

Cross constructions of childhood

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Elena Giacobini, 2009

- *Many adults feel invaded by children. Adults are not always willing to welcome what the culture of childhood has to say. Some adults feel that we are seeking to allow children to have a voice that is more important than the adult voice. This shows that we still do not 'know' each other. It is not about who is more important, it is about the equity of visibility of views and opinions.*

Previous research

- This research project/paper seeks to continue research conversations that both researchers have begun (Harcourt, 2005; 2008; Sargeant, 2007; 2008) in relation to young children's standpoints on matters that they may have an opinion about.
- Children's standpoints on quality
- Children's perspective on their place in the world

Framework for the research

- A central philosophy underpinning this work seeks an acknowledgment of the *presence* of children and their accounts of life, as an essential element to understanding their social worlds. This challenges traditional notions of developmental psychology that children *become* someone (i.e., an adolescent or an adult).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Article 13 states, in part, that a “child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information ... orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice”.
- Most professions that deal with children (i.e. education, law, health, etc.) are “accustomed to making assumptions about the needs of children and what is best for them” (Smith, 2007, p. 3).

Research methodology

- The research methodology draws upon an adaptation of the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) for data collection tools, whereby conversations, drawings, text, photographs, digital voiced recordings and interviews are used to consider current understandings of childhood (from the adult standpoint), adulthood (from the child standpoint) and the *UNCROC* document. In order to empower the participants, both adult and child, data collection tools were offered in such a way that the respondents chose a medium that they were most confident in using.

Participants

- Dr Harcourt worked with approximately 25 children aged 3 to 6 years from kindergarten, preschool and prep two early childhood settings (one community based and one private).
- Dr Sargeant worked with approximately 25 children aged 8 to 12 years drawn from Years 3, 5 and 7 in two primary school settings (one public and one private).

Research focus

- These children were invited to put forward their views and opinions through conversations, drawings and /or written texts on their understanding of how adults view children and childhood. Children were invited to theorise differences in perspectives and propose reasons why this may be so.

Engaging with children: Informed assent

- Integral to moving toward developing the relationship as a research partnership, is the exploration of what is expected within the partnership
- Explanation of the why, what, when and where of the research
- Discussions about the roles and responsibilities of those participating in the research project, how data will be gathered and analysed, and with whom it will be shared need to be undertaken

Documenting assent

- Once the informing process has been carefully examined by all of the potential research participants, discussion should then move to inviting children to document their assent
- It is critical at this point to reassert to children that their agreement to participate is essential but that their initial assent is not a one-off and final decision
- It is equally important that children are sufficiently informed that a decision to withdraw their assent, at any point in the project, will be respected without consequence

