are seeking to find the ‘right’ answer, already determined by the teacher” (p. 213). This nature and style of conversation underestimates the child’s ability to engage in conversation; to understand or critically think about a particular situation.

Communicating with children is complex. Ruch (2014) suggests that the complex nature of conversations with children is a conceptual continuum, with practitioners seeing children as vulnerable and in need of protection, while practitioners at the other end see children as competent and able to articulate their views. However, despite these two continuums, what becomes evident in the literature is that meaningful conversations between practitioners and children require an interactional adult partner and knowledge of the individual child’s everyday life and how he or she makes sense of it (Benzein et al., 2008; Morgan, 2013; Storo, 2013; Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015; van Nijnatten, 2013). From this perspective, children’s views are heard through the co-construction of meaning between the adult and the child.

Diminishing the power relationship in conversations between children and adults is important. The establishment of common ground in an interactional conversation, results in diminishing the power relationship between individuals (Kahane, 2010; Scharmer, 2009). However, children will have less experience in these kinds of
conversations with an adult and may have difficulty in expressing their thoughts and experiences (van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). For example, in dialogue with a practitioner about ‘disturbing’ or ‘negative’ experiences, reluctance to talk about it by the child may be a result of the trauma itself, or the child may be reluctant to take a position that is deemed as a ‘breach of trust’, for example, between the child and his or her parent (van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). Hence the child is less likely to disclose their thoughts and experiences in fear of retribution by those deemed close to them.

Confusion about the role of the practitioner by the child, in not understanding what the practitioner might do with the information, may also cause the child to be reluctant to talk. Further confusion may be a result of the pattern of conversation, where the child expects a similar pattern of conversation he or she is familiar with and will take up the role that fits with their previous experiences of conversation with adults (Blatchford et al., 2016; Soto, Hixon, & Hite, 2010; van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). Furthermore, conversational patterns children are familiar with may be one of ‘questioning’ or ‘testing’ of knowledge, as described earlier in ‘teacher-pupil’ talk, where children give the answer they think is ‘correct’ rather than what is consistent with their lived experience (Blatchford et al., 2016; van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011).

Children may also be excluded from what might be perceived as an ‘adult’ conversation. For example, children may not be told about a dying relative or pending divorce, or are told made up things about sex and sexuality (van Nijnatten, 2013), as children are perceived to be too young or innocent to understand. Hence, practitioners may exercise restraint in the kinds of conversations he or she will have with a child,
as very young children, in particular, are often still considered as vulnerable beings or victims to be protected.

Furthermore, in shared dialogue, conflict and differences of opinion are more likely to occur, which may also influence a practitioner’s willingness to participate in open conversation with children. However, as suggested by Kleipoedszus (2011), conflict in conversations between practitioners and children plays a crucial role in their interactions, as it allows for growth in the relationship and helps to develop the potential for both the practitioner and the child to consider others points of view. Therefore, if the practitioner does not hear the child’s perspective, it is impossible to understand who the child is and what the child knows, or build a connection to seek out new ground together. It could be argued that for meaning making through conversation to occur, the practitioner’s role in conversation with a child is to assist children in forming views and enabling them to talk about their experiences in an open and honest way.

Central to conversations practitioners have with children, is the notion that interpersonal skills are important in working face-to-face with others. van Njnatten (2013) suggests "... many professionals have very little idea about how to approach children, what to tell them and how to ask questions of them” (p. 47). Hence, some practitioners will be less skilled at communicating with children and will find it more difficult to be an ‘interactional partner’ in conversations with them (Lefevre, 2014; Petrie, 2011; Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). The literature on child participation states that the benefits for including children in meaningful conversations signals respect for children and produces psychological self-worth
(Johnny, 2006; Lefevre, 2014; Sevasti-Melissa, 2015). However, there is little research or evaluation of the processes, and insights into which contexts achieve these outcomes.

There is concern that the level of understanding by many practitioners to engage in meaningful conversation with children. Having conversations with children is not necessarily part of their study or practical experience (Lefevre, 2014; Lefevre, Tanner & Luckock, 2008; Petrie, 2011). Hence, reluctance by practitioners to engage in open conversations with children may be a result of their lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding on how to communicate with children, as well as other deeper issues such as the image held by practitioners about children and childhood, and the more fundamental question of how children are positioned in society and how these notions are embedded into practice.

**Identifying Ways of Having Meaningful Conversations with Children**

In the project “Talk with us”. *Professional practices and children’s participation* (2007-2013), researchers wanted to understand and identify new ways of working with children that would enhance a child’s ability to be an active participant in his or her everyday life, enabling them to form views, and articulate their experiences in a way that was familiar to them (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). In this project, the questions of how to talk with children, what to talk to children about, and why children should be engaged in conversations were examined (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). This project was conducted with the underlying assumption that “knowledge of what happens in a particular child’s everyday life, and how she or he makes sense of it, is crucial for the professional to be able to assist the child” (Ulvik &
Gulbrandsen, 2015, p. 210), as well as the idea that explorations into children’s everyday life would lead to shared understanding between the practitioner and the child; opening up the conversation to exploring a wide variety of topics. Furthermore, the notion of exploring children’s everyday life in conversation with them implies that the child’s social context is relevant to the professional’s analyses (Cameron, 2013; Fulcher & Garfat, 2013; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015) and infers the child has a right to participate in matters that involve them.

Opening up the conversation to include children’s everyday life experiences and how he or she makes sense of them, creates a common focus for both the child and the practitioner. This approach to talking with, and listening to, children is a contrast to the narrow conceptual image some practitioners may hold about a child, for example, assuming that they are weak and in need of protection, or having a focus based only on a child’s ‘behaviour’ or ‘deficits’ as perceived by the practitioner (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). The “Talk with us” project identified children’s ability and willingness to talk about events in their everyday lives, making it easier for the child to open up to the practitioner (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Everyday life narratives enabled co-construction of meaning in the dialogue, where both the practitioner and the child were able to talk about things that otherwise may have been left unsaid (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Starting the dialogue in an open way led to children introducing topics that were of relevance to them, creating a sense of collaboration between the practitioner and the child (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). The findings also indicated that open dialogue enabled the child to be participative in the conversation, and led to exploring opportunities for future possibilities.
This way of having conversations with children leads to what has been described as ‘presence’, where those in dialogue with each other are ‘present’ in the conversation. Presence is defined by Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) as “… deep listening, of being open beyond one’s preconceptions and historical ways of making sense” (p. 13). The practitioner is able to let go of the ‘need’ to take control and let go of his or her habitual ways of thinking. Once the practitioner is able to let go, it is possible to look to what is described as ‘letting come’ (Senge et al., 2005). Deep listening and going beyond one’s preconceived notions creates a sense of self-awareness (Fulcher & Garfat, 2013; Kellet, 2011; Rinaldi, 2001; Senge et al., 2005). This shifts the forces that influence one’s way of thinking to moving from re-creating the past to considering what could be different; it is about noticing more closely what may be going on “out there” and “in here” (Fulcher & Garfat, 2013, p. 35). This way of thinking about conversations between practitioners and children aligns with the literature on listening to children’s voice.

**Listening to Children’s Voice**

Listening to children’s voice is defined as an active process of exchange of meanings (Clark, 2005a, 2005b; Clark, McQuail & Moss 2003; Clark & Moss, 2001; Rinaldi, 2001). Rinaldi (2001) states that “listening is an active verb, which involves giving an interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who are being listened to” and “requires a deep awareness and suspension of our judgement and prejudices” (p.1). Thus, listening to a child’s voice refers to an active process of communication that is both contextual and interactional, which involves hearing, interpreting and co-constructing meanings (Rinaldi, 2001; Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2005; Tangen, 2008) in shared dialogue.
In the Mosaic Approach Framework (Clark & Moss, 2001) for listening to children, listening to children is a process not limited to the spoken word, but includes the many ways that children learn to express their views and experiences. The practitioner, in their ability to listen to children, must take the time to notice and observe what is happening for the child. This approach to listening to children is based on the notion that children’s experiences and how they make meaning of their own lives helps practitioners to understand children and the practitioner’s own limitations on understanding another’s life. Thus, the practitioner learns to listen to what the child is saying rather than assuming he or she knows the answer to what is best for that child or group of children (Clark & Moss, 2001; Petrie, 2011; Rinaldi, 2001).

Capturing the perspectives of children requires a shift in attitude and ways of communicating with children. Pascal and Bertram (2009), in their review of the progress in England on active participation for children to have a voice and have their opinions heard, found that a change in values and attitudes about and towards children was required to enable practitioners to hear children’s perspectives. Hence to promote listening to children’s perspectives, as a research team, they used Clark and Moss’ (2001) Mosaic Approach Framework for listening to children across a number of projects to capture the perspectives of children. They were also inspired by the work of Freire’s dialogical and reflexive action (Pascal & Bertram, 2009), working with those that are silenced (children in this case) to help them to name their world and to actively shape it. They found by listening to children in different ways, for example, using cameras, videoing, mind mapping and conversational groups, they were able to
co-construct meaning with children in a process that was meaningful to the children. By using what they called ‘symmetrical’ and ‘reflexive’ dialogues (Pascal & Bertram, 2009), the capacity for the children to give voice and to be listened to, and have their perspectives heard and acted upon increased significantly. Hence, listening to children’s voice has different forces which impact on the adult’s ability to hear children’s perspective.

To shift the forces that enable or constraint conversations between practitioners and children, reflexivity and self-awareness play an important role. Practitioner understanding of how childhood has been constructed from a historical perspective, along with current discourse on children and childhood is necessary. The following section will discuss the ways the notions of children and childhood have been socially constructed over time.

**Historical and Current Discourses on Children and Childhood**

The position of children in society, and views on their capacities and rights to citizenship, are clearly marked by the way in which adults have constructed childhood, and by the discourse that surrounds that construction. It is important to explore both historical and contemporary discourses around childhood in order to better understand what we hold true about children and childhood in order to understand how the image adults hold of a child’s social position affects their ability to converse with, and listen to, children in order to hear the child’s perspective. In this section of the literature review, particular attention is given to how societal views of children and the construction of childhood have changed over time; including the production of adulthood and childhood.
Image of the Child

Within the image of the child as constructed in contemporary western societies, age plays a significant role. Age is regarded as a fundamental aspect of a person’s identity and a determinant of one’s position in society (Alanen, 2001; Christensen & James, 2008; Hendrick, 2008; James & James, 2012; Prout, 2005; Smith, 2010). However, this is not a universal concept, nor has it always been regarded as significant. The idea that childhood is not a universal concept and children’s experiences are different across social contexts, time and place alerts us to the fact that childhood has political dimensions as a life course phase (Brown & McCormack 2005; James & James, 2012; Mayall, 2003; Prout, 2005; Skott-Myhre & Tarulli, 2008; Smith, 2010) within and across societies. The political dimensions of childhood are fractured by class, gender, ethnicity, poverty, and the peculiarities of family composition and lifestyle (James & James, 2012; Qvortrup, 2009; Smith, 2010; Wyness, 2006).

The idea that childhood is socially constructed is made evident in the way that societies hold different expectations for their children. Review of the literature shows how children are treated, and the beliefs held about children’s capabilities (Brown & McCormack, 2005; James & James, 2005, 2012; Mayall, 2003; Prout, 2005; Skott-Myhre & Tarulli, 2008; Smith, 2010; Wyness, 2006). Tyler (1993) contributes to the idea of the plurality of childhood by arguing that in western democratic societies a child is often characterised as someone who lacks the complete range of capacities necessary to being a full functioning citizen. Wyness (2006) suggests that childhood is seen as a social and moral apprenticeship for adulthood. One might also argue that children have been reduced to the level of a commodity with little or no power, where
the child may have rights but the adult holds the political and economic power
(Mayall, 2003; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Qvortrup, 1999; Soto et al., 2010). Qvortrup
(1999) believes that, although these definitions have merit, what is missing is that
“childhood is a construct influenced by a number of social forces, economic interests,
technological determinants, cultural phenomenon, etc., inclusive of course the
discourse about it” (p. 5). Children may be seen as social actors with some influence
over others and their environment, however, as a minority group, children are forced
to adapt to the dominant power relations and social changes that have come about
regardless of their influence (James & James, 2012; Qvortrup,1999; Skott-Myhre &
Tarulli, 2008; Soto et al., 2010; Wyness, 2006).

Much of the published work on childhood has not given children a voice. When
children do not have a voice in how they see themselves within societies view, denies
them an essential element of human identity (Hendrick, 2008; James & James, 2012;
Soto et al., 2010). Mayall (2000) suggests we must conceptually look at children as a
social group separate from their parents, family and professionals if we are to hear
children’s voice and take their views into account. Therefore, is necessary to look at
children from a new set of perspectives, making them visible by giving them the right
hto contribute to social thinking and social policies (Mannion, 2007; Mayall, 2000,
2003; Sana, 2015; Skott-Myhre & Tarulli, 2008; Soto, 2010). However, by making
children visible, adults run the risk of being exposed to the wrong doings that many
children have experienced as a minority group (Mayall, 2000; Sana, 2015; Soto,
2010). If adults choose to take children seriously by listening to and conversing with
them, this will lead to having more respect for them and to understand the world from
a child’s perspective. Hence, it is clear to see that the perspectives or images held by
adults about children and childhood are diverse; what is needed is a fuller understanding of children and childhood from their perspective.

**Historical Discourse on Childhood**

The study of childhood came from modernity. Modernity is rooted in the political, economic and social changes that took place around the eighteenth century onwards, based on complex changes, including changes to the state, the rise of capitalism, and different ways of thinking (Prout, 2005). The works of Aries (1962) opened up the discourse by initiating a debate about childhood, claiming that it was subject to historical change (James & James, 2012). In his thesis, Aries concluded that the understanding and treatment of children in the medieval period pointed to an absence of the concept of childhood (Hendrick, 2008; James & James, 2012; Prout, 2005; Smith, 2010; Wyness, 2006). His work linked the idea of childhood to the evolution of the family and its relationship to the broader cultural and political climate. “Aries’ work opened up two main themes: the variability of concepts of childhood and the experiences of childhood and (more implicitly) the experiences of children” (Hendrick, 2008, p. 42). Childhood was placed within changes to the family and the relationship between the family and agents of the wider society (Hendrick, 2008). Jenks (1996) claims a similar view, as she considers the idea of the ‘postmodern child’ being linked to the acceleration of social change in the late twentieth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, conceptions of children as innocent, dependent and in need of protection had become widespread (Qvortrup, 1999; Smith, 2010). The removal of children from paid work and the introduction of compulsory schooling gave rise to the removal of children from the public sphere (Hendrick, 2008; Smith,
It can be argued that with the exclusion of children from the public sphere, children were placed in a marginalised position in society where the child’s opinion had no worth, so therefore was not sought (Hendrick, 2008; Smith, 2010). Hence came the age-old adage that ‘children are to be seen but not heard’. Hendrick (2008) argues that children have never been in a position where their accounts of their lives are made public, as they are restricted not only by adult bias but by their position being made invisible, hidden within the family, school or peer groups. Therefore, children have had to leave the meaning of their lives to adults whose interpretation of their lives could be completely different from their own. The belief was that children do not have the capacity to give an informed opinion and that their interests could only be articulated by adults (James & James, 2012; Smith, 2010).

It would follow that modern children were in need of adults that were able to recognise their children’s needs and use ‘proper’ child rearing and child development practices in the production of the children’s future performance as adults (Jenks, 1996; Tyler, 1993). The discourse around what is ‘proper’ in raising young children was privileged by child psychology (Hendrick, 2008; Tyler, 1993). Developmental psychology that views children as moving through a stage of development from birth through to adulthood has traditionally dominated academic and lay discourses (Brown & McCormack, 2005). This dominant view sees the importance of studying children, not for understanding what it was like to be a child, rather for the scientific study of their stages of development (James, 2011). Only using this paradigm in thinking about what makes ‘good’ children led to the problem of what constitutes ‘good upbringing’. As a result, it was discovered that a ‘proper childhood’ was based on
middle and upper class western values and thought to be desirable for all children (Hendrick, 2008). This dominant view can be summarised as children being viewed as incomplete and dependent, with the notion that society must invest in their future, with the modern nuclear family being responsible for their care and upbringing (James, 2011). Jenks (1996) proposes that the architecture of the modern nuclear family has become the social structure for the advancement of capitalism. Thus, as a result of the change to the division of labour through industrialisation and the ‘promise’ of childhood, childhood has been transformed into a form of human capital needing both nurturing and protecting for the sake of progress.

The postmodern world presents new challenges. In the postmodern world with its new complexities and the dawn of ‘individualisation’, other challenges for children, parents, policy-makers and educators have emerged (Bryderup & Frorup, 2011; Perez & Cannella, 2010; van Njnatten, 2013). Individualisation is based on the notions of choice and opportunity, allowing individuals to pursue new social groupings and liberation from previous social structures (Wyness, 2006). It can be argued the societal and social political conditions coinciding with the dawn of individualisation for adult choice and opportunity is evident, however “there is little understanding of children’s positions within a new social order” (Wyness, 2006, p. 53). According to Bryderup and Frorup (2011), children and young people in this new paradigm have no set traditions from which to base their decisions, however they must assume responsibility for choice and action in their own lives. With this in mind the emerging competencies needed by children to navigate and feel confident may be quite different to the ones open to them presently. It may follow that parents, practitioners, and
policy makers may also lack the knowledge, will or experience of how to proceed in this new environment.

**Contemporary Discourse on Child Development**

The shift in thinking about how we view childhood and the notion that children are independent social actors emerged in the social sciences during the 1970s (Brown & McCormack, 2005; James & James, 2012; Smith, 2010). This new paradigm has come from within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, focusing on the relationship between social structure and the agency of individual social actors (James & James, 2012; Mayall, 2000, 2002, 2003; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; Wyness, 2006). The concept of childhood moved to seeing the diversity in children’s experiences rather than the commonality that is clearly linked to age, class, gender and ethnicity (Brown & McCormack, 2005; Hendrick, 2008; Morrow, 2001; O’Kane, 2008). This shift in thinking came as a result of ‘social theorising’ and a change in the awareness of different childhoods (James, 2011; Prout, 2005) within and across societies. The importance of culture and social context was now being recognised in the study of children and child development.

This new discourse has acknowledged that research about children’s lives is essential for policy-makers and professionals developing services and programs that are responsive and relevant for children. Thus, there is an ever-increasing interest in hearing the voices of children, by listening directly to their experiences, aspirations, and viewpoints (Brown & McCormack, 2005; James & James, 2012; Kellet, 2011; Morrow, 2001; O’Kane, 2008; Scott, 2008). Some would argue that despite our best efforts to listen to and research with children, children’s comments and views are still
mediated by the adult researchers, as it is most often the researcher who decides how to represent the child’s voice (James & James, 2012) rather than the child or children.

What children have to tell us is not always straightforward. Spyrou (2011) suggests that children’s voices are not always clear, as they are often constrained by factors based on assumptions about children (e.g., the use of language and institutional contexts) and the ideological climates that prevail at the time. This aligns with the thinking of Mayall (2000), which suggests that the new understandings of children and childhood point to a paradox in thinking, one where children are seen as competent actors that are mainly controlled by adult political agendas.

Despite this shift to listening to children’s views and perception, the structural view of children based on age and maturity still remain a constraint on children’s participation and continues to work to ‘silence’ children’s voices (James & James, 2012; Mason & Hood, 2011). Age is still regarded as the key definitional marker of the status in modern western society, where children are seen as inferior to adults, and this remains the way in which children’s lives are structured (James & James, 2012; Mason & Hood, 2011). This one-dimensional view of child development continues to ignore the agency that children bring to their social context and everyday lives.

**A Child’s Right to Participation**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) was ratified by Australia in 1990. Articles 12 and 13 of this convention state:

*Article 12: The Governments of all countries should ensure that a child who is capable of forming his or her own views should have the right to*
express those views freely in all matters affecting that child, and that the views of that child should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child;

Article 13 [which includes the right to freedom of expression]: This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in form of art, or through other media of the child’s choice. (p. 4)

Both of these articles embody the notion that children should be heard and respected for their contribution to what is in their best interests, and be able to participate in civic and social life. In Australia, the *Children’s Rights Report*:

…raises concerns about inadequate fora for taking into account the views of children below the age of 15 and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; inadequate mechanisms for children’s meaningful participation in schools; and the absence of interviewing by immigration officials of children who arrive with their families. It has been recommended that Australia continue to ensure the implementation of the rights of the child to be heard, in accordance with article 12 of the Child Rights Convention (CRC), by promoting meaningful and empowered participation of children at all levels of government and within the family, community and schools, with particular attention to children in vulnerable situations. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 23)

The Child Rights Convention agenda has led Australian governments, service providers, and practitioners to seek children’s input into the development of programs and practice, as well as its evaluation. However, it has proven to be difficult to listen
to children, as children (as mentioned previously) are often silenced in the spaces they occupy with adults. Pascal and Bertram (2009) in their aim for participatory practice in research with children, found that the progress towards child participation in early education was slow. The Australian Child Rights Taskforce (2016), in their review of child participation in the Australian context, found that despite evidence of support for the participatory rights of children, progress was slow and remained a challenge for practice.

Child participation rights continue to be difficult to uphold. It appears that adults’ views on children’s social position and capacity to participate make it difficult to proceed in the implementation of child participation rights (Johnny, 2006; Lundy, 2007; Nolas, 2015; Nolas, Varvantakis, & Aruldoss, 2016; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Sana, 2015; Theobald, Danby, & Ailwood, 2011). Further research is needed into what enables children’s agency and participation to occur within the institutions children are most likely to occupy, and which practices promote or constrain a child’s right to be heard.

Practitioners that work with children will need some new knowledge and skills to proceed. Fitzgerald and Graham (2011) suggest that practitioners need a new set of skills to enable them to engage in genuine and authentic dialogue with children, no matter the complexity of the situation. Moss and Petrie (2002) argue that a new type of profession may also be needed; one that works across all children’s services with a stronger focus on meaningful dialogue and consultation with children for the development and provision of services. This has several implications for a new type
of adult-child relationship in the spaces and places they occupy together, as to how progress is made into the participatory rights paradigm for children.

**Current Policy and Practice**

As suggested earlier, many governments and organisations have policies and procedures for child participation and listening to children’s voice with the promotion of citizenship for children within their frameworks. However, this proposal has been seen as problematic, as the ambiguity of the citizenship rationale often leads to rhetoric and not to change. Mannion (2007) suggests “that policy and practice and research on children’s participation is better framed as being about child-adult relations” (p. 405). Christensen (2004) agrees, as she proposes when researching with children, researchers need to see children as fellow human beings, rather than objects under study, in order to hear what they have to tell us. Mannion (2007, p. 406) also suggests that the role of space and place need to be considered in the endeavour to ‘listen to children’ as he believes by “addressing the spacial alongside the intergenerational and relational aspects of children’s participation as a dual focus, we can begin to usefully move the discourse of children’s participation forward”. Hence, understanding the features of the adult-child relationship in time and space, as well as how these features impact on conversations between adults and children, is important if children’s voices are to be heard.

**Adult Child Relations**

Notions of children and childhood have changed dramatically over the years. Current discourse around children and childhood see children as having a sense of agency, which develops through their social interactions with others (Brown & McCormack,
van Nijnatten (2013) points out that “Social interaction is where interpersonal processes intersect with social structures: it is influenced by the characters of those who are involved in the communication and by the social categories that shape the context” (p. 33). From this perspective, “agency at the interactional level is about the voice of participants, being heard, and about their contributions to the exchange of thoughts in encounters, and about capacity to present and negotiate identities” (van Nijnatten, 2013, p. 33). Hence, the communication contexts children encounter will greatly influence their potential for interactive processes that build their ‘social position’ and their capacity to be equal contributors in the communication process with adults.

Notions of childhood held by both the adult and the broader society is an issue for open and honest communication between children and adults. In Mayall’s (2002) exploration of adult-child relations, it was found that found age differences, generational issues and power inequalities as the main components that influence the adult-child relationship. Hence relationships between adults and children are produced in a number of contexts and places (e.g., child care, schools and therapeutic encounters), where conflict may arise between an individual child’s life experiences and the characteristics the adult assigns to the child.

The interactions between adults and children have been produced over time and play a significant part in what happens in an adult-child relationship. Mayall (2002) suggests that the way that relationships are understood in terms of ‘adulthood’ and ‘childhood’ are based on what the adult bring with them. Their habitual knowledge and assumptions about adult-child relationships and children are based on their
experiences, which are deeply influenced by the social structures at play during their own childhood (Alanen, 2001; James, 2011; Mayall, 2002). Children will also bring their own past experiences and what they have learnt about their place in an adult-child relationship and their social position. All of these complexities need to be taken into account when one considers the impact the adult-child relationship has on conversations between adults and children.

If we understand the child as having a sense of agency within a relationship, it would follow that the child has power to negotiate his or her position within that relationship. Adults and children are guided by the contexts in which they grow up (Alanen, 2001; Hendrick, 2008; James & James, 2005, 2008; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013), and are often linked to the power structures that exist in society between adults and children. However, the structural restraints of childhood by the more powerful adults can act as a barrier to this negotiation, limiting the child’s opportunities to assert autonomy (James, 2011; Punch, 2001; Qvortrup, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013).

Adult-child relationships are interdependent. Mannion (2007) in his reframing of hearing children’s voice research, also suggests the need to have a closer look at adult-child relationships, being sensitive to the socio-spacial aspects of that process. The spacial and intergenerational aspects of the adult-child relationship are undergoing continuous change, therefore, to better understand child participation possibilities we must consider the ‘interdependence’ of the child and adult relationship. In his view, children’s voices are more likely to be heard and acted upon in the context of adult support and partnership with children. Therefore, when the
child is credited with having knowledge and the propensity to act on that knowledge (Mannion, 2007; Mayall, 2002; van Nijantten, 2013), the child becomes an active agent in the relationship and is addressed as an equal participant. From this perspective, relationships between adults and children can be seen as an end in itself; relationships form the basis of embracing the notion that children have a sense of agency and act as an empowering approach towards building trust between adults and children, not only as individuals but also as a social group.

Further to the notion of interdependence, we need to consider how adulthood and childhood are produced. Alanen (2001) suggests that adults need to move away from focusing on external relations (such as age, class and gender) and move towards internal relations, which refers to the complex internal processes used in the construction of ‘children’ and ‘adults’. Alanen (2001) states that:

> Construction involves agency (of children and adults); it is best understood as a set of practices. It is through such practices that the two generational categories of children and adults are recurrently produced and therefore they stand in relation of connection and interaction, of interdependence: neither of them can exist without the other, what each of them is (a child, an adult) is dependent on its relation to the other, and change in one is tied to change in the other. (p. 21)

In relational thinking, it is necessary to explore agency from the individual case, along with the social position or social agency of children, in terms of their power to influence and control events that take place in their world, and how this is derived. Alanen (2001) goes on to say this is best approached by considering possibilities and limitations based on the social construction of adult-child relations. Therefore, to
understand and rethink the social position held by children, it is necessary to liberate both adults and children from the dominant discourses that see them as separate and unequal, and identifying the historical and generational structures from which children’s social position has been derived (Alanen, 2001; Mayall, 2002; Skott-Myhre & Tarulli, 2008).

The main idea in a generational perspective (Alanen, 2001, 2011; Mayall, 2000, 2002; Qvortrup, 2011) is the existence of generational ordering as a distinct concept to be considered in determining the social construction of childhood. Adding this to the other definitions (e.g., age, class, race and gender) has an impact on the lives and everyday experiences of children. Alanen (2011) proposes that generational order provides an analytical tool for understanding the structural nature of childhood, as well as children’s agentic presence in it. Hence to further explore children’s agency, it would make sense to consider how adult-child relationships work as the child develops.

**Brain Development Research in Child Development**

Recent advancement in neuroscience and brain development cannot be ignored, if we are to be better informed in our relational practice with children. There are many documented and emerging findings from the field of neurodevelopment that tell us that relationships with caring adults are crucial for healthy human development from in utero and throughout the lifespan (Centre on the Developing Child, 2010; 2016; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a; Schore, 1997, 2001; Siegel, 2001). The neural networks in the brain are shaped by genetic make-up and life experiences, and strengthened by repetition, starting with the most rapid brain
development taking place in the first years of life (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016; Perry, Hogan, & Marlin, 2000; Schore, 1997, 2001; Siegel, 2001).

Consequently, children that have positive, predictable and nurturing relationships in enriched environments will thrive, whereas children in negative and chaotic environments with unpredictable or traumatic relationships will have developmental problems in all areas of functionality (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016; Perry, 2014; Siegel, 2001).

The relationships children have with adults assist them to engage in the human community. The ways children engage within their community help them to define who they are, what they become, and how and why they are important to other people (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a). From birth, children develop their abilities to experience and express emotions, feelings, cognitive processes, physical activity and communication skills. However, emotional development often does not receive the attention that is given to cognitive and physical development. According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004b), a child’s emotional development is built into the architecture of their brain and is the basis of their social competence, affecting all other aspects of their development across the lifespan. In other words, children’s emotional well-being needs to get the same attention as cognitive thinking skills (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016; Schore, 1997).

Policy makers and practitioners often underestimate the importance of a child’s emotional development, and how individual and personal everyday experiences, and the environments in which the child lives, becomes embedded in the architecture of their brain (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b).
Furthermore, research tells us that children who have healthy relations with caring adults are more likely to have enhanced insight into other’s thoughts and feelings, which are the foundation for an emerging conscience (Centre on the Developing Child, 2014, 2016; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004a). Research also suggests that children that have healthy relationships with educators and teachers will be more excited about learning and perform better in school (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004a, 2004b).

The recognition that prolonged emotional distress on a child affects the architecture of the brain gives ample evidence to support policies, programs and practices that include an understanding of how everyday life experiences, social contexts and environments impact on a child’s developmental trajectory. However, despite this scientific knowledge Perry (2014) points out that:

> Our current policies, programs and practices in the Western world remain fundamentally disrespectful of the two great inter-related gifts of our species – the remarkable malleability of the brain in early life and the power of relationships”. (p. 6)

Given the notion that secure adult-child relationships are a determinant of the architecture of a child brain, it would follow that practitioners working with children would be well rehearsed in how to develop secure relationships with children and provide environments that are conductive to listening to them.

**Workforce Issues and Development**

To provide a space for children’s perspectives to be heard and acted upon, changes in how we prepare the workforce need to be considered. If policy makers and
practitioners want to achieve respect for children and their rights, learning how to support and listen to children’s voice through meaningful conversation and equity in relationships is crucial (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). According to Lansdown and Damsted (2009), unless we start with professional awareness and education on children’s participation rights and how that might be embedded into the way we think about children’s position in society in every day practice, sustainable cultural change will not occur.

Participatory research with children has shed some light on what children are telling us about their encounters with practitioners (e.g., teachers, child welfare and social workers). How the practitioner engages with them seems to be an important concern to children (see Cameron, Petrie, Wigfall, Kleipoedszus, & Jasper 2011; Cameron, 2013; Lefevre, 2014; Lefevre, Tanner, & Luckock, 2008; Ruch, 2014; Zufferey & Gibson, 2013), as well as the practitioner, demonstrating the need for honesty, reliability and continuity. For example, in attempts to deconstruct childhood from the views of children, Lowe (2012) interviewed children under five years of age attending day-care, to explore with them what it means to be a child. Lowe (2012) identified four main themes including a desire to have more play opportunities, recognition that some skills and knowledge were beyond their immediate reach, and having a ‘trust’ in adults to provide them with support in their physical care, protection and problem solving. In a study undertaking by Fitzgerald and Graham (2011) on children’s perspectives about their participation in decision-making in supervised contact visits and family law decisions, it was discovered that ‘having a say’ was important to all the children interviewed, which they found was consistent with much of the research conducted in this area. ‘Having a say’ for these children included having adults they
could trust to talk things through, clarification of the situation and issues, as well as wanting adults to listen to how they felt about the situation and what they wanted (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2011).

Studies of practitioner’s perceptions of their preparedness to communicate with children has also shed some light into what needs to be included in pre-service and ongoing professional learning for practitioners that specifically work with children and their families. For example, a study inquiring into social work education in the United Kingdom concluded that social work students were not prepared for establishing effective communicative relationships with children (Lefevre, 2014). Studies conducted within Australian social work education also found little evidence of a focus on children in the social work curriculum, acknowledging that as a result of little or no training on working with children, voices of children were often silenced or invisible (Zufferey & Gibson, 2013). More in depth study considering what might be included in the practitioner’s learning, suggested that understanding of child development, practical experience with children, and observational skills (learning to notice what is happening for children) is necessary (Zufferey & Gibson, 2013). The non-linear way in which communication happens with children is in stark contrast to the ‘result’ based and standardised communication procedures many practitioners have been taught (Lefevre, 2014; Ruch, 2014). Therefore, training that includes the ability to listen to a variety of ways in which children communicate (e.g., play activities and use of creative arts) is necessary.

The recent Australian report on workforce development in the Child and Family Support sector, Your Workforce Your Future 2016 Survey Report has indicated a need
for more highly skilled practitioners and capable organisations to meet the complex needs of children and families (Queensland Family & Child Commission, 2016). This report indicates that the child and family support workforce comprised 28% of the Community Services sector, with only eight percent of the workforce from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and seven percent from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (Queensland Family & Child Commission, 2016). Sixty-eight percent of the workforce had a minimum employment qualification, with only 40% holding a bachelor level qualification (Queensland Family & Child Commission, 2016).

The top concerns and challenges faced by the child and family support workforce included: (1) attracting and retaining qualified staff, (2) attracting staff in regional and remote areas, (3) filling specialist and senior management positions, (4) new practitioners not being prepared for the complexities of the work, (5) limited shared practice approaches to working with children and their families across the sector, (6) limited job security, and (7) staff burnout (Queensland Family & Child Commission, 2016). All of these issues lead to poorer outcomes for children, with less opportunities for practitioners to build the kinds of relationships necessary for listening to children.

There are numerous studies on the child care workforce in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and other Western countries. In Australia, one third of the early childhood workforce do not meet the National Quality Standards (Australian Child Rights Taskforce, 2016). Concerns were raised that child care services are more likely to be considered low standard in Quality Area 1 (Educational Program and Practice) than any other quality areas (Early Learning: Everyone Benefits, 2016). The State of
Early Learning in Australia Report 2016 suggests that there are real concerns with low numbers of staff-child interactions, poorly trained staff, high staff turnover, and low adult-child ratios (Early Learning: Everyone Benefits, 2016). The Queensland Government (2016) has also engaged in a plan for the development of its workforce, The Early Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-2019. There was an overall concern that the qualified educators in Early Education and Care Services were not well prepared for entering this workforce, as the complexity of this work is increasing (Queensland Government). Recruitment and retention of staff was also a major concern, particularly the recruitment and retention of early childhood qualified teachers (Queensland Government, 2016). Issues of pedagogical leadership was also of concern, as noted in the Queensland Government’s (2014) Review of the 2011-2014 Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan, where opportunities to improve practice through professional development and to share practice approaches were limited. These workforce factors equate to Australian children being less likely to participate in stable adult-child communicative interactions in and across early childhood and care services.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary society, and the way children and childhood is viewed, is changing in a manner that calls for different ways of thinking and doing in regards to pedagogical understandings of how adults work with children in organisational settings in the Australian context. This literature review revealed the different dimensions needed for co-constructing meaning in conversations between children and practitioners, to understand how to hear another’s perspective. The practice of listening to and hearing
children’s voice illuminated some of the gaps that exist in the preparation for practitioners to work with children in all of its complexities.

