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**A PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER INQUIRY INTO CHOICE, VOICE AND AGENCY  
IN INDIVIDUAL DRAMATHERAPY SESSIONS: CO-RESEARCHING WITH  
CHILDREN IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL SETTING**

**Emma Ramsden**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Leeds Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**JUNE 2014**

**AUTHOR'S GUIDANCE NOTES on the PDF version of this Thesis:**

- Please note that the reproductive photographic quality of co-researcher artefacts and cartoon images has been comprised in the electronic conversion of this document in PDF format. To view images as they are intended by the author, please visit the Thesis reading room at Leeds Beckett University library (formerly Leeds Metropolitan University).
- Minor layout, formatting and text spacing anomalies are present in this document as a result of format conversion.

## Dedication

To the children in the study: Ambipom, James, Lady Gaga, Mia, Rocksus, Rosie and Stargirl; whose voices will enable others to be heard by adults who, as active listeners, can support what they hear.

## **Abstract**

**Emma Ramsden**

### **A PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER INQUIRY INTO CHOICE, VOICE AND AGENCY IN INDIVIDUAL DRAMATHERAPY SESSIONS: CO-RESEARCHING WITH CHILDREN IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL SETTING**

This qualitative study engages seven children as co-researchers of their individual dramatherapy experiences within a mainstream inner-city primary school. The study adopted a practitioner research approach and data were collected over 18 months. The research questions address the ways in which children can engage as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions; whether choice-making can promote agency; and what the field of dramatherapy can learn from children's reflections.

Data collection took place across three phases: Phase One (two sessions) was concerned with assent choosing. The co-researching took place in Phase Two (10 sessions), during 15 minutes of reflection time towards the end of individual dramatherapy sessions. Phase Three (three sessions) focused on each child and myself reviewing their co-researching experiences. The children led the pace of their engagement throughout the phases, and reviewed their choice to co-research on a session-by-session basis. They also chose the nature of their engagement from 12 arts-based creative research methods, which had been identified and made available from the existing practice of dramatherapy and the additional resources already in the therapy room.

The study is underpinned by theoretical frameworks relating to choice, voice and agency, and by practices – such as the provision of research methods that draw on creative processes – that invite children to be equal agents in matters which concern them. Also influential in the study's design are practitioner research theories that aim to develop and improve practice, engaging the researcher as an active and effective listener whilst respecting the existing client-therapist relationship.

The findings are presented in the form of a thematic analysis and three case studies. The findings reveal that making choices about the ongoing nature of assent is an important way in which children can gain insight into their co-researching experiences – and therefore into themselves. They also show that the opportunity to choose creative research methods and resources, through which children can review and reflect upon their co-researching experiences, promotes and reveals their agency. This study has the potential to contribute to theory, practice and research in dramatherapy, and to the field of research with children.

**Candidate's declaration**

I confirm that the thesis is my own work and that all the published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in references. I confirm also that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Leeds Metropolitan University, and its Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education for the award of the Centennial PhD Studentship that has enabled me to conduct this study. **Heartfelt thanks go to my Directors of Studies, Professor Phil Jones and Professor Pat Broadhead, for illuminating the darkness by listening to, responding to and supporting my voice.** Thanks also to Professor Anne Campbell for her supervisory input during the first two years of the study, and to Dr Jon Tan for his support in the preparation of the Research Training Programme portfolio, and his directorship during the final months of the process. Thank you to the examining panel for their input in the viva voce. I would also like to thank Howard Stones for his collegial support and co-teaching mentorship, Sarabjit Bissas in the Research Office for her generosity of spirit, enthusiasm and support throughout the study, and Mike Jennings for IT support.

My deep thanks go to the children in the study; to Sara who first suggested the dramatherapy post to me in 2001 and who recently became Head of School; and to other key school staff (Ann, Ellie, Hilary, Jeanette, Lynne, Maureen, Vicky, Vince and Nigel) for their support. Thank you also to Sally Nicholson for depicting my research process from start to finish through insightful and detailed cartoon illustrations, and for her support from the start of the study. Thanks too to Alison Kelly and Deb Haythorne for clinical consultations throughout the study and to the CASToff supervisors group for their support and encouragement. Thank you to Heidi Jockelson at the British Association of Dramatherapists for invaluable help and efficient responses to many queries.

For supporting me as I compiled the thesis for submission, my thanks go to 'co-researching buddies' Jane Jackson and Mandy Carr for peer consultations and for proofreading chapters along with Georgia Laval for her professional proofreading services; Gala Woolley for her work compiling the references during her gap year between school and university.

Thank you to Phil Ramsden for being a rich resource on many education-related issues (including spotting newspaper articles on children's voices), and to the memory of my friend Mags Golby, who died a few months after the scholarship began but who taught me almost everything I know about administrative layout and attention to detail.