Emily 3.9 years

EMILY

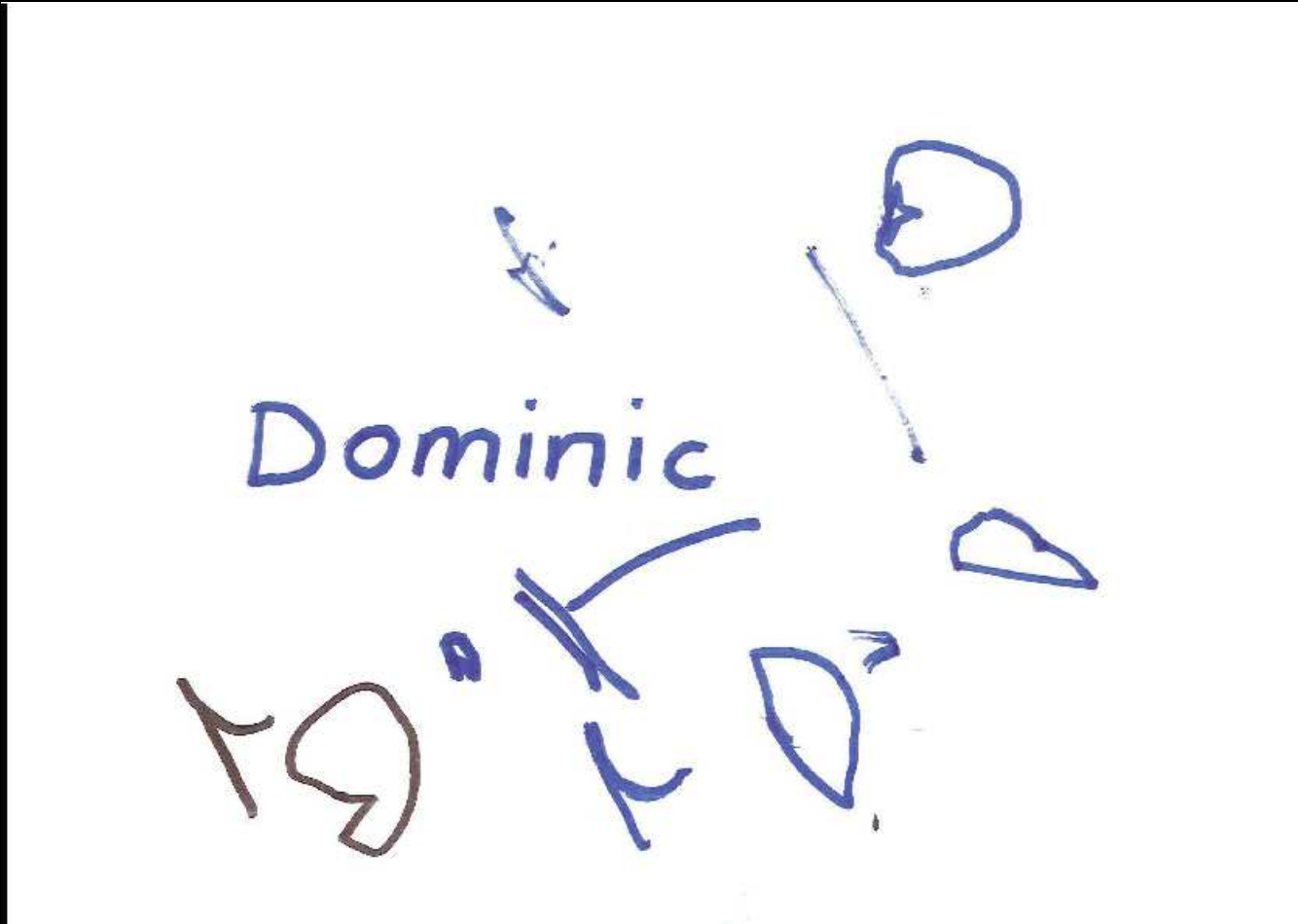
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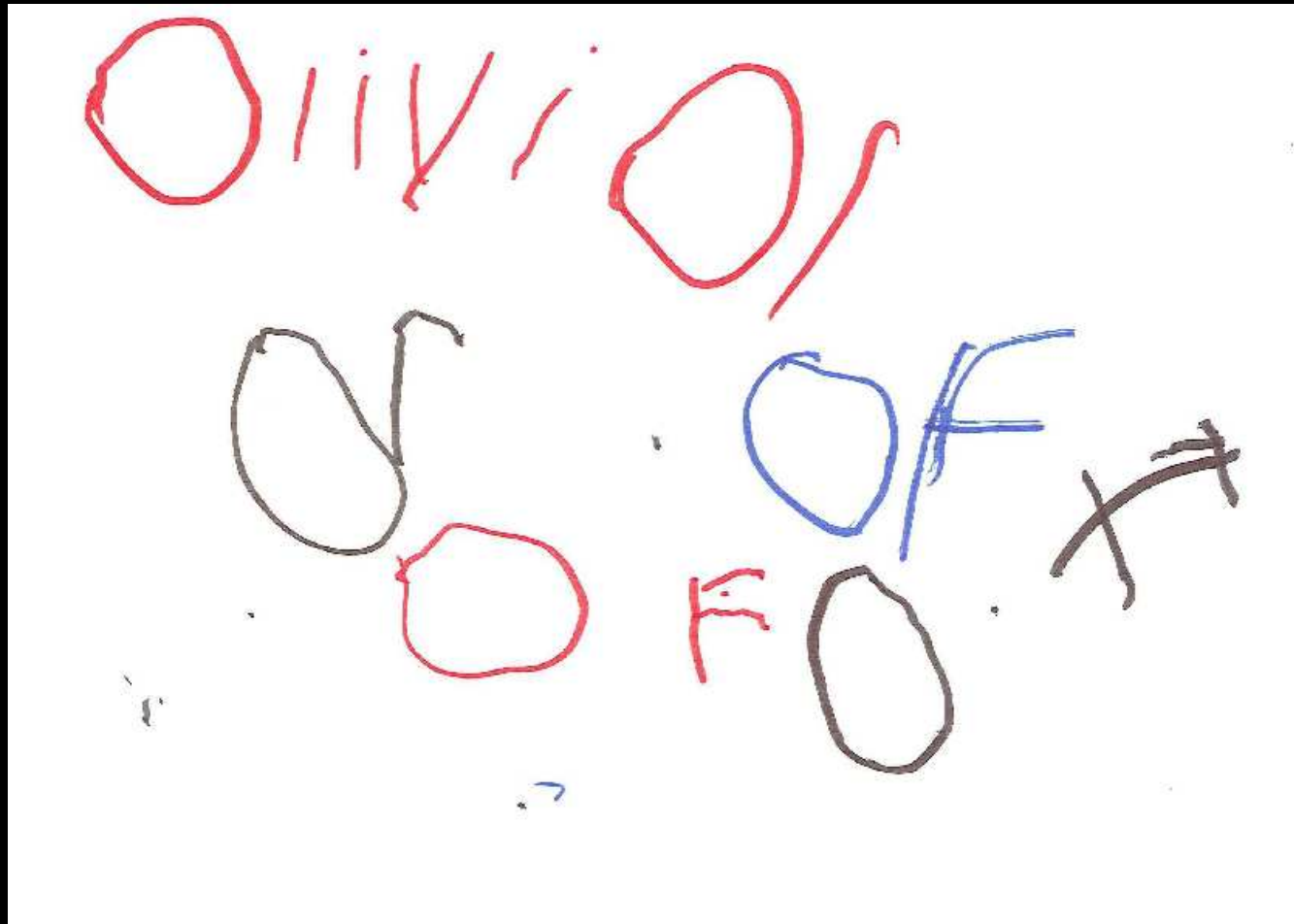
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Dominic 4.0 years



Olivia 3.6 years



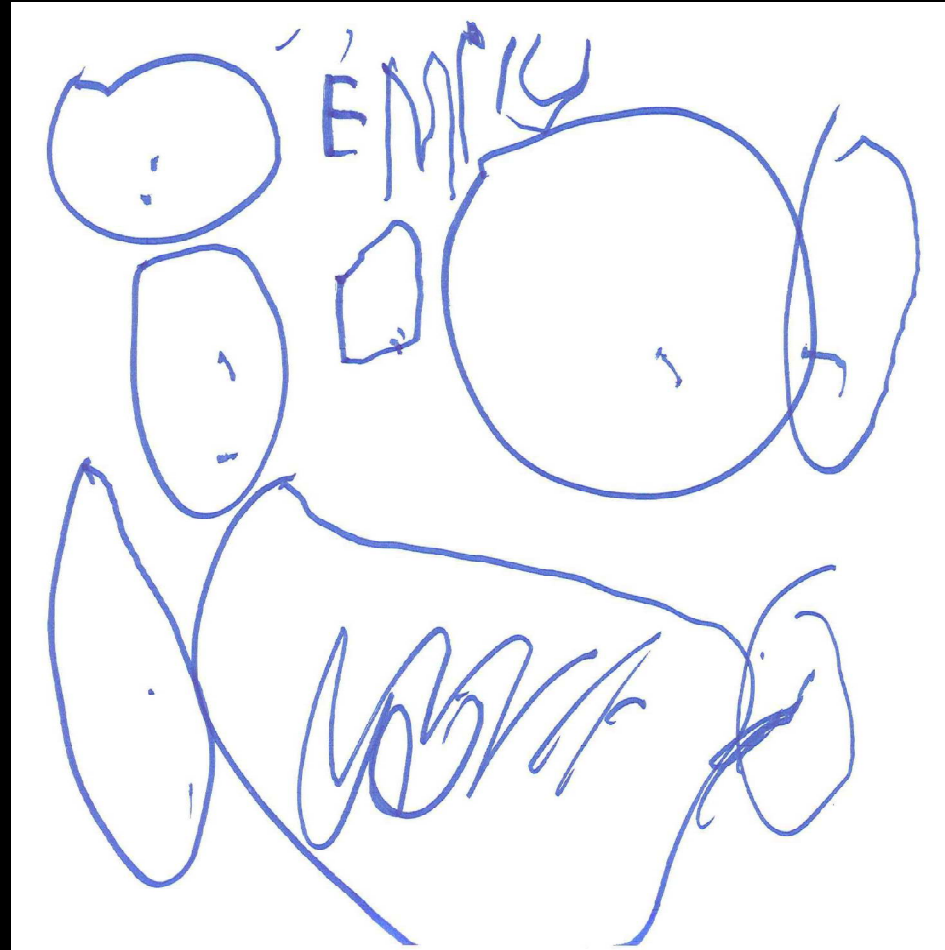
Can you tell me something about the difference between adults and children?

- Babies get scared from the dark, but adults don't get scared. If the mother leaves the baby alone AND if it is dark, then the baby will be REALLY scared and that's not right (Lucy, 4.1 years)

What happens when you and your mummy and daddy are apart during the day?

- They miss me when I am at kindy. They miss me all the time. When they clean, do washing, eating, they miss me (Emily, 3.9 years)

What is the difference between adults and children?



Emily

- I have been thinking about bodies. That's what happens when you grow up to be an adult. See, it goes like this, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,

Emily

- I think it is easy to be an adult. When you don't have a baby it's easy. Sometimes it is hard to be a child. Sometimes that's just the way it is. Trying to draw an A is hard. I tried to do a small a but it was too tricky. The realiest trickiest thing is to work our how adults grow. So I thought they grow from size to size, but now I think it is different.
- If adults could be a bit nicer coz my mummy gets a bit sad when I do not nice things. Its hard because sometimes I don't know what the right and wrong things are. That makes it hard to be a child.

Taylor 4.3 years

- When you go to bed (when you are a mum) and your baby cries, then you have to think about what the baby wants. That's a tricky thing to think about. When you are a child, you don't know how to say all the things, so the mum has to figure it out. That's the tricky part (about being an adult). See, when you grow up you can think quicker and faster.

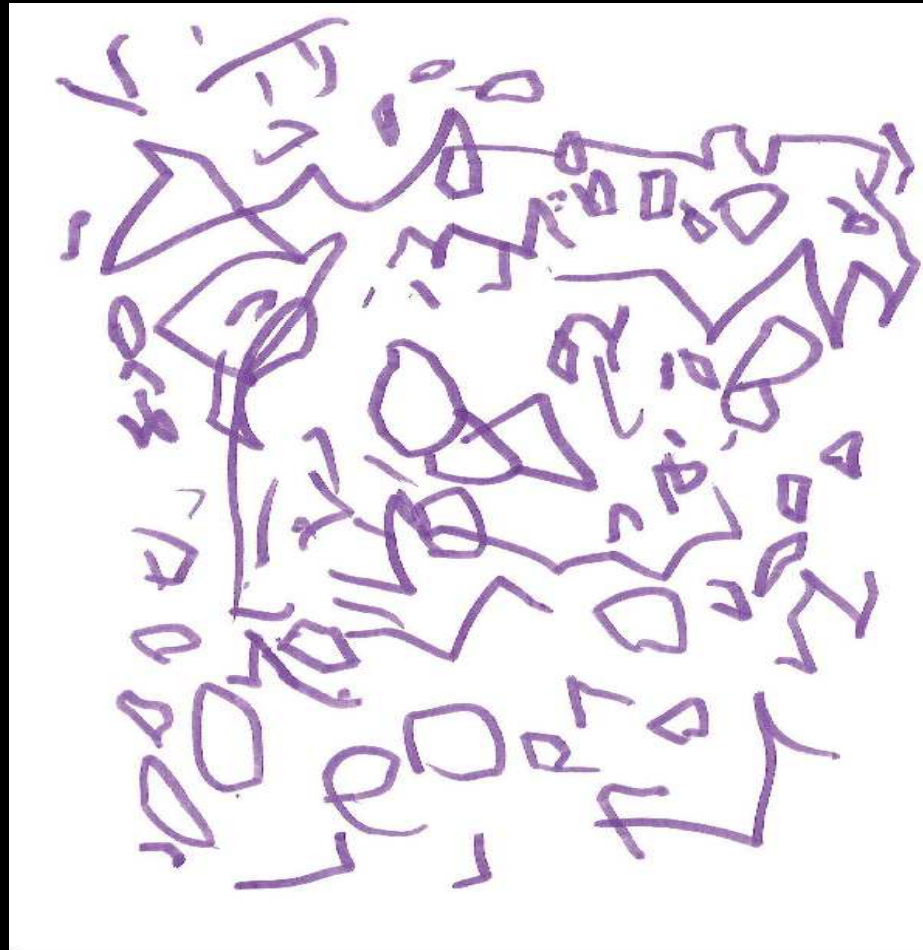
Olivia 3.6 years



Olivia

- This is mummy and me. See, mummy was born first so she is the biggest, and then came me, that's why I am small. It was tricky for mummy. It is very tricky to be a mum. You have to feed the baby and put the baby to sleep and then take it out of the cot. It is very hard work to be a mum.

Luke 3.8 years



Luke

- I am writing about adults and children. Jason is my brother. I am writing about these ones adults (points). They don't have names. They are drawing. Jason is telling them a story. It says, A 2 who he a t e w kicking king O C 80 and 81 at the end. 40 this is how old they are and then 5 & 6 & 3 that's about the way they love each other a lot. L is for Luke at the bottom