Communication on conversations between practitioners and children draws attention to how the notion of historical and current discourse on children and the production of childhood influences the capacity for practitioners to understand a child’s perspective. There are multiple intersections between the construction of childhood and the images held by practitioners and the wider society about the status of children and their capacity to be active participants in conversations and participatory decision-makers. The limits that are placed between childhood and adulthood erected by current discourse needs further investigation by questioning existing assumptions on ways of seeing children and childhood. In doing so, a better understanding of the adult-child relationship may be illuminated. This may also help to discover how the adult-child relationship impacts on a child’s identity and their place in society.

Demands for new approaches to the ways professionals work with children and additional knowledge on how we prepare the workforce are important as the future of childhood emerges and we continue to grapple with new realities and trends. It is hoped that this research examining the way adults and children converse will open new ways of thinking about child participation in contemporary Australian society.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will discuss the theoretical framework chosen for this study and how this links to the chosen methodology, narrative inquiry. As this chapter unfolds it will become clear that narrative inquiry is an appropriate way to study human interactions and contribute to social change. The first part of this chapter will explore the historical aspects of narrative inquiry. Second, the theoretical underpinning of narrative inquiry and its multiply layered approach will be explored and contemporary perspectives on narrative inquiry outlined. Third, the theoretical lenses that borderline with narrative inquiry methodology will be examined. The chapter will conclude with the theoretical lens chosen for this inquiry about what shapes an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective.

Beginnings of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry beginnings are located in the humanist approaches within western sociology and psychology, Russian structuralism, and (later) French poststructuralist, postmodern, psychoanalytic and deconstructionist approaches to narrative within the humanities (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Despite narrative study having its beginnings in a number of disciplines and ways of thinking, there are some common themes in the movement towards narrative inquiry.

There are four main themes in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) in their examination of the historical accounts of narrative research studies and projects across various disciplines and individual researchers, found there are four main themes or
‘turns’ in the thinking and action towards narrative inquiry. The four turns discussed by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) include: (1) a change to the research relationship, (2) a move from the use of numbers to stories as data, (3) a move from the focus on the general to the local and specific, and finally (4) a widening of the epistemologies or ways of knowing.

The first turn, a change to the research relationship, is a move away from the position of objectivity defined from a positivist perspective. From a positivist perspective, the researchers set themselves apart from the researched and treat the phenomenon under study as being bounded, static and atemporal. From this perspective, researchers believe they can keep themselves objective and at a distance from the researched. In doing so the phenomenon under study can be generalised. It was argued that the researcher distancing themselves from the researched could consider the things under study reliable and unbiased (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). As a result, the researcher creates a situation whereby the phenomenon under study can be made knowable and as a result leads to creating a ‘truth’ or generalisation about the phenomenon and/or individuals under study.

Narrative researchers, on the other hand, argue that the human experience is not static, bound or atemporal, so it is impossible for the researcher to remain outside the research relationship. From this way of thinking the researcher and researched relationship is viewed as relational. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) state that in the turn to the narrative, “Researchers admit that the humans and human interaction they study exist in a context and that the context will influence the interactions they study and the humans involved” (p. 11). Therefore, the narrative researcher understands that the
relationship is essential to the trustworthiness of the account and to its meaning making.

Building a trusting relationship is important in narrative research. Polkinghorne (2007) argues that in narrative research, the evidence gathered is not to determine whether the events actually happened, rather the storied evidence is gathered through sharing of the participants’ experienced meanings. The storied descriptions that people tell about their lives are about the meaning they express in telling their story, which can only happen in a trusting relationship between the researcher and his/her participants, where the participants “trust that the interviewer is open to accept their expressed meaning without judgement” (Polkinghorn, 2007, p. 481). The research texts generated are the creation of the interaction between the researcher and the participants, with the co-construction of the research story in relation with the lives of the participant and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Kim, 2016). The commitment of the narrative researcher is to live alongside the participants. Thus the ‘trusting’ relationship between the researcher and the participants is of high importance in narrative inquiry.

The second turn towards narrative inquiry involves moving from numbers as data to stories as data. This comes from the idea that numbers alone cannot give adequate ways of knowing about the human experience. As explained by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007):

The turn from numbers to words is not a total rejection of numbers but a recognition that in translating the experience to numeric codes researchers
lose the nuances of experience and the relationship in a particular setting that are of interest to those examining human experience. (p. 15)

Numbers have a sense of reliability for some social researchers; in their desire to create something that is knowable they easily embrace the idea that only numbers can give their research credibility.

The turn to using stories as data came about from researchers questioning the accuracy of their findings. Social researchers started to wonder whether the questions asked, the survey tools used and representation of people surveyed adequately reflected the human experiences they were trying to understand. For example, in Eckersley’s (2011) *A New Narrative of Young People’s Health and Well-Being*, he argues that the conventional view of young people’s health and well-being is that it is good and getting better. There are fewer young people dying, as a result of better nutrition, sanitation, housing, education and medical advances. However, while 80% of the young people surveyed said they were healthy, happy and satisfied, 40% of those same young people scored low levels of social and emotional well-being, and particular categories of health and well-being were missing. What Eckersley is pointing out is that often we are only looking for what we already know, how society understands social challenges depends largely on how they are framed. He argues that only when the stories of young people are heard can new knowledge be discovered and a new story of young people’s health and well-being be determined. It could be argued by focusing only on numbers the research is limited in how the data can be used to evoke a deeper level of understanding and its possibilities to influence change.
As a result of this way of thinking about numbers as data to story as data, one can see that the relational view held in narrative inquiry is intertwined with the turn from numbers to words as data. As discussed by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), the verbal accounts and personal stories told in a narrative approach turns the researcher towards a more relational stance with the researched. It is more likely that a relational view of the researcher researched relationship will enable the participant’s worldview to be uncovered, leading to a new story, and possibly a more accurate story than numbers alone can describe. Co-constructed narratives, as in a conversation between two people (Andrews et al., 2008), can be assumed to be more representative of an individual’s inner feelings as well as the social circumstances behind the stories told. The storied descriptions that people tell is possibly the best evidence available to the social researcher about their experience (Polkinghorne, 2007), despite some of the validity arguments posed by the positivist perspective.

The third turn from generalizability to the local and specific in the social sciences came about as a result of the cultural forces that appeared in the post war era. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) noted, “In the post war world, the cultural forces were as important as academic ones, and preeminent among those cultural trends was the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union for global predominance” (p. 23). The cultural forces or liberation movements around the world at the time sought to challenge the Cold War orthodoxy. With this focus on political and social change a new social science was created, one that looked at the experience of minorities and the inequities experienced by them. The stories told within these social movements led to academic research on the questions raised by these movements. According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), personal stories added richness to social scientist work.
giving rise to innovation in methodologies, theory and presentation, where personal accounts were used for some or all of their evidence. Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) believe by using stories as data, the researcher is “able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change” (p. 1). This can be seen in narrative research through the use of oral histories to identify “modes of resistance to existing power structures” or “to change people’s relation to their social circumstances” (Andrews et al., 2008, p. 4). The turn to narrative data is linked to this notion of individual and social change, as with words, people give meaning to their lives not only in an objective way but also in an affective way that mutually acts on each other. Understanding people’s experience in this way led narrative researchers to turn from the general to the specific in understanding human experience.

Finally, the fourth turn from one way of knowing about the world to multiple understandings, came from academic researchers questioning the one truth notion and the validity of using only quantitative data to understand human interactions and experience. In the early 1970s scientists and social researchers from outside the mainstream science culture made this significant turn possible from their own questioning of that culture. These ‘reformists’ (Polkinghorne, 2007) were influenced by epistemologies that question ‘realist’ assumptions about knowledge and suggested that evidence such as personal stories can serve to create new knowledge that is neglected in the human realm.
Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, p. 25) state that: “for some researchers, an understanding of the limits of validity within a quantitative paradigm precipitated a move toward narrative inquiry”. The notion of more than one way of knowing has given narrative inquirers credibility to explore human interaction and experiences as a multidisciplinary many layered expression of human thought (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This represented a move from discipline specific and investigator-controlled practice to one where the investigator relies on diverse theories and epistemologies. Hence, the turn from the social science tradition of having proven facts to create a specific view of the world to multiple ways of knowing gave narrative inquirers the credibility to execute the methodology of narrative inquiry.

In summary, it is understood that narrative inquiry had its historical beginnings in differing academic moves and philosophical turns. The move to narrative inquiry contrasts from a positivist social science to one that embraces multiple views and ways of studying human experience. Tracking the history of narrative inquiry illuminates a decline in the positivist approach to social research to alternative ways of thinking about human experience.

**Theoretical Orientation of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry has momentum in social research as a means of better understanding individual’s circumstances. Contemporary narrative inquirers view the study of human experience as relational, contextual and having broader conceptions of ways of knowing. Narrative researchers use stories as means of telling an account about something. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) tell us:
People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as ‘phenomenon under study’. (p. 375)

Hence narrative inquiry is a method for hearing people’s stories with the intention of gaining knowledge from their lived experience.

Narrative inquiry understands the study of narrative as both the method and phenomena of study. According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), “The method and inquiry always have experiential starting points and are informed and intertwined with theoretical literature that informs the methodology or an understanding of the experiences with which the inquirer began” (p. 5). Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) perceive narrative inquiry as a means of better understanding the individual and social change, they argue:

By focusing on narrative we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested and accepted (pp. 1-2).

From this perspective, people’s lived experience is not the only focus of the narrative inquiry; it is also an inquiry into the political, social, cultural, economic and systemic narratives within the individual’s experience. Not only do individuals continually
produce stories to make sense out of their own world, but these individuals also use stories to make sense of others’ lives and the social world in which they live (Andrews, 2002; Moen, 2006). Multiple narratives from the social world are greatly influenced by cultural, political and economic situations. It follows then, that within the told stories there will be a number of other stories.

The philosophical foundation of narrative inquiry methodology sits within the Deweyan theory of experience. Dewey (1938/1997) in his book, *Experience and Education*, suggests “experience and experiments are not self-explanatory ideas. Rather their meaning is part of the problem to be explored” (p. 25). Dewey’s theory of experience has two inseparable criteria of experience: continuity and interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016), referring to the idea that every experience grows from previous experiences and leads to future experiences. The notion of continuity is a key to narrative inquiry as there is always a past or a history that is ever changing which influences the present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, to truly understand the meaning one gives to his or her life it is necessary to move backwards and forwards between the personal and the social within the inquiry.

Interaction as the other principle of Dewey’s theory of experience, refers to an interplay of the object and interaction, and when taken together form a situation (Dewey, 1938/1997). People live in a series of situations; hence an experience is what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, along with whom or what is in that environment (Dewey, 1938/1997). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) describe the Deweyan theory of experience as “a changing stream that is regarded as continuous interaction of human thought
with our personal, social and material environment” (p. 39). Thus experience is a construction of what happens between temporality, sociality and place.

Dewey’s conception of experience differs from other philosophical perspectives. Dewey’s ontology is transactional rather than transcendental, implying the inquiry is not about generating a representation of reality independent from the knower but to create a new relation between the person and his or her way of seeing the world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This new relation makes possible a new way of dealing with them (life, community and world), and according to Dewey (1981) one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those that proceeded, but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive” (p. 175). Therefore, this type of inquiry will lead the person to a deeper understanding of how his or her lived experience is connected to a number of other influences including their world view.

**Three Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry**

The most defining feature of narrative inquiry is the study of experience as it is lived. Distinctive to narrative inquiry is the idea that stories have three commonplaces, temporality, sociality and place (Andrews et al., 2008, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2007; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, Kim, 2016; Reissman, 2008). Temporality refers to the idea that an experience is bound in time, in other words people and experiences under study are in temporal transition, therefore, the stories told are described with a past, present and a future. Sociality points to the social context of the participant and the researcher, the existential conditions that form an individual’s context including aspects such as feelings, hopes, desires and moral
dispositions (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Social context also refers to the individual’s environment and other surrounding factors that put them in relationship with others. Place is about where the story or series of stories take place. Understanding place is important with respect to how the person describes their circumstances. The qualities of place and the feelings attached to place are crucial in understanding the individuals lived experience.

From these three commonplaces, the researcher looks back on and recounts their lives that are located in a specific time and place and the existential conditions that surround an individual’s context. What becomes of interest to the researcher is the individuals’ experience; who is telling the story, why are they telling this particular story, what is said and unsaid, where the story located, what kind of cultural, institutional and social narratives are being told (Andrews, 2011). Hence, the three commonplaces are what make narrative inquiry a methodology, with Deweyan theory of experience as the central epistemology.

The interaction between structure and agency in narrative inquiry might be seen as one of the tensions across the more traditional inquiry paradigms. It is believed in narrative inquiry that an individual’s experience is both individual and social. The conundrum in a narrative inquiry into human experience is whether people have power to influence social structures by their own engagement in narrating and re-narrating their stories, or whether people’s stories are mostly shaped by the metanarratives that influence their experience. The narrative inquiry researcher moves away from this dichotomy of thinking, by acknowledging that individual experiences are temporal, embedded in their everyday experiences, and in their relationship to
others. Therefore it could be argued that only through narrating and re-narrating their stories can possibilities to influence change be envisioned.

**Narrative Inquiry and it’s Philosophical Neighbours**

For the purpose of academic rigour, a third level of theory, at the macro-level is needed in narrative inquiry. Kim (2016) argues the interpretation of the experience at the macro-level gives rigour to the narrative process. Narrative inquiry methodology accounts, and their multiple layers, sit not in one theoretical orientation, but rather borderline on a number of epistemological understandings (Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016) and meaning making processes. Depending on what it is the narrative inquirer hopes to explore will influence which epistemological leanings are chosen. This section will discuss the different theoretical paradigms that narrative inquiry sits beside and how the epistemological and ontological differences in the traditions of narrative inquiry come together.

Narrative inquiry sits with a number of ‘philosophical neighbours’ including post-positivism, critical theory, feminist theory, constructivist and poststructuralist perspectives (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007; Kim, 2016). For example, narrative researchers interested in how context influences the individual’s stories over time will use a post-positivist approach in trying to search for ways to speak to universal themes of what the individuals are telling them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that the desire to speak to the universal is embedded in the academic world, therefore, the positivist narrative researcher can take some comfort in the idea that the work they are doing has some patterns of generalisability or themes, and will be recognised as
reliable and accurate. However, when narrative inquirers move closer to this way of thinking it can cause tension within the narrative inquiry perspective. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) caution that:

The desire to speak of general trends, of the context free, and to provide a stable knowledge base for social science inquiry stands in tension with a narrative inquiry view that knowledge of human experience begins and must return to the stream of particular human lives. (p. 60)

While this tension can be a source for a new way of looking at the human experience it can also become a contradiction in terms for many narrative inquirers.

Narrative inquiry lends itself to both a poststructuralist and a constructivist paradigm. Both of these paradigms attest assumptions that there is no ‘absolute truth’, and thus, the objects of inquiry are individual constructions of reality, and multiple realities exist as individuals construct their world from their own worldview (Guba & Lincoln 1994). In other words, the discourse that we construct to make sense of our lives comes from the way in which we give meaning to the events we experience in our lives. Lived experiences then, are abstract mental constructions that are experientially based, local, and specific. The constructivist paradigm acknowledges that elements of reality may be shared across social groups so one can argue that multiple realities are experientially based. Polkinghorne (1995) argues that narrative inquiry sits most comfortably within the constructivist way of thinking. The constructivist would acknowledge that the ‘truth’ is “what we agree it is” (Hatch, 2002, p.161), therefore the researcher and the participant will be mutually engaged in their investigation of the topic. With this in mind, the constructivist researcher co-constructs the stories with their participants.
Narrative inquirers also draw from a critical theorist view when trying to uncover the hidden or silenced voice in a story. Critical theory is a socio-cultural and political theory that examines relationships of dominance and subordination that produce inequalities in society (Antony & Samuelson, 2012; Best & Kellner, 1991; Kellner, n.d.; Kim, 2016). The fundamental assumption of critical theorists is that social structures, particularly large scale institutions use powers of oppression to colonise and disempower people (Antony & Samuelson, 2012; Best & Kellner, 1991; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Habermas, 1984, 1987; Kim, 2016). The core cause of oppression is ‘ideology’, referring to a “system of thought and practice that gives rise to false consciousness in individuals and communities” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007 p. 47). In their critique of ideology critical theorists have “excelled in ideological critique and discerned the important role of ideology in integrating individuals into the existing social order” (Kellner, n.d., p. 1). Furthermore, the critical theorist seeks to confront injustices that are based in socially and historically rooted power relations, suggesting the need for new agents of social change (Andrews, 2002; Antony & Samuelson, 2012; Best & Kellner, 1991; Habermas, 1984; Kellner, n.d.; Kim, 2016)

From this perspective, stories can empower the individual and contribute to the transformation of the oppressor, opening up the possibilities for new stories to emerge (Andrews, 2002; Kim, 2016).

Critical theorists use an approach to social analysis that detects existing social problems and promotes social transformation. Therefore, using a critical perspective, the narrative inquirer will be interested in the metanarratives that are embedded within the stories told (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For example, individuals will tell
about their lives within the context of political stories; their stories speak about how they see themselves within the communities they live, to whom they see themselves belonging to and alienated from, how they construct notions of power, and the processes by which such power is negotiated (Andrews, 2011; Andrews et al., 2008). Their stories may not necessarily be about politics; however, the stories are embedded in the political ‘ideology’ of that time.

From a critical lens, as the narrative researcher is listening to the individual’s story, it may be difficult for the researcher to remain unbiased. The challenge is for the researcher to listen to the individual’s experience from his/her perspective, rather than the story being heard only as a socially constructed script. The back and forth in narrative inquiry can help researchers to challenge their own bias and assumptions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 184) describe this as “wakefulness” requiring a high level of reflexivity and thoughtfulness in listening to, writing and analysing the stories told from both a micro and macro level.

Narrative inquiry also borders on the poststructuralist paradigm. This perspective is used when the narrative researcher is interested in disrupting the notion of one truth and seeks to interrogate power relations appearing in the narratives or stories told (Kim, 2016). The poststructuralist perspective also attends to the multiple truths in their effort to reject the dominant discourse or universal truth (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016). Poststructuralists are interested in questions of language and power, questioning assumptions that are found in binary thinking, placing the subject in the meeting of social forces and discourse (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016). The narrative inquirer using a poststructuralist paradigm will be interested in the
broad pattern of human experience and consider the stories people tell as sources of new knowledge, and hence are attracted to the productive power of stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Despite sitting well together, there are tensions between narrative inquiry and poststructuralist frameworks. This tension arises from the position of the poststructuralist focus on broad patterns in human experiences as opposed to the narrative inquirer’s focus on the individual’s experience. The poststructuralist researcher is concerned with representing the complexity of the stories being told in order to ‘deconstruct’ the ‘grand narratives’ (Best & Kellner, 1991; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Hatch, 2002. Poststructuralism provides tools to understand the relationship between knowledge and power, implying that oppression operates in what counts as legitimate knowledge (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016), however, what poststructuralism frameworks do not allow for is the reconstruction of alternative ways of knowing the world. In this inquiry new ways of constructing understandings about an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective is needed.

In summary, despite the tensions that arise from using multiple understandings and theoretical orientations, the narrative inquirer sees the multiple influences as contributing to the richness and complexity of narrative inquiry. Many narrative researchers think it is more important to do innovative work across the contradictions (Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) rather than trying to resolve them. However, Kim (2016) gives a warning not to let one’s theoretical position cloud the ability to listen to and hear participant’s stories, by attempting to fit their stories into a
theoretical position. It can be argued the use of different ways of knowing within narrative inquiry makes it possible to study people’s lives in a more complex way.

**Moving Back and Moving Forward in My Inquiry**

As mentioned in chapter one, reflecting on the conversations I had with children in the Talking Circles project, called me to think about my lived experience in what shaped my ability to listen to and hear children’s perspectives. In narrative inquiry, the researcher has their own story to tell that sits alongside the participants’ stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Kim, 2016). Grappling with the notion of my ability to listen to children’s perspectives, along with the notion of children’s rights to participate in matters that affect them, prompted me to use a narrative approach to this study. Narrative inquiry gave me the tools I needed to listen to the participant’s stories, as individuals, and within their social context with other adults, other children, and within and across various environments (e.g., workplace, classroom, home and within their community), as well as the broader, political, cultural, social, economic, institutional, and systemic metanarratives.

For the purpose of academic rigour, I also needed to consider the theoretical lens that would assist me in understanding the metanarratives embedded in the participant’s stories. Moving back to, and reflecting on the metanarratives I encountered in the Talking Circles project, I chose critical theory with a constructivist lens to help me understand how children see themselves in conversation with adults, and how adults see themselves in conversation with children, how children are positioned in the broader context of society, and how the social construction of childhood and adulthood impact on what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective.
**Critical Constructivist Perspective**

A critical constructivist perspective was used in this study to identify the constraints imposed upon children in seeing themselves as competent social actors with participation rights. A critical constructivist lens was used as a way of thinking about the mechanisms by which childhood and adulthood are produced and which voices may be silenced in the process. Silencing is a term used by those that talk about who holds more power than ‘others’ or the ‘silenced’, used by critical researchers, feminists and educationalists (Soto et al., 2010, p. 217). Silencing can take on a number of forms that can be detected in the metanarratives found in participant’s stories that speak to how they see themselves, as well as, how the institutions they occupy contribute to the production of childhood and adulthood. For example, from a critical constructivist perspective children are produced as ‘future members’ of a class system entrenched in a capitalist society; the sole purpose of their care and education is for them to become productive members of society (Hendrick, 2008; Jenks, 1996; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015; Thomas, 2005; Wyness, 2006). Hence children are seen as ‘becomings’ or as Sims and Waniganayake (2015, p. 40) suggest, “young children are not valued for who they are now, but rather for who they will become; the aim is to create compliant, productive, employable citizens”.

Within a paternalistic paradigm children are powerless. Sana (2015) suggests the precursor to becoming a ‘good citizen’ within a paternalistic paradigm, is considered to be similar for children and other minority groups. She claims that the tension between children’s rights and a paternalistic way of thinking about children in need of protection, continues to dominate the way society views childhood. Children are
excluded based on their immaturity, which works to maintain conditions of a paternalistic paradigm (Sana, 2015). It is only by overcoming claims about children’s incapacities that the status of children can be re-constructed and child rights can be achieved. Similar arguments have been made by Mayall (2002), where the dominant discourse on childhood is produced through the lens of developmental psychology, which has made ‘truth’ claims about children developing in stages linked to age. This way of thinking about children and their limited capacities continues to undermine their status as citizens.

A critical constructivist lens also helped me understand the culture or ‘ideology’ of professional practice. Practitioners’ understanding of what it means to listen to children’s perspectives is often constrained by the discourse or ‘truth’ claims made about children’s competency and the practitioner’s role in complying to the dominant discourse about children as a form of ‘human capital’. For example, practitioner compliance to accreditation systems, state produced curriculums, and frameworks of practice for working with children, are also be seen as a form of silencing (Soto et al., 2010; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). For example, children’s lack of status makes them more governable, and the responsibility for producing an economically productive citizen sits within the “…well-established and largely invisible ideology of professional pedagogical practice” (Williams & Taylor, 1993, p. 2). A critical constructivist approach to social analysis is useful in detecting the ideologies embedded in practice used to legitimise a contemporary capitalist society.

Habermas (1984, 1987) in his quest to theorise social reality, formulated *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where he prioritised communication as the means by which
society sustains itself. Habermas developed his theoretical perspective through his reconstruction of the ideas of classical social theorists (e.g., Marx, Weber, Mead, Lukas, Hoekheimer, Adorno and Parsons) by thinking in dialogue with them and then going beyond them. Through this critical dialogue he was able to uncover a critical theory of modernity. Habermas (1984, p. 398) states, “the social life contexts reproduces itself through media controlled purposive rational actions of its members and through the common will anchored in the communicative practice of all individuals”. Thus, communicative reason plays a part in what is to be ‘preserved’ in society constituted by the interpretive accomplishments of its members and reproduced through communication (Habermas, 1984).

An emancipatory intent is also evident in the work of Habermas. This is based on the notion of democratic participation, social solidarity and a just society (Best & Kellner, 1991). Hence, focusing on modes of socialisation that increase conformity and decrease communicative processes needed for democratic participation (Giroux, 2015; Habermas, 1984; Kellner, 2003) go hand in hand with Habermas’ (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action. One of the key ideas of Habermas, the idea of redirection rather than an abandonment of the project of emancipation, is employed in my critical constructivist view to understand how modes of increased conformity and decreased communicative processes are linked to children’s identity and position in society, along with professional practice embedded in the institutions that children and adults occupy.

The critical constructivist lens sits well within narrative inquiry. Andrews (2002) suggests that as we come to know each other through the stories we tell, the act of
narrating has the capacity to locate the historical, political, economic and social processes where the social construction of ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ can be made visible, and in doing so can create the possibility to effect social change. Through narrating, the discourse imposed by political, social and institutional structures, and the constraints imposed on practitioners in their practice with children can be better understood, making visible the historically based processes of power and control (Qvortrup, 1999, 2008; Williams & Taylor, 1993; Wyness, 2006) in a paternal and capitalistic society. “We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell; our stories are a cornerstone of our identity” (Andrews, 2002, p. 80). Narratives both construct and are constructed by individuals, and are encased in larger ideological narratives. As the relationship through living and telling is dynamic (Andrews, 2002), it is through the telling of the participant’s lived experiences that a new consciousness emerges about their lives and worldview, which can create a heightened awareness of agency. A heightened awareness of agency allows for both adults and children to consider redirection in the communicative processes needed for democratic participation (Giroux, 2015; Habermas, 1984; Kellner, 2003).

Figure 3.1 demonstrates my conceptualisation of the theoretical framework used in this inquiry. The left side of the diagram refers to the questions about how the individual participants see themselves. ‘Why’ this particular story is being told refers to intention or purpose of telling a particular story, ‘what’ refers to the complexity of the story and the emotional responses the story evokes. Finally, ‘where’ the story is located refers to the idea that stories are not static but change over time and place. The centre of the diagram refers to the specific narrative inquiry aspects of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), which are used to analyse the individual participant stories. Finally, the right-hand side of the diagram illustrates the
metanarratives in which the stories are embedded and the epistemological leanings (ways of knowing) chosen for the inquiry.

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 3.1. Conceptualisation of Theoretical Framework**

**Final Comments**

In this chapter historical accounts, contemporary practices, and the three commonplaces distinct to narrative inquiry were explored. The critical constructivist approach adopted for this study was also outlined. Narrative inquiry is both a theoretical framework and a methodology. Narrative inquiry as a theoretical framework is first and foremost based on John Dewey’s ‘ontology of experience’, where ‘fundamental reality’ is seen as relational, temporary and continuous, and is a
reconstruction of human experience based on the relationship between temporality, sociality and space (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The theoretical orientations that sit alongside of narrative inquiry were discussed and the theoretical perspective used for this study was identified.

Despite the tensions that arise from using multiple understandings and theoretical orientations, the narrative inquirer sees these multiple influences as contributing to the richness and complexity of narrative inquiry. Many narrative researchers think it is more important to do innovative work across the contradictions (Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) rather than trying to resolve them. It can be argued that the multiple theoretical orientations with the narrative inquiry methodological structure make it possible to study people’s lives in a more complex way. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write:

> As we reflect on our conceptual cartography of narrative inquiry, we are struck by the energy generated by those interested in studying people’s lives. This rush to narrative inquiry and the willingness to move into the borderlands with narrative inquiry suggests an eagerness to understand in more complex and nuanced ways the storied experiences of individuals as they compose storied lives on storied landscapes. (p. 71)

It is hoped that this gives clarity to an argument for the use of narrative inquiry as the theoretical framework for this study about what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective.
Chapter 4: Methodology

The basis of this study is about how conversations between adults and children shape an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective and what enables or constrains an adult’s ability to talk with and listen to children in various places and contexts. Narrative inquiry methodology was used to examine what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. This study is not intended to be generalisable, however, it uncovers new knowledge and ways of seeing and ways of supporting an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective.

This chapter about the methodology of the inquiry is divided into three parts. First, I attend to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as the conceptual framework to explore the participant’s experiences. Second, I discuss the relational aspect of narrative inquiry as a means of honouring the participants’ voice. Third, I describe and explain the design of this study including: selection of the participants, building the relationship, means of data collection, writing the field texts, analysis, interpretation used to inquire into the lives of the participants, and ethical considerations.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narrative inquirers listen to, describe, and interpret stories of people’s experience. Narrative inquiry is a way of inquiring into experience through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Using narrative inquiry methodology to study experience requires more than the techniques of
collecting and analysing stories people tell; narrative inquiry methodology requires the researcher to be able to think narratively (Kim, 2016). Hence the stories of four adults and three children become my narrative.

To think narratively requires the actions of living, telling, retelling and reliving the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The stories people tell contain more than a reflection of what happened in the past; rather stories people tell are about who they are and the things that happen in their world. In other words, stories give shape to experiences, identity, and the ways people interact with one another in the political, social, cultural and institutional landscapes they occupy (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This narrative inquiry is an example of living, telling and retelling stories about adults and children in conversations with each other.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the three-dimensional features of temporality, sociality and place, as conceived by Clandinin & Connelly (2000), are the conceptual framework used in this study for meaning making of the participant’s life situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Pepper & Wildly, 2009). The stories people tell are bound in time, when people tell a story it has a past, present and implied future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The story is also told within a social context attending to both personal and social contexts. Place refers to the specific place or places in which the story is located. Through the exploration of the participant’s stories using the three commonplaces simultaneously, the complexity of people’s lived experience are studied from both inside and outside of the inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).
In using this approach, narratives differ from interview data in the way the stories are constructed. To construct the narrative, the data is processed in a way that honours the participant’s voice and builds a rich data source focusing on the particularities of the participant’s life within a social context that creates powerful narrative accounts (Pepper & Wildly, 2009). According to Hatch (2002), “the emphasis of this kind of work is on the meanings individuals generate through stories” (p. 28). In this way, the stories participants tell and the co-construction of their storied accounts become the framework and context for meaning making. The result of this narrative inquiry endeavour is to use a holistic approach designed to hear the stories participants tell, to tell their stories in an interactive and structured process, and to use literature and a critical constructivist orientation to analyse and interpret meaning.

**Honouring the Voice of the Participants**

Narrative inquiry is a relational process. The relational aspect of narrative inquiry ultimately frames the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Craig & Huber, 2007). Choosing the participants takes careful consideration, as well as the interviewing process. Narrative inquirers that use in-depth interviewing or conversational processes aim to transform the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee into one of narrator and listener (Chase, 2005). Chase (2005) also suggests that the participant as a narrator moves away from the notion that he or she has the answers to the researcher’s questions, to where the narrator has a voice and stories of his or her own. With this notion in mind, it is important for me to build the relationship between the researcher and the participant prior to inviting his or her story to be told.
An opportunity to honour and give voice to the child participants influenced my decision to use narrative inquiry methodology foremost. Using narrative inquiry methodology to research with these children allowed me to move away from categorising children according to developmental and age expectations to recognising children as actors in their own lives (James & James, 2012). As narrative inquiry methodology is a collaborative inquiry between the researcher and the participant, this relational approach allowed me to listen to and hear the children’s accounts with the storied accounts, and the analysis of the children’s responses co-constructed between myself as the researcher and the children, in conversation with them. Through the conversations I had with the three children, I would not only learn from them, but would validate them as knowledgeable in their own lives, and as contributors to change on how adults listen and respond to them; moving them from a subordinate role to one where they are seen as competent contributors to this research.

Honouring the practitioner’s lived experience, as a source of data is also important for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) when studying teacher knowledge, discovered that narrative inquiry methodology was useful as a ‘dialogic relationship with practice’. In their work with teachers they came to understand that “teacher’s knowledge was a narrative construction composed in each teacher’s life and made visible in their practice” (Clandinin et al, 2006, p. 5). As practitioner knowledge is constructed with historical, political, moral, emotional and aesthetic dimensions (Clandinin et al., 2006), hearing the four practitioner’s stories helps to uncover the layers of meaning across the places the participants spoke about, and how the stories of practice and place enabled or constrained adult-child conversations. Attending to the ‘dialogical relationship with practice’ as told by the practitioners across social
contexts and place, helped me to understand what was held by them as important in
their relationship with children and what enabled or constrained their ability to have
conversations with children. It was also possible to hear the tensions in the
participant’s stories in the context of place (Clandinin et al., 2006), as their stories
‘bumped up’ against the dominant discourse of what happens in a particular place, for
example, in schools or child protection services. These stories are interwoven with
their identity as a person and as a practitioner (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin &
Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006). The four practitioners’ stories opened up
other possibilities for them, as through telling, retelling, and reliving their stories,
stories of change emerged. It is through ‘living out stories’ and ‘telling stories of
living’ that change can occur (Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin &
Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006; Kim, 2016). By inquiring into these
practitioners’ stories alongside them, change is possible as the participants ‘relive’
their stories. This is where the possibility to move beyond those stories as fixed and
begin to ‘restory’, which can shift the metanarratives embedded in those stories
(Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al.,
2006; Kim, 2016). Hence, as our stories sit alongside each other, possibilities emerge
and change can occur.

As the four practitioners shared their stories, I sought to be ‘wakeful’ (Clandinin &
Connelly, 2000) to my own stories of identity and practice as I prepare practitioners to
work with children across a number of landscapes. I was also ‘wakeful’ to my stories
of conversations I had with children in my practice, and particularly from my
experiences in the Talking Circle project as I tried to lessen the power differential
between myself and the children. This collaborative aspect of hearing practitioner’s
and children’s stories helped me to consider who I was in my story of teaching and what could be different in the way I prepare students to work with children.

In summary, narrative inquiry uses story as the portal for understanding people’s lived experience. The three-dimensional commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place, make up the conceptual framework by which the stories are simultaneously explored. The relational nature of narrative inquiry makes possible a means of honouring the voice of the participants and an opportunity for social change. Through story, people come to know about how they see themselves within the communities they live, make sense of their own world view, and learn from it.

**Study Design**

This section provides the criteria for the selection of the participants for the inquiry and data collection techniques, followed by a description of the data analysis process. First, I explain the process and justification for the selection of the participants, how I negotiated their contribution to this inquiry, and gained consent. Second, I describe the techniques used to collect the data, and the journey from field texts to the final storied accounts. Finally, I detail the analysis and interpretive approach taken, including ethical considerations.

**Participant Selection**

In narrative inquiry research, the goal is not necessarily to secure a representational sample. The overall goal of narrative inquiry is to go deep within each participant’s lived experiences to hear the narration of their own lived experience as he or she understands them (Clandinin, 2013; Cousins, 2008). Despite differences in narrative
strategies for representing participants lived experiences, “…what narrative researchers have in common is devoting their time to fewer individuals than other qualitative researchers” (Chase, 2005). For this study, the lived experiences of four adults and three children were studied. The four adult participants were selected from alumni students from the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies Griffith University Logan Campus. The three children were selected where a relationship with the researcher had been previously established.

**Adult Participant Selection**

The criteria for selection of adult participants for this study were that the adults: (a) had completed Griffith University’s Bachelor of Child and Family Studies, (b) were employed in a position within child and family services, and (c) were from various services within South East Queensland. I chose the local area, as I would have easy access to the participants over a long period of time and was also familiar with many of the organisational landscapes in which the participants worked.

The Bachelor of Child and Family Studies alumni students were contacted via email, which included details outlining the purpose of the research and the research methodology. I also had personal conversations with former students with whom I had maintained contact, to ask if they might be interested in becoming a participant in my research study. In total I had seven practitioners interested in participating in the study. I chose to approach four practitioners, Natasha, Angus, Sarah and Thomas as each of them worked in different child and family services, Sarah, Angus and Natasha had been former students of mine, and Thomas I knew from the field. All of them were working in the local region, giving me easy access to them over a period of time.
During the period of the data collection, Natasha moved to England and Angus and Thomas changed positions, however they all remained within the criteria.

**Child Participant Selection**

As discussed in the literature for conversations with children to be meaningful, it requires an interactional adult partner and knowledge of the individual child’s everyday life and how he or she makes sense of it (Ulvik, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Furthermore, as some children will have less experience in these kind of conversations, they may have difficulty in expressing their thoughts and experiences (van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). Dockett and Perry (2007), in their research with children, state that:

> [I]n order to make some judgements about the nature of their responses [...] it was] important to be involved in ongoing interactions within the research context and to build relationships that support this involvement. Knowing the children and their knowing the researcher, as well as the context, are essential parts of constructing meaning and the interpretation of the data. (p.52)

With this in mind, the selection criteria for the children were: (a) the child participants were known to me, with a sense of trust already established, (b) I had previous conversations with them, and (c) I had access to each child, in order to observe them in different contexts. Choosing child participants already known to me added trustworthiness to their responses, and allowed me to better understand the three-dimensional contexts of their stories, and access further conversations for the co-construction of their storied accounts.
Initially I spoke with five children about participating in my study and decided to choose the three children with whom I had a long-term established relationship. The children were from families that I knew in a social or work capacity, therefore, knowing the children and their parents gave me access to them in different contexts, including home, school, and within their community. For the recruitment of the children, I made arrangements with each of the parents to have a conversation about my research project and the possibility of asking their children to become a participant in the inquiry. The parents agreed for me to meet with their children to talk about the inquiry and ask if they would like to be involved.

At the initial meeting with the children, I explained my role at the university as a teacher of people that will, on completion of their studies, work with children in different contexts, for example, schools and children’s services. I wanted to know more about what it was I should be teaching my students from a child’s perspective. I further explained, as participants in my study, they could contribute to improving my teaching and preparing adults to work with children in the future. Each child was given an information sheet to take away and discuss with their parents, along with consent forms for their parents and a child friendly consent form for them to sign if they decided to take part in the study. All of the children took this proposal seriously, as each of them asked me questions about where the interviews would be held and what kind of questions would I be asking them. This indicated to me that they were interested in the study and felt they were able to contribute.

**Research Ethics and Gaining Consent**

I received ethics approval for this study through the Griffith University Research and
Integrity process. Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Each participant was given information about the research study and signed consent forms (see Appendix A and B for adults, and Appendix C, D and E for children) to participate in this study. The participants chose pseudonyms as a way to protect their identity and maintain anonymity. Names of institutes were omitted in order to protect third-party anonymity, unless otherwise agreed to by the participants.

**Building the Research Relationship**

The research relationship in narrative inquiry methodology is what makes this a unique way of doing research. Listening to individuals tell their story, living alongside the participants, and closely examining individual’s experiences with them, makes narrative inquiry a relational way of doing research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, the term ‘living alongside’ is not necessarily a literal term, rather it is used to describe the research relationship as we tell and hear stories within the context of where the stories take place and where the stories are told (Clandinin, 2013). As narrative researchers live alongside their participants for the duration of the research inquiry, a mutual understanding of how the research relationship will work is a key factor. In narrative inquiry methodology, the participants are considered co-inquirers and co-composers in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), hence building the research relationship is the first step in the study.

In narrative inquiry, negotiating and re-negotiating the relationship is important. In narrative work, the participant opens up in a way that is personal and may cause them to feel uncomfortable or vulnerable in the process of telling their story, and there is
potential risk for mistrust if negotiation of the process is not discussed and re-discussed throughout the research relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For example, in this study the meeting places for the interviews and conversations were negotiated with the notion that safety of place for the time spent together would facilitate open and genuine dialogue between us. I refer back to the Talking Circles here, where the children told me they liked coming to the Talking Circles because it was calm and ‘they felt less stressed’. With this in mind, the interviews and further conversations took place in a number places including: my home, participants’ homes, coffee shops and in my office at work, as decided by the participants.

**Data Collection**

For this study, the researcher is the teller of the stories in a negotiated partnership with the participants to co-construct their storied accounts. “The process of narrative inquiry is described as a recursive process … being in the field, composing field texts, drafting and sharing interim research texts and composing final research texts” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 10). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the final research text as the storied accounts of the participants. This section will describe my data collection process, which included field texts, interviews and a researcher’s journal.

**Field Texts**

In narrative inquiry methodology, field texts refer to the collection of data. It is important to note that, “central to the creating of the field texts is the relationship between the researcher and the participant” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 94). In other words, what is asked and told is shaped by the relationship between the
researcher and the participant, and is always considered to be interpretive. From a relational perspective, the connections made in the inquiry space offer the inquiry a depth and richness, enabling insights that might not be otherwise possible (Craig & Huber, 2007). According to Moen (2006), the written text needs to be produced in a way that depicts the harmony between the life as lived, told, and written as text.

Composing field texts can take on many different techniques in narrative inquiry methodology. For this study, the participants and I generated the field texts through a chronicled life-line drawing; two semi-structured interviews (I refer to as focused conversations [duration 30 minutes – 120 minutes]), informal conversations, and research journal entries. I will explain each of these in detail in the following sections.

**Chronicled Life-line Story**

This data collection strategy was used as a reflective tool to explore the relationships, connections, past experiences, important events and the significance of place of each participant. I started by asking the participant to draw a ‘chronicled life-line’ from when they were born until the present. I explained to the participants that drawing and talking about their life with me would help me to get to know them better and discover the significant people, places and situations in their lives that had meaning for them. It also provided a starting point for establishing how each participant created meaning out of situations in his or her life, and created an opportunity to find out what might be significant in each participant’s social context. As mentioned previously, human experience is narrated with a past, present and implied future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), therefore listening to how the participant sees themselves over time, who he or she interacted with, and where the interactions took
place, gave me insight into the relationship between temporality, sociality and place in each individual’s story. Samples of the chronicled life-line stories are pictured in Figure 4.1 (child) and Figure 4.2 (adult). The participant included events from birth to the day of the first interview.

Figure 4.1. Chronicled Life Line Drawing – Child

Figure 4.2. Chronicled Life Line Drawing – Adult
Semi-Structured Interviews

The design of the semi-structured interviews was based on a conversational process known as a ‘focused conversation’ (Stanfield, 2000). A focused conversation, is designed for the intention of taking the participants from the surface of a conversation to a deeper level (Stanfield, 2000). This type of questioning is structured more like a conversation than an interview, allowing it to take a number of turns depending on what the researcher and participant choose to explore further at the time.

A focused conversation has four stages of questioning: (1) exploring the facts, (2) discovering the feelings, (3) interpreting the situation, and (4) assisting in what could be different (Stanfield, 2000). These four levels of reflection formed the pattern of the conversation for the semi-structured interviews. ‘Exploring the facts’ was about understanding ‘what is’; this was placed in a historical context with probing questions used to uncover the external reality of what was happening now. This established the temporality in the stories told. Reflective questions called for an internal response to the external data, eliciting the participants’ feelings, emotions, beliefs and values associated with their stories. These questions helped me to understand the social context or sociality of their stories. Probing questions included: (1) ‘How did that make you feel’ and (2) ‘What are some images or thoughts about that situation that come to mind for you?’ Questions to interpret the facts and feelings started to draw out the significance of the data and implications for action ‘What surprised you?’ is one example. Another is, ‘Why do you think you felt that way?’ The interpretive questions looked at layers of meaning, which helped to answer ‘why’ did this happen in this way? This helped me to unpack the participants understanding of his or her view about the context of their stories. Decisional questions focused on implications,
new directions, and other possibilities, opening the conversation for ways to think about things differently in light of what is happening for them now. For example, ‘What could be different?’ ‘How would that look?’ Using this process, facilitated a deeper level of thinking about how adults and children were in conversation with each other.

The Focused Conversation

To commence the semi-structured interviews, I started the conversation by asking the participants to tell me about a time he or she had a conversation with a child/adult, (see Appendix F). These semi-structured interviews were audio and video recorded, transcribed, and sent back to the participant for verification prior to our next meeting. This gave each participant an opportunity to validate the accuracy of the account, and change or refine the story as he or she saw fit. The second semi-structured interview was designed to seek clarification and an opportunity for each participant to re-narrate his or her story. This interview was also recorded and transcribed, and used along with the first field texts to produce the final storied accounts. This process fits with the ethical considerations needed when telling the stories of others and improves the balance of power in the construction and ownership of the stories (Hatch, 2002).

Generative Listening

Narrative inquiry is also about listening. I used the notion of ‘generative listening’ as described by Scharmer (2009) as listening to oneself, listening to others, and listening to what emerges from the conversations, as a tool in my data collection. Generative listening requires a high level of reflexivity and openness to hearing what the other person has to say. As the emphasis for this narrative inquiry is on the meanings
individuals generate through their stories (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006; Hatch, 2002; Kim, 2016), the stories the participants tell and the way in which I hear them leads to the co-construction of the storied accounts. As mentioned in Chapter Two, listening involves giving meaning to the message and value to those who are being listened to, which requires a deep awareness and suspension of our judgement and habitual ways of thinking (Rinaldi, 2001; Scharmer, 2009). Listening from this perspective involves hearing, interpreting and co-constructing meanings (Rinaldi, 2001; Senge et al., 2005; Scharmer, 2009; Tangen, 2008,) through shared dialogue. Therefore, my framework for meaning making in dialogue with my participants was based on using a focused conversational process with which I was familiar. My understanding and experience in using generative listening helped me understand meaning from more than one perspective.

An overview of the data collection episodes with the participants is presented in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. These tables list each of the participants and some demographic information about them, including professional positions held by the adults and ages in years for the children. Further, it details the formats and dates of data collection points.
Table 4.1. Data Collection Chart (Adult Participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Participants</th>
<th>Position(s) Held</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>School Aged Care Residential Care Child Protection (Investigation)</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>02/11/12 04/05/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>05/11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>02/07/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>High School Teacher Child and Family Team (Community Organisation)</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>14/08/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity Officer (University)</td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>04/09/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Long Day Care School Aged Care School Family Liaison (Education Department) Child Protection (Investigation)(England) School Family Liaison (Non-Government Organisation)</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>22/11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>17/05/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>8/11/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>29/05/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Early Intervention and Prevention Service (Community Organisation)</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>13/3/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>30/8/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>5/9/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation (via email)</td>
<td>2/12/13 14/12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20/12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Data Artefacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2. Data Collection Chart (Child Participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Participants</th>
<th>Ages in years for duration of inquiry</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>27/07/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>2/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>26/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>23/08/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>7 - 12</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>27/07/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>2/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>26/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>08/04/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>23/08/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4th Informal Conversation</td>
<td>15/03/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>9 - 14</td>
<td>Lifeline drawing and 1st Formal Interview</td>
<td>27/07/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Formal Interview</td>
<td>2/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st Informal Conversation</td>
<td>26/10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>08/04/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Informal Conversation</td>
<td>23/08/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Data Artefacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Text to Storied Accounts

Drafting the storied accounts from the field texts analysis of the data commences as the researcher positions the field texts with the conceptual framework of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). As I read the field texts again and again, I was asking, ‘What does each individual have to tell me about conversations they have with adults or children’, ‘What is going on between the three-dimension space’, and ‘How did the stories sit within the broader
spheres of experience’? As I was drafting the field texts into the storied accounts I started to include my own thoughts or interpretation. Amid this process I returned to the participants for clarification through informal conversations to help me co-construct meaning; being mindful of their role in the interpretation of their stories. As the lives of the participants were still being lived, it was difficult to freeze their stories in time, hence to further understand their experiences I continued to talk with my participants throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Informal Conversations**

As narrative inquiry happens in the midst of on-going experiences, bringing back the ‘interim field texts’ (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Huber, 2010) for further clarification or to engage in further conversation with the participants is often essential in writing the final accounts, as well as in the analysis the data. I pursued the opportunity of on-going conversations with the participants as a means of pulling together some of the commonalities, differences or tensions within and across in the field texts. The conversations were open dialogue between us, with the intention of inviting the participants to tell me more about their experiences as they were happening. There were also times when the children would tell me about something that happened at school or on the week-end when they had a conversation with an adult about something. For the adult participants, further conversations took place when there was a change in their work situation, which gave them further insight to what enabled or constrained their ability to have conversations with children in various work places. These informal conversations were written as journal entries into my research diary and used to develop more complex accounts of the participants’ experiences and contribute to my interpretation and analysis.
**Reflexive Journaling**

A researcher journal was used to collect data and locate my voice in the inquiry. Reflexive journaling is a process of critical self-reflection based on theoretical predispositions, and an acknowledgment of the researcher’s place in the setting, context and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand (Kim, 2016). This journaling process acts as a way of listening to myself, listening to the participants, writing the accounts and interpreting the stories told. Reflexive journaling is important to hear the stories from more than one perspective and allow for each participant’s voice to be heard and honoured. As described by Horsdal (2012):

…it is an interpersonal interaction that takes place between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the former is receiving a gift during this performance as the narrator consents to share her experiences and to allow the listener to accompany her on the journey she is travelling.

(p. 75)

Finally, reflexive journaling helps to capture my experience of the experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is part of my learning journey as a narrative inquirer.

**Concentrated Data Analysis**

In narrative inquiry, the analysis process relies on the ability of the researcher to describe the inquiry process, use reflexivity, search for connected themes across and within the stories, as well as understand the stories of experience in context, both personal and social. The data collected in this study shaped the construction of the narrative accounts by using literature and a critical constructivist perspective to ‘twist and turn’ the data with the intention of exposing the multiple layers of meaning. In
this way, the methodology is able to draw out the individual’s experience as well as the political, social, cultural, and institutional metanarratives from which the individual’s experiences are expressed and enacted (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). From this way of studying human experience, the understanding of what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective will be made possible. This section provides an overview of the data analysis and interpretation used in this study.

Data analysis and interpretation in narrative inquiry occurs continually thought the data collecting process. According to Kim (2016), it is important that narrative inquirers understand qualitative research analysis as it generally informs how narrative analysis is undertaken. “…data analysis in qualitative research in general is comprised of; examining raw data, reducing them to themes through coding and recoding, and representing the data in figures, tables, and narratives in a final research text” (Kim, 2016, p. 188). The interpretation of the research texts is developed through the use of literature and theoretical perspectives.

In narrative inquiry, analysis and interpretation work in tandem. Narrative inquirers try to highlight the meanings that are present in a participant’s story, as well as illuminate the meanings that lie hidden within a story (Josselson, 2004). As narrative analysis and interpretation is a way to find meaning in the narrative, Kim (2016, p. 190) argues that “narrative researchers interpret meaning through the analysis of plotlines, thematic structures, and social and cultural referents”. The meanings are concurrently analysed and interpreted as the research texts are developed, which is especially important, if the research topic is about challenging the status quo, or social justice issues based on a critical theoretical framework (Kim, 2016).
For this study, my analysis and interpretation is informed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) where narrative analysis and interpretation happen throughout the inquiry. The phenomenon under study often shifts and changes as stories are told and re-told, hence this shifting and changing is part of the analysis. Narrative inquirers pay attention to the approaches of both ‘faith and suspicion’ as described by Josselson (2004), where the participant is seen as an expert in his or her own life, and the analysis and interpretation are about exploring the social and historical worlds of the participants. Narrative inquirers use analytical and interpretive tools to broaden the context of the story; to analyse and interpret ways of feeling, interpreting and thinking, as told by the participants (Kim, 2016), as well as what has been learnt about the broader context of the participant’s circumstances.

As mentioned previously, the individual’s story depends on their past and present experiences, values, the listener of the story, and when and where the story is being told, with each story having multiple voices (Moen, 2006). Further, it is believed that language plays a role in the meaning of the experiences told. For example, as children tell their stories about an experience, it relates to the kind of meaning that the culture has imposed on them (Gudmundsdottir, 1996). Therefore, it was important for me to be mindful that the stories told by both adults and children are rooted in their own cultural and generational settings. The combination of what is told, how it is told, and its social location, gives voice to each of the stories, with the researcher looking for the patterns in the accounts of self, subjectivities, realities and cultural context that the narrator creates in a particular time and place (Clandinin, 2007, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
Two Waves of Analysis

For this study, two waves of analysis were used to make meaning of the field texts as they were collected and written into storied accounts. The first wave of the analysis examined each participant’s lived experience in order to identify each participant’s voice. In the first wave of analysis, I used the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This was about making explicit the participant’s views, feelings and understandings, and the events that were significant in their impact on the individual over time and place. The second wave of analysis was a thematic analysis or, as described by Clandinin & Connelly (2000), discovering the emerging patterns or story threads that appear within and across the stories told. The next section will describe each wave of analysis and interpretation.

Identifying Voice

To identify each participant’s voice in the first wave of analysis, the field texts were coded using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry of temporality, sociality and place. Temporality in narrative inquiry is one of the main distinguishing features (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Pepper & Wildly, 2009). Narratives unfold in time, covering a space of time; therefore to understand the temporality of the participant’s experience the analysis and interpretation needs not only to include the here and now, but also how each participant’s experiences are seen as part of a continuum over time. This was accomplished by colour-coding the connections or relationship between the participant’s life-line story; what has happened in the past and how that has influenced the way he or she views things in the present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The temporality sweep comes from the participant’s drawing of
his or her life-line and from the field texts. Coding categories used to identify temporality included: previous childhood experiences, events and feelings, which impacted on the participant’s present-day experiences.

Sociality, or the personal-social aspect of the field texts, was coded by identifying the participant’s personal conditions such as, “…feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 480). The social conditions were identified by the surrounding factors and forces within each person’s social context. Place is understood by where the participant’s experiences took place, or as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the landscapes on which people’s lives are lived. Place was coded based on its significance to the participant’s story and impact on the participant’s experiences, feelings, interactions or beliefs about a particular place. Figure 4.3 depicts how the transcripts were coded according to temporality, sociality and place. It illustrates the colour-coding and note-taking used to categorise the data for insights into previous childhood experiences, events and feelings, which impacted on the participant’s present-day experiences.
Thematic analysis featured in the second wave used to analyse the field texts. The themes emerged from looking within and across the data, and from my theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The themes that emerged were about relationship building and power. Its purpose was to listen to the participants’ voices, hear their perspectives, tell their stories, and find multiple ways of thinking about the inquiry.
The second wave of analysis began with reading the set of field texts as a whole. This was done to understand the data as a whole picture and the relationship the participants’ voices have to each other (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The data was transcribed, read and re-read prior to commencing open coding. It was through reading and re-reading the data as a whole that the themes started to emerge and the broader political, cultural, institutional, social, economic and systemic contexts were uncovered.

After reading and re-reading the data as a whole, I coded each of the adult participant’s field texts according to what stood out about conversations the adult participants had with children, and used the same process with the children’s field texts about the conversations they had with adults. First this was done by highlighting key phrases that had some connection to conversations between adults and children within each participant’s narratives. These topics or ideas were the beginning of identifying the themes and sub-themes, which included listening, trust, respect, open and honest conversations, time, play, support and guidance, safe spaces, and barriers for conversations to take place. I made notes alongside the highlighted phrases with a brief summary that explained why this was significant for this inquiry. Once I had identified the phrases that were connected to conversations within each participant’s field text, I went back to look for any themes that occurred and reoccurred across the data. I colour-coded each of those themes with a brief summary alongside the coded data.

Next, I went back to my research questions and thought about the image these particular adults held about the children they encountered in their work and whether
that impacted his or her ability to converse with them. I did the same with the
children’s stories, considering how they saw themselves in conversation with adults. I
also thought about what the participants were telling me about adult-child
relationships within the landscapes they occupied together and whether that impacted
on their conversations. I looked for phrases that uncovered the social contexts and
places they occupied and whether the social context enabled or constrained adult-
child conversations. After re-coding, each of the field texts with these questions in
mind, I developed a chart (see Figure 4.4) with the major themes and sub-themes. I
placed significant parts of their conversations under each of the emerging themes and
used this method to move and change the conversational snippets to further develop
the themes and subthemes.

![Figure 4.4. Thematic Data Analysis](image)

As the analysis in narrative inquiry is in tandem with its interpretation, the next stage
of the analysis was to locate the data with the relevant literature and theoretical lens
(Pepper & Wildly, 2009; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To do this, I went back to the storied accounts and began to go back and forth with the participant’s narratives and the literature. Using the literature in this way helped me examine their personal and social contexts. This included the perspectives of the participant’s way of thinking about temporality, sociality and place. I made notes and references from the literature to help me understand each participant’s ways of thinking about time, people, place, and the broader metanarratives that were embedded in their stories. Finally, I decided on the main themes and subthemes in a way that revealed self, experience, and each person’s social reality, drawing out the participant’s point of view, and why it was important to tell that particular story (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

**Ethical Considerations**

The experience of the participants with the researcher is a primary concern in using narrative inquiry methodology. From a relational point of view, the researcher needs to carefully consider their responsibility to their participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). According to Tracy (2010, p. 847) “relational ethics involve an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others”. In relational ethics, reciprocity with participants is the main issue, involving an explicit and implicit contract between the researcher and the participant (Josselson, 2007).

For this inquiry, I made explicit in the consent forms the role of the relationship between the researcher and the participant including: nature and purpose of the study, freedom to participate or withdraw at any time, and details about the conduct and venue for the interviews; including how the interviews will be recorded, what will
happen with the data, and how confidentiality and anonymity will be upheld. The implicit contract was an on-going negotiation between myself and the participants. The implicit contract is more difficult to navigate as the relationship is based on trust. Therefore, it was necessary to be open to negotiation throughout the research process to ensure the participants felt safe enough to tell their story and trust me with their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber & Clandinin, 2002). I recognised that it is the relationship between the researcher and the participant that allows for openness and safety in sharing stories. This ‘shared narrative unity’ is the implicit contract in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988).

**Inviting Children into the Narrative Relationship**

When inviting children into this narrative inquiry a ‘shared narrative unity’ was important. My long-term relationship with the child participants helped to establish this from the beginning of the study. Knowing the children and their families was part of the ‘trust’ issue that is faced in working with children in any study, as the power differences are heightened where traditionally children have been denied the right to have their voice heard (Christensen & James, 2008). With this in mind, and considering what it is to be an ethical researcher with children, I turned to Huber and Clandinin (2002), where they discuss their ethics of relational narrative inquiry. When inviting children into a collaborative research position, their ethical position is grounded in Nodding’s (1986) “ethics of care”, which for them is an ethics of relationships, paying very close attention to the trustworthiness in their relationships with children (Huber & Clandinin, 2002). They also pay close attention to the ‘narrative authority’ of children, and what might be considered an ‘acceptable’ story for a child to tell. With the complexities of stories told in ‘narrative unity’, extra care
must be taken to further negotiate what stories to tell or not tell based on the ‘risk’ involved in telling that story for the participant. Therefore, it was my moral and ethical responsibility to take care of the relationship, and the stories told, with this seen as more important than what might count as ‘good’ research (Huber & Clandinin, 2002). The stories told were guided by the relationship I had with the children, to respect what they had to tell me and learn from them. Therefore, I was consistently reflecting and listening at the same time in conversation with the children to ensure the integrity of our relationship was privileged.

The responsibility in the ethics of ‘relational narrative inquiry’ (Huber & Clandinin, 2002) was also important in this collaborative approach to researching with my adult participants. What was different was that I did not have a long-term relationship with the adult participants. I knew of them as students and as colleagues, but did not know about them, hence in becoming collaborative researchers with them I needed a relational shift. I was aware that I had crossed over identities from teacher to researcher and would need to be mindful of my involvement in their preparation as child and family practitioners. When exploring their experiences as practitioners with them, this had potential for tensions to arise in terms of pedagogy and practice. However, from a relational ethics standpoint, it was important for me to “honour each of these relationships and each of their knowing” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 141) by allowing any of these tensions to challenge my beliefs and assumptions. One participant, Sarah, after her first interview wanted to withdraw from the study. I spoke with her about why she wanted to withdraw, which she described as feeling embarrassed about opening up about her personal life to me. On reflection, it illustrated to me how vulnerable a participant can feel when being asked to talk about
their lived experiences. Hence, the care needed for a trustworthy relationship cannot be separated from the inquiry.

**Who Benefits from the Research?**

Who benefits from this research is another ethical question that needs to be addressed. I think this is particularly important when children are part of the inquiry, as noted by Alderson and Morrow (2011), it is well documented that researchers that involve children in research and report on their views, find the children often have little influence or impact on the development of strategies or policies as a result of their participation. Therefore, in order to uphold the rights of the child to have their voice heard and participate in decision-making, it is of upmost importance that the children in this study are given authority over how their stories are told and what will happen as a result of them telling me about their experiences. The ethical dilemma becomes what others will read into their stories from their own view of children’s capacity to narrate and give meaning to their own lives.

Finally, grappling with the ownership of the final report can still be of concern from an ethical standpoint. Josselson (2007) points out that in western societies the written word holds power far beyond the word spoken, thus I must consider the power I hold as the writer of the final research report. This ethical consideration can be managed by acknowledging the ‘gift’ the researcher has been given from the participants and ensuring that my writing is respectful to them and understood by them. Further to this notion I have read parts of the report to one of the child participants and gained approval.
Final Comments

This chapter described the methodology for a narrative inquiry into what shapes an adult’s ability to listen to a child’s perspective. The methodology is based on hearing the lived experience of four adults and three children in collaboration with me to tell their stories. The selection of participants, data collection, analysis and interpretive tools were discussed, along with the ethical considerations for the study.

As a final comment, it is important to note that the ability to hear a child’s perspective as the phenomenon under study sits with the relationship between myself and the participants under the microscope; the very nature of this study puts me not only in the position of the researcher, but as a participant. I aimed to be true to the processes chosen for this study and tell the stories with the upmost respect for those that were willing to come with me.
Chapter 5: Narrative Accounts

For this inquiry, I have talked with and listened to all of my participants, as well as lived alongside my participants in various ways. The stories told by my participants about conversations they have had with adults or children have opened up opportunities for many other narratives embedded within in their stories. I understand as a narrative researcher I have entered into the lives of my participants and it is my ethical responsibility to take care of and honour their commitment to this study, as the voice of each participant is the most influential voice in the research text (Clandinin, 2013). This chapter is dedicated to their voices.

In this chapter, I will present the narrative accounts of each of the participants. In narrative inquiry, as there is no one way to create the final text (Clandinin, 2013), I have chosen to use the transcripts and my field notes to give a sense to the ‘living’ experience of the practitioners and children. I have co-constructed each of these accounts along with my participants to represent their lived and told experiences. It is their voices that are shaping the narrative accounts, with my voice as the interpretive link.

To tell the narrative accounts of the participants I have used the three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to help me understand the stories told. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), a person’s experience is not just a reproduction of the social structure, but rather the combination of a person’s experience in relation to the social and contextual experiences he or she has over time. As their stories are placed
alongside each other in this chapter, different aspects of their stories are made visible. Each story has been given a name that represents the significance to each account as to what shapes an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective.

**Narrative Account of Natasha: Respectful, Trusting Relationship Building**

Natasha is a former student of mine from the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies program. Natasha entered into my inquiry when she was employed to work in two primary schools to support a number of children who had been identified as having a high number of days absent from school. Natasha had asked me to mentor her in her first year of work. Since I have known Natasha, we have had many conversations about each of our lives. From her life-line drawing at our first interview and previous conversations, I learnt that Natasha’s parents separated when she was young, and by the time she was in her late teens both of her parents had passed away. Natasha drew her lifeline with the positive things in her life on the top and difficult things on the bottom. She said there were tough times both in primary and high school as she had a very transient childhood moving from her mother’s home to her father’s home. Despite Natasha’s difficult childhood she appeared to be settled into her life with her partner of seven years. She had completed an undergraduate degree and was successful in gaining employment soon after graduating.

It was tough times through there and I guess the two houses here at the bottom are representing the transience of my childhood, going from my mother’s home to my father’s home. I didn’t quite know how to draw that and I guess I drew it there because it happened when I was quite young and then that led for rest of my life until … my mother passed away here and then my father passed away here. I was about 13 when my mother
Natasha spoke positively about her life despite the difficulties she had experienced as a young girl. After her father died she moved in with a friend’s family for nearly a year and then moved to Sydney. She said she needed a change and wanted to be closer to her older sister, who she said, “has always been a significant support in my life” (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12). However, after time living in Sydney, Natasha felt she needed to move back to Brisbane to be closer to her network of friends and “do what you do with friends” (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12), as she put it. She also spoke of being independent and wanting to make her own decisions, so moving back to Brisbane to be close to her friends was the right thing for her to do at the time. More recently her two younger twin sisters have come to live with her and her partner. She seemed to be happy about this turn of events, as she liked the idea of having her sisters around her, as it had been such a long time since she had lived with them and she wanted to be supportive of them.

Reflecting on her upbringing she told me that constantly moving, and starting and ending relationships as a young person, was difficult for her. It made her think of her father and how he grew up and his life.

I think talking to anyone might’ve been hard for him, so it is all a bit of a cycle. I think that’s why it highlights for me the importance of understanding how a child feels about a particular topic and making time to hear them and understand them so they’re not left out. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)
We talked a little about ‘trust’ and what that means in terms of conversations with children. She thought it might be a ‘feeling’. She said:

> For me I think it is a feeling or the intuition you get from somebody or a situation. I think it is really hard to answer because it is a personal thing. So I think it must, I don’t know, but I am guessing it would be different for each individual. But I guess honesty, and I keep saying trust and being open. (Natasha F2 17/05/13)

**The Conversation is Only the Beginning**

Natasha told me she started working with children when she was 18 years old, in a number of different childcare services (e.g., Early Childhood Care and Education, and School Age Care), and working with children with disabilities. She felt that since then the conversations she had with children had changed.

> I didn’t I really have a conversation with them so much. I would engage with them over an activity but never have a meaningful conversation. I think it might have something to do with me furthering my education and possibly maturing as well and just sitting and listening to children. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

When talking about her more recent experiences in having conversations with children she spoke about having to build respect and trust with children before a meaningful conversation could take place. Natasha told me that sometimes adults, including herself, stop children from talking rather the adult stopping to listen to what the child had to say, basically showing a lack of respect.

> As adults do we give them permission to share that or time and space to share that? I am probably to blame for that as well. We just end up
stopping them from talking, rather than listening to them in the present and what they have to say. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

At the time of our first interview Natasha and a social worker were facilitating a Talking Circle with four children at the school. She spoke of the children she worked with as having some life difficulties and this particular young girl Natasha spoke of, was having a very difficult time opening up to the group. However, after a period of time the girl did start to open up.

Going back to the beginning of our group, this particular child, wouldn’t talk, she didn’t want to share, she didn’t want to talk about her family or friends or anyone. After some time, it was funny that I have chosen her [to talk about] because the week before she started showing confidence and leading the group and like WOW that was such a significant change. Now she is still hesitant to let go or share her knowledge but she has come a long way and I think it is the trust or feeling comfortable with the people in that group. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha told me that she shared information about this girl at a case management team meeting at the school, mentioning the change she had seen in the young girl as she opened up with her and the other children about a special person in her life. Natasha was surprised when the principal had a completely different view of what was happening for the girl and focused his concern on this girl’s special person.

Yet she was so happy with that special person and I was so pleased even though she was still quite cautious about sharing that. I didn’t know what to do with that, I never met the person I couldn’t comment but it was very
interesting as it shows the different perspective that sometimes children and adults can have. But she was able to share that with us and that was really nice. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

As I listened to this story it seemed to me Natasha was able to listen to the young girl in a different way. Natasha focused on the child’s willingness to open up to the group and noticed a change in her relationship to the others in the group rather than only focusing on the actual words the child said about a special person. Natasha told me by listening to and having conversations with children, they are letting her into their life. The children are sharing important information with her and are allowing her to hear what they have to say. Natasha told me she felt humbled by knowing a child would trust her enough to let her into his or her life.

I think everything you share with someone brings you closer, brings us closer. Anytime you share things with people it brings you closer especially meaningful stuff like that. That stuff is hard to share with people at the best of times. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha noticed in her conversation with this particular child, the child was making herself vulnerable in sharing particular information. Natasha felt it was like the young girl was giving her and the group permission to protect her.

She can tell us something fantastic [knowing] that we are going to be excited with her or something bad or harmful [knowing] that we are going to help her. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)
Building the relationship is important to Natasha in her work with children. For her it is about building the relationship and then reaching a goal, in this case, either identified by the school or the child. She aims to discuss the goal(s) with the child and find out what the child thinks and what he or she wants to work on. According to Natasha this often takes time.

Often there is a goal given to me. In the back of my mind I know the pressure this child is facing within a school setting or at home. And I guess what the problem is or the behaviour is or the mental health concern. There is always something that needs to be addressed. Whether it’s me addressing it, someone else addressing it or the school saying this is what happened. But not always do I talk to a child about that. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

There are a number of factors that she tells me she needs to do to help build a trusting relationship with children before she starts talking with them about the issue that has brought them to her attention. She spoke about making herself available to the children in a number of ways including: spending time together, reading books, talking about family and friends or home and school, drawing pictures or playing Lego. How she spends time with each child depends on the child’s interests and age. It also depends on how aware the child is of the situation that has brought them to her attention.

As Natasha works with a number of children that have experienced trauma and disconnect for home and school, she told me to build trust it is necessary for the adult to be open and honest in his or her conversations with the child. This is accomplished
by being upfront and explicit about what would happen if the child told her something that might be causing the child harm. This is established from the start, rather than after a child has told her something she must disclose to others.

I work with a lot of children that have experienced trauma or are going through a tough time, I think trust is a big thing. Because there are not a lot of people they trust anymore and sometimes it is really hard to gain their trust. So I always try to be open and honest with them to the best of my ability. I don’t promise things I don’t think I can keep and I will say that to them - I don’t know if I can promise that, I will try my best but I can’t promise and I think they respect that. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Being open, honest and upfront with the child from the beginning is of the upmost importance to Natasha, as she told me, this is the only way to build the trust that is needed for a reciprocal relationship with a child.

On the first meeting with the child I tell them what my responsibilities are in regards to their safety and well-being at all levels from preps to grade seven. Sometimes there is a different level of understanding for some students. I always tell them what my responsibilities are, letting them know if they tell me someone is hurting them I would have to tell someone. I would tell them whom I would have to tell and what might happen. I tell them that I will ask for their permission first and keep them in control of the situation as much as I have control to do so. I have posters on my wall in my room where I meet with the children about that. Some children will read it every time they come to see me, with others, as
they have done that once, they don’t want to hear about it again. But they
still open up - some of them, not all. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

From her experience, Natasha thinks the child must want to engage with the adult as
opposed to being told or coerced into interacting with the adult. She also feels that
spending some consistent time together is one of the keys to building a trusting
relationship.

I think trust; trust is the biggest one I can see because if they [children]
don’t trust me they are not going to form a real relationship with me.

(Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

I learnt that Natasha likes to spend time with each child talking and doing things with
them. She is available to them on the playground or in her office where there is
always something for them, something they like to do or talk about. Natasha told me
the environment plays an important role. It needs to be calm and relaxing, otherwise it
can be stressful for both her and the child, and not conducive to having a
conversation. She thinks this is maybe why the children might want to get to know
her and might be willing to open up to her.

Despite the fact that they know from the beginning that she may have to tell others
about their conversation in certain circumstances, most children seem to warm to her
and open up. She seems to have the capacity to talk to children in a way that is
meaningful to them. She is able to draw on their past experiences to help the child
understand the situation they find themselves in. She doesn’t say it is going to be OK
when maybe it won’t be. She spoke of developing risk management strategies with
them so they will have the capacity to deal with situations; she tells me this is her way of building their problem solving and resilience skills.

Natasha spoke of a particular little boy (let’s call him Tony for the sake of the story) that she was working with at the time of the interview. He would often come to her office to play Lego, as that is what he liked to do. One day he came to see her, she noticed a huge bruise on his head. When she commented on the bruise he told her a story about it [bruise] that made her somewhat suspicious, but didn’t dwell on it as she felt that was all he could tell her at that time. He came to see her again that same day and was very upset and crying but couldn’t tell her why he was crying, so they played some more with the Lego.

He had this huge bruise on his head and I noticed it and I said, “That looks like a really big bruise”, and he looked away and he said I got it because I ran into; I fell backwards into a pole. That story sounded quite different because it is front on, you know. I didn’t want to go any further because that is what he wanted to tell me at that point so we just played Lego.

(Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

I thought this was significant, as she sensed this was not the time to delve any further. She wanted him to talk to her when he was ready not when she was ready.

As it turned out it was his older brother who told Natasha what actually happened (she works with his older brother as well). Apparently, Tony’s mother hit him. As she was very concerned about Tony; she approached him with this new information and asked him if there was anything he might want to tell her about what his brother had told her. They went to her office and she explained what she would have to do, tell
someone else, if he told her someone was hurting him. He opened up to her and told her the story. She reported this to the principal of the school and as far as she knows the case was investigated by the police. Tony still lives with his family and still comes to see Natasha, sometimes with more bruises.

Natasha told me she believed children love their family despite what might be going on at home. She spoke of children being told not to talk about what happens at home with anyone and understands the uneasiness or inability a child may have to talk about certain things. Tony was no different.

We talked about what happens in movies what happens when people get hurt or what the police do or how do people take care of you and then we did a risk assessment for him – if something like that happens what can he do. And he still comes to me every day, every time at school he looks for me. I do know that with him sharing that information with me, Child Safety went to investigate and he has spoken about it since and he has had bruises since and he tells me the truth straight away. Well he tells me possibly the truth straight away. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha talks of the paradox in building a trusting relationship with a child whilst at the same time having to tell others about what the child has told her if she perceives it to be harmful to them.

It makes me feel like he trusts me with that information and that I will try my best to protect him or help [him]. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)
She told me she was surprised that a child is willing to tell her something that they have been told by his or her family not to tell.

He told me not to tell anyone, as he is told not to tell anyone about what happens at home in case Child Safety are called or because the parents do not want to get in trouble and that if they do tell they will be taken away, and, of course, as a child they do not want to be taken away from their family…they love them. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha likened this to friendships between children.

It is like if they tell their friends a secret and the friend breaks the secret they are so angry. A lot of kids come to me about friendship dynamics, they are so angry with their friend, they are not going to be my friend anymore, and so I can only imagine what they think of me sometimes. That I had to do that so it is building the friendship back up, just being there for them after that event and making sure they are still aware of what I have to do and we can still talk about other things. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

As Natasha is telling me this I am wondering how she felt about this situation – why did Tony open up to her and how would she feel if the child was removed from his family. She told me she would feel extremely responsible. Responsible on a number of levels. She said she felt she was responsible for telling the children they can trust her and responsible for having to report that information, responsible for asking them to break the trust with their family, and responsible for possibly disrupting their family unit.
Despite these sometimes difficult circumstances, Natasha told me she feels she has had success with the children she works with. Her understanding of success is about being a person that is available to the children. She told me she has also had occasions when children she was not working with directly have come up to her to talk, and on a few occasions have spoken to her about something that is happening for them in their life. She spoke of a young girl who had come up to her on the playground just to have a chat. They started meeting regularly and one day Natasha sensed there was something the child wanted to tell her. Just before the bell rang to go into school the girl opened up and told her that she had been hurt by an adult. Natasha listened and told the young girl she had to tell someone (the principal), as it was her responsibility to do that. Natasha did report what had happened to the girl to the principal.

She stills comes and says hi, she doesn’t stay as long anymore not for the moment but I think she might in the future. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

I have not had any experience where a child has not come back to me.

There was one that took a very long time for him to come back to me, on his own terms. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

At this point in Natasha’s story I wondering why the child chose to go to talk with her rather than someone else at the school. I asked why a child might go to her when she had not necessarily built a relationship with that particular child.

I have time in my job to sit down and talk with them and play with them.

Just wandering around in the break times meeting the children that I know and meeting their friends, introducing myself and just getting to know
them so they get to know me to. Being present helps maybe? (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

They call me Natasha. I am a firm believer in children calling me by my first name. Other teachers have said to me you should be Miss Natasha at least. I am Natasha, they do no need to call me Miss they will respect me because of what I do not for what I am called. For some of them it is so great for them to call anyone older Miss and that is OK too. Some of them love they can just call me Natasha like I am a normal person. I can see some of them like that – they just come over and say, “Hi Natasha”, just because they can say it. They just like saying the first name. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha sees herself as someone that the children are willing to come up to on the playground to have a talk with or just to say hello; someone that is non-judgmental and sees children as capable of solving problems, maybe some times with a little help. She sees children as wanting to build a relationship with an adult, if the adult is willing to take the time to listen to what the child has to tell them. According to Natasha the conversation is only the beginning!

That is how I see a success. Success for me is when a child will want to seek me out when they feel that they need me or when I am hanging out on the playground socialising with the kids they just come up to say hi to me. That’s a success for me - knowing I am there if they need me.

(Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)
**Places Natasha Occupied with Children**

Natasha started a fulltime job shortly after finishing her university study. It was in a professional position that she found challenging. She told me there were some difficulties at work, which she had expressed to me previously in our mentoring sessions. She told me during the interview that it was difficult getting to know the industry. She was now in a school setting with some people having very different perspectives on how to work with children than she had. Thus, she was very concerned about how children were treated in the school landscape and this became a real dilemma for her. At one point, she was not sure she could continue. However, she knew she was learning a lot and she related well to the children and seemed to be making some progress with the children and their families so wasn’t prepared to give up just yet.

One example comes to mind right now they all seem to be quite negative so I apologise for that. Not negative but something serious ends up happening or someone is doing something wrong [at the school]. Next to my office it’s hard for people to see in but I can see out because of the fly screens and I could see some older students smoking. I didn’t want them to do it so I said… “Hey guys can you put that out please?” They all scrambled and stopped doing what they were doing. I am just going to come out, so I walked out of my office to talk to them – I said it is not allowed at school only adults are allowed to do that. Then a teacher came up from the oval yelling out – “GET TO THE OFFICE, PUT IT OUT YOU KIDS”. I said, “All right guys it seems you have done the wrong thing here I think you need to go to the office. I don’t mind if you guys go by yourself or whoever was part of it, or saw what happened, it would be
really good if you go to the office”. I don’t see myself as the enforcer -that might help the kids maybe relate a little bit more, I don’t know, but I am never the one that gives them a punishment for something. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha told me working in a school setting was different than in School Age Care, as it was much easier for the children get access to her.

It was so easy for them to access there. I wasn’t in a room; I was with them the whole time. I was there for them if they needed me. There were times when certain children needed to have conversations with me more than others. In School Age Care we would talk things through with them. Not in sit down and let’s have a lecture…you can’t do this because it is the rule, if we need to change the rule this is what we need to do. Even though sometimes I thought it was unreasonable as well. Some things aren’t fair so I would try to problem solve with them not for them. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

I might ask them if I could play. Give them language to use sometimes, or just be there with them sometimes so they felt strong enough to tackle an issue and maybe next time they could do it on their own. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Sometime after our first interview Natasha and her partner moved to England, where she took a position in a child protection service. I had sent her the original story that I had written to seek her clarification and to have a chat about where she was now and
what was happening in her work with children in a different context. I started by asking her what she thought when she read the story and she said she was a little emotional.

   It was bringing back memories about that time at work, and how I perceived things and how things possibly should be, but sometimes aren’t and that challenge and that difference. (Natasha FI 2 17/05/13)

Natasha was now working in the team for ‘looked after’ children as a family care worker. The majority of her work revolved around writing court reports based on parental assessments, including interaction with their child(ren). She told me her work was very different to what she had been doing previously. She said the trickiest part of her work was working with many other cultures that she had not encountered before and how they treat their children was a challenge for her to understand.

Natasha told me:

[I]t’s made me unsettled in my work a lot of the time because of the way things are conducted; the legalities of it all and sometimes the unfairness for the parent or the child. I feel horrible saying this, but sometimes things go ahead when they shouldn’t, when children are seeing their parents and they shouldn’t. (Natasha FI 2 17/05/13)

I caught up with Natasha after she returned from England. She was working at a primary school as a Family Liaison Officer. We had a long chat about her work there, which she said she was starting to find very stressful. She told me there was so much trauma within the families. She reminded me that it takes time to get to know the children and you can only do that by listening to them. To do that she was going to
start up the Talking Circles at the school as from her previous experience she believed this was a good process to get to know the children better. She also told me a lot of the children do not like coming to school, as they tell her it is too chaotic there.

Natasha also works with the parents. She spoke about struggling to try and figure out a way that she can help the parents to ‘like’ something about their child. Natasha also spoke about the teachers being very stressed as they have too many children with behaviour problems and hence chaos in the classroom. The children keep telling her that the teachers are angry all of the time. Natasha ended up leaving this position at the school, finding it too stressful, and took up a position as the Coordinator of a School Age Care Program.

**Narrative Account of Angus: Guidance Can Make all of the Difference**

Angus is also an alumni student from the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies program. At the time of the interview Angus was completing his Bachelor Degree in Child and Family Studies and was employed as a casual residential worker for children in out-of-home care. After Angus completed his first degree he completed an Honours Degree with a focus on childhood studies. On completion of his Honours, he took a position at foster care and then a position in child protection, followed by further study (Graduate Diploma in Teaching), and is now working as a teacher in a primary school. I asked Angus to be part of my research as I wanted to have a male perspective, and I knew from other discussions with him that he had a strong interest in young children, particularly about their opportunities for play and the consequences for children that are deprived of play.
Growing Up

Angus grew up in Melbourne and lived with his family in a housing commission neighbourhood, which he described as “a tough place to grow up” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12). In his adolescence he went to a technical school for boys, where he was asked to leave after three years. He attended another high school where he lost interest in schooling for a number of reasons including having teachers with very poor English skills and wanting to earn himself some money. Getting into fights with other boys was very prevalent in his school years. As Angus put it, “I was quite academically bright but my attitude sucked” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12).

He dropped out of high school in year 11 and went to work. He had various jobs and went from job to the dole to work throughout his early adulthood. Alcohol and drugs played a big part in who he was during that part of his life. He moved around a lot and had his first relationship with, as he described, “his first love” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12). In this relationship he had his first child. He later married another woman and had two more children. By then he had settled into a management position in a hotel, where he worked for 20 years. He entered university after he decided he needed to make a change in his life. He is now divorced with the primary care responsibility of two young boys at home and, with the help of his parents, he was able to pursue other avenues of study and employment. I look back now I never thought that I would be here [university] no way in the world (Angus FI 1 02/11/12).

Angus spoke of the high school he went to as a Technical School for obtaining a trade based education. The high school he later attended was for those ‘academically’
inclined, however, he had no direction from any of the teachers that he could recall, and in fact he felt it was a very dysfunctional school.

I had a science teacher that we bought dope off and we would go to the pub with him at lunchtime and a math teacher that couldn’t speak English.

(Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus spoke of how his past has influenced him in several ways.

My background is a huge influence on everything I do, say and think. I have to keep remembering that at different times depending where I am in life. When I go back - education wasn’t important in my neighbourhood, wasn’t important in my family. That guidance can make the difference.

(Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

The way I talk to kids now is because of my background. As a child, I wasn’t guided or listened to so I am the opposite now. Everything in my life has been influenced by my background, especially with kids. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

He said he is trying to raise his boys differently from the way he grew up and from the lessons he has learnt in life. His oldest son, despite growing up in the same area as his father, has done very well in achieving a successful education and career, of which Angus is very proud.

It’s Not About Power and Control

Angus has a good relationship with all three of his sons. He is very proud of his oldest son who has a degree in Law and lives and works in England. His youngest sons are
both in primary school. He spoke of his younger sons as being like “chalk and
cheese” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12), one is quiet and reserved and the other full of energy.
When asked to tell me about a conversation he has had with a child, Angus chose to
tell me about a conversation he recently had with his youngest son. Angus told me
about some trouble his son was having in school. “Chip off the old block” was how he
described him. “Because the teacher he has this year is a very old-fashioned control
freak, I call her, he is always in trouble” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12).

Angus told me, despite his perceptions of this teacher, he wanted to know, from his
son’s perspective, what was happening at school so he could help guide his son on
what to do about the situation he was in at school. Being able to listen and hear his
son’s view is important, Angus told me, in how he teaches his son to problem solve.
In the process of listening he is able to build an open and honest relationship with
him.

So, I sat down and I asked him, I said, “What happens, why, what are you
doing that is upsetting the teacher all of the time?” He [son] said, “I speak
out”. “OK so you don’t put your hand up, is that what you are saying?”
He said, “Ya, but I seem to be the only one that gets told off and that gets
put in the corner”. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

One thing I noticed as Angus was telling me the story about his son getting in to
trouble at school was the context when a conversation took place at the school
between Angus and the teacher, about Angus’ son’s behavior. Angus’ son was not
included in the conversation. I asked Angus about that. Angus told me:
[N]o he wasn’t supposed to be there; they [children] are not allowed to be there at those things. It is just the parents and the teachers. Which I thought was wrong anyway because I think that kids, if something is being said [about them] that is not right”. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus told me he had very open discussions with his son to try to hear his son’s perspective on what was happening at school, how he felt about it, and why this might be happening. He also spoke with his son about how he saw the situation changing. They considered together, different ways to deal with what was going on and what his next steps would be. Angus described this conversation as, “putting the ball in his court and try to get him to solve it” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12).

I also had a chat with him at the end of it – he is not silly he is a smart kid. I said, “You will go through your life with teachers like that and you might not like the way they teach or how they go about working their classroom but you just can’t say I want to get out and go to another class, it doesn’t work like that in life as much as it possibly should but it doesn’t. This is a bit of a learning tool for you. I don’t like her. I don’t like the way she teaches. But at the end of the day the choices are you comply with how she wants to run that class or you will keep getting in trouble every day”. And he understood and he has had a whole week now where he has not got into trouble, which is the first time this year. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus felt that having those kinds of conversations with his son brings them closer together and strengthens their relationship.
When you share those things - we bond. You have a father-son bond anyway but that sort of bond just grows stronger. I think just from understanding each other and just knowing we care enough to actually take the time out to sit down and talk about those things. Our relationship grows stronger every time we have those talks. Clearly, we both get a clearer understanding of what we each are, not just thinking, but feeling about those things as well. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

I took Angus back to the original question about conversations he has had with children in other contexts. He said in his work with children and even when he was young he was very aware of “the control thing” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12) as he remarked:

It’s about adults learning that it’s not about power and control. Listen, just listen. That’s hard to for adults because they’ve been brought up differently. The thing I have learnt working with kids in the last few years is just how smart they are, I had no idea they were so smart, but they are and they can, I mean they’re mature at such an early age now, physically and mentally. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

**Places Angus Occupied with Children**

Angus spoke of the many different landscapes where he has worked with children over the past few years. He spoke of working in School Age Care where he had opportunities to have conversations and build relationships with the children with whom he worked. He did this by playing with them. As he told me, through playing with children, relationships can be built, and he believes play is very therapeutic for
children that are neglected at home or are having difficulty making friends. He felt that on this landscape communicating with children was much easier.

As far as communication with them [children] you do all the normal stuff - you try to get down to their level and use the language they understand. Kids are a lot smarter – every time I work with a child, I realise they are smarter than we give them credit for, if you are actually talking with them and asking their opinion on things. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus also spoke about his work in residential care where he works with children whom are living in out-of-home care. He told me that as a worker he is not allowed to have certain kinds of conversations with the children, which he felt made it difficult to form a close relationship. He also spoke of the difficulty in building relationships with any of the children because, as a casual worker, he is not always with the same children.

In a work relationship, it is difficult. Because the children we work with…we are, sort of, well we are not told but it is a sort of, it is a rule in a sense you can’t delve too much into kids…you can’t get kids to disclose stuff unless they come out. You can’t dig too deep; you have to be careful how you dig with children when you are working with them. I hate it because you can’t get to really know what they are thinking or feeling, honestly. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

I was very curious. If this was a policy of the organisation, what was the thinking around this way of talking with children? Angus told me it was:
Because you can’t lead them, because everything can lead to something else and that can be construed if you ask a question you are leading them to an answer…well sometimes you are because you want to know what is going on but you can’t do that in some circumstances. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus spoke of a kind of conversation you could have with a child if they had an outburst. He named these conversations as “life space interviews”.

In those life space interviews, all we do is just ask them how they are feeling, it is all about verbal and non-verbal cues and things like that not really getting into the deep stuff, unless the kids actually come out and says stuff. I know kids reveal, but not very often they reveal things and you sort of have to…we don’t know most of the time what those kids have been through. We have a simple report like a reference form where they come from and that is pretty much it. We don’t know what’s happened in their life a lot of the times, which is really difficult. They do not want to disclose. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Angus felt that in his work at residential care the problem of being a causal worker stands in the way of having conversations and building relationships with the children, and he believed this was not helpful for the children.

The problem is because I was casual for so long and you work at different houses all the time you work at one house one day and another house the next. You might not get back to that house where you started to build that relationship for weeks or months. So it was really hard. You can
understand why those kids don’t disclose much as they have different people coming in and out of their lives all of the time and everyone single one of them goes away. They come in and go out and so they have no steady adult influence in their life. So it is really hard. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

When reflecting on what he does at home with his own children he felt it is quite different from working with children in residential care.

We have to be more careful in what we say around those kids… a lot more careful. Your ps and qs have to be watched. Even the movies you watch or the music you listen to and all those things in those houses are totally different than what you do at home. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

At this point I started to wonder about who makes the ‘rules’ are the kids involved in what happens in the house? Angus said that the ‘rules’ in the houses he worked in were made according to what the adults considered to be age appropriate and did not include the children in the decision-making. Reflecting on this interview I started to think again about why can’t the residential care worker have conversations with the children and who makes decisions for them and for whose benefit? On having another chat with Angus over coffee one day, I asked him about the decisions made in the house, as I was still very curious about how things worked in this environment. He told me that that decisions on what happens in the house are made on what the adults believe to be age appropriate and the children have no say in those rules. The staff are not allowed to use reward or punishment (behaviourist theory) in teaching children how to self-regulate their behaviour. For example, he told me they [staff] are not able
to give children pocket money for doing jobs around the house as that is seen as a ‘reward’. However, he saw this from a different perspective. “Having an opportunity to earn some pocket money would teach the children some responsibility and don’t we all earn money for the jobs we do” (Angus IC 1 05/11/12). Nor are there any consequences for their [children] behavior, that is no pocket money [seen as ‘punishment’]. According to Angus this has resulted in the children no longer keeping their rooms nor the house tidy and he said as a result the children “do not have the opportunity to learn life skills” (Angus IC 1 05/11/12).

Upon further investigation into Angus’s experience in residential care, he spoke of one of the frameworks used where he had worked was called a “therapeutic model” based on every activity you did with a child had a therapeutic purpose. According to Angus, “There was no sort of discipline, there was some consequences but usually these were natural consequences” (Angus IC 1 05/11/12) to guide children’s behaviour. He felt this model had some merits, however, children are not assisted to live in the “real world” nor do they learn “real consequences”. The outcome was children often returning to residential care time and time again after being transitioned out. He told me he believed this model was based on a one-size-fits-all approach, which he felt does not work for all children.

If you put those kids in a normal house they won’t survive with normal kids because of the way they’re allowed to behave and what they’re allowed to do in a different environment, it’s totally different. So they wouldn’t last five minutes, and when they get transitioned out they come back. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)
If a kid went out and punched the hell out of another kid the only consequence would be we’d have a chat with them and say “Well, you know, what was going through your mind when you did that and how can we do it better next time?” Rather than “You do it again and there is going to be consequences”. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

If they get up and say “I don’t want to go to school” they don’t have to go to school, that’s it, they don’t. If they say they don’t want to have a shower, they don’t have a shower. We don’t force them, that’s the therapeutic model. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

I understand they want to change the child’s behaviour through talking and discussing, but it doesn’t work because the kids have been in the system for so long they learn I don’t have to do that. If you do that I [child] can ring up such and such and you’re [staff] are in trouble. I [child] can get you sacked. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

Angus told me he believed if residential care was to work for the children, the model would need to be based on what he called a “family model” where the adults have the time to get to know the children as individuals and to form a relationship with them. He told me of a house he had worked in where there was a permanent female and male with four teenage children.

They have boundaries, they have consequences, natural and from other people as well. You know what? They have been there for five or six years, those kids living together and there’s been three transitions out successfully. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)
All the literature says kids need boundaries and they want boundaries, when you sit down and have a heart to heart with them they want to know that they can’t cross the line. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

If they don’t know what normal is, how have they got any chance of being normal in society when they get out of these situations, that is why the outcomes are so bad. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

Angus felt the biggest issue for the children in out-of-home was the contact the children have back and forth with their parent(s). He felt the children are re-traumatised every time this happens and most re-unifications don’t work.

In their hearts, they want to be with their real mum and dad, but with the alcohol and drug problems not being addressed the children are back and forth. (Angus IC 1 05/11/12)

In relation to working in child protection Angus spoke of the discourse around out-of-home care as only defined at the micro-level and if the bigger issues are not considered, nothing will change. He expressed his shock at the number of parents misusing alcohol and drugs and his concern for the children being re-traumatised again and again once they are in the child protection system. He also mentioned his concern that child safety officers are in a hurry to reunite the children with their families as a result of current government policy that focuses on reunification of families.

A lot of the time in the contact itself the kids get let down because the parents don’t turn up or they turn up stoned or pissed or whatever and then they go back to the foster family and then it all blows up and the kids...
get re-traumatised. It doesn’t happen all of the time, some parents actually do the right thing. (Angus FI 2 04/05/13)

You are not doing the kid any favours by trying to, by giving him hope that they’re going to be reunified with drug addicted parents who are never going to change, and that is about the whole society and the socioeconomic issues. (Angus FI 2 04/05/13)

Narrative Account of Thomas: Never Give Up on Them

Thomas is currently employed as an Equity Officer at a university. I asked Thomas if he wanted to be part of my research, as I knew he had experience working as a teacher and in a family support team for a community organisation to which I had been previously connected. He had completed the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies and a Bachelor Primary Education program.

The First Three Years are the Most Important

Thomas’ story tells of him as young boy who experienced domestic violence and physical abuse growing up. His story tells about his father and stepfather who were not very nice men to say the least. Both him and his younger brother suffered from physical and mental abuse at the hands of his stepfather and witnessed violence against his mother from both his father and stepfather. He spoke of his grandfather as the only positive male role model in his childhood.

For me my grandfather certainly took over that male role model in my life and he was an influence certainly from three to five or even longer, he was the main male role model in my life and influence, he was very calm
and very understanding and he certainly took me under his wing. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

As a result of his experience, he said he became a very angry and confused teenager. He had a very hard time building any kind of positive social relationships, as he didn't feel he could trust anyone; he felt inferior. This led him to hanging out with the ‘wrong’ crowd where alcohol and drug use was very prevalent. He used this to escape and as his way of coping. However, Thomas said that he decided that this was not for him and he choose an alternative life journey by deciding to go overseas to get away from this negative influence. He spoke about how going on an extended trip overseas helped him to make a change for himself and in doing so he felt he became a better person. His many adventures opened him up to a new world and opened his mind to thinking about things differently and eventually led him to wanting to help the disadvantaged in the community.

I certainly got away and broke some of the cycles that I had been in. For me it was about the experience of moving out and meeting people. When you go to these places it makes you look at the real issues and the real things that go on and then the way the rest of the world portray things. Going to India [that] certainly changed me big time you know going there, and Egypt and India, India more so seeing the poorest of the poor. You know children on the streets with their arms hanging off them, leprosy, you know people dying on the street, people from the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. I associated with both. I got to experience a whole different world of poverty to middle class to the richest of the rich with marble floors and you know things like that. So, for me seeing so
many poor people and so many disadvantaged people made me think I’d like to help these people one day and empower them. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas spoke of how his early upbringing had a significant influence on the way he is with his own children and his relationship with his wife.

Certainly, through my early years of life it made me, as a parent, not want to ever, ever be mean to a child. From the things, I experienced I am glad it happened to me and not my children. I always say that to them because it did …the early years of my life had an effect on my future relationships. Because when you see a parenting model when you grow up in a household you think it is normal. In some ways, I treated my partner the same way, I didn't hit her or anything but I talked to her the way my stepfather talked to my mother and things like that. I think to myself hang on here…I think it was learned behaviour [as] that was the role model that I grew up with. My mother was submissive. This male dominating role model that would you know… It wasn’t a good role model but then I found myself following that same thing. I thought hang on this isn't me. But certainly, as a parent though, I did not ever physically abuse or mentally abuse my kids. I want to be the best parent I can to them. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas felt that going to university at 31 years of age was the best decision he ever made despite the struggle he had financially. This situation took a toll on his marriage. He said he did not give up on himself despite the financial burden of
studying and raising a family at the same time. His passion for his work is very obvious. He wants to make a difference in the lives of children. On reflection of his own story, Thomas told me his early years influenced the work he has chosen to do.

A lot of people go down another path, because children have had it hard, there is no future and things like that, whereas it took me awhile but I finally got through all that and went back to university and I help people that are disadvantaged now. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

### Give Them Some Respect

Respect is the word that comes to mind when speaking with Thomas about his experience in having conversations and building relationships with the children. He treats children as individuals, trying to find a way with each of them to assist them in changing the way they see themselves and in turn changing the way others perceive them.

As a teacher, I have seen it. When I was working down there. I remember they gave me a class. There were 30 boys. They said to me, “These are all the dead beats, mate, just get them through the year. Don't worry about them just concentrate on their behaviour”. I was like… oh man deadbeats you are labelling them. That’s what they would tell me. They wrote a letter about it. The teacher said “This kid is a no hoper”. I read it out to them [students] and I ripped it up and said, “This is what they think about you and this is what I think about the letter…CRAP. Let’s change this. YA [kids]”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)
Building mutual respect through a supported relationship was how Thomas found his way to work with these particular boys. In conversation with them he speaks to them “straight” as he put it, which he felt builds mutual respect and trust that he believes is necessary to build an equitable relationship with them.

Just building that rapport up and getting to know them individually. And sort of saying to them, “Guys like what they say about you is not true! You can really do this; don't let anybody knock you down”. By reading that letter out to them, it was like for them, if this is what they think about us then we will work with Mr K to try to change it and they did. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Ya it’s respect. I would tell them straight if they started to act up. Sometimes I would say to them, “This is shit you know” I would swear at them and say to them “Your behaviour is actual crap. If you are going to be like this”… they [the rest of the class] would be silent because I would talk to them straight down the line. I would say “If you were out in the field and you treat your boss like this mate you are going to be”… some [students] would say “I don't care”. I would say “If you don't care then you can get out”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas’ story indicated to me that through his ‘straight’ dialogue with children and his belief in the children he works with; anything was possible. Thomas seemed to have the ability to assist children whose sense of identity and autonomy were at risk. He spoke of a young Maori boy whom did just that.

One of the Maori boys, he had Es all across his report and his behaviour report from all the schools he had been to, he had pages of it, and he said
“Mr K the Titans are interested in me but I have to pass Maths and
English if I want to be interested in their program”. I said “I am glad you
told me that mate. Let’s work on your English and get you passing”. He
said “Thanks sir what I am going to do now is move my desk away from
all of my mates and I am going to change it”. I said “You come to see me
at lunchtime for extra tutoring” and he did so he started to turn it around.
He was a kid cutting himself to get out of class when I first started there
and things like that. To see him change…when I left he came up to me to
shake my hand and said “I really appreciate the work and the time and
effort no one has ever done that for me before ever”. (Thomas FI 1
14/08/13)

However, Thomas did not always have success and he felt a sense of loss when he
could see a child going down a path of little hope for his or her future.

There was one boy there he was going to leave school to get a job pushing
trolleys, you know and I will never forget him… he was from a really
dysfunctional family he really struggled at school. I saw his literacy and
numeracy; he could hardly put two words together you know and now no
matter how much I tried to talk to him…“We can really work on this
Kyle” and stuff like that…but he had too much going on outside for him
to concentrate on school so he ended up leaving. He was 15 years old and
in grade 9. I was thinking to myself “My god, what is the future”, you
really worry you know. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)
Despite this, Thomas told me he did not give up on the students, as he believed so many other adults in the child’s life had. He said that he took his responsibility as a teacher very seriously and was often frustrated by the attitude of some of the teachers towards the children. He was so disheartened by this attitude of indifference and lack of care for the students that eventually he could no longer work under those circumstances and had to leave his teaching position.

You can't give up… your job there is to motivate, inspire and be a role model and you can't give up if you give up on them you are not doing your job but so many teachers give up. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas mentioned that his university studies in child and family studies helped him develop the knowledge and skills to notice body language and that he was able to sense when something was not quite right with a child. I think one of the most tragic stories of which Thomas spoke was a conversation he had with two young girls in the school after noticing something was not quite right.

I said to her one day “Something is not right with you, should we go and see the guidance officer? You need to tell me because it is affecting your schoolwork”. She said “My stepdad has been interfering with me”. I thought “Thank you for telling me, you have done the right thing because it is going to stop now. What he is doing is really bad. Does you mum know?” “Ya but she doesn't believe me” and stuff like that. “Do you mind if we go see the guidance officer because I think you need to go and talk to someone who is a professional who can help you though this”. “Don’t tell my uncle, don't tell this one …can you not tell anyone”.

(Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)
Thomas took this information to his Head of School (HOD) as a result of the child’s disclosure about sexual abuse. The response from his HOD was very disturbing.

I went off to my HOD and I said to my HOD this is confidential this has been happening and he said “Ah don’t worry about them they are all sluts here”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

**Places Thomas Occupied with Children**

During Thomas’ study at university and in his work as a member of a family support team, he came to believe the first three years of a child’s life are the most important. However, he experienced a lot of substandard care in many of the child care centres attended by the children with whom he worked and expressed that he would not leave his children at any of them. He observed very little interaction with the children from the staff. In his reports, he would tell the directors “You have to talk to the children” (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13).

So many kids are in child care now that you’ve got to relate to them, interact with them. When I was doing my pracs [field placements] with human services, I used to play with all the kids at lunchtime. They’d be screaming and yelling and having the ball of their lives, while others [staff] would sit down and watch and [think] what is he doing playing with the kids? (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

It’s such an important job. It’s probably more…child care is just as or more important, probably than teaching. You’re bringing the children up. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)
Thomas’ experiences have heavily influenced the passion he has for his work with children. He clearly sees the potential in children and works with children to empower them to see their inherent capabilities, and tries to help them build the confidence they need to reach their fullest potential. Thomas sees the importance of obtaining education as a means for breaking the cycle of disadvantage. He believes that all children, if listened to and supported, have the capacity to make a positive change for themselves. However, despite the image he holds of children he also sees the many barriers that young people face in making that change. For some it is just too difficult.

Thomas sees the family having an important influence on a child’s capacity to do well in life. He works with men’s groups and in doing so talks to them about their role in assisting their children to make changes. Thomas spoke of privilege in a number of contexts including: family, socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and elitism.

Because if they have that piece of paper it opens up the doors, so many more doors for them. That is what I say to the guys at the men’s group you have to start thinking about your children’s future. If you can say to your kids, I have been telling these guys, “If you can support your kids through these four years you are going to see the benefits not just for them but [also] for your family”. And to try to change that way of thinking. But there are some people that [say]…like at the event here… “My kid is in grade six and no way are they going to university no way!” (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas tells me that not only is the influence from family a factor in how a child sees themselves but also that families themselves may not see or want a change for
their children. From my conversation with Thomas I sense he views interventions with the child as important as those aimed at the family. He sees the potential in the child to make decisions for themselves and uses the conversations he has with them to empower them to change the image they hold of themselves as well as the image their family may hold of them.

Thomas described his relationships with children with whom he worked as enabling them to make decisions for themselves.

Bringing them on campus they see university is hands-on, it’s also fun and engaging. You have to work hard to get here and be passing school but you can do it. That is the message we give them. You can do it. So we get that thought into their head young and then they go home and talk to their parents. We get them to write a thing about inviting their parents to come to the university. So write a letter to your parents to say that you are invited to come with us to the university. They all write letters and things like that you know. A lot of parents do come and a lot don’t. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

By communicating and engaging with the children in this way Thomas tells me he has seen a change in many of the children as well as some of the parents. This has been gauged by what has occurred after the children’s visit to the university. He goes back to the school after the university visit to have what he described as “reflection lessons”. His enthusiasm must be contagious as he tells me the response is overwhelmingly positive from the children. He also speaks of changes to some of the parents’ views on what is possible not only for their children but also for themselves.
Thomas uses his own personal experience to connect with the parents and the children.

It’s a community here with so much potential. It is just getting people to realise their potential and getting parents, when we bring them here for the workshops, to have belief in their children. We do talk a lot and also I give them my story how I went back as an adult I went back to university and things like that. “Be a role model for your kids you know you can do it too”. The next thing you know the parents are all getting the books and dads come up and talk to you and say “I have been in this job for years and I am thinking about doing what you do”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas seems to have less success working with the adults (teachers, principals and guidance counsellors) who work in some of the schools. Their ability or willingness to see capabilities and potential in all of the children that attend their school is not evident. He has experienced a view about children from some of the adults in the schools that he has worked with that does not sit well with him.

Some schools pigeonhole some kids…these are the ones that will go to university. A lot of teachers label the students they do. The ones that are going to go out and work in the factories, the ones that are going to go out and go to university. For me it’s really frustrating, as I don't think anyone should be given a label. When I was at high school there was no way [I thought] I would ever go to university and be getting a job now. There’s no way! (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)
Thomas spoke of privilege in a number of contexts including: family, socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and elitism. Thomas speaks of the school landscape he has had experience within as one that holds a ‘truth’ about who will succeed and who won’t. His way of thinking about the school system tells a story of inequality where students are marginalised on the ‘belief’ that is held about particular individuals. This, he felt, is based on the adult’s perception of who the child is and often where the child lives. He found there was no sense of caring for some of the children and only the ‘elite’ were supported to excel.

Certainly, attitudes of the teachers and things like that made me think …do I really want to work in an environment like this with people who really don't care… who are detached. They concentrate on the excellence classes, emergent excellence, sports excellence. I had one of those sports excellence classes and I just couldn’t, I just did not connect with them at all. They thought they were better than everyone else. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas eventually left the school system and commenced work as the equity officer at a university. He shows a lot of enthusiasm for his work and tells me he likes working with children in a way that is both empowering for them and fulfilling for him. He now works in a landscape of possibility and has the opportunity to inspire children no matter who they are or from where they come.

For me working in equity…I really struggle with excellence. People who are put in the excellence basket and think they are above everyone else. I am inclusive; we are all equal no matter our gender, ability…whatever, people are better at some things than others. How can we say they are
excellent in this and that when someone I know, in my 30 boys, that you [teachers] have not picked out and you haven’t motivated and inspired for all of these years would probably blow them away! And this is what I really struggle with. Like working in equity, I know have really found my niche. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Narrative Account of Sarah: Safe Spaces

Sarah was also a former student in the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies program and has been working with primary school-age children in an organisation that provides early intervention and prevention programs for children having difficulty in mainstream schooling. I asked Sarah if she would agree to be part of my research as I felt, from what I had learned about her during her studies and observing her on her field placement; that she had the ability to engage with children in a genuine and authentic way. I hoped that through our conversations she would be able to give me some insight into her thinking and feeling around conversations she has with children.

Being in the Present

Sarah is very self-aware. She is aware of how her past experiences play a part in the way she is with children and how that influences her work with them. She has the ability to be ‘present’ with the children she works with and in doing so creates spaces where children feel safe enough to be who they are, which assists her in understanding who they are and what they know.

Sarah spoke of coming from a very transient childhood in location as well as family composition. As a child, Sarah moved several times as her father worked in the
hospitality industry. Her father’s work took them to many different locations and forms of accommodation. Continually moving locations made her feel like she had very little consistency in her younger years, which she felt influenced who she is as an adult. When thinking about this in terms of her work with children, Sarah told me trying to be consistent with the children is important for her.

I think moving has influenced where I am now. Probably in my work with children, because I do make sure that, or I try and make sure I’m consistent because I remember growing up there wasn’t a lot of consistency so I know that I do focus on being consistent for families. By that, consistency, I mean my own behaviour. I make sure it is consistent.

(Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah’s family composition had some consequences for her including having to manage several different and sometimes difficult relationships. She felt there were times in her upbringing that she did not have a safe space or as she put it “There wasn’t always a space for me”. The difficulty in some of her family relationships led her to become more self-aware and a desire to explore healthier relational dynamics. She spoke of having a significant person in her early adult years that helped her “process things and made me aware of who I am”. As a result of this relationship she intentionally thinks about what a safe space might look like for the children with whom she works. Many of them have difficulty in organising their feelings and actions. Hence, Sarah thinks it is important to make children feel safe when they are with her.

I guess that influences the way I work with kids too, because I try to promote those healthy dynamics for all children and I guess that ties in
with consistency, and the safe space because I reflected on growing up not feeling there was a space for me too. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah said there were times when she felt safe and supported in her upbringing, therefore, she also knew what it felt like to “do my own thing and have my own say, so I got to see the difference” (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13). Sarah went on to tell me that when she felt supported by the adults in her life her self-esteem grew. Now that she works with children she also focuses on supporting them; focusing on building up their self-esteem. “It is all about them when I am supporting them” (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13).

Sarah’s story reveals that self-awareness influences her way of thinking and doing. Her strong sense of self-awareness seems to allow her to not only be ‘present’ with the children, but is also reflexive in her approach with them. Sarah mentioned several times that her ability to be ‘present’, and her sense of what a safe space might look and feel like for children, is a key feature for having meaningful conversations with children and the ability to understand their perspective.

Before I came here I would be thinking of my experiences all of the time, every time I have a child and if I have a strong reaction I just know that it is a link to something else. It provides me with a lot of insight so I use this when I am working with the children. (Sarah FI 2 30/08/13)

**Listening, Understanding and Acceptance**

Children identified as having social and emotional difficulties are referred to Sarah’s program with the overall purpose of assisting children to self-regulate their behaviour.
They are not able to fit in to the rules at school. It is all about giving the students the tools in order to self-regulate, so that they are able to sit in the classroom and focus on their work, so they are able to listen to the instructions that are being given at home and things like that. Sometimes there are attachment issues so we also have family support workers and there might be a psychologist that the child is seeing so we all communicate in order to move the family forward together. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah builds a relationship with children by listening and noticing what is going on for them. She spoke of wanting to understand who the child is and the connection between the child and the child’s behaviour.

I think it starts by being perceptive so watching what is going on for them. Trying to understand their worlds. Listening to what they are saying I think is really important. If they are saying to you “I am no good at this” or “Mum has hurt me.” ... I think eye contact and body language is really important too. It is like saying to them “I heard what you just said”. Being present with them when they tell you those things and noticing. Because I feel like then they know that you are listening. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah mentioned that acceptance of a child’s behaviour is important. It is not about managing or controlling the behaviour, but rather providing a space where the child is able to discover for him or herself whether the behaviour is necessary or not. The ability to suspend judgement is also evident in Sarah’s story. Sarah notices the child’s behaviour but does not react to it straight away, implying that the behaviour is part of
what the child knows at this time. She mentions that noticing the behaviour and seeing it for what it is, from her perspective, and trying to see it from the child’s perspective could change things.

Acceptance is a really a big part of it instead of trying to correct or control the behaviour. I just call it a behaviour that does not reflect their highest good. Others it might be called …being…what would the word be… being naughty. I don’t really see it like that. I just see it as something has happened and this behaviour has developed. So it is like being accepting providing a space for the behaviour. I try to be warm and accepting rather than judging the behaviour. Like I allow the behaviour room. That seems to help as they do it and look at you and they see that you are not going to react maybe how other people might have reacted. I don’t really know what happens after that, it lifts, the behaviour lifts a little. It is not needed as much in the space that I have created. They don’t need to use it in that space. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

The children with whom Sarah is working have diverse backgrounds and often she says other practitioners may want or feel the need to challenge the children about what they are saying or doing. Sarah thinks it is important to challenge a child when it seems right to do so, however, she was not sure when that right time might be, however, felt the right time is when it comes up naturally.

I try to ride that accepting space. And I show them [children] I need to be firm in who I am so I need to be consistent. I am not always perfect at that. I try to be consistent so every behaviour they have I try to be the same back to it. So they know where they kind of sit. But at the same time
I think it is a bit more relaxed and comfortable. So it is like they might need time to explore that space a little longer it might take a little bit longer for them to feel comfortable…and then when I feel like it is comfortable is when I can start challenging [them]. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

I wanted it to come up naturally. I didn’t want to force it. I didn’t want to make the session about challenging behaviour I want it to come up naturally and it did. It was funny how it happened. The room just got too loud and we [adult and children] couldn’t handle this and we all kind of just sat and then [I said] “OK let’s talk about some of the things”. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

When asked to tell me about a conversation she has had with a child, Sarah told me about a young girl (Vera) who comes to one of her groups.

There is one child that I am working with and she is actually quite interesting. I am doing a group situation and she is a part of the group and I have noticed, my observations of her, coming into the group is that she is very controlling. So she is really controlling the room and likes to, I guess, be in charge of everything and if anyone else wants to do something she goes over and does it instead of them without asking. She is really intelligent so she is often correcting me, constantly. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

There was one session we were talking about our own behaviours because it is all about being mindful about you and of other people. So, we were
sitting around with the whole group of students and there were a couple of other students there and we all helped each other out on different things that we could work on. So, someone said “Oh, that boy is really loud and he needs to watch his manners and listen to other people a bit more” and then the young girl said to the other boy, “Well he needs to get more involved, he doesn’t speak very much but besides that he is actually really good”. She is very insightful. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

I would think the children would have to feel safe in order for this kind of conversation to take place.

And then it was time for her, you know, I said to her, “So what do you think you need to work on?” Her body language is kind of closed in and I could tell she felt really targeted. I was very gentle in my approach so I said, “Maybe you should watch how you like to help a little too much. Sometimes helping is OK but helping too much can sometimes stop people from being able to be themselves in the room”. She reacted like, “No I don’t, I didn’t do that” then tears were coming to her eyes but then they went. It was just about holding her in a safe place in a way and I think my body language was very important at that time. I was smiling and saying, “It is ok; it is alright that you are like this”. And then I think it pushed a little bit far…Ya I had to hold her hand and she got upset and she said “That is because what my mum does to me”, “That’s because my mum corrects me all the time”. Ya, she said something like “She corrects me all the time” and she was getting really upset and I just held her hand and I said “I understand, I know, I know, it is OK”. She was OK. Before
she left we tried to do some fun things to try to lift the mood. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah also told me about a young boy she had built a relationship with over a period of time. Her relationship with the young boy basically started out through saying hello to him when he came to see his speech therapist and by playing with him. These initial encounters led to the young boy forming a very close attachment to Sarah.

I will tell you where it began. He first came in for speech therapy and I met him in the foyer. I was working alongside a family support worker and she had told me that he is often saying things like, “I am not a good boy”. He is from another country, so he has got an accent. “I am not a good boy, I am bad and I do not do well at things”. That is what he says. Or “I do not understand” or “I don’t know”. So, him and I were playing to begin with [this is] when I first met him. I was basically just repeating back everything that he said back to him and every idea he had I would just reflect it back to him. I think that created a good foundation for a relationship. Every time he saw me, week after week, I would say hello and greet him and he would tell me about his day and all of that. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

The story about this little boy is interesting as it unfolds, as it seems that he must trust Sarah and turns to her in times of distress rather than to others that work directly with him. She told me of a time when the boy was very distressed when he was left on his own in the bathroom at the service. He could not be comforted by the family support worker nor by his mother, but rather turned to Sarah to help him through the situation.
So this has gone on for a few months and now he is part of one of the other groups with younger children. And what has happened he has gone to the bathroom with the boys and he’s feeling…so he lost it because the boys left. He was crying and screaming to the other worker…saying “You left me, you left me in here, why did you leave me in here”, and my co-worker was saying “I did not leave you here on purpose” and things like that. But he wasn’t able to calm himself down and um so mum and him went outside. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah was able to help the boy calm down, however, he then became distressed thinking about Sarah not being there for him in the future.

[And] then he said to me, “What am I going to do when you are not here?” And I was like oh…um…I think I just said to him “No you’re doing OK I am going to be here I work here. You are coming back every week and I will see you next week and I will see you the next week and if you need me I will be there”. And then he calmed a bit after that. And then he was saying, “No what about next year and the year after and the year after where will you be then?” I was like oh... I said something like, “We don’t have to worry about that now. I am here now, I’m here now” and I think it was just grounding…something was happening. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

I wondered how she felt about him having such a strong attachment to her so I asked how she felt about this conversation.
I wanted to portray to him I am here, I am listening and I understand you. I tried to get across you’re safe. Somehow, I try to portray that. I feel like maybe he just needs that more. Maybe he is thinking a lot in his mind about what he needs or something. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

In a further conversation about this little boy Sarah told me she wasn’t concerned about the boy forming a close attachment with her. She describes this, as “I was the person then and there, being responsive in the moment” (Sarah FI 2 30/08/13). She also felt that what she did at the time was relevant, as she was role modelling for his mother. However, she noticed if a child was to become too dependent on her it might be disempowering for the mother.

It depends on my perception [what is needed in the moment]. When the child comes to me directly, the child wants some affection, as they do need someone right at the moment. The parent may not be able to respond. Maybe no one is there to help him organise his feelings. It’s complex. (Sarah FI 2 30/08/13)

**Creating Safe Spaces for Children**

In the conversations adults have with children, Sarah believes that not having an agenda is important in creating a safe space and having the confidence and ability to let things happen naturally. She tells me this not only takes time but patience. Furthermore, she notes that if adults only talk to children with something they [adults] have in mind, something they want to challenge the child on, or a goal the adult has set for the child, it is not about the child anymore; it is more about the adult and what
the adult wants to change in the child. Hence, the children are not valued or considered in having a part in the negotiation of whatever is happening at the time.

I think patience is important and not having an agenda because easily we, as workers, can get caught up in time constraints and we’ll have an agenda, and that’s OK. Like we want to get this done at this session and I do it myself too, still now. When I am having a good day; I am feeling like, I guess, at peace or whatever, when I feel like I am having a good day is when I am less controlling and when I am more relaxed with my lesson plans. I noticed that is when I am more patient that’s when I am more understanding. And I am in the right space and then that is when those conversations are even more effective. Because I am a better listener, if I am a better listener then the children are able to, I guess, tell me about their day, tell me about what they like and all of that. And then you can just see it in their faces how chuffed they are that someone is listening to who they are. It is like almost like…it is like self-esteem. I feel like they are gaining self-esteem from it. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah mentioned in our third conversation how much her practice has changed since our first interview. Sarah said the conversations she has with the children have changed. She described the conversations she has with them now as more efficient, not so focused, and more automatic. This indicates to me that she really thought about the conversations she was having with them in the first place. Now that she knows the children better [she has known them for six months now] she is teaching them some tools or strategies to help them when they find themselves in difficult times or situations. She realised that by getting to know them first and by providing them with
a safe space to talk, she is better equipped to know which tools might work for each child. However, she mentioned that she is always learning.

We talk about the tools now. I am trying to give them a safe space and a place to talk. I am teaching them tools to help them. Getting to know them first so I know which tools might work for them. (Sarah IC 05/09/13)

Sarah invited me to observe one of her sessions after our first interview, which gave me the opportunity to observe some of the things she was telling me about in our first conversation. For example, I noticed the calmness of the space and Sarah’s calm and patient approach with the children. Sarah clearly demonstrated her ability to build a space where the children were enabled to take ownership of the group.

At this session one of the children was leading the session with limited input from Sarah. Her first task was reinforcing their knowledge on the parts of the brain and how each part functions. The other children responded to her. She would often look to Sarah for reassurance that the child responded with the correct answer. From there she asked the group for some ideas on what was ‘mindful’ and ‘unmindful’, which she wrote on the white board. Each of the children gave some suggestions and seemed to follow her lead without any problems. One little boy became distracted with the toys on the shelf. The young girl running the session tried to bring him back by asking him a question. I was amazed at how well the children attended to what was going on in the session. Sarah sat back and observed, letting the children take ownership of the session, she did not interrupt nor add suggestions unless asked to do so by the young girl leading the group.
After the session, Sarah and I had a conversation about the purpose of the sessions and how she felt about the process. She told me that there are 15 lessons delivered in over seven weeks (twice a week). The purpose is to help them to try to regulate their own behaviour through ‘mindfulness’. It seemed to me that this was accomplished by role-modelling on Sarah’s part with her calm demeanour, and by allowing the children to have some control over what happened in the session. She provided them with a calm and safe space for modelling an ability to listen to and understand each child. If I had not known that these children were referred to this group for ‘poor’ self-regulation I would not have guessed that this was a problem for them.

The girl that led the session was very adamant that Sarah tell her dad how she did at the session. She mentioned this to Sarah several times. Sarah told me the young girl had made some bad decisions the day before in the classroom at school. Therefore, her father was quite concerned that the program was not working for his daughter and her behaviour was not changing. After Sarah’s discussion with the father, it seemed to me that Sarah needed some reassurance or rather someone to dialogue with in regards to whether her strategies were assisting the children to learn to self-regulate. I mentioned it was too bad the father was not at the session as he may have noticed a young girl that was mindful of the others and could lead a group of her peers quite easily.

I asked her what she thought might improve the outcomes for the children. Sarah said there needed to be more consistency in reinforcing the ideas of mindfulness at home and at school. I asked if the parents usually attend the sessions and she said not all of
the time. She also told me there were no conversations between her, the child, and the child’s teachers. She felt that these types of conversations would also be very helpful.

Sarah and I could talk for hours on how we are with children. I found Sarah to be very insightful, reflective and thoughtful in the work she does with children. I think her story tells of someone who has the capacity to hear a child’s perspective in a number of ways, not only through the conversations she has with them, but from her ability to notice, understand and accept a child in the present. She creates an environment that is safe; allowing children to be who they are and giving them the power to decide what and when change can occur for them—through her conversations with them and by letting go of power and control.

I like having these conversations; it makes me feel good about what we are doing. I wondered why adults wouldn’t let children speak more…maybe you can get caught up in what you, the adult, are doing…rather than listening to the child. (Sarah IC 05/09/13)

**Narrative Account of Toby: They Need to Guide Us**

Toby was nine years old at the beginning of my study. Toby has been a friend of mine all of his life. I asked Toby if he would like to be part of my research study as I believed we had a well-established and trusting relationship. Toby took my proposal seriously and agreed to be part of my research study. For this account, I have drawn on our two formal interviews as well as other conversations Toby and I have had since I began this inquiry. When I asked Toby how he felt after he read the story I wrote about him his comment was, “I think you did a really good job explaining me” (Toby FI 2 02/10/13).
Toby’s Life Experiences

From previous conversations, I have had with Toby and from his lifeline drawing, I learned that Toby was born on the Sunshine Coast and lives with his mum, dad, younger sister and brother. He spends a lot of time with his family, and likes going places and doing things with his them. He specifically mentioned going to some interesting and fun places with his family; going to the river on Friday nights, visiting his relatives, going to the zoo at Dubbo, and to the Woodford Folk Festival.

Toby went to day care prior to going to school and he started prep at the school where he is now in grade seven. He went to a primary school in Victoria for six months when his family went to be with his grandparents when his grandpa was very sick. Toby told me he likes going to school but is rather disgruntled with having to do so much homework. He is not convinced that after spending all day in school that going home to do more schoolwork is necessarily a good thing. As his story unfolds, it is usually when he has homework that he has had some unpleasant conversations with his mother.

Toby is very athletic and loves playing all kinds of sport. He started playing organised sport when he was in grade one and is still involved in a cricket club. Whenever I visit him and his family we are often outside playing cricket or doing some other kind of physical activity like playing at the park or going to the beach. Toby has become a very good cricket player, which has become a big focus of his life.

Conversations with Adults

Talking to Toby about conversations and interactions he has had with adults, he
mainly spoke of conversations he has had with his mother and conversations he has had with some of his teachers and coaches. Conversations with his mother usually revolved around doing his homework. Toby told me these conversations with his mother are often frustrating for him as he told me he feels that she doesn't always know the same processes he is learning at school. He doesn't like when that happens as it makes him feel frustrated and he doesn’t like to “fight” with his mum.

Sometimes in the afternoon when I get home from school and mum will let us go to play for a bit and then we'll have to do our homework. Sometimes when I don’t understand something - then when they [parents] start to explain it to me I'll remember it. Then I'll go, “Yeah, yeah” and I'll remember all that. Then they'll go, “Oh no, you've got to do it like this, because this is how I [parent] learnt it”. But, I learnt it a different way so I kind of get - we sort of get into a bit of a fight. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

This made me curious about what he thought was the purpose of doing homework. I asked Toby why he thought he had to do homework. He told me he thinks that the reason children have to do homework is so their parents can see how they are doing at school. He tells me he doesn’t mind reading at night and understands that is important, but he cannot understand why they have to do more Math and English.

Interestingly, Toby told me he didn’t fight over his homework with his mum so much when he was going to school for the six months in Victoria. He told me he and his mum had a conversation about why that might have been the case. From the conversation, he had with his mum, he felt the reason they did not have so many fights was because he did not have as much homework at that school as he did in his
school in Queensland. He also had two teachers in his classroom in Victoria, as it was a combined classroom of grade five and six. He felt with two teachers, there were more opportunities to receive help with his school work when he was having trouble understanding something. “If there was a grade six student that was still having trouble, they would do a bit more grade five work, they could still do grade five work but be in grade six (Toby FI 1 27/07/13).

He also told me he thought he had less arguments with his mum over his homework because the teachers he had at the school in Victoria had a better way of explaining what was expected of him. Therefore, he had a clearer understanding of what he had to do and did not have to rely on his mum as much. He said he felt it was better if he could do his homework on his own and that could only happen if the teacher guided him through it.

When I speak to my teacher in grade six now she helps me, she doesn't like go “Oh, yeah, you just do it like this, you do that, and you do that and that”. She actually helps me through it. She guides me through it; she doesn't go “You've got to go like that, that and that” really quickly. Now I can do my homework on my own. We get a card, like in nearly every task we do, we need to sign it off to say that we finished it [task]. So, then she'll [teacher] sign it and if we haven't finished something she can— like, I'll take it up to her and she can help me through it. I reckon my teacher is very good, yeah. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

Toby also spoke of being acknowledged by the teacher for ‘good’ work and ‘good’ behaviour in his classroom. He said his teacher has a good system for the students to
do their work. He explained the system as one where the student would get points when he or she finished all of their tasks and once the student had enough points he or she was given a reward. I was curious about who made the rules and whether the children were consulted in this process. Toby explained to me that the teacher made the rules for what is considered ‘good’ and the teacher could also add negatives if someone was not doing the ‘right’ thing and points were taken away.

I think it is good because you get lollies for doing our work and I think it is a good way to get other kids to finish off their work, or to do their work. They [students] could just sit there, listen, not do anything, do a test and like all the other schoolwork just does maybe a quarter of it and just leave it and they never do it. I think it is a good system. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

Just say I’ve been doing work she’ll say, “Oh, Toby, you’ve been doing your work very well so I’m going to give you a positive”. But, I’ve got a boy in my class and they are not very good friends at all and they sort of get into fights a bit. Shaun whacked a ruler over Josh’s face and so Josh swore at him before that. Sadly, the teacher had to add another system thing onto it. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

Toby told me he likes it when adults treat him fairly and acknowledge when he is doing the ‘right’ thing. He likes it when the teacher can explain things to him so that he can do his schoolwork correctly, however, there have been times when he thought he was doing well at school but that was not reflected on his report. He doesn't think that was fair. In the past when I’ve had some teachers I reckon I’ve done very well.
that year. For my report they’ve given me below expected standards. I don’t think that is fair. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

**Places Toby Occupied with Adults**

Toby particularly enjoyed his time going to school in Victoria. He liked the way the day was set out for the students.

Like how they had the days planned out. Like in the morning when we got there we'd get to like - they'd take us out onto the oval or somewhere and we'd get to do an activity, like we might do skipping or we might do kilometre club where we have try and run a kilometre and a half in 15 minutes. Sometimes you might get two kilometres, sometimes I got two kilometres or two and a half kilometres in 15 minutes so that was good.

You'd do dancing. So you'd try out new things. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

In our second interview Toby told me that he does not really have conversations with his teachers except about school work. However, he did tell me about one of his teachers talking to him about cricket. He said he thought she spoke to him about the cricket because her son plays on the same team. However, he spoke about conversations he has with his cricket coaches. He said they ‘kind of’ consult with him.

Yeah, they ask me what I think and they ask me where I’d like to bat.

They’re really good because they are not like, you have to bat first and that person has to go there. They’re always asking somebody, my opinion, or somebody’s opinion. It’s really good. (Toby FI 2 02/10/13)
I was curious as to why he had those kinds of conversations with his coaches but not with his teachers. The next time I saw Toby I asked him what he thought. He told me he thought it had to do with the surroundings. School, from his perspective, was a strict and more serious place and he didn’t really want to talk with the teachers about what he did on the weekend or things like that. He said, “Not everyone is your friend in the classroom” (Toby IC 23/08/14), and he wouldn’t want to talk like that in front of his classmates.

**Narrative Account of Olivia: Just be Happy**

Olivia was seven years old at the beginning of my study. I had spoken to Olivia about my work at the university and why I wanted to know about how adults talk with children. I recall one time when I had just started teaching at the university I asked her, “If there is one thing I could teach my students about working with children what would that be” and without hesitation she said, “Tell them not to yell at us and let us play more” (RD 02/07/13).

I also spoke to her about being part of my research and what I was hoping to discover by talking to adults and children about conversations they have. I spoke to her about this, hoping she would not worry too much about having the ‘right’ answers to the questions when it came time for the interview. The day I asked her to read the information sheet she took the process seriously. She read aloud the information sheet, and asked me questions with regards to where the interview would take place and what questions was I going to ask her. Olivia told me she was nervous, as she didn’t know what questions I would ask her. I told her not to worry, as there were no
right or wrong answers. I only wanted to know about what it is like for her when she talks to adults.

**Life Experiences**

From previous conversations with Olivia and from her lifeline drawing, I learned Olivia has a mum, dad and two brothers; one older and one younger. Her first memories were going on a boat with her family and going to day care prior to going to school. She spoke about going to school in a positive way, except she had to do a lot of maths and she “hates maths!” She particularly liked prep, as she put it, “Prep was really fun because we didn’t have to do any work” (Olivia FI1 27/7/13). She spoke about her prep teacher as being very nice because she did not shout and her teacher, “did this red peg thing. If you didn’t follow the rules you would get a red peg. If you got a red peg you had sit out time. I never ever ever got a red peg” (Olivia FI1 27/7/13).

Olivia spoke about going on lots of holidays with her family and friends. She told me she really liked going to go to the Gold Coast for her dad’s birthday and to Victoria to visit her grandparents. This past year she went to live in Victoria with her family, as her grandfather was not well. She spoke of starting a new school there, which she thought was a very good school. She was in a mixed grade class and her uncle knew her teacher.

> It was a good school. It had two grades mixed together. Like I was in three so I had three and four. My teacher was Miss Tally and my other teacher was Mr Carmen. My uncle knows Mr Carmen as he played golf with him. (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)
Other memories that she had on her lifeline included, being in a dance concert and a sports carnival, where she came second in her race. She also mentioned having grandparents day at her school recently and was pleased that I came in place of her grandparents. There was a running carnival that day and she came in fifth position. One of the things I noticed about Olivia’s timeline was how much she was in the present, as the things she drew were more about everyday things happening now and not so much what has happened in the past.

**Conversations with Adults**

Talking to Olivia about conversations she has with adults, she mainly spoke of conversations she has had with her mother and father, and also conversations she has had with some of her teachers. From our conversation about her teachers, it became obvious that the one thing she did not like about conversations with the “strict” teachers, as she referred to them, was that she didn't want them to shout at her. She didn’t like how that makes her feel and it seems she cannot understand why teachers have to speak to her in that tone of voice.

Like if you have a teacher that’s really strict, you don’t want them to shout at you. You want them to be nice and not shout. Just give them [children] the work and then if it’s not as they [teacher] expected, you know you, just give it back to them [children] and say, “Please go and do this again”. (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)

Olivia told me the people who do not like her will shout at her, and the adults that like her are really nice and do not talk to her in a mean way. When people are nice to her it
makes her feel happy and when they are mean to her she does not want to be around them. She likened this idea to her friends, in that when they [her friends] are mean to her she does not want to play with them.

   Like if they are being mean to me, I would just go away and play with someone else. But sometimes other people are mean to other people that I play with. So, I just tell them that “maybe you’re hurting their feelings so can you please stop that”. (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)

Olivia spoke about feeling scared when the teacher spoke harshly to her and described this very well with an imitation of how the teacher spoke to her.

   I accidentally made a mistake in my book. Then he [teacher] thought that I was like Jack or someone else in my class. He was like “Hey, what did you do that for?” I’m like, “Because I know how to do it”. So then he got cross at me. Then he realised that it was me, Olivia. So then he's like, “Oh, that's OK”. (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)

The conversations Olivia has with her parents made me think she has a close relationship with them. Conversations with her parents often happen when she comes home from school, and they [parents] from work. Olivia told me other conversations happen at the dinner table or just when something pops into her head.

   Sometimes I ask mum about her day and my brothers about their day.
   They always say “Yeah, it was” - the boys say that “yeah, good”.
   Otherwise, then they say, “Oh, I had a horrible day” [laughs]. Then mum and dad - they'll say - dad will say, “Yeah, OK”. Mum says “Yeah, I had a
cruisey day, but it was a bit busy”. Then, usually, someone else says “how was your day?” (to her). (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)

According to Olivia, conversations that happen at the dinner table are often about what they (family) are planning to do on the weekend.

Sometimes what we're doing on the weekends, like maybe if we're going to the beach with our friends or going to a party or somewhere like that. We ask them [parents], “Can we maybe have this person over?” or see if we can go over there. They'll usually try and organise it. Sometimes things will just pop into my head [and I] will go have a talk with mum about it. (Olivia FI1 27/7/13)

Places Olivia Occupied with Adults

I was curious to find out from Olivia if things could be different in the way adults talk or interact with children. She gave this some serious thought. She focused on what goes on at school between the children and the teachers, and how the teachers could treat the children different. She told me, “Maybe the teachers could do something for the ‘good’ kids, the ones that are ‘good’ all of the time”. I believe she was identifying with the children that are good all of the time.

To do ‘something for the good kids’, Olivia talked about having a point system for the good kids, which they don't have in her class. Olivia told me in her class if you are ‘not good’ the teacher moves you to another place in the classroom. This made me curious about what was considered ‘good’ and what was considered ‘not good’ in the classroom and who made those decisions. Olivia told me the teacher makes the rules,
however, on further discussion Olivia told me if she was given an opportunity to make some of the rules for the classroom, she would add “not saying nasty words” as she does not like when the boys do that.

Olivia likes it when the teachers are engaging, as she said she likes it when they do more than just write on the board and talk at them. She felt that the teachers need to show them some clips or something to help the children understand what they are trying to teach them, as “it would be more interesting and less boring”. Olivia also said it would be good if the teachers would “give [her] a welcome in the morning when [she] came into the classroom”. Olivia spoke about liking the teachers that play with the children. “Mr F lets us play in the classroom, he plays basketball with us in the classroom” (Olivia FI1 27/7/13). Olivia’s final comment about what could be different in the way teachers are with the children, she said for them to “be happy!” (Olivia FI1 27/7/13).

I had been thinking about why the children did not talk about having conversations with their teachers. I had a chance to ask Olivia and she told me that she did not really have conversations with her teacher other than maybe saying “have a good weekend” at the end of the week. She told me that her teacher did not have time to talk to her. Olivia said lunchtime is too short, as the students just have enough time to eat their lunch, and that was about it. After school, her teacher has to do bus duty so she has to leave the classroom straight away. I commented with, “What you are telling me is that the reason you don’t have conversations with your teachers is because the teachers don’t have the time to have conversations with you?” She agreed.
Narrative Account of John: Playfulness is Important

John was five years old at the commencement of this study. He too has been a friend of mine all of his life. I have had many conversations with him and I find him to be very insightful as he thinks a lot about things that often amaze me. For example, sitting around the table having lunch one day, John asked me, “Do you go to university?” I said, “Well you know I teach at a university”, and he said, “Yes I know that, but do you go to university?” (RD 21/05/13) I said, “Do you mean am I studying at university?” He said, “Yes”. I told him I was studying and he responded with “What are you going to be?” I told him I was studying to learn how to be a researcher and I was doing research about what happens when adults and children have conversations. I asked him if he would like to be part of my research and he seemed to be excited to be asked to be one of my participants. However, on the day of the two formal interviews John was not as engaged as the two older children. However, he did tell me a few insightful things about his life, and some of his thoughts about the conversations and interactions he has had with his family, teachers, relatives and adult friends.

Life Experiences

At his first interview, John was not interested in drawing a lifeline so instead I asked him some questions about his life. He told me he was in grade one and he liked going to school because he sees his friends there. He told me he has two adult friends, one is kind of bossy and the other one is a bit mean sometimes, but only sometimes.
The other adult he mentioned was his grandma, as they had just got back from staying with her when his grandpa was sick. He said he liked visiting his grandparents because he had a lot of fun when he was down there.

It was fun, the most fun bit was when I got to drive the car. The first time I drove it, my uncle was taking off around in circles and I pushed the rev too fast. [I] got to ride on the quad bike and go yabby fishing. (John FI 1 27/10/13)

He said he liked being with his uncle because his uncle lives on a farm and he took him fishing and to feed the cows and the bull. John told me his two favourite things to do were going fishing and riding his bike.

**Conversations with Adults**

I asked John if he could tell me about a conversation he has had with an adult. He told me his grade one teacher was kind and nice, as she does not shout, however, he didn’t talk to her much. He told me he has conversations with his mum and dad about his day at school. When I asked him if he had any conversations with his uncle he said he “not much” (John FI 27/07/13).

At the second interview John said he had a new teacher, so I asked him about his new teacher. He said she was nicer than the other one.

She doesn’t shout, she is a bit strict, like just say you weren’t doing the right thing [she asked you to do], except that doesn’t usually happen, she will shout. (John F2 2/10/13)
He went on to tell me he does not have conversations with his teacher. John said the other adult he has had conversations with was me. He said he has conversations about all kinds of stuff with me. Having a conversation with John at another time he told me he talks with his two adult male neighbours, mainly about fishing. He spoke about Matthew telling him fishing stories about when he was a child, which John thought were very funny stories and he liked that. He also told me about the “mean” man who lives down the street that he is too scared to talk to. He told me about one day when his friend’s dog went into his [the mean man’s] yard, he came out and said “COME HERE” but they were too scared so they ran away (John FI 2 2/10/13).

**Places John Occupied with Adults**

John spoke about a male teacher he has at his school now, that he really likes because, “He is more chilled out and likes to ride bikes and plays games with the kids”. He also told me that the “girl teachers were more serious and boring” at his school (John IC 23/08/15).

**My Reflections on the Narrative Accounts**

As I reflected on the stories of my participants I found I was still curious about things they had said and observations I had made. There were still gaps and further pieces to the inquiry that I felt had been left hanging. I returned to some of my participants to ask for further clarification, or went back into my memory of conversations I had with them previously to help me check my thoughts with them and to inquire beyond the stories told at the time. Reading and re-reading the data, I found I was constantly thinking about what had been discussed. Coding and re-coding illuminated a number
of themes within and across the stories. To help me understand the themes I went back to my three questions:

(a) How does an adult’s image of the child affect their ability to converse with and listen to children?

(b) What are the features of the adult-child relationship that impact on conversations between adults and children?

(c) How do contexts enable and constrain adults and children’s conversation?

What have the participants told me that relate to these three questions that will help me understand the broader question about how conversations shape an adult’s perspective to understand a child’s perspective? Secondly, how will this knowledge impact or influence social change; where a child’s right to participation is upheld and children are listened to seriously?

After writing the final storied accounts I used the format of the conceptual theoretical framework for the inquiry (see Figure 3.1) and expanded the ideas contained within it to include my analysis work. This is illustrated in Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.1. Reconceptualisation of Conceptual Theory

**Themes and Subthemes**

The term ‘resonant themes’ is used to describe what resonates within and across the participants’ stories. Resonant themes, according to Clandinin (2013) are not only what is similar across the stories, but also refer to the intersections, differences,
overlaps, gaps, and tension that exist within and across the stories. By weaving the themes amid the stories, patterns across the stories began to emerge and deepened my understanding of the participants’ lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013). By listening to and co-constructing the participants’ stories with them, some of the broader social contexts or metanarratives were revealed. I initially identified 12 resonant themes: (1) time, (2) trust, (3) play, (4) safe spaces, (5) talking and listening, (6) sense of agency, (7) power, (8) marginalisation, (9) labelling, (10) supporting/guidance, (11) rights, and (12) self-awareness. After re-reading and coding the data I identified two main themes each, with a number of subthemes. The two themes that emerged were: (a) adult-child relationships that build trust, and (b) power and agency between adults and children.

As Clandinin (2013) suggests in narrative inquiry, thinking with stories is about thinking relationally. Narrative researchers need to think within and outside the stories simultaneously.

When we begin to engage in narrative inquiry we need to be attentive to thinking with stories in multiple ways, toward our stories, toward the other’s stories, toward all the narratives in which we are embedded as well as toward what begins to emerge in our shared lived and told stories. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30)

In the following two chapters I bring together the stories of my participants as they sit side by side, to uncover the themes and patterns, and how they intersect with one another. The broader contexts and meanings in which their stories are embedded will
be analysed using the literature and a critical constructivist lens to help me to gain knowledge of what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective.
Chapter 6: Building a Trusting Relationship Between Practitioners and Children

In the preceding chapter, I presented the narrative accounts of the participants in this study. In the following two chapters I inquire further into their stories to unpack the themes: (1) adult-child relationships that build trust, and (2) power and agency between adults and children; and patterns discovered from my analysis of the field texts. I have used the literature and a critical constructivist perspective to delve deeper into the layers of meaning that are interwoven within and across the participants’ stories from the broader social and theoretical contexts.

The features of the adult-child relationship that builds trust, as told by the adult participants included four subthemes: (a) how the conversations adults have with children build trust and respect, (b) the significance of safety of the space for conversations to happen, (c) playful behaviours, and (d) using interpersonal skills of being open and honest when talking with and listening to children. Interwoven into all of these narrative threads is the notion of self-awareness.

The children expressed their understanding of a trusting adult-child relationship by how they felt about the interactions and conversations they had with the adults in their everyday lives. The subthemes discussed by the children included: (a) the nature of the conversation and attitudes of the adult towards them, (b) safe environments, and (c) playful behaviours. By weaving the threads together, and using the literature to discuss the findings, a space was opened up to help me uncover the many layers of meaning embedded within and outside the participant stories. This also illuminated
the tension or conflicts that arise when the participant’s stories ‘bump up’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006) against the broader metanarratives embedded in the participants’ stories.

Discussing features of the adult-child relationship that build trust will be the overall intention of this chapter. In this chapter, I first examine the data collected within and across the participants’ understanding of how conversation contributes to building a trusting relationship between an adult and a child. Second, this chapter explores the settings or places that promoted or constrained conversations that build trust between children and adults. Interpretation of the broader context around adult-child relationships will also be a feature of this chapter, including the metanarratives embedded in the stories. I will draw from the narrative accounts in the previous chapter, along with the literature and a critical constructivist lens to discuss the findings for this inquiry.

**Building Trust**

All of the adult narrative accounts enunciate the importance of trust. In this section, I draw on the voices of the adult and child participants to understand their experiences of building trust. From listening to the stories of the adult participants, I came to understand that there are many features involved in having conversations with children that promote trust. I understand the conversations between adults and children were only one part of building trust between them. The adult participants told me, when trust was established between a child and an adult it promoted deeper conversations, as the children were more willing to open up to them. This helped them to hear and understand who the child is and what the child knows. However,
there were other conditions mentioned by both the adult and child participants, which needed to be in place for the conversation to take place and for trust to be established.

All of the adult participants described how they consciously considered the manner to which they established trust with children. For the adult participants, the conditions for building trust with a child or group of children included: (a) getting to know each child, (b) safe spaces for conversations to take place, (c) opportunities for play and entering into the child’s world, and (d) the adult’s opportunities and skills in having open and honest dialogue with them. As described by Natasha, “The conversation is only the beginning” (Natasha FI 22/11/12).

The children spoke about trust, in terms of whom they would trust to tell things to and what they liked or disliked about the way adults interacted with them. For example, all of the children commented on not liking adults that were mean and shouted at them. Trust, for them, was displayed by an adult being supportive, acknowledging them for doing the ‘right thing’ and giving them ‘important’ things to do, indicating the adult trusts the child to perform a task and the child trusts the adult to help them know how to be successful in their everyday lives. The children spoke about liking adults that treated them nicely and fairly. All of the children liked adults that displayed playful behaviours and played with them, indicating to the children the adult liked being with them.

When considering the concept of trust, it could be argued, in order to build a trusting relationship between an adult and a child, both the adult and child need to experience
and feel trust; it is a reciprocal response to the quality and reliability of the people encountered in one’s life. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) point out that:

> Trust can only be nurtured gradually and carefully, building strong relationships takes time and is a joint process, requiring both parties to trust the other person and to be trusted by him or her. Placing trust in children, in their competence and responsibility, can be an empowering experience for them, not only strengthening the relationship but also for their self-confidence. (p. 43)

Hence central to an adult-child relationship is the development of trust, and building trust takes time to get to know and understand each other.

Adult responsiveness towards a child is a building block for children to develop trust as suggested by participants. They highlighted that getting to know and understand each child as an individual was an important element in relationship building. Furthermore, neuroscience tells us that children benefit from having multiple attachments and secure relationships (Centre on the Developing Child, 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001, van Nijnatten, 2013). The quality of these relationship will determine the emotional connection the child will have with his or her parents, teachers, peers, and other significant people in his or her life (Centre on the Developing, 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001). These early experiences will also lay the foundation for all aspects of development and influence one’s ability to build trusting relationships in later life (Centre on the Developing Child, 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001). Thus, adults
bring with them knowledge about trusting relationships based on their own past experiences, which are deeply influenced by experiences during their childhood. Children will also bring their own experiences on what they have learnt about trusting adults from their everyday experiences with them.

**Trust and Childhood Experiences**

I had asked the participants to draw their lifeline mainly for the purpose of getting to know them better and for building a relationship with them. Through this process, it opened up a conversation into how the adult participant’s childhood experiences influenced the way he or she worked with children. For example, Natasha’s memories of her transient childhood led her to reflect on her relationships with children.

> I think about how my father grew up and his life, I think probably talking to anyone might have been hard for him, so I guess it is a bit of a cycle there. I think that’s why it highlights to me the importance of understanding how a child feels about a particular topic and making time to hear them and understand them so they are not left out. (Natasha FI 22/11/12)

Angus told his story in terms of how his past influenced the way he is as a parent and the way he builds relationships with children.

> Why I talk to kids the way I do now and the way I try to communicate with them has a lot to do with my background. In that as a child I wasn’t, I guess, guided or listened to and all that. So, I am the complete opposite. Everything in my life has been influenced by my background especially with kids. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)
Thomas spoke regularly in our conversations about how his traumatic childhood influenced the way he is with his own children and the way he works with children. “

My early years have influenced my work that I do now. A lot of young people that I work with are going through some of the issues that I went through when I was younger. (Thomas F2 04/09/13)

Sarah’s reference to her childhood also spoke about how her past experiences as a child and a young person have influenced how she works with children.

I think moving has influenced where I am at now. Probably in my work with children, because I do make sure that, or I try and make sure I’m consistent because I remember growing up there wasn’t a lot of consistency, so I know that I do focus on being consistent for families. By that consistency, I mean my own behaviour. I make sure it’s consistent. I try and promote those healthier dynamics for all children and I guess that ties in with consistency and the safe space because I reflected on growing up and not feeling there was a space for me. (Sarah F2 30/08/13)

As I discussed the adult participant’s childhood experiences with them, it illuminated for me the importance of considering one’s previous experiences, not in a habitual way (Scharmer, 2009); as only using habitual judgments one is less likely to hear or consider interpretations and options different to the ones they know and trust (Senge et al., 2007). Learning to recognise habitual ways of thinking, learning to ‘suspend our voice of judgement’, and to recognise how decisions are made, is a type of ‘self-awareness’ or the ability to listen to oneself (Scharmer, 2009). This way of listening
enables adults to understand how their childhood experience and other past experiences influence how they are with children in the present. This also helps the adult to be able to recognise how a child’s individual lived experience will influence the child’s ability to build trust with them.

The stories told by the adult participants about their childhood experiences brings clarity to the theoretical notion that experience grows from previous experiences and leads to future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). There is always a past or a history that is ever changing, which influences the present. Moving backwards and forwards between the personal and the social (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) helped me to think about how self-awareness contributes to shaping an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective. As discussed in the communication literature, to understand another’s perspective one’s ability to be a reflexive listener (Barge & Little, 2008; Holman, 2000) is a key component. This also aligns with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000, p. 184) notion of ‘wakefulness’; listening to children’s stories challenges the listener to be reflexive of his or her assumptions and “necessitates ongoing reflection”.

In this inquiry, the concept of self-awareness was articulated by the participants in more than one way. By talking with and listening to the participants stories, the notion of presence started to emerge. “Presence is about deep listening, of being open beyond one’s pre-conceptions and historical ways of making sense” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 13). Presence is established when the practitioner has developed self-awareness; where he or she knows where they are coming from and how the past influences the way they are in the present. They are aware of how their own lived
experience can both hinder and help to listen to what a child has to tell them. The adult begins to understand that children make sense of their world in a similar fashion. In presence, we also come to know the world as having a historical account of how the broader society we live in influences who we are and where we might be headed (Senge et al., 2005). These metanarratives change over time and place, thus being aware of how things came to be is important if we are to be open to other ways of thinking about children and childhood.

Children speak about, and make sense of, their lives from their lived experiences. If the adult understands how presence works it will enable them to understand where a child is coming from in his or her thinking, actions and reactions; enabling the adult to gain insight into a child’s worldview. Conversations between adults and children open up possibilities for meaning-making (van Nijnatten, 2013). For this to happen the adult needs the ability to reflect and listen simultaneously; to suspend judgement where the normal flow of thought is suspended so that new ways of thinking can emerge (Senge et al., 2005). Suspension of judgement is about noticing our own thoughts and, as a result, those thoughts have less influence on what we see and do (Rinaldi, 2001; Senge et al., 2005). Through talking with and listening to children, a connection can be built that enables adults and children to suspend the ‘voice of judgement’ together and meaning making emerges.

The child participants—from their life line drawing, and from the stories they told about their interactions with their parents, teachers and adult friends—suggest they have established secure attachments in their early years. Developing secure attachments in early childhood and its link to building trust is well researched and
documented in research and literature (Centre on the Developing Child, 2010; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001). As discussed in the brain development research review, the capacity to form and maintain healthy relationships with an empathic perspective for others is a fundamental capacity for human interactions (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). The creation of a core neurobiological capacity for healthy, empathic relationships requires healthy caregiving and parenting in the first three years of life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b, 2010; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). Responsive early relational experiences determine a child’s capacity to form close attachments and build trust with others.

Furthermore, children’s ability to build trust is noticed in the kinds of conversations children have with adults. As discussed by Berk (2013, p. 299), “as children talk with adults about the past, they not only expand their autobiographical recollections but also create a shared history that strengthens a close relationship and self-understanding”. Berk (2013) also suggests that children who have established secure bonds with significant adults will engage in more detailed conversations about past experiences than those with insecure bonds. This aligns with the notion presented in brain research, that establishing secure attachments between an adult and a child takes place in an environment of secure relationships (National Scientific Centre on the Developing Child, 2004a; Centre on the Developing Child; 2010, 2016; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001).

Living alongside and conversing with the child participants led me to believe that they had developed secure attachments with significant adults in their lives. I asked the
children to draw their lifeline, as I was mainly interested in what would be significant to them in terms of their life experiences and which adult relationships were important to them. Toby and Olivia drew very detailed lifelines. Olivia drew two, as she wanted to do another one while Toby was doing his. John was not interested in drawing his lifeline; he chose to talk about his life rather than draw it. What was similar across each of the lifeline drawings and conversations about their lives, was that they all spoke about going places with their family, extended family, and friends. They all spoke about having fun with them.

I also noticed that the children told their stories mainly from the present, particularly John, the youngest child participant. As I lived alongside these children, I have found it was during our informal conversations when the children really opened up to me about what was happening for them in their everyday lives. This notion of ‘going alongside’ the children is found in the literature as a strategy used for practitioners to build trust with children. It is seen as a strategy used to understand each child and practice collaboration with them (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Children are building their identity understanding by what others say to them. This happens through interpersonal communication with those around them and the way their position in society has been socially constructed. Social meanings about a person’s status in society, and the identity that it produces, are conveyed through a child’s relationships and interchanges with others (James & James, 2012; Petrie, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013). This exercise with the children illustrated how the children told the story of themselves from a personal and social context across time. Their stories mainly took place on the landscapes of home and school and with adults that inhabited those landscapes. Trust was not always spoken about explicitly. I
interpreted what the children told me by what was implied; how he or she felt and related to the adults they encountered in their everyday experiences.

**Trust and Respect**

The children spoke about trust in terms of who they would trust to tell things to, and what they liked or disliked about the way adults interacted with them. Trust was displayed by an adult acknowledging them for doing the ‘right thing’ and giving them ‘important’ things to do; indicating that adults show trust in children to perform tasks and children trust adults to help them know how to be successful in their everyday lives. As discussed by Clandinin et al. (2006), trusting themselves in a new situation may be of concern to young children as they need to know how to act or do something that is unfamiliar to them. Therefore, the child will turn to someone they trust to seek help. The children spoke about liking the adult that guided them through unfamiliar territory and trusting them with important information.

Toby spoke about trust as an empowering experience; he liked it when an adult gave him responsibility to do something important.

There’s one teacher, in one week he’s chosen me twice to do pretty important stuff, he is the religion teacher. I think he sort of knows I can, he goes, that boy there, [he] knows he’s [Toby] trustful. He knows I’ll get the job done and stuff like that. (Toby F2 2/10/13)

Toby also spoke of his sport coaches having trust in him, as they always ask for his opinion or somebody’s opinion when making decisions about the game. Olivia described trust in terms of respect and how she would like her teachers to interact with
her. For example, she suggested, “a nice good morning welcome when you come into the classroom” (Olivia FI 1 27/07/13).

Olivia told me several times throughout the interviews and other conversations I have had with her, that she does not like it when a teacher shouts at her. This could also be interpreted as the teacher being disrespectful. Children may not trust the teacher in this sense, as they do not know how the teacher will react to them. Olivia said she felt scared if a teacher reacted to her in a negative way.

He [teacher] was like, “Hey what did you do that for?” I [said] “Because I didn’t know how to do it”. So, then he got cross at me. (Olivia F2 02/10/13)

John expressed similar concerns, he told me did not like it when his teacher shouted, which speaks to not feeling safe in the classroom and not being respected as a person.

In the children’s stories, it was their teachers that were identified as people who were the least trustworthy. As discussed in a study by Moore, McArthur, Noble-Carr, and Harcourt (2015), it was teachers, coaches and police that often used their power as adults to intimidate children and young people, particularly children and young people who were challenging their authority. Children and young people felt that to be safe they needed to be around adults they could trust to react to them in a positive way; familiarity and predictability were key characteristics of safe people (Moore et al., 2015). Furthermore, children said they did not place their trust in adults until they got to know them (Moore et al., 2015). Hence if a reciprocal relationship is at the
heart of trust, it is important that practitioners and children get to know and respect each other.

Conversations as a Means of Building Trust

Conversations with children is a means of building trust and being respectful to them. Natasha spoke of several experiences she had in conversation with children where she felt there was trust between them.

To begin the relationship, they need to want to engage with me. We spend lots of time together. I think time is a big part of building a relationship, it doesn’t have to be hours but consistent. I think trust is the biggest one I can see because if they don’t trust me they are not going to form a real relationship with me. (Natasha F1 22/11/12)

Angus spoke in a similar way about building trust through conversations he has with his son. “I think when you share those things you bond. You have a father-son bond anyway that bond just grows stronger” (Angus F1 02/11/12). However, Angus spoke of many experiences he had where the opportunity to build trust with children was constrained. In some of his work he was not given access to the same children on a regular basis, or he was not given enough time to build the kind of relationship he felt was conducive to building trust, therefore, meaningful conversations between them did not happen. Angus felt he could not get to know what a child was thinking or feeling because of those constraints.

On the other hand, Thomas felt he could build trust with a child in a short time. He did this by sharing his own experiences with them and noticing when something was
not ‘right’ for them. He felt sharing information, noticing, and listening to children built the context for children to trust him.

A girl I had in my class, I said to her one day, something is not quite right with you, should we go and see the guidance officer, it is just not right. You need to tell somebody as it is affecting your school work. She said, my stepdad is interfering with me. I thought thank you for telling me. You have done the right thing because it is going to stop now. (Thomas FI 14/08/13)

Sarah also spoke about building trust as an important aspect of her work with children. She spoke of needing time to understand each child by having conversations with them. She does this by listening and accepting them and “not feeling challenged by it [child’s behaviour] or trying to control it [child’s behaviour], allowing them to be who they are” (Sarah FI 1 13/03/13).

Practitioners’ may not have the skills to build trust with children through their conversations with them. Studies have found that practitioners do not necessarily have the skills to talk with and listen to children, and often have a very narrow view of what to talk to children about (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Lefevre, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Hence, if practitioners and children are to build the kind of relationships necessary to strengthen their capacity to build trust and create collaborative partnerships with children, relationship stability and the kinds of conversations they engage in may need to be broadened. Rather than the narrow view held by practitioner’s that tend to focus solely on their profession-specific practices, there is a need to include conversations about what is happening for children in their
everyday lives (Boddy, 2011; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015) in order to strengthen the child’s position to build trust and respect with them.

Trust is a problematic concept. As discussed, the development of trust is built on one’s individual experiences, however, it is further complicated by the socially constructed concepts of ‘adulthood’ and ‘childhood’ where both children and adults may find that assumptions about whom they can trust are made for them (Alanen, 2001, 2011; Mayall, 2001). How ‘adulthood’ and childhood’ are constructed, and the metanarratives surrounding their production, plays a part in building trust between adults and children. As discussed by Mayall (2002), children in their relationships with adults, may find adult’s understanding of the social world stems from their past experience of childhood, which adds complexity to the adult’s ability to understand or support children in the present. This is often seen in the way children are positioned both within and outside the home, where adult authority and social policies are constructed by adults drawing on their own past experiences, ideologies and goals (Mayall, 2002), with the views of children excluded. Mayall, (2002, p. 28) suggests, “The extent to which children’s rights to protection, provision and participation are respected at home and school varies according to individual adult perspectives, resources and the local environment”. From this way of thinking, social policies constructed by adults for children, may not necessarily refer directly to the present cohort of children and their experiences (Mayall, 2001, 2002). This in turn may be one of the conditions that works against building trusting relationships between adults and children. These notions were highlighted in the stories told by the adult and child participants in regards to safe spaces.
Safe Spaces

When adults and children spend time together, adults often define the space they occupy. In these spaces, children also interact with adults in an adult-defined way (Moss & Petrie, 2002), in other words, they learn about their ‘place’ in that space. The way in which spaces for children and adults are created depends on both the cultural and political views held by policy makers, lawmakers and the adults in ‘charge’ of that space (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Wyness 2006). This is evident in most settings where children find themselves; home, childcare, schools, and on the sports and playgrounds that children occupy. Often what is encountered in the spaces designed for children is a clear line of authority that minimises children’s agency and powers of negotiation (Wyness, 2006). Wyness (2006, p. 145) argues that “schools reinforce the subordinate status of children in a way that rules, values and working routines are oriented around the need to act on and position children”. Management of children’s spaces takes on caregiving and teaching styles used to manage and control children by imposing rules and regulations that govern children’s behaviour in those spaces (Blatchford et al, 2016; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Wyness, 2006). However, in these spaces children often exercise their individual agency to disrupt the limitations put on them, resulting in what is often perceived by the adult as negative behaviour. Dealing with the behaviour then becomes the focus for the adult, and not necessarily what is happening in that space for the child or children.

The adult and child participants in this study spoke of spaces occupied by adults and children in both a positive and negative light. The adult participants described what a ‘safe space’ for children might look like from their perspective and how this contributed to their ability to build trust between them. The child participants
described what happened in the spaces they occupy with adults and how they felt about the adult’s actions towards them.

Creating safe spaces for children was evident in the stories told by all of the adult participants. A safe space was described by the adult participants as a space where children: (a) could be themselves, (b) where they were accepted for who they are, and (c) were given opportunities to experience a sense of belonging. Safe spaces for both adults and children were identified as one of the important conditions for building trust between them.

Natasha provides a space where children can come to talk to her when they choose, as opposed to being told or coerced into being there. She spoke of how children that were removed from class to ‘see’ the social worker would find it embarrassing; she would try to find other ways of connecting with a child on the child’s terms. Natasha also spoke of not seeing herself as someone who imposes the rules. She thought this helped children to relate to her better and that they were consequently more willing to talk with her than other adults they encounter in the school setting where she worked. As she put it:

I don’t see myself as the enforcer, that might help the kids relate [to me] a little more, I don’t know, but I am never the one that gives them a punishment for something. That could be the reason. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha spoke of the space she provided needing to be informal, calm and relaxing. This might be described as non-threatening, a place to talk and be together. A story
Natasha told about a girl that was not in her caseload, rather a child that decided on her own, to talk with Natasha. This happened on the playground, where Natasha says other children often come up and say hello to her. This particular girl continued to meet with Natasha on the playground “just to talk”. One day Natasha noticed the girl had a sore finger and “looked guilty”, as Natasha put it. Natasha said, “You look like something is bothering you”. The young girl sat beside her and said nothing.

The bell rang, she said I have to tell you the real reason and she told me the real reason and I was a little shocked and she could see that on my face. I said, “That sounds like it could be really dangerous and hurt. I am glad you are OK now but because someone has hurt you I will have to tell the principal”. And she said, “No I am just joking”. You could tell she didn’t want anyone else to know. As I said she wasn’t one of my clients and did not have one of those intense one-on-one sessions. It was quite different. As far as I am aware the principal spoke to her and what she said was true, she was scared as she was told not to tell anyone, the usual story. She still comes to say hi, she doesn’t stay as long anymore, not for the moment, but I think she might in the future. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

This story made me think about trust and how a child decides who they can trust. What made this girl think she could trust Natasha with her story? As we reflected together on this, Natasha thought it was because she wanders around the playground with the children; she “just hangs out with them”. She told me she has time in her job to sit down and talk and play with the children. “Just wandering around at break times meeting the children that I know and meeting their friends, introducing myself and
just getting to know them so they get to know me too. Being present helps” (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12).

This is consistent with the literature on attachment and building trust. It has been well documented, that children who have negative early attachment experiences are less likely to build trusting relationship as they grow older (Centre on the Developing Child, 2004b; Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001). The basic feelings of trust are directly shaped by interpersonal experiences, where children develop an internal working model of trust by having a safe haven where they can seek the proximity of a secure adult who promotes trust and security. As development is an ongoing process, secure relationships will continue to have a profound importance on the interpersonal and emotional development of all children. Hence for children to identify and understand their own emotions, read and accurately respond to others, and establish and maintain relationships (Centre on the Developing Child, 2004a; Moore et al., 2015), a secure environment with proximity to a trusting adult is imperative.

Angus spoke about working with children in residential care, where he felt that the framework used for practice was often dysfunctional for himself as a worker and for the children. The opportunities for children to experience a safe haven and close proximity to a trusted adult were limited.

People in those places, for me, should be working like parents, not like workers, not like employees. That’s the way we should be looking after kids, like parents do. Treating those kids differently to other kids is not actually doing them favours. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)
As a result of his work across residential and foster care, Angus came to believe that many of the places that adults and children occupied were not places where children might feel a sense of belonging or have trust in themselves or the adults meant to help them know how to act outside that space. As a result, children did not have the skills to transition out of care successfully.

So if a kid went out and punched the hell out of another kid the only consequence would be we’d have a chat with the child and say well, you know, “What is going through your mind when you did that and how can you do it better next time?” Rather than, “If you do that again there’s going to be other consequences”. Because he is not learning real consequences for his behaviour, he’s not actually learning much other than, if I do this again I’m just going to get spoken to again. They do it over the years, they treat those kids differently so then the kids don’t learn how to act and that’s why they don’t last in school. Most of them don’t go to school. All of the literature tells you children need boundaries, even teenagers, they might say they don’t, but they actually do. When you sit and have a heart to heart with them they want to know that they can’t cross that line. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Thomas spoke about the school he worked in as a teacher, describing his experience and that of many of his students as negative. He felt that this was because, not only were students labelled as ‘deadbeats’ or ‘no hopers’, but the space they found themselves in was not always what he would consider ‘emotionally’ safe.

I remember they gave me a class. There were all 30 boys. They said to me, “These are all the dead beats mate; just get them through the year.
Just get through this year. Don't worry about them just concentrate on their behaviour”. I was like… oh man deadbeats you are labelling them. That’s what they would tell me. They wrote a letter about it. The teacher said, “This kid is a no hoper”. I read it out to them [students] and I ripped it up and said, “this is what they think about you and this is what I think about the letter…CRAP. Let’s change this”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Thomas spoke of developing mutual respect with the children as a way of empowering the children in that space. He provided a safe space for them by giving children some control over their situation in the classroom, and opportunities to make decisions on what was possible for them. He also said he adapted his way of teaching so that the children were engaged with the subject matter, and in doing so saw a change in the children’s behaviour.

Just building that rapport up and getting to know them individually. The deputy principal would walk past and there they [students] are in silence, sitting there every single one of them reading. He said, “What’s going on here?” “Well we are on track now they [students] are reading something they want to read instead of something that is forced on them to read”. “My god how did you do this?” “It is just mutual respect; we are going to achieve something here. You have to adapt your teaching to suit them”. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Sarah took the time to observe and notice what was going on for each of the children before she made any decisions on how she would proceed with them. “Setting up that safe space and getting to know them and their behaviours is actually informing which
tools I think are good for them” (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13), in terms of addressing the reason the child had joined her group.

Acceptance is a really a big part of it instead of trying to correct or control the behaviour. I just call it a behaviour that does not reflect their highest good. Others it might be called being naughty. I don’t really see it like that. I just see it as something has happened and this behaviour has developed. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Sarah does not define the child by his or her behavior, she accepts children for who they are and supports them to be able to be successful in the space she occupies with them.

The children, on the other hand, talked about spaces they occupied with adults in a somewhat different way. They referred to what could be described as a safe space, as one where the adults didn’t shout at them, where children were acknowledged for being ‘good’, and where there were consequences for being ‘bad’. This could be interpreted as the child understanding the ‘rules’ of that space and what is expected of them. The children seemed to be comfortable with the adults making the rules, however, the adult needed to be fair in how the rules were applied and acknowledge the children who followed the rules. All three children said the teachers that were ‘nice’ were the ones that were not too strict, and took the time to explain and guide them with their schoolwork. For example, Toby spoke of his grade six teacher as someone that would take the time to help him with his schoolwork.

When I speak to my teacher in grade six now she helps me, she doesn’t like go “Oh, yeah, you just do it like this, you do that, you do that, and
that”. She actually helps me through it. I reckon my teacher is very good, yeah. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

When asked about the ‘rules’ that govern what goes on in the classroom, all of the children told me the teachers made the rules. Toby explained this as follows:

Just say I’ve been doing work she’ll say, “Toby, you’ve been doing your work very well so I’m going to give you a positive” and she’ll give myself a positive. But, I’ve got a boy named Stan in my class and I’ve got a boy called Jason in my class, but they’re not very good friends at all, and they sort of get into fights a bit. Stan whacked a ruler across Jason’s face and so Jason swore at him. Sadly, the teacher had to add another system thing onto it. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

Olivia also spoke of her teachers making the rules in the classroom and thought this was a good system. She identified as one of the ‘good’ students and appreciated when she was rewarded for her ‘good’ behaviour. However, there were times when she felt this system could be improved by acknowledging the children that were “good all of the time”. Considering the importance the children placed on the ‘reward system’ as a means of making the environment safe, opens up the broader metanarratives embedded in their stories. When you lay the stories alongside each other what becomes visible is what ‘bumps’ up against the dominant discourse around placing trust in children.

When children are not trusted to make decision about how they are with others, this leads to a kind of vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Centre on the Developing
Child, 2016), which is evident when the children said they felt sad or scared when the adult yelled or was not patient with them. The idea that the adult ‘knows best’ in terms of controlling the environment they occupy with children is a classic example of how ‘childhood’ and adulthood’ are socially constructed. This is clearly seen in the stories that took place on the school landscape and in children’s welfare services, as described by my participants. The subordinate position held by children in those spaces lends itself to both the dominant discourse around age as a determinant of capacity to be trusted, as well as the notion that behaviours needed to become productive; citizens are to be managed by those attributed with more authority (Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 2011).

Environments that are only managed by means of ‘power and control’ are not necessarily conducive for building trust between adults and children, nor are they necessarily safe places for them. Hence in order to build trust children need to be seen in their own right, rather than only making reference to their “futurity” as adults (Qvortrup, 2011, p. 23). It is by talking with, and listening to children, that their presence is made visible, and spaces can be made to feel safe.

**Talking and Listening**

In my experience of working alongside children, I have found that the use of generative listening was a key component for being able to listen to, and have some understanding of children’s perspectives. Generative listening is defined as listening to oneself, listening to others and, listening to what emerges from the group or collective (Scharmer, 2009). This level of listening, “requires us to access our open hearts and open will” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 13). It is our capacity to imagine
possibilities that emerge by focusing on “…getting our (old) self out of the way to open a space, a clearing, that allows for a different sense of presence to manifest” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 13). This practice is reflected in a person’s ability to engage in conversation with others where meaning-making is made possible by the co-construction of meaning. This entails the ability to reflexively listen to oneself in an interactive active communication process, which involves listening, interpreting and co-constructing meanings (Clandinin, 2013; Clark, 2005; Rinaldi, 2001; Scharmer, 2009; Tangen, 2008; van Nijnatten, 2013).

For meaning making to occur in conversation between adults and children, the adult must go beyond his or her individual world and mandated policies and frameworks to a place where he or she is attuned to what the world is like for the child. As discussed by Clark (2005, p. 491), “this exchange is not about extracting information from children in a one-way event but is a dynamic process which involves children and adults discussing meaning”. Therefore, to begin to understand the inner world of a child, adults need to listen to them (Clark et al., 2003; Rinaldi, 2001; Tangen, 2008; van Nijnatten, 2013).

Listening to children is an active process, where there is an exchange of meaning and an awareness of the temporal and social contexts embedded in the adult-child relationship (Clark, 2005; Rinaldi, 2001; Tangen, 2008). Listening includes all of our senses (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Scharmer, 2009), and is not limited to verbal exchanges but involves observation, noticing body language and other non-verbal ways that children communicate. For example, infants are skilled at conversations as they interact with their caregivers though eye contact, and responding to facial and
verbal remarks (Berk, 2013; Centre on the Developing Child, 2010). Advanced communication skills are present early in a child’s development if interactions with their parents, educators and other significant adults are sensitive and consistent. Children with disabilities or children that have been exposed to trauma may use other behavioural cues to communicate. Thus, listening to children about their inner worlds and experiences encompasses understanding how children choose to communicate, as well as a willingness to take the time to listen to them.

Furthermore, listening is a crucial element in building respectful relationships and trust. Pascal and Bertram (2009), suggests listening to children challenges assumptions and provides insights into how children think and about their capabilities and capacities for learning. Understanding talking and listening in this way provides children with an environment where they will feel confident and safe to express themselves.

As the stories of the participants continued to unfold the notion of using open and honest communication between an adult and a child as an effective way to build trust and mutual respect became evident. As mentioned previously, Natasha works in a school where there are a number of children that have experienced some form of trauma or neglect. Natasha told me about the process she uses in her first meeting with a child to establish trust. Natasha told me she talks openly with the child about what her responsibilities are in regards to the child’s safety and well-being. She also has posters on her wall that explain this process to the children that come to see her.

I always tell them if they tell me someone is hurting them I would have to tell someone. I would tell them who I would have to tell and what might
happen. I tell them I will ask their permission first and keep them in control of the situation as much as I have control to do so. I have posters on my wall in my room where I meet the children. Some children will read it every time they come to see me, with others they have done that once and they don’t want to hear about it again. But they still open up, some of them not all. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Angus also spoke of talking openly with children as a way of being respectful to them and acknowledging their capacity to solve problems and think for themselves. He spoke of his son often being in trouble at school. Angus uses talking with and listening to his son as a way of helping him to make decisions about his behaviour at school.

The teacher my son is with this year is very old-fashioned, a control freak, I call her. He [son] is always in trouble. I sat down with him a few times and said, “How are we going to stop you getting into trouble?” I asked him, “What are you doing that is upsetting the teacher all of the time?” He said he speaks out. “So, you don’t put up your hand, is that what you are saying?” He said, “Ya, but it seems I am the only one that gets told off and the only one that gets put in the corner”. I try to help him solve it. He is not silly he is a smart kid. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

Building mutual respect through a supported relationship was how Thomas described the way he was with children. In conversation with them he speaks to them “straight” as he put it, which he felt builds mutual respect and trust.

Just building that rapport and getting to know them individually and sort of saying to them, “Guys what they [other teachers] say about you is not
true. You can really do this; don’t let anybody knock you down”. It’s respect. I would tell them straight if they started to act up. Sometimes I would say to them, “This is shit”, you know, I would swear at them and say to them, “Your behaviour is crap”. I would talk to them straight. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Sarah attempts to understand a child’s world by being perceptive and noticing what is going on for them. This happens by listening to them with all of her senses.

Being present with them when they tell you those things and noticing. I feel like then they know I am listening. I think you have to use the same language as the child. For example, I have one of the students in my group, he has poor vocabulary and I think he doesn’t like speaking in front of groups. So, I have to be really careful with how I talk with him because I can easily talk to him not with him. You just have to be really perceptive as he will close down if you come on too strong, so I am more explorative with him. (Sarah FI 1 13/3/13)

Talking about everyday things can be seen as a means of getting to know another person and the beginning of building a trust and respect with them. Ulvik and Gulbrandsen (2015) suggest for conversations to be meaningful between a child and an adult, knowledge of a child’s everyday life and how he or she makes sense of it is essential. As discussed in the literature review, practitioners are often taught how to involve children in assessment and planning, or how to engage children in learning activities, however, how to talk with children is still dealt with in a very generalised way (Ruch, 2014; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). Ulvik and Gulbrandsen (2015, p.
216-217) argue that “making everyday life and its narratives a starting point for professional conversations is an available way to probe issues that have to do with emotional states and relationships”. Thomas puts this into context when he told me about his ability to listen to children, “I see a lot of kids that are into footy, but then you talk to them and there’s all this other stuff going on in their lives” (Thomas FI 2 04/09/13).

From Angus’s work experience, time to talk with and listen to children about their everyday experiences were not part of his conversations with them. He felt the framework of practice in his workplace was very narrow in terms of talking with and listening to children. He told me about the ‘life space interviews’ used in his work in residential care. For example, when a child had an “outburst” Angus was required to have a ‘life space interview’ with the child.

In those life space interviews, all we do is ask them [child] how they are feeling, it’s about verbal and non-verbal cues and things like that. Not really getting into the deep stuff, unless the kids actually come out and says stuff. I know kids reveal, but not very often they reveal things and you have to sort of, we don’t really know what the kids have been through. We have a simple report like a reference form where they come from and that is pretty much it. We don’t know what has happened in their life a lot of the times, it is really difficult. (Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

He didn’t have time to get to know each child due to the nature of his ‘casual’ employment, he was unable to form the kind of stable relationship he knew was crucial to having those meaningful conversations with children.
Sarah talked with and listened to children as part of her practice. She mentioned several times that building trust with children started with the conversations she had with them.

I sat down beside him and he was saying, “This happened and I don’t want to tell you, you will think I am bad”. I said, “You do not have to tell me if you don’t want to, if that is the way you feel, but I won’t think that [you are bad]”. So he started saying this happened and that happened. I just kept reflecting back what he was saying, “Oh that is what happened”, I used the same words and language as him. Then he said to me, “What am I going to do when you are not here?” (Sarah 15/03/13)

All of the three children indicated they had conversations with their parents. This usually took place when they got home from school or around the dinner table. The conversations they had were usually about their day, planning things for the weekend, or things they would like to do with their friends. When I asked Toby to tell me about a conversation he had with an adult, he told me about talking with his mother about his homework.

I get home from school and mum will let us play and then we’ll have to do our homework. Sometimes when I don’t understand something they [parents] start to explain it to me and I’ll remember it. Then they’ll go, “Oh no you’ve got to do it like this because that is how I [parent] learnt it”. But I learnt it a different way so we sort of get into a bit of a fight. I don’t like it when it happens. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)
Olivia and John both told me every time the family has dinner together they talk about their day.

Sometimes we talk about what we’re doing on the week-end. Like maybe if we are going to the beach with our friends or to a party or somewhere like that. We ask them, “Can we maybe have this person over or see if we can go over there”. (Olivia FI 2 202/10/13)

When I asked the children about talking with their teachers it produced a different set of responses from them.

We normally [talk] in class about class work and stuff like that. When I came back from regional cricket, she [teacher] said, “How did you go”? We spoke a little while about the cricket because her son does the cricket too. So sometimes we do have conversations but normally it’s just about school work and stuff like that. (Toby FI 2 02/10/13)

It [school] is more strict, more serious surroundings, so you don’t want to talk about stuff, like what you did on the weekend. But informal with the teacher if I saw them after school outside the school grounds I would have a conversation with them. (Toby IC 3 04/08/15)

Olivia told me she did not really have conversations with her teacher other than maybe saying have a good weekend at the end of the week. When I asked her why this was the case she told me it was because her teacher didn’t have time to talk with her.
Lunchtime is too short as they just get enough time to eat their lunch and that is about it and then after school she has to do bus duty so she has to leave the classroom straight away. (Olivia IC 3 23/08/15)

John told me he did not really talk with his teachers. He told me the reason he didn’t talk to them was because, “the girl teachers are more serious and boring” (John IC 2 23/04/8/15).

The idea that professional practice with children often focuses on a ‘professional specific’ aspect of children’s lives (Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015) corresponds with the children’s views on having conversations with their teachers. Studies conducted in the United Kingdom, of children’s interactions with their teachers in primary schools over the past 40 years, found that interactions between children and their teachers have increased significantly (Blatchford et al., 2016). However, these interactions are mainly seen as students listening and teachers talking, where pupils’ contributions to the conversations are brief and the style of conversation is very different to other contexts (Blatchford et al., 2016). There has also been concerns raised in Australia, where children in early care and education centres have low numbers of interactions with their educators (Early Learning: Everyone Benefits, 2016). Thus, for children to want to have a conversation with their teacher, the teacher would need to move beyond this ‘professional specific’ view of their interactions with children to one where children are treated as equal partners, and getting to know each child is privileged. When children are considered as equal partners in conversations with adults, they are given opportunities to influence what happens in the space they occupy with adults. This leads to adults and children joining together to do something that is important to them (Tholin & Jansen, 2012). From this perspective children are
trusted as participants in content-specific conversations, which creates a more
democratic process for building trust.

**Play and Playful Behaviours**

Building trust is not only about talking with and listening to children, but is also about
engaging in everyday activities with children as a way of getting to know them and
promoting dialogue with and between them. Play is considered as an essential
component and a right (see United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,
1989) in the everyday lives of children. Children’s play is understood as a democratic
process that is chosen freely by children and is personally directed by them (Ebbeck,
Gray (2013) goes further by describing play as a ‘sense of freedom’ as play is
motivated by what one wants to do as opposed to what one is obliged or told to do.
Play happens in the here and now, and is a democratic activity as all players must
agree with the rules, and if the rules change all players must agree to the change
(Lester & Russell, 2008). People can stop playing when they want, as it is self-
directed. Adults can play with children, however, as adults are often viewed by
children as in an ‘authoritative position’ children may feel less self-directed and feel
obliged to follow the adult’s rules (Gray, 2013; Lester & Russell, 2008). In this
inquiry, when the practitioners used play and playful behaviours to interact with
children, they found that the children related to them better. The child participants
also expressed their pleasure in playing and liked their interactions with the adults that
played with them.
Olivia liked going to prep class, saying “prep was really fun because we didn’t have to do any work”. Toby spoke very favourably about the school he went to for six months, as they did more fun things than in the school he regularly attends. John spoke about adults that played with him as fun and not boring.

From my ongoing relationship with Toby, Olivia and John I have come to know and build a relationship with them through play. We have spent a lot of time together doing fun things; during her interview Olivia recalled how she likes sending me her photos over Instagram as, “that is lots of fun”. She commented on a photo I had posted to her, where we were riding on a double seated electric bike with, “this was the best day of my life” (Research Diary 10/14).

It was evident in all of the conversations I had with John that play was at the forefront of his everyday life. He measured who he liked and what he talked to adults about in terms of the things he considered to be fun, with most of them revolving around fishing and other things he liked to do. He told me he thought the teachers should let them play more in school because “it is fun” (John FI 2 2/10/13).

Play, as discussed by the adult participants, was a tool used with a child or group of children in order to get to know them and to build trust with them. This could be considered as a shift in thinking about the space that children occupy with adults from an adult-directed space to a child-directed space, where play is seen as an important part of learning and where children are empowered by having some control over the space they occupy with adults (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Too often the structure and intentions of places adults and children occupy are not conductive to use play as a
means of building relationships; there is often a lack of understanding on the part of the adult as to what is meant by play and the level of control needed (Lester & Russell, 2008). In spaces where adults’ knowledge and acceptance of play as a means of building relationships, learning, wellbeing and community cohesion (Boddy, 2011; Cameron, 2013; Lester & Russell, 2008; Moss & Petrie, 2002), play is an accepted practice in their work with children.

Natasha used the things the children liked to do in their play as a means of building a relationship with them.

A few children come to mind when I think of trust and honesty. One that is coming to mind mostly is a little boy I have been working with. I had been through the initial meeting with him, [where I tell him], “This is what I do, this is what I need to do if I find out you are in harms way”. It must have only been a couple of weeks later or a bit more, we were playing Lego, as he liked to play Lego a fair bit, building robots and different sorts of things. He had this huge bruise on his head and I noticed it and I said, “That looks like a really big bruise”, and he looked away and he said, “I got it because I ran into; I fell backwards into a pole”. That story sounded quite different because it is front on, you know. I didn’t want to go any further because that is what he wanted to tell me at that point so we just played Lego. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

There were times when Natasha would ask if she could join into children’s play, she felt this was not only a way to build trust, but also a way to guide children in their problem-solving abilities when something wasn’t going quite right in their play. She
felt by being involved in their play, she could give them the language they might need to tackle difficult problems, or as a way of just being there with them so they felt that they were supported in tackling an issue. By doing so she hoped the next time they could handle the situation on their own without guidance from an adult.

I have a couple of children that have been referred to me for social skills, they really struggle making friends, they seem to not have the language or the interest in playing with their peers. So we learn about what makes a good friend, before we go out and try to make friends. What qualities would a good friend have, what do you like, what would your friend need to like for you to like them. They tell me who they think would be good friends or who the friends they already have and then we go try to learn how to play together. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Angus spoke of taking time to get to know children through play. He used play as a means of getting to know and understand each child. He believes through play trusting relationships can be built and he sees play as therapeutic for children whom may be neglected at home or are having difficulty making friends. “One of the girls particularly, no one would play with her so I would always make a point to go and play with her” (Angus FI 1 02/11/12).

Thomas spoke about using play as a coping strategy and a protective factor for children. From his own negative experiences as a child, where he experienced physical and emotional abuse, he remembers using play as a coping strategy.

I was just walking on eggshells as a child all the time. I could let my guard down by go into my world of imagining I was a cricket player, for
me that was my coping mechanism for switching off. (Thomas FI 2 04/09/13)

Thomas also spoke about using play as a way of relating to and getting to know children in a non-threatening way. He felt talking with and listening to children whilst playing with them is helpful for building a trusting relationship.

So many kids are in childcare now, you have to relate to them and interact with them. I used to play with the kids at lunchtime, [for example] What’s the time Mr Wolf, Three Little Pigs, you know, the kids would all be playing. They would be screaming and yelling and having the time of their lives. Kids need to be played with. (Thomas FI 2 04/09/13).

Similarly, Sarah spoke of playing with a child as “crucial” for getting to know the child and building trust between them. Sarah also spoke about using play as a way of “lifting the mood” if a child was upset or stressed about something.

From the participant’s responses, one can see that play can be used as the medium for building a connection between an adult and a child. Play is seen as an enjoyable experience, and a democratic process. Play is a means for building relationships; a means for guiding problem solving, and decision-making (Cameron, 2013; Gray, 2013; Lester & Russel, 2008; Perry et al., 2000). This is possible when the adult displays a playful attitude and uses approaches to practice that see children as participants in the spaces they occupy with adults. It is a form of communication available to children that is non-threatening and builds a sense of emotional safety, as in play there is no right or wrong. As discussed by Perry et, al. (2000, p. 12) “a child
will play when she feels safe”. Therefore, a key to gaining children’s trust comes from practitioners that provide children with playful environments and have playful attitudes themselves.

**Chapter Summary**

The resonant theme of building trust discussed in this chapter makes transparent not only what happens to and between practitioners and children in their conversations and experiences with each other, but how place and the metanarratives around practice influenced their capacity to build a trusting relationship. From their experiences, the adult participants found there were certain ways of being together with children that influenced whether trust could be established between children and practitioners. The patterns that emerged as enabling a trusting relationship for both the practitioners and the children revolved around the notion of talking and listening from an everyday experience perspective (Boddy, 2011; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015), which allowed for adults to be present with children. Further from their experiences, the participants talked about respect for one another and the idea of feeling safe in the space they occupied together. However, providing a ‘safe’ space for children was often disrupted by the metanarratives around spaces designed for children as having clear lines of authority, which minimised children’s right to participation.

Play was also found to be an important element in building trust between a practitioner and a child or group of children. When the practitioners engaged in play with children it opened up opportunities to build reciprocal respect and to have conversations about everyday experiences that deepened their relationship. Play and playful behaviours were important to the child participants as it was seen as less
threatening and created a safe environment for conversations to take place between the practitioner and the child.

Finally, within and across the participant’s stories, there was a sense of tension and often a ‘collision’ with the dominant discourse around ways of being with and building trust with each other. In some of the landscapes this tension was seen not only as a barrier to hear a child’s perspective, but as disrespectful to children and their capabilities. This chapter revealed the complexity of building trust between practitioners and children and opens up questions about current practice that undermines building trust with children in order to hear their perspectives and include them in decision-making.
Chapter 7: Power and Agency

In everyday life, children and adults relate to each other through communication and interactions. As described by Mayall (2002, p. 28), “In everyday living, people relate to each other as individuals; children and adults at home and school work through relationships and boundaries; they negotiate space, time and status”. The way in which individual children are communicated with, and related to, varies according to the adult’s image of children and the broader historical and socio-political stories adults hold about children and childhood (James, 2011; James & James, 2005; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011). The intention of this chapter is to describe the findings in the participant’s storied accounts that speak to how the adult’s image of the child impacts on their ability to converse with, listen to and hear, a child’s perspective. This chapter will also discuss the findings in terms of how the stories of the participants illustrated how the social context and socio-political metanarratives on the construction of childhood enabled or constrained practitioner and child conversations.

This chapter has the over-arching resonant theme of power and agency with the sub-themes of: (a) children’s agency, (b) equitable relationships, (c) power imbalances, and (d) silencing children’s voice. As in the previous findings chapter, by weaving the threads together, and using the literature to discuss the findings, a space was opened up to help me uncover the many layers of meaning embedded within and outside the participant stories. This also illuminated the tension or conflicts that arise when the participant’s stories ‘bump up’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006) against the broader metanarratives embedded in their stories.
In this chapter, I first examine the data collected within and across the participant’s understanding of how children’s sense of agency plays a role in building equitable relationships between practitioners and children. Second, this chapter explores the notion of power and how that was perceived by both the adult and child participants, and how power was used within and across the landscapes children and adults occupy. Interpretation of the broader context embedded in the stored accounts around power and agency is also discussed, including ways in which the adult participants worked to address the power imbalance. I draw from the narrative accounts of my participants, along with the literature and a critical constructivist lens to discuss the findings for this inquiry.

Children’s Agency

Individual agency refers to the power individuals have to act independently and to exert influence on the course of events (James & James, 2012; Mayall, 2002; Smith, 2010; van Nijnatten, 2013). van Nijnatten (2013) argues we can only make sense of others if we look at them as having a sense of agency; where individual interpretations of the world are made through daily interactions and relationships with others. Children are considered to become active agents when they are addressed as participants, as individuals who have the power to make a difference (Van Nijnatten, 2013). However, the desirable level of autonomy for children is often valued differently by adults, cultures and contexts, which limit a child’s ability to act independently and influence matters that affect them (James, 2011; Punch, 2001; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013). Thus, a child’s right to participation is very much dependent on the cooperation of adults.
Historically, children have been seen as passive recipients of adult’s actions. Children have been viewed as not having the capacity to give an informed opinion (Clark & Moss, 2001; James, 2011; James & James, 2008; Punch, 2001). As Punch (2001, p. 23) argues, “The structures of adult society limit children’s opportunities for asserting their autonomy”. Therefore, children’s subordinate position in society makes it difficult for children to influence change in how society views, listens, and responds to them as individuals and as a social group.

As discussed by Ruch (2014), the complex nature of communicating with children is a conceptual continuum, ranging from some adults who see children as vulnerable and in need of protection, to those that see children as competent, and strive to empower children to articulate their views. However, the lack of acknowledgement of children’s agency by adults continues to contribute to their minority status and reproduces their powerlessness (Hilppö, Lipponen, Kumpulainen, & Virlander, 2016; Mayall 2002; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; Soto et al., 2010). Questions about how children see themselves as agents for change, and questions regarding children’s own aspirations or capacities, are still largely unaddressed (Hilppö et al., 2016). What is still unknown is to what extent children are enabled to exercise their agency and how this could contribute to social change.

Children are seen as predictable objects rather than subjects in our inquiry of them. Smith (2010), in his exploration of the concept of childhood, argues one of the main features of childhood is made visible by the interest adults’ have in them, for policy-making, marketing and the media. Smith (2010, p. 144) goes on to say, “commentators have had a tendency to adopt restricted views and determinate views
of children, their needs and abilities; these must be unpacked in order to obtain a fuller and suitably nuanced view of childhood and change processes”. Furthermore, children are often made invisible from the wider view, as they are only considered as part of other groupings such as parents and families. According to Mayall (2000, p. 243) “we must extricate children, conceptually, from parents, families and professionals” in order to “write them into the script of the social order”. Therefore, to understand a child’s perspective, there needs to be a better understanding of children’s social condition as viewed by children rather than only from the adult’s perspective.

The idea that children are social actors who have a sense of agency can easily be observed in their everyday relationships within a family, at school, with their peers, and in other social contexts. Children express their wishes, likes and dislikes, and seek justice in what might be perceived as unfair treatment on the playground, within the family or at school (James, 2011; Punch, 2001). Despite this observable sense of agency, children in Western societies are under constant surveillance as parents and professionals work towards understanding children’s needs and abilities based on assumptions, and often on their own goals or agenda (Mayall, 2000). Rather than having conversations with children that promote a mutual understanding of those needs, it appears the metanarratives about children and childhood still remain a barrier towards meaningful conversations between adults and children. My data suggests it is important to examine how the adult’s view of children affects their ability to converse with and listen to children. It is also important to conceptualise what needs to be disrupted in the dominant view of childhood by exploring children’s agency as transformative rather than passive.
In this inquiry the adult participants shared the view that children were active agents in their interactions with them. The adult participants viewed children as having the capacity to understand and explain their worlds, if the adult listened and responded to them in a fair and equitable manner.

She [child] is letting me into her life. She is sharing important information and she is allowing me to hear that. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

I didn’t want to go any further because that is what he wanted to tell me at that point so we just played Lego. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12).

He must know it is not OK for them [parents] to being doing that to him [child], for him to be continually telling me this has happened. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Kids are a lot smarter. Every time I work with a child [I realise] they are smarter than we give them credit for. If you actually talk to them and ask their opinion, because most of the time they have opinions on things.

(Angus FI 1 02/11/12)

From the children’s stories, exercising their sense of agency in conversations the children had with adults were somewhat different across landscapes and in different social contexts. The children indicated that they liked talking with adults that: (a) were interested in them, (b) respected them, (c) made them feel listened to, and (d) helped them to be successful in the social contexts they shared with them. The children’s stories also indicated the children were not influential in decisions making on the school landscape, however, they did speak of having conversations with adults, where they could express their opinion and felt they were being listened to in some
circumstances. For example, Toby spoke of his cricket coaches as adults that consulted with him and his teammates on strategy for the game. He liked the idea that the adults sought his and others’ opinions. “They’re always asking somebody, my opinion or someone else’s opinion. It’s really good” (Toby FI 2 02/10/13).

At home, all of the children had opportunities to have discussions and participate in decision-making conversations with their parents. Olivia particularly spoke about conversations she had with her parents about what the family were going to take part in on the weekends and planning times to be with her friends.

Sometimes [we talk] about what we’re doing on the weekends, like maybe if we are going to go to the beach with our friends or going to a party or somewhere like that. (Olivia FI 1 27/07/13)

We ask them can we maybe have this person over or see if we can go over there. They’ll usually organise it. (Olivia FI 1 27/07/13)

John also had conversations with his parents (usually about his day at school) and with adult friends (usually about fishing). I have had conversations with John and his family around the dinner table. For example, I had a conversation with the children about talking to their teachers. Toby said, “My teacher is really nice because she gives us points when we are good that we can use for different things”. I asked, “What happens when you’re not good?” Toby replies, “You get points taken away”. John said, “There is a boy in Toby’s class that has anger management issues”. I asked John why he thought the boy had anger management issues and Olivia said, “He probably had a bad upbringing”. John agreed with Olivia (RD IC 26/10/13). However, when asked about the conversations the children had with their teachers, they told me those
conversations were mainly about their school work. As Toby said, “Schools are more serious surroundings” and conversations with his teacher are “normally about class work and stuff like that” (Toby IC 3 23/08/14). When asked if she has conversations with her teacher, Olivia responded, “Sometimes, but not really. But you could go up to her [teacher] if you couldn’t get something” (Olivia IC 5/4/14). John told me he did not have conversations with his teachers, as the reason he even went to school was “I get to see my friends” (John FI 1 27/07/13).

This closely aligns with the literature on child and teacher interactions in the school classroom. As discussed by Blatchford et al. (2016), children’s interactions with their teacher was found to be mainly concerned with schoolwork, where children spent most of their time passively listening to the teacher talk. This type of talk between adults and children leads one to believe that the adult’s view of children in this context is that children are passive recipients of knowledge, and understanding and listening to a child’s perspective to promote their learning and development is not seen as essential (Brown & McCormack 2005; James & James, 2012). The literature speaks critically of the ‘unequal communication rights of children’ in the classroom and argues this type of communication between adults and children has evolved in order to ‘manage’ the classroom and the children within it (Blatchford et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study undertaken by Moore et al. (2015) on safe environments for children, found a significant barrier for children in schools was not feeling comfortable talking to teachers about sensitive issues. The notion of adults listening to a child’s perspective in this context seems highly unlikely. However, the practitioner’s stories in this study, indicated that when an equitable relationship with a
child was established, a child’s willingness to talk with an adult, and the adult’s ability to listen to a child’s perspective, was enabled.

**Equitable Relationships**

Identified in the adult and child participant stories was the notion that an equitable relationship needed to be established in order for the adult to hear a child’s perspective in conversation with them. To build an equitable relationship is only made possible through dialogue and listening (Boddy, 2011; Clark, 2005a; Rinaldi, 2001; Scharmer, 2009; Tangen, 2008). The adult has the child in ‘his or her heart’ (Boddy, 2011) and the ability to listen to the child and together, with the adult’s professional knowledge, an equitable relationship is built.

It is through open and honest dialogue that a trusting relationship is established, as discussed in the previous chapter. In this kind of trusting relationship, responsibility is given to the child, where the practitioner becomes supportive in a mutual relationship with the child. This has been described as ‘going alongside’ children in their everyday lives (Boddy, 2011). This understanding of equitable relationships between an adult and a child “means the conception of the young person’s rights in that relationship goes beyond what is stipulated as procedures and legislation” (Boddy, 2011, p. 117).

When children are given responsibility, there is a feeling of empowerment for the child; presenting them with the notion that the adult sees them as capable and willing to treat them equitably. For example, Toby liked the notion of being given responsibility and being able to do things for himself.
I can do my homework on my own now, if we get a card, like in nearly every task we do. We need to sign it off to say we are finished it. So, then she’ll [teacher] sign it and if we haven’t finished something she can, like I’ll take it up to her and she can help me through it. I reckon my teacher is good. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

On the other hand, Toby didn’t like the teachers that got frustrated with him if he didn’t understand something.

He goes, “Now you do it [like this]”, and you might go to the wrong thing and then he’d go, “No you don’t go there”, and he gets really frustrated. But because he does it so quick, he doesn’t guide you through it. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

Olivia commented on teachers changing their teaching style so it was more engaging and less boring. “writing on the board and showing; maybe instead of just writing all over the board like that, maybe show us some clips or something” (Olivia FI 1 27/07/13). John’s way of speaking about a more equitable relationship with an adult was indicated to me when we spoke about what I needed to know about teaching people to work with children. “Always tell them to play iPods, computers and Xboxes. Tell them [adults] to tell the little kids to do that. Because it is fun” (John IC 05/04/14).

The children’s stories about conversations on the school landscape suggested a powerful, implicit ‘set of rules’ on how conversation takes place in a classroom between adults and children. Qualitative studies on this subject have shown the rules of the classroom conversation are not necessarily considered a democratic conversation, but rather one where the teacher controls who talks and about what
The teacher is not necessarily interested in a child’s perspective in these circumstances, therefore it would follow that children see themselves in a subordinate position, with little power within the classroom, nor are they given the opportunity to change the way the classroom conversations are structured.

**Going Alongside**

The adult participants discussed strategies for building equitable relationships with children. Giving children responsibility was evident in the practitioner’s storied accounts, as was the idea of ‘going alongside’ children rather than only taking control of them (Boddy, 2011). For example, Sarah worked alongside a small group of children, as she supported them to take responsibility for their own behaviour, as well as how they were going to be together as a group.

So we have group rules on the side, just in the room. And it was getting really rowdy in the room and I think we all got to the point where we couldn’t handle the loudness. And I think it was the young girl (Vera) who said, “I can’t deal with this, it’s too loud”. She was having trouble being able to talk and being heard. I think that was the common issue. There were two younger boys who are quite silly. So we went around the room in a circle with the other children, it was really funny. She took control, so I think she must have gone first so she went around and told everyone this. She said to the first boy, “You are being really silly and that is one of our rules, you know you shouldn’t be silly in here as it gets really annoying”. He said, “Yes, I know, I know that is what I do, I am
silly”. He knew and he knew the behaviours that went with it. He changed his behaviour. (Sarah FI 1 13/03/13)

Thomas, in his work, brings primary school aged children onto a university campus to give them a hands-on experience on what happens at a university. From his conversations with the children he discovered that some children were not encouraged to think about themselves as having the capacity to go to university. The message he tries to give them is “You can do it”, giving them the idea that they can take responsibility for themselves.

I think it is about being strong enough and having people out there to say, “You can change, you can be whatever you want. Just find something you are passionate about and the next thing you know…no matter what your background is there is a place for you”. (Thomas FI 2 14/08/13)

Natasha talked about what success was like for her in terms of working ‘alongside of children’ that had experienced some difficulties in their lives and as a result were not coming to school.

That is how I see success, for me is when a child will want to seek me out when they feel they need me or when I am hanging out on the playground socialising with the kids, they come up and say hi to me. That’s a success for me, knowing I am there if they need me. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Angus spoke of the conversations he has with his son as a way of building an equitable relationship between them.
Allan is a lot like me I think, he won’t take a backwards step and if he gets provoked he will lash out. I sort of see a bit of me, not all of me but a bit of me in him, and from my experience convey that to him. There are better ways of dealing with it. I am now trying to teach him to walk away. Turn your back because if he gets stirred and people know when they stir him up he is going to react even at a young age. I’m trying to teach him to just walk away. It’s hard for him though. But he is getting there I think. 

(Angus FI 02/11/12)

Achieving equitable relationships between an adult and a child proved to be difficult in some contexts and within some landscapes. The imbalance in power was identified as a constraint for conversations between adults and children to happen.

**Power Imbalance: Structure and Agency**

The way the participants spoke about children’s individual agency aligns with the literature on structure and agency. Children may be seen as social actors with some sense of agency over others and their environment, however, they must adapt to the dominant power relations that exist within the landscape they occupy with adults (Qvortrup, 1999, 2011). Mayall (2002) in her study of childhood with children found in the children’s accounts, childhood was seen as a distinct life stage. Children spoke about childhood as a time for fun, for protection and provision from adults, as well as a time to learn about what will be needed for their future (Mayall, 2002). The main problem with their social status as children, was the issue of having little control over decisions that were made for them both at home and particularly at school (Mayall, 2002).
Lowe (2012) found similar accounts from the children in her study of childhood.

“Children showed frustration and dissatisfaction when they demonstrated an ability to solve problems, complete tasks or knew what to do next, and this was quashed by the social rules of the situation” (Lowe 2012, p. 276). However, the children showed an acceptance that the ‘rules’ were different for them, as they were children, hence accepted their subordinate position for reasons of protection.

Children’s voices are marginalised due to their subordinate status. Mason and Falloon (2001, p. 101) found in Australia, that “children’s voices are given little space in the media or in the decision-making space, even where their interests are directly concerned”. For example, in their study on children’s view of child abuse, they found the overall standpoint taken by the child participants, was that child abuse is entrenched in society through the legitimisation of hierarchical authority; with age differences seen as the rationale for discrimination (Mason & Falloon, 2001). In a more recent study into child perceptions of safety in institutions, it was discovered that lack of meaningful participation where children’s views were taken seriously, was of concern to the children (Moore et al., 2015). Children wanted adults to listen to them and support them, rather than use their power to belittle or be unfair to them (Moore et al., 2015; Moore, McArthur, Heerde, Roche & O’Leary, 2016).

The notion that children hold a subordinate position to adults and have little control over decisions made for them was evident in the both the adult and child participant’s stories. However, whether this was seen as a negative or positive shifted as the participants told their stories and illuminated how the power imbalance between adults and children is seen from different perspectives.
As mentioned in the previous chapter, the child participants chose to follow the rules on the school landscape and noticed the consequences when other children chose not to follow the rules. Soto et al. (2010) argue that children may accept their social status as they identify themselves as the ‘good’ children and do not want to be perceived as the ‘bad’ children. The children may also choose to follow the rules because they are rewarded for doing so and want that particular reward.

The other day, on Friday, I was doing my work and trying to get my card up to date because I hadn’t finished it. Some of the kids that haven’t had their card up to date for a while weren’t trying, so I got a point and a lolly for that. That was good. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13)

We do have a points system and she [teacher] gives out fake money. She also does auctions so she’ll buy stuff and we bid on it. You have to be ‘good’ and with our points system if you get 10, 15, 20, 30, so on you get $10 and the first one to get to 50 gets $20. First one to get to 100 points gets $50. (Olivia FI 2 02/10/13)

Olivia told me she liked this system. However, she also told me that there was one thing she really wanted to bid on but felt she would never get enough money to bid on it. She told me there was one girl that always had the most money as she was really ‘smart’ and ‘good’. She would probably have the money before Olivia and therefore, Olivia would miss out (Olivia IC 08/04/15). In this light, children’s voices were being silenced as they were taught to comply rather than being considered as participants within some of the landscapes they shared with adults.
Silencing Children’s Voices

Silencing is a term used in feminist and critical research, where silencing is seen as way means of excluding ‘voices’ from a particular group of people. For example, labelling children can be seen as a way of silencing a child’s voice. Soto, Hixon and Hite (2010, p. 217) state, “Anyone can be silenced by someone who holds more power than the silenced”. If the child is positioned as a special category of person that lacks the complete range of capacities necessary for a full functioning citizen (Tyler, 1993), then it follows that those that are labelled early as not progressing through the developmental path ‘appropriately’ are seen as dysfunctional or not ‘normal’ are often marginalised or excluded. Not only do we label children by defining them according to their developmental pathway, their age, by the parents that raise them, and the area they live in; we also exclude children by not listening to them or giving them an opportunity to be heard (Soto et al., 2010). It is by silencing children’s voices that the status quo is maintained and the adult’s image of children is verified.

This view of children is seen as problematic as it focuses on a child’s deficits. This view of children does not consider the child’s capacities or potential as an individual nor as a social group (Bryderup & Frorup 2011). When the adult only views a child by his or her deficits this can, and often does, shape the adult’s opinion and expectations for an individual child or group of children (Soto et al., 2010). Adults marginalise a child or group of children by legitimising their expectation of them and silencing the child’s ability to speak from their own way of seeing the world. Thus the child comes to believe no one has an interest in them, nor what they can contribute to a situation or social context. Furthermore, children will often accept silencing by the dominant group as that is seen as the way to ‘fit in’ (Soto et al., 2010). Fine (1991) in
his study of school age children, found children stay silent in order to avoid the perception that they are seen as ‘rude’ or had ‘poor’ discipline. In the Fine (1991) study, it was also discovered that if you wanted to be perceived as ‘good’ by your teacher, your voice was neither needed or wanted in the classroom.

For example, Toby told me he did not like the idea of having to do homework as this was when he usually got into an argument with his parents, which he didn’t like. Both Toby and Olivia told me the teachers make the ‘rules’ in the classroom with no consultation with the children. Neither of the children suggested they should be consulted on this matter. Toby told me he thought the system to get rewards for ‘good’ behaviour and getting their work done was a good system.

I think it’s good because we get lollies for doing our work and I think that is a good way to get other kids to finish off their work, or to do their work. They could just sit there, listen, not do anything, do a test and like all the other schoolwork, they just do maybe a quarter of it and just leave it and they never do it. I think it is a good system. (Toby FI 1 27/07/13).

When I asked Olivia if the teacher was to ask her about what she thought should happen in the classroom, what would she suggest to the teacher? Her response was, “Maybe do something for the good kids that have been good in class every week”. She also mentioned she would add “no nasty words” to the rules (Olivia FI 1 27/07/13).

For all of the children, the idea that teachers would yell at them was the most disturbing for them. This showed a lack of respect for children and instilled a fear of
authority in them. Gray (2013, p. 49) suggests that adults ultimately use their power to teach children to “respect the hierarchy of power”, which is visible in the metanarratives embedded in the ‘reward and punishment’ stories of the children.

**Labelling**

All of the adult participants experienced the ‘silencing’ of children’s voice through labelling, for example some of the children they worked with had been labelled by other adults as ‘no hopers’, ‘deadbeats’, ‘neglected’, ‘high flyers’, or as having ‘challenging behaviour’ to name a few. In this light, adults working with children may compensate for a child’s behaviour based on the adult’s expectations of them and not what is be going on for the child in the present, nor what is possible for them in the future (Bryderup & Frorup, 2011). Children that are ‘labelled’ may be excluded or sometimes punished for not being able to conform or comply with what is expected of them. However, it is through conversation and cooperation, where the adult sees the child’s potential rather than the deficit, that more equitable relationships between adults and children are built, and children’s voices are heard (Bryderup & Frorup, 2011; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011).

The adult participants identified that the power imbalance between adults and children varied across different landscapes, however, labelling children was consistent within their stories. For example, Thomas was very frustrated in how children were viewed and often labelled in the community where he worked. He felt the adults in the children’s lives had given up on them or did not see them as having the capacity to make a change for themselves or their community. Often no support was given to these children and he felt this was not only inequitable but also unethical.
Thomas spoke of many of the young people he talks with as an Equity Officer, as being silenced as a result of the image other adults held of them. Thomas told me about a conversation he and the guidance officer had with a young girl. She told them she was stereotyped within her family, as she was only encouraged to go out and work as all her family wanted from her was to be able to contribute financially to the family. She thought there was more to life and saw her life as a total mess.

There are so many stories of people [children] from these different cultures that you know want to succeed, especially the Pacific Islander and Maori background. All of the girls, especially, they are really intelligent and go getters and things like that. Because of the fact there is no HECS help, how are they going to support themselves to go to university and no family support, none whatsoever. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

Some schools pigeon hole kids, these are the ones that go to university. No don’t give him a form, there is no way he will go to university. A lot of teachers label the students, the ones that are going to go out and work in factories, the ones that are going to go to university. For me it is very frustrating because I don’t think anyone should be given a label. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

However, Thomas spoke of trying to change the way a child might perceive themselves by the conversations he had with them.
“The doors are open now guys; you don’t have to be the smartest or the richest person to go to university. The doors are open and you can do it too”. Some of them, it is just the thing about stereotyping and myths about going to university that has been drummed in to them, especially those in this community, people like us don’t go to university in our family, no way. (Thomas FI 1 14/08/13)

I was curious in my conversation with Angus about the notion of power in the residential houses within which he worked, as he spoke of the movies the children watched and the music they listened to as being totally different to what he would do at home with his own children. His response to who decides what goes on in the house was, “The adults make decisions based on ‘age appropriateness’ and children do not have a say in those rules” (Angus IC 1 05/11/12).

In some of the houses they have older kids, some 15 to 17, they still couldn’t watch certain movies. I don’t know what the reasoning is behind that because kids their own age are doing their own stuff and that’s what they should be doing, the normal stuff that their peers are doing. (Angus FI 2 02/11/12)

If you put those kids in a normal house they won’t survive with normal kids because of the way they’re allowed to behave and the what they’re allowed to do in a different environment, it’s totally different. So they wouldn’t last five minutes, and when they get transitioned out they come back. (Angus FI 2 04/05/13)
Angus was concerned about the children he worked with in out-of-home care. He felt children were re-traumatised by the child protection system and had little or no say in matters that affected them.