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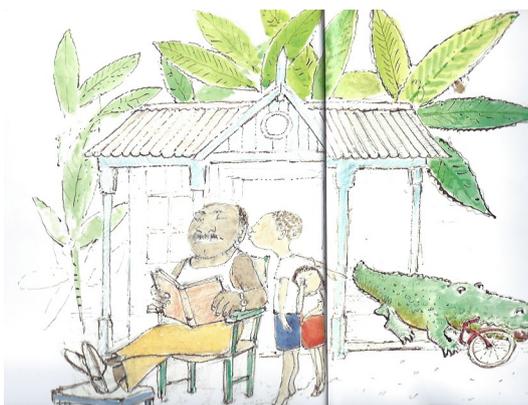
# **A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introducing and outlining the thesis**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

“Allow us to tell you what we are thinking or feeling. Whether our voices are big or small; whether we whisper or shout it, or paint, draw, mime or sign it – listen to us and hear what we say.”



UNICEF (2002), illustrated by John Burningham.

The journey that led me to conduct this qualitative practitioner research study began 20 years ago. At the time I was a student of film, drama and theatre studies, and a volunteer drama facilitator with two local initiatives: a theatre company for adults with learning disabilities ('In The Boat') and a homeless charity providing food, clothing and shelter to young adults during the winter months. In these settings I noticed that through their engagement with drama people were able to find a voice with which they could express their stories. The insights I gained from these experiences, combined with an interest in performance art 'happenings' of the 1960's and community theatre projects of the 1970's and 80's, eventually led me to train as a dramatherapist. Qualifying in 1998, I began working with children, adults and families who were experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, using drama and the

creative arts with the specific aim of facilitating a therapeutic process in which these experiences could be expressed and transformed. Since that time I have worked with homeless adults and orphaned children in Romania; homeless men and women in the UK; adults with addictive behaviours in community settings; and adults and young people detained in high secure services.

Over the last decade I have added to the body of knowledge surrounding dramatherapy by contributing chapters to publications addressing areas of practice through case study investigation; this has enabled me to develop my practice and share findings within the field of dramatherapy and associated professions. It was this interest in improving practice, in combination with my practitioner experience, that culminated in my embarking on the study – which took place in the school setting where I have worked part-time since 2001.

The opening quotation conveys the idea at the heart of this inquiry: that children can deepen their self-knowledge and experience well-being through the choices they make in relation to how they express their voices. The quotation is taken from Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989), which concerns the rights of children to express themselves freely in methods of their choosing. However, their expressions must be heard by people who are committed to seeing them as meaningful and supportive of well-being (see Appendix 18, page 317, for additional information about the opening quotation and illustration).

This study was conducted with children who were already engaged in individual dramatherapy, and was influenced by theories supporting choice, voice and agency, which consider children equal and competent in their own right. The invitation to co-research during the reflective phase of their dramatherapy sessions was offered as a means of empowering the children as the choice-makers in their own journeys. Research methods developed from dramatherapy techniques provided opportunities for self-expression in ways that were familiar to the children and which supported their empowerment.

The body of knowledge in dramatherapy continues to develop as practitioners respond to the need to gather evidence about their practice (which can also help to secure funding for the commissioning of posts). Evidence helps to improve practitioners' understanding of their clients' needs; this can be achieved through practitioner research, which is conducted as small-scale in-house projects or as more formal

research studies. As dramatherapist Roger Grainger has said of research into practice: 'If we want to understand the phenomena of dramatherapy, we must adopt models of research which are in harmony with the object of our study [...] we have to be willing to involve our clients as partners in our research and to take up a position within, rather than without, the context we are examining' (Grainger, 1999, p. 137). This thesis therefore contributes to the fields of dramatherapy and research with children through its exploration of children's potential to reflect on their experiences in different ways, and to promote their agency through choice-making and self-expression.

Seven children engaged as co-researchers of their individual dramatherapy sessions in this study, and their reflections guided the analytical process. Ambipom, James, Lady Gaga, Mia, Rocksus, Rosie and Stargirl are the self-selected pseudonyms that each child chose and agreed for me to use when referring to them in this thesis; these names represent one of the many ways in which each child expressed their voice as a co-researcher in the study. Data were collected over 18 months and the study adopted a practitioner research approach, focusing on the reflection phase of the dramatherapy sessions. A variety of research methods were used, based on dramatherapy techniques already familiar to the children, which had been selected by them and other children throughout the years of practice.

Conducting this study has impacted on my practice by deepening my knowledge of these seven children – a knowledge facilitated by their self-reflections. My understanding of the processes of assent has also significantly developed (Alderson & Morrow, 2004), along with that of conducting research with children in therapy (Jäger & Ryan, 2007; French & Klein, 2012; Elefant, 2010). My awareness of the tensions and challenges that arise as an 'insider' researcher, in terms of negotiating power and creating an ethically sound research design which holds the client at the centre of the inquiry (Proctor, 2002; Daniel-McKeigue, 2007), has impacted on my role as both a practitioner and a researcher.