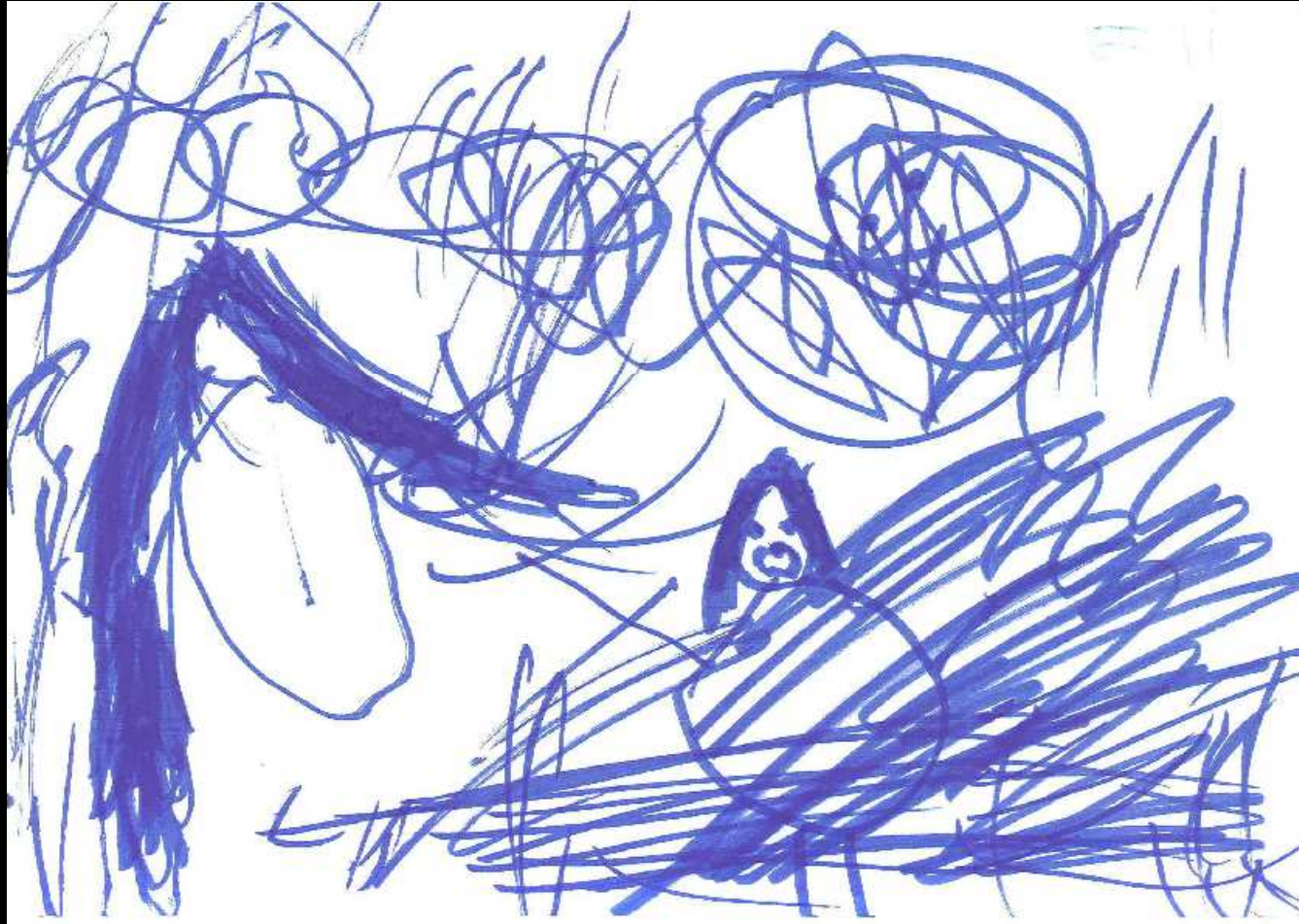
Emily



Emily

- Now, this is about toes. How the toes grow. (pointing) This is the child and child size toes, then it grows to the adult and then to this size. See, this shows how the toes grow.

Zara 4 years



Zara

- When my mum was little she grew up. Soon she will grow up like dad and be a real person. Then I will have 2 dads. Mummy will be a dad but she will have long hair and still be called Julie (So you won't have a mum then?). Oh, well, that's how it will go.

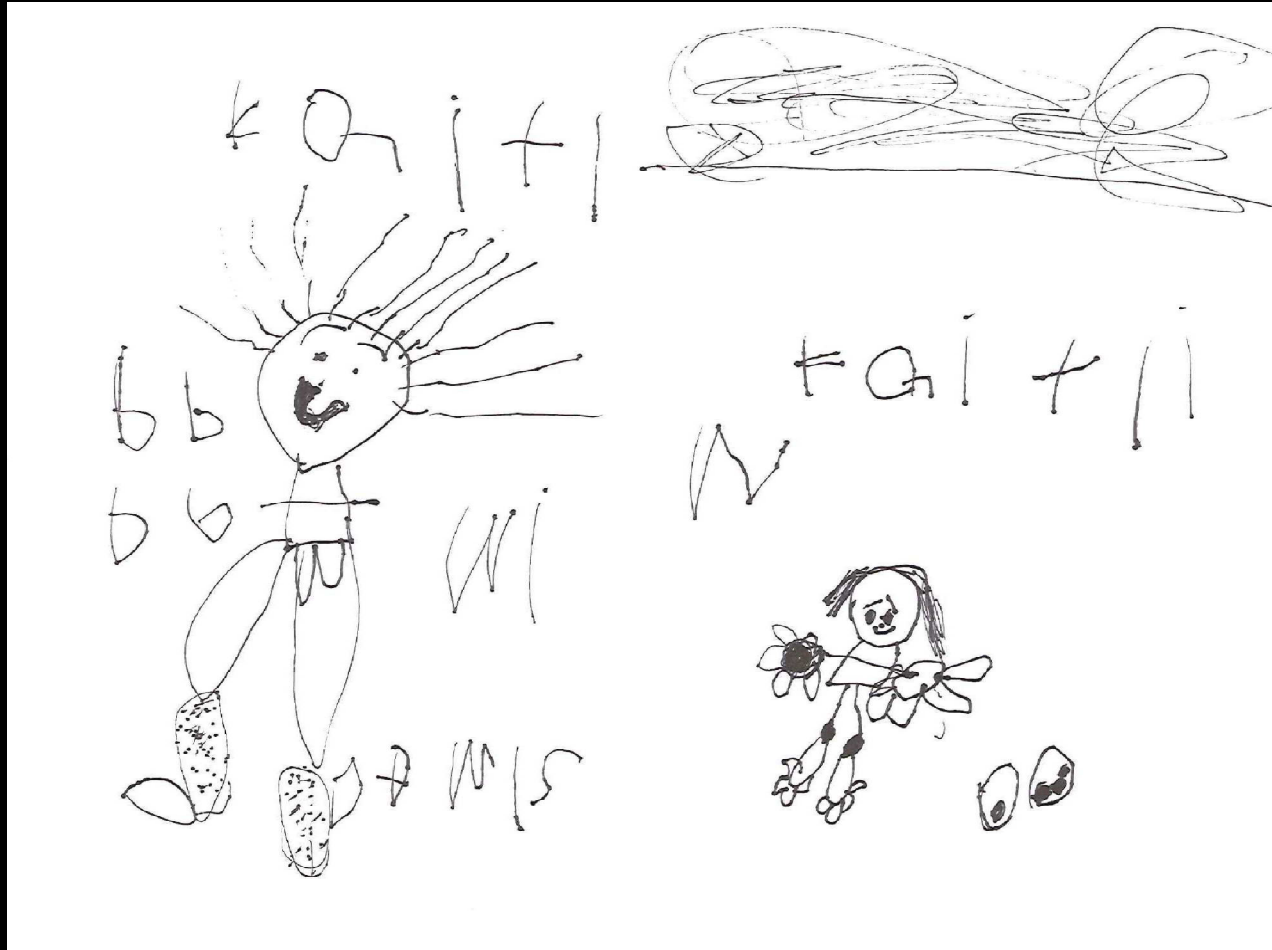
What do adults talk about?



Rory 4.1 years

- The adults have more words to say and children have less words. The adults have learned the words and children haven't. The baby hasn't learned any words.....they (adults) talk about the children. They don't know what it is like for me because they went to a a different school so when they talk about me its not the same. They didn't have mobilio and they didn't have computers so how would they know?

Kaitlin 4.5 years



Kaitlin

- Children talk about their favourite shows. My favourite show is Barbie. Adults talk about what they look like. My mum always says, “Do I look nice? Do I look beautiful?” Sometime she does and sometime she doesn’t. Daddy always tell her she looks beautiful otherwise she would cry. I only talk about TV or sometimes I say “Can I come to your birthday party?”

Conclusion

- We support the notion that a community can provide the structure and procedures that enable children's participation, should it view the child as a competent and capable contributor. It is this commitment that shapes the ideas the community has about children. The wish to listen to, and involve children, originates within this context and leads to structures and procedures that can support the involvement of children around a range of issues that impact on children

Nina 4.3 years

- Not peeing in your bed is hard. I can't control my bladder. When I grow up I won't pee in my bed. I wish my mum understood that.