The biggest problem that comes about in foster care is the family contact. So if a kid goes into foster care there is usually a honeymoon period. Settling in period, everything is good and they can actually extend it or it can go on forever. But then if there’s contact, which there generally is, that is when kids get re-traumatised and they get upset and that is when they come back with the behaviours, back to the foster family. So they’re never actually in one place, their head’s in two places at once. They’re in the foster care family trying to learn, but their hearts are going to be with their real mum and dad. A lot of the time the kids get let down because the parents don’t turn up or they turn up pissed or stoned or whatever and then they go back to the foster family and then it all blows up. It doesn’t happen all of the time as some parents do the right thing. The kids just get so confused. You have to understand and listen to them. The child care system is in such a rush to get the kids back to the parents as reunification is what the government’s pushing heavily for at the moment. It is doing no favours for those kids. (Angus FI 2 04/05/13)

Angus also mentioned in the child protection system children are silenced by the way they are placed; “They just throw kids in ad hoc, that might not fit. I have seen that happen so many times that it is ridiculous!” (Angus FI 2 04/05/13).

Similar to Angus, Sarah spoke about inequities in adult-child relationships where she worked. This was expressed as her concern when other practitioners challenged
children’s behaviour rather than listening to what was going on for them.

I tried to understand why adults didn’t allow children to speak more.

Some adults do challenge the child and I’m wondering where that’s coming from. But I’ve noticed you just get caught up. I’ve noticed you can just get caught up in what you are doing and that it’s not intentionally challenging the child. I just think maybe children aren’t as valued by some people. (Sarah FI 2 30/08/13)

Sarah worked with children that had been labelled as “not being able to fit in with the rules at school”. Her task was to work with the children and a number of other professionals, as well as the parents, to support the children in their learning and development so that they would be able to succeed in mainstream educational contexts.

It is all about giving them the tools they need to self-regulate their emotions. Regulate themselves so they are able to sit in the classroom and focus on their work. So that they are able to listen to instructions at school and at home.

Sarah told me about a conversation she had with one of the children she works with (Vera) and Vera’s mother about Vera’s feelings of being unloved and her mother’s frustration with Vera’s behaviour at home.

Vera how can we help you to feel loved? We started going through things like, maybe mum could help you with your hair but maybe you have to show mum or tell her how you like it. You need to use your voice to show mum how you want things done. At the same time, I am trying to hold
mum in a place where she feels I am not targeting her, so mum started to
listen to what Vera was saying. (Sarah FI 1 13/03/13)

It is apparent in the participant’s accounts that children’s voices are not always being
heard and are often marginalised in the communication processes. Turning back to the
literature on communication, adults as holders of knowledge and the child being
labelled as less knowledgeable constitute a ‘power relation’, so the question arises as
to how can a child’s perspective be heard if the adult does not consider his or her
position in the communication process (Ulvik, 2014). As Habermas (1987) argues,
this model of communication is based on the ‘willingness’ of the child to follow those
that have been accredited with ‘prestige’ based on, for example, personal attributes,
such as knowledge, physical strength or appearance’ which are derived from cultural
norms and validity claims, and reduces the likelihood of mutual understanding being
achieved in conversation between them. Hence, the power imbalance needs to be
addressed in order for a child’s perspectives to be heard.

Addressing the Power Imbalance

The adult participants spoke about ways of addressing the power imbalance between
themselves and the children. The adults attempted to achieve this in a number of ways
including: (a) treating children as participants in conversations, (b) including children
in decision-making, and (c) being aware of the power imbalance.

They call me Natasha. I am a firm believer in children calling me by my
first name. Other teachers have said to me you should be Miss Natasha at
least. I am Natasha, they do not need to call me Miss, they will respect me
because of what I do, not for what I am called. Some of them [children]
love they can call me Natasha, like I am a normal person. I can see they like that as they come over and say “Hi Natasha” just because they can say it. They just like saying the first name. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12).

Natasha’s ability to lessen the power imbalance with a child is also demonstrated by her inclusion of a child in decision-making.

Normally what I try to aim for is to share that goal with the child and then say what do you think we need to work on? There are times when the child will say to me I know I need to be at school more. We might spend most of our time talking about friends, school, playground stuff, talking about home. It is only a short time that I might say, how are you going at school, how many times have you been at school this week, or tell me what is going on at home. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

Natasha spoke of a boy aged nine years with whom she worked and how she felt she had built a trusting relationship. By talking with him and listening to him, she was able to help him open up to her and together they could develop some strategies for him. She talked to him with knowledge of him as a person, what is happening for him in the present, with the aim of empowering the child rather than telling him what he must do.

I went up to him and told him I knew, I said, “Your brother told me a different story about how you got the bruise. Is there anything you want to tell me?” And back in my room I made him aware of the poster again. I was kind of asking him to open up to me as I was worried about him. He told me the real reason [he had the bruise] and I told him what I needed to
do. I said, “I will have to tell the principal and he will have to tell other people”. We talked about what happens in movies, what happens when people get hurt or how do people take care of you and then we did a risk assessment, if something like that happens what can he do. And he still comes to see me every day, every time at school he looks for me and I do know that by him sharing that information with me child safety went to investigate. He has spoken to me about it since and has had more bruises since and he tells me the truth straight away. Well he tells me the truth possibly straight away. (Natasha FI 1 22/11/12)

For Angus it is about understanding power and control. To him adults are all about having power and control over children.

At some stages some controls are needed but it becomes a power battle all the time with kids, and I have that with my own kids, I have to sit back and pull myself up sometimes. Or I reflect on it later and think I could have done better than that. So it is about adults learning that it’s not about power and control, it’s actually about listening to them. (Angus FI 2 02/11/12)

The children Sarah works with have been labelled by someone else. Sarah talks about changing the power differential by her ability to be present. She spoke about children not being challenged by a child’s behaviour and only trying to control the child. Rather from Sarah’s perspective, it is necessary to address the power imbalance by talking about what is happening in the present with the child or group of children.
I don’t want to make my sessions about challenging behaviour. I want it to come up naturally. Let’s just talk about things. Explore rather than suggest. (Sarah FI 1 13/03/13).

Finally, Thomas was so concerned with the way children were treated in some of the environments he worked made him critically reflect on teaching, as he felt there were too many adults giving up on young people.

That is what we want as education and human service practitioners is for young people to reach their full potential and that is why I like to do the job I am doing now as I can really motivate some young people. I know for a fact I have changed the life of many young people. You can do it! (Thomas FI 2 04/09/13)

Chapter Summary

The resonant themes of power and agency were discussed in this chapter. The experience of the practitioners and the children portrayed similarities and differences in how they saw themselves within and across the landscapes from which their stories were told. All of the participants’ stories spoke to children having agency, however, it was the power imbalance between adults and children that often constrained children’s ability to exercise their sense of agency.

As the stories unfolded the adult participants revealed their feelings about their own experiences within institutions where power was used to oppress, colonise and disempower children (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Lundy, 2007; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; Soto et al., 2010). The adult practitioners spoke of injustices they have
encountered within their workplaces, where children continue to be treated with little or no respect and are given little responsibility in decision-making. Often this power imbalance worked to alienate children from experiencing a sense of belonging and building an equitable relationship with adults. Hence the practitioners’ ability to have conversations with children in order to hear their perspective was constrained.

The children’s stories also spoke of injustices, particularly on the school landscape, where they felt they were being treated unfairly. The practice of ‘managing’ rather than empowering children was revealed when the children spoke of being rewarded for ‘good’ behaviour and ‘punished’ for bad behaviour. The child participants also spoke of times they felt empowered and treated in a respectful way, for example, when he/she was being listened to, or asked for his or her opinion in their conversations with adults.

The practitioner’s stories identified strategies used to empower children in their conversations with them, which acknowledged children’s rights and their capacity to make changes for themselves. This was accomplished by noticing what was going on for children in their everyday lives, talking with and listening to them in an open and honest way, and by ‘going alongside’ of them to offer support and guidance in an equitable relationship.

Finally interwoven in all of the stories were the metanarratives about children and childhood. The dominant discourse about children’s capacity and rights to participation still remain in question. The image held by the practitioners about children and childhood was clearly identified in considering what shapes an adult’s
ability to hear a child’s perspective. In this inquiry, the practitioner’s views often ‘bumped’ up against how children are positioned on the landscapes they occupied with them. ‘Silencing’ of children’s voice through labelling, and their lack of opportunities to have conversations with children, constrained their ability to listen to and act upon children’s perspectives.

The child participants’ view of childhood, although somewhat different, also spoke to the metanarratives that silence and marginalise them as children. The metanarratives embedded in the children’s stories were identified as having ‘feelings’ of respect and safety with the adults they encounter in their everyday lives. The children wanted to be with adults that were willing to take the time listen and to guide them in a respectful manner. Despite this view, some of the landscapes they occupied with adults were seen as restrictive in their ability to have conversations with adults due to the power imbalance, or the adult’s lack of time, respect, or skills to guide them in a positive way.

The findings in these two chapters have led me to think about what could be different in adult-child relations within and across landscapes that adults and children occupy. The recommendations come from what I have heard and learned from the children and practitioners in this inquiry, as well as, my own lived experiences as a practitioner working with children, and as a lecturer and field educator in the Bachelor of Child and Family Studies. I decided that I need to go beyond the rhetoric of ‘child participation’ to a more structural approach in thinking about children’s everyday lives and their position in society. New possibilities and ways of thinking from both an individual and a structural level are outlined in the following chapter.
Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

The knowledge gained in this inquiry is about imagining new possibilities for shaping an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. As Andrews (2007, p. 489) reminds us, if we want to understand the perspective of others we must be “willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know”. In this concluding chapter I have reflected upon the stories told, resonant themes that emerged, and limitations of the inquiry. I also speak to the possibilities, and recommendations for practice and further research.

When I began this narrative inquiry, my intention was to explore the lived experiences of four child and family practitioners, and a group of three children, about how conversations shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. The main aim of the inquiry was to consider what was needed to enhance the skills of child and family practitioners to talk with and listen to children in order to hear their perspective. I was also interested in gaining new knowledge by hearing the children’s perspectives on how conversations they had with adults impacted on them.

Over a six-year period, I have interviewed and had conversations with these four child and family practitioners and three children to gain an understanding about what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. There is evidence from their stories that the conversations that take place between practitioners and children influence the adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective. However, what is most revealing is the complexity and challenges that exist within the broader political, cultural, institutional, social and economic metanarratives that enable or constrain
adult-child conversations, and in turn limit a child’s right to be heard and their perspectives taken seriously.

By co-constructing the stories with my research participants and putting each of their stories in conversation with each other, I came to think about these stories as an invitation to listen, question further, and consider what could be different in practice. For me these in-depth conversations (and conversations with my doctoral supervisors) were an experience that refined the way I teach and advocate for children’s voices to be heard and be taken into consideration. I hope this research will encourage all practitioners that work with children to use practices that acknowledge children as competent human beings with the capacity to form a view and for those views to be heard (Lundy, 2007). Beginning with children’s everyday experiences, rather than the dominant narratives about children and childhood is a good place to start. Recommendations for what shapes an adult’s capacity to do so will be the focus in this final chapter.

**Limitations**

I am conscious that this inquiry can not and should not generalise about what happens in practice for either children or practitioners. The stories told are only a small percentage of the many stories that could be told. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, stories give insight into people’s lived experiences and open up possibilities for other stories to be told, in this case, about shaping an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective.
Building reciprocity in the research relationship may be difficult, not necessarily from the researcher’s perspective, but from the participant’s perspective, as preconceived ideas, habitual ways of thinking and cultural influence may be in play. For example, both the children and the adults may see me, as the researcher, as the one with authority holding the expert knowledge, they may not have had experience where the ‘teacher’ or the adult is a co-constructer of knowledge, which may cause the participants to tell their story based on what they think I want to hear. On the other hand, because there is no way of the researcher knowing the participant’s ‘real' thoughts, misreading of the texts could happen. Therefore, it is understood that the researcher is also part of the phenomenon under study, where I too am embedded in the temporal, social and place sitting alongside the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Misreading of the texts is always a possibility in attempts to make meaning of the accounts. In trying to make sense of the stories the researcher may be seduced by wanting the threads or voices to have some coherence or sameness in the attempt to ‘tell the story’ of the stories. The researcher must be aware of this possibility when composing the research texts, working from the perspective that there are multiple truths and a sense of coherence may not happen (Tracy, 2010). The researcher must be aware that the differences in culture, age and/or gender can be the basis for the different meanings and needs to pay attention to these differences for credibility (Tracy, 2010). Finally, to ensure credibility, ongoing reflection or ‘wakefulness’ is necessary (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which can also be open to bias if the researcher is not familiar with processes of listening reflexively.
What Did I Hear?

The adult’s ability to talk with and listen to children in an open and honest way leads to building trust. As suggested by Boddy (2011), Clark (2005), Rinaldi (2001), Scharmer (2009) and Tangen (2008), and confirmed by my participants’ stories, to have meaningful conversations with children, a trusting relationship must be established between the practitioner and a child or group of children. This recurring theme was interwoven throughout the stories of the four practitioners when engaged in open dialogue with a child. It was also discovered that children and practitioners need a safe space for meaningful conversations to take place; one where mutual respect has been established between them.

Opportunities for play and playing between the practitioner and the child was spoken about across all of the participant’s stories. The practitioners that were seen by the children as playful gave children a sense of being accepted and trusted; they found enjoyment in their interactions with them. The children also liked the idea that the adults they interacted with were supportive, rather than authoritarian, and liked to be acknowledged by them as being successful in their everyday experiences with them. The practitioners accepted play as an important aspect of childhood experiences. In their play episodes with children, the four practitioners found opportunities to have meaningful conversations with children. This was a safe space and a time for getting to know and understand each child.

The wider social construction of ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ cannot be ignored in the discussion of how conversations shape an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective. As children hold a minority position in western society, they are forced to
adapt to the ‘macro-societal’ forces which dominate their capacity to have influence over their everyday activities (Qvortrup, 1999, 2008, 2011). By choosing to ignore the minority status of children, the notion of hearing and acting upon children’s perspectives may be impossible. Qvortrup (2011, p. 29) sums this up with the response that, “sociological answers to these questions cannot be found in changing individual dispositions or psychological readiness, but rather in transformations of culture and society”. With a shift in the balance of power, relationships between groups of people have changed over time, change in the adult-child relationship is not static, therefore it is possible to think and act differently towards children and the way we think about childhood. There is no argument that children are headed for adulthood, it is the conditions they experience as children that can be different (Qvortrup, 2011). Reconstructing how adults think about children and childhood is possible by uncovering the way children see themselves and their aspirations for change.

The dilemma this poses for practitioners in their relationship with children is one of ethics and rights. It appears that the ethical dilemmas faced by practitioners, in this inquiry, were produced by the metanarratives within and across the landscapes they occupied with children. These metanarratives often constrained adult-child conversations and revolved around issues of safety, exclusion, marginalisation, and silencing of children’s voice. This was revealed in the four practitioners’ stories where children were labelled or silenced based on their age, abilities, gender, economic status, or in the way they behaved. The practitioners in this inquiry considered the marginalisation of children to be an unethical approach to practice, with the notion of children’s rights and children’s agency often being ignored.
There needs to be a shift in status of children. A shift in status of children seems unattainable in a society that sees ‘age’ as the dominant way of defining maturity and capability; or in a society that sees compliance as respect for authority (Blatchford et al., 2016; Gray, 2013; Mayall, 2002; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Qvortrup, 2008, 2011; Wyness, 2006). As discussed by Mayall (2002), there cannot be a change in how children are viewed without a change in how adults view children and childhood. Furthermore, the notion that the children in this inquiry saw themselves as subordinate to adults, particularly in decision-making, reinforces the notion that children identify as having a different position in society to adults. However, in their eyes this does not give adults the right to treat them badly or unfairly. Furthermore, it appears social structures, particularly large scale institutions, do not strive to confront these injustices that are based in socially, politically, and historically rooted power relations that continue to exist between adults and children (Mayall, 2002; Nolas et al., 2016; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013). Hence, in order to re-think child participation, an approach that focuses on children’s every-day life experiences and current adult conversational practices with children are necessary. This will help us to understand the “spaces in between intentions and actualities” (Nolas et al., 2016, p. 254). This may open up opportunities for re-imaging childhood and adulthood from a political sense.

The stories of all of the participants indicated that conversations between practitioners and children were not privileged, this was due to time constraints, models and frameworks of practice, and the dominant discourse around children’s capacity. It was also revealed that in the current political climate there is more focus on educational outcomes and economic production, with a far less focus on children’s rights. The
practitioner’s stories attended to this notion, as they often worked with children who were caught up in a systemic cycle of marginalisation and exclusion. Hence, rather than listening to children and hearing their perspectives, the current political climate dictates to the practitioner: what a child should accomplish, who should accomplish it, and how that should be accomplished; where most often children’s perspectives are not considered.

Seeing children as competent and capable is necessary. The practitioners in this inquiry, came to see children as competent and capable with the ability to take responsibility in decision-making when given the opportunity to do so. The three children also indicated that having conversations and interactions with adults who were playful, respectful, and supportive, with opportunities to have their opinion heard, was empowering for them. This highlights a need for change in the discourse that surrounds adult-child relationships. Hence, what shapes an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective is about reciprocal relationships and safety in the spaces they occupy together, along with open and honest conversations between them.

A change in the way children and childhood is viewed by adults leads to different adult-child relationships. This change opens up possibilities for new stories (Andrews, 2002; Kim 2016; Scharmer, 2009) to emerge about children and childhood. As suggested earlier, it is through telling, retelling, and reliving their everyday experiences (Boddy, 2011; Clandinin, 2013; Nolas, 2015; Nolas et al., 2016; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015), that children and practitioners can open up possibilities for change to occur. The following recommendations will be a step in that direction.
Recommendations

The recommendations of this inquiry are based on the findings woven with my own story, and acknowledge the complexity of listening to and hearing a child’s perspective. This section proposes seven recommendations for practitioners working with children in and across various landscapes and contexts. The recommendations have application for all stakeholders including law-makers, policy makers, professionals and practitioners across the multiple disciplines that work directly with children. The first recommendation pertains to an overall approach to practice that pays particular attention to children’s ‘everyday life experiences’ (Boddy, 2011; Nolas, 2015, Nolas et. al., 2016; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015). The next five recommendations are specific to the principles and practices needed for embedding an ‘everyday life perspective’ approach (Boddy, 2011; Nolas et, al., 2016; Ulvik & Gulbrandsen, 2015) to practice. Finally, the seventh recommendation promotes additional research. The recommendations are not aligned specifically to each of the findings, rather they are interlinked, as that is the nature of this narrative inquiry.

The Everyday Life Experiences Approach

The first recommendation is to embed the use of an ‘everyday life experiences’ approach into pre-service training for all professionals and practitioners who will work with children in Australia. An ‘everyday life experience’ approach would encompass an understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as this document is not only a model for good practice, but is a legally binding obligation in Australia. Children and adults developing a mutual understanding of this document, would be the first step towards understanding children’s perspectives about what is important to them from a rights perspective. It
has been observed in this inquiry that issues of most concern for the children are about being accorded respect and having an opportunity to contribute to decision-making about everyday matters that affect them. Hearing from children needs to be integral to work with them, and must be an ongoing process to ensure it is not tokenistic, or only relevant to some children.

To shape an adult’s ability to hear and act on children’s perspectives, a change in thinking about children and childhood as a construct is necessary. Challenging the dominant thinking about children’s capacity and the construction of childhood needs to be addressed in training of professionals and practitioners. In order to make children visible (Boddy, 2011; Mayall, 2000, 2002; Qvortrup, 1999, 2008, 2011; Soto et al., 2010), a shift from our habitual ways of defining children and seeing childhood is essential. The restricted view of children and childhood needs to be unpacked to obtain a fuller and suitably nuanced view of modern day childhood. For professionals and practitioners to understand a child’s perspective there needs to be a better understanding of children’s social condition as viewed by children themselves rather than only from the adult’s perspective. This shift in thinking is about viewing children’s perspective as fundamental in any discourse with them and about them.

Giving children opportunities to express their view and to be heard means the need to develop mechanisms which give children the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with adults about how they make meaning of their everyday lives. The following recommendations will give insight into how conversations can take place, where children’s perspectives are listened to and understood by adults.
Conversations About Children’s Everyday Life Experiences

The second recommendation is to listen, hear, and act on how children make sense of their own lives; rather than children being subjects of practitioners’ inquiry about them. The aim for the practitioner would be to hear the children’s interpretation of their own life experiences, as they are living them, where the practitioner uses conversation as a tool to create a platform for children to articulate their experiences. The co-construction of meaning about a children’s everyday experiences is what helps shape the practitioner’s ability to hear children’s perspectives. Therefore, practitioners in their everyday conversations with children will have the ability to: (a) be present in the conversation with a child or group of children, (b) create a safe and supportive spaces, (c) understand the importance of reciprocal relationships, and (d) address the power-imbalance.

Being Present with Children

It is recommended that teaching of communication skills that facilitates co-construction of meaning with children is necessary for understanding children’s perspectives and to act upon them together. This is not necessarily about a set of rigid communication skills, but rather a process for meaning making. One key strategy for implementing the ‘everyday life experiences’ approach is for practitioners to learn and understand how to be present in the conversations they have with children. This practice is reflected in a person’s ability to engage in conversation with others where meaning-making is made possible by the co-construction of meaning. This entails the ability to reflexively listen to oneself in an interactive active communication process, which involves listening, interpreting and co-constructing meanings with a child or group of children. For meaning-making to occur in conversation between adults and
children, the adult must go beyond his or her individual worldview and mandated policies, to a place where he or she is attuned to what the world is like for a child or group of children. It is about having the ability to listen reflexively to oneself, to others, and to what emerges from the group. This entails suspending judgement and listening with an open mind, open heart, and open will (Boddy, 2011; Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2005). In order for these types of conversations to take place it has been discovered that a safe and supportive space is necessary.

**Safe Spaces**

The third recommendation is about creating safe and supportive environments for children. The key strategy comes from the practitioner being able to listen to and notice when children are not comfortable in the spaces they occupy with others. Noticing involves not only being observant, but also learning to take observations, and analysing those observation using critical thinking processes. Practitioners need to be taught to notice what is going on for children in the spaces they occupy with them and to critically analyse those observation from more than one perspective. Particular importance is placed on listening and noticing a child’s interpretation of what is going on for them ‘in and out’ of that space (Fulcher & Garfat, 2013; Lundy, 2015; Scharmer, 2009). Noticing requires the practitioner to free themselves from pre-conceived notions that children will undermine the adult’s authority in the space they occupy together. Challenging the discourse that works for adults to ‘manage’ children’s behaviour to one where children are supported to express their view without fear of punishment or belittlement. A safe space allows for trusting relationships to emerge and inclusive environments to be created.
Building Relationships

The fourth recommendation is about building trusting relationships. Relational practice is based on attachment theory and the neurodevelopment evidence around the importance of secure relationships and attachment in the early years and beyond. To work in an ‘everyday life experience’ approach it is imperative that training for professionals and practitioners needs to include the study of attachment and a neurodevelopment perspective to practice.

The importance of play and participating in ‘play’ activities with children is often missed in the preparation for practitioners to work with children. However, it appears to be very important to children in terms of their worldview and is found to be crucial in children’s health, development and learning. Perry et al. (2000) suggest that play provides a crucial component in a child’s life for relationship building. The fifth recommendation is training of professionals and practitioners which includes a theoretical understanding of play and related play skills that are important to healthy brain development and relational capacity for all children. The study of play for pre-service practitioners is highly recommended.

Addressing the Power Imbalance

Approaches for addressing the power imbalance between children and adults is the sixth recommendation. The power imbalance between children and adults stands out as a major constraint for hearing a child’s perspective. The adult participants in this inquiry spoke about the unethical practice of ‘labelling’ children based on age, gender, ability and behaviour, where children’s perspectives and rights are ignored. Guidance and support is what the three children spoke about in terms of trusting
relationships with adults. To confront injustices, the socially constructed power relations between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ (Mayall, 2002; Nolas et al., 2016; Qvortrup, 1999, 2011; van Nijnatten, 2013) need to be confronted. This is achieved in an everyday life experience approach by building reciprocal relationships between adults and children; ‘going alongside’ (Boddy, 2011) a child and being supportive. Participatory research with children is taking the next step to building reciprocal relationships with them and works to shape the adult’s ability to hear children’s perspectives. As discussed by other researchers (e.g., Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015; Mason & Danby, 2011; Pascal & Bertram, 2009), participatory research engages children as active and informed co-researchers and is seen as a means for disrupting the dominant discourse that silences children voice and renders them invisible. To address the power imbalance, it is recommended that the use of a relational narrative approach to inquiring about children’s everyday lives.

**Further Research**

The seventh recommendation promotes further research. Additional research is needed into an ‘everyday life perspective’ approach for application in the Australian context, as much of the current pedagogical insight is linked to research from the United Kingdom and Europe. Using a relational narrative approach will capture and act on children’s perspectives. This needs further conceptual and practice knowledge, as the call for children’s rights continues to ‘bump up’ against the broader political, cultural, social, institutional and economic metanarratives about children and childhood.
As the practice of researching with children and its participatory approaches are relatively new to the study of childhood, further research is also needed to ensure that children’s rights are at the heart of this work. It is through relational narrative research with children that the means for disrupting the dominant view of seeing children as weak and needy, to viewing them as capable actors with rights.

**Concluding Remarks**

The stories shared in this narrative inquiry are an invitation for conversation and further inquiry into adult’s capacity to hear a child’s perspective. These stories gave me an opportunity to listen, ponder, and wonder, and further inquiry into what could be different for children in the spaces they occupy with adults, if their perspectives were heard and taken seriously. This dissertation tells many stories and opens up possibilities for a change to practice with the views of children in mind. This inquiry also opens up possibilities for disrupting the dominant discourse around child’s participation and to our obligations to children as human beings. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us, it is through the telling and retelling of stories that possibilities for change occur. As political agendas come and go, those of us that advocate for children to be made visible will need to exercise our own sense of agency to re-tell and re-live our stories about what we are hearing from children about their everyday life experiences.

It is my intention that this narrative inquiry will improve the theoretical knowledge and practice skills for child and family practitioners, and promote the use of narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology for co-constructing meaning with children and adults. The use of the narrative in the three-dimensional space, the life-line drawing
tool, and the understanding of using an ‘everyday life perspective’ approach, will be added to my teaching and preparation of child and family practitioners in the university context.

This experience has made me think differently about children’s perspectives and has given me further insight into the complexity of working with children, and the tension that comes with trying to disrupt the metanarratives surrounding policy and practice. This inquiry has also given insight into what shapes an adult’s ability to understand a child’s perspective, including ways for children to have their views heard and become co-participants in decision-making on matters that affect them, as individuals and as a social group.

As I conclude this narrative inquiry I would like to end on the words of Olivia as she gave voice to what she thought could be different in her interactions with adults. “Just tell them to be happy”.
References


http://www.developingchild.net


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Nicholas Brealey.


Appendix A: Information Sheet (Adults)

Information about the research study on: Conversation: What happens when children and adults converse? An invitation to join a research project and information for adults

This study is an inquiry into how adults and children converse and its impact on their relationship. If conversation shapes a relationship then what impact will the conversations adults and children have influence the characteristics of their relationship?

You are invited to participate in a research study called “Conversation: what happens when children and adults converse?” This research study is part of my course of study at Griffith University (Masters of Philosophy). The purpose of this study is to hear the stories of children and adults tell about the way they experience conversations with each other. The study is aimed at identifying the role that conversation plays in adults and children forming relationships and to create storied accounts that will be used to develop new research projects and inform my teaching practice. It is expected the study will create new possibilities and new applications for educators and child and family support staff in their care and education work with children and families.

You will have the opportunity to tell your story to me (the researcher) in two face-to-face conversations at a venue of your choice. The first conversation will be up to two hours and the second conversation one hour. The first conversation is for me to build a connection with you and for you to tell your story. I will ask you to draw a chronicled lifeline as way to tell me your life experiences and for you to tell me about conversations you have with children. The conversation we have will be recorded and transcribed. After the story has been written up by me, it will be taken back to you for a second conversation to clarify, change or refine the story as you see fit.
Participation is completely voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time.

What will happen with your story?

The conduct of the research involves the collection of your story and personal information. Any names or personal information in your story will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent. A de-identified copy of the data will be made available to you for your approval prior to its use in the research report. Your privacy will remain safeguarded at all times. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Policy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan

What will your story be used for?

All the information that you give to me will confidential. The information you give me will be written as text and reviewed by my University Supervisors to help us consider the circumstances around how adults and children converse and its effect on their relationships.

The analysis will then be used to help develop further research projects and to inform teaching of educators and child and family support staff working with young children and their families. You are more than welcome to read the research report when it is completed. The research report will be completed by December 2014, please contact me if you would like a copy. The original transcripts and analysis will be erased unless further consent has been sought from you for its use.

Choosing to take part

Please consider carefully whether you would like to take part in this research. Please feel free to ask me or my University Supervisors any questions you have prior to giving consent and during the research project. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to call us on the numbers provided below. Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human
Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research please direct them to the Senior Manager, Research Ethics and Integrity on (07) 3735 5585 or email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

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Appendix B: Consent Form (Adults)

CONVERSATIONS: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN CONVERSE?

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Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:
- Have read and understood the information sheet about this project;
- Are willing to be interviewed;
- Are willing for your interview to be recorded and transcribed;
- Understand that if you have any further questions you can ask me;
- Understand you are free to withdraw at any time

Your privacy will remain safeguarded at all times. The audio taped transcripts will be erased after analysis unless further consent has been given by you for its use.

By ticking this box, I allow my story and diagram to be used in any reports and presentations about this project.
The research report will be completed by December 2014, please contact me if you would like a copy.

Name ______________________
Signature_____________________________________________
Date ____/____/____
Appendix C: Information sheet (Parents)

Conversation: What happens when adults and children converse?

An invitation to join a research project and information for parents

Dear Parent / Carer

I am doing a research project as part of my study at Griffith University. I am seeking to find information from children about what happens when they converse with adults.

I teach university students who will work in education and care services. The information gained from this research project will be used to inform my teaching and develop further research projects.

I will be visiting your child in a venue of his/her choice for two sessions. I will be interviewing your child to seek his/her views on what happens for him/her when conversing with adults. I will be recording the interview and then transcribing the information. I will write up the information your child gives me and then take it back to him/her for clarification and verification. I have one activity which I hope will help me to get to know your child and to tell me their experiences. This includes:

**Drawings** – I will ask your child to draw a chronicled life-line to help me get to know them better.

The conduct of this research involves the collection of personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without you and your child’s consent. A de-identified copy of this data will be used for the research. However, your child’s anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at
What will the information be used for?

All the information that your child gives to me will be confidential and anonymous. Your child’s name or service will not be used (your child can use a pseudonym). The information I collect will be kept safe and private.

The information will be used by me to write a report that will be used to help develop further research projects and to inform teaching of educators and child and family support staff working with young children. You are more than welcome to read the research report when it is completed. The research report will be completed by December 2014, please contact me if you would like a copy. The original transcripts and analysis will be erased unless further consent has been sought from you for its use.

Choosing whether to take part

Please talk over the project with your child to see if they are happy to take part. I can be contacted at Griffith University by phone or email if you require additional information (+61 7 33821116 or m.casley@griffith.edu.au. Please feel free to contact me at any time before or during the project should you have any questions or concerns.

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research please contact the Senior Manager, Research Ethics and Integrity on 3735 5585 or email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Thank you and I look forward to meeting your child.

Marilyn Casley
Associate Lecturer
School of Human Services and Social Work
Griffith University
Appendix D: Consent Form (Parents)

CONVERSATIONS: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN CONVERSE?

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Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information sheet about this project;
- Are willing for your child to be interviewed;
- Are willing for your child’s interview to be recorded and transcribed;
- Understand that if you have any further questions you can ask or contact me;
- Understand your child is free to withdraw at any time;
- Agree to allow your child to participate in the project

Your child’s privacy will remain safeguarded at all times. The audio taped transcripts will be erased after analysis unless further consent has been given by you for its use.

☐ By ticking this box, I allow my child’s drawings and conversation to be used in any reports and presentations about this project.

The research report will be completed by December 2014, please contact me if you would like a copy.

Name _______________________

Child’s Name ___________________________

Signature__________________________________________

Date ____/____/____
Appendix E: Invitation to Participate in Study (Children)

An invitation to be part of my research project for children

HELLO!

My name is Marilyn Casley. I am a teacher at a Griffith University where I teach adults that are going to work with children in schools, outside school hour care and other places where children go. I would like to learn what you think about when you have a conversation with an adult and how that affects the way you feel and talk with them. I hope from what you tell me I will be able to tell the adults that I teach what you think about how they can be ‘good’ at working with children.

I would like to invite you to talk with me at a place of your choice. I will come the first time for about 2 hours, however if that is too long for you I will make another time to come back to talk. The first time I come I will ask you to:

1. Draw some things about your life (like when you were born and about your family) and ask you to tell me about what you have drawn.
2. Tell me about conversations you have had with an adult.

I will record our conversation so that I can write down what we have said to each other. Once I have finished writing it down I will come back and talk with you about what I have written so that you can tell me if I got it right! I will ask you if I can use your ideas to help me teach adults how to have conversations with children.

I will not tell anyone else what you have told me unless you tell me it is OK to do so.

If you have any questions, please ask me or your parent to ask me. My phone number is 3882-1116 and my email is m.casley@griffith.edu.au. Thank you and I look forward to meeting with you 😊
Appendix F: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

OPENING
Before we start our conversation, I would just like to remind you that our conversation will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. The purpose of the research is to understand what happens when adults and children converse. I am hoping our conversation will be a genuine exploration of the topic meaning there are no right or wrong answers. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Chronicled Life-line:
Could you draw your life-line for me – you can use pictures or words to describe the significant events and people that have meaning for you in your life. The life-line can take any form you would like as it is your life story you are drawing. The purpose of this drawing is to help me get to know you. Please tell me about your drawing.

Proposed Interview Questions:
Could you tell me about talking with children/adults?
Can you tell me about a specific conversation you have had with a child/adult? One that is significant for you.
What did you talk about?
What stood out for you in the conversation?
How did the conversation make you feel?
Why do you think you felt that way?
How do you think the conversation affected your relationship?
Tell me more.
Is there anything else you would like to share with me about having conversations with adults/children?

CLOSING
Thank you for sharing your story with me today. Once the conversation has been transcribed and written up I will return to have you read your story to ensure its validity and make changes where you see fit.
Appendix G: Conference Presentations

The following presentations have resulted from this research:

2016 – How do conversations shape an adult’s ability to hear a child’s perspective?

   International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN)
   Calgary, Canada

2015 – Re-thinking the adult-child relationship

   Child Rights Symposium (Early Childhood Australia Queensland Branch)
   Brisbane, Australia

2014 – Using narrative inquiry to listen to children’s lived experiences

   School Age Care Research Symposium
   Gold Coast, Australia

2013 – A narrative inquiry into what happens when adults and children converse

   Health and Medical Research Conference
   Gold Coast, Australia