The study's findings give insights into choice, voice and agency for children in dramatherapy, and have implications for theory, practice and research. They are of potential interest to practitioners working with children, who may gain insights into their own practice by engaging with the findings and discussing the theories and key ideas that shape this study.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the study, including a rationale of the theoretical framework – relating to choice, voice and agency – that underpin it and have influenced its development. The study’s aims, objectives, research questions, design and its significance in the field of dramatherapy are also introduced.

## **1.2 Research rationale**

This study is influenced by the unprecedented interest and growth in the welfare, care and currency of children and childhood that has emerged over the last three decades. During this time, research into the nature of childhood and the experiences of children has been prolific, and sociological changes have resulted in children being considered competent in matters that concern and affect them. As Allison James and Alan Prout (1997, p. 8) suggest: ‘Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live’. Many factors have influenced these developments, including changes in policy and law – most significantly in the UNCRC (UN, 1989), which sets out a series of universal rights and responsibilities towards children in support of their protection, provision and participation (Jones et al., 2008). These rights and responsibilities include those that must be upheld by adults to support children and their agency through engaging them in the issues that affect them (Hill, 2006).

Yet consultative and participatory processes have been argued to be complex and problematic. It has been argued that these agendas may purport to seek and understand children’s experiences, but their proponents may have limited capacity to listen to children’s views, hear what they say and know how to act upon them (Farrell, 2005; Laming, 2009). Failing to listen effectively to someone is in effect a way of silencing them and compromising their well-being (Baker, 1999; Clarke et al., 2011); for children, in some cases, this silencing can have catastrophic and tragic consequences. For example, in the recent serious case review (SCR) into the death of four-year-old Daniel Pelka, the findings saw him as the subject of professionals’ concern rather than the focus of their interventions (Lock, 2013). The findings of the SCR strongly support the need for adults to listen to children actively and effectively, however they choose to express themselves.

The study draws on the theoretical influences of voice as a mechanism for self-expression, self-insight and agency (Lundy, 2007; Oliver & Dalrymple, 2008). The concept of the 'voice of the child' is used by academics, researchers and policymakers to refer to a set of experiences which draw on many physical, psychological, social and political discourses, serving to empower children by creating opportunities to engage with them as equal, active and competent (Jones & Welch, 2010). The concept is also influenced by the growing body of knowledge surrounding the engagement of children as researchers and co-researchers: children's voices are becoming more directly represented through the dissemination of the findings of their own studies and their collaborations with others. As a consequence, adults are increasingly entering into research studies with children as co-researchers (Kellett, 2010). The concept of the voice of the child and its relevance in research into therapeutic practice is revealed through the study's findings.

The study was designed to provide opportunities for the children to make choices in dramatherapy which empowered them to express their voices, support their own well-being and deepen their self-knowledge. Assent-choosing and assent-reviewing processes were designed to be ongoing rather than single events; this draws on the body of knowledge relating to conducting ethical research with children (Alderson & Morrow, 2004), as well as research into therapeutic practice with children (Daniel-McKeigue, 2007), both of which prioritise child-centred research methods. Finally the methods in this study have been influenced by creative arts and play-based approaches; these include the multi-modal use of creative resources such as drawing, cameras and 3D materials, which have been offered in studies with young children to elicit their views and help them develop knowledge of themselves and their environments (Clark & Moss, 2001; Bishton, 2007; Jäger & Ryan, 2007).

### **1.3 Research questions and aims**

The questions that the study sets out to address are based on a combination of issues, raised through preliminary reviews of literature and clinical observations in dramatherapy practice. These issues also informed the development of the theoretical approach and the design of the study.

### **1.3.1 Research questions**

1. How can children engage as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions?
2. Can choice-making in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions promote and reveal agency?
3. In what ways can engaging children as co-researchers in dramatherapy inform the field's understanding of both children's agency as co-researchers and the reflective phase in therapeutic process?

### **1.3.2 Research aims**

1. To provide ethically sound co-researching opportunities during reflection time in the final 15 minutes of individual dramatherapy sessions (10 sessions per child).
2. To provide assent-choosing and assent-reviewing processes that place each co-researcher in control of the choices they make throughout the study.
3. To provide choices in the range of co-researching methods and additional resources, incorporating arts processes and dramatherapy techniques.
4. To listen actively and effectively to each child and to capture their self-expressions in whatever form they are offered, presenting the findings in ways which empower them.

## **1.4 Originality and significance of the research**

The findings of this study demonstrate that making choices with regard to the ongoing nature of assent is an important way in which children can gain insights into their co-researching experiences – and therefore into themselves. They also show that the opportunity to choose from creative research methods and resources, through which they can review and reflect upon their co-researching experiences, promotes and reveals children's agency. These findings make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in dramatherapy.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

Chapters Two and Three contextualise the research in terms of the bodies of knowledge from which they draw upon; Chapter Four explores the theoretical influences informing the methodology and research methods, and outlines the design of the study in detail; Chapters Five and Six present the research findings through a thematic analysis and three in-depth case studies; and Chapter Seven discusses the study's overall findings and their implications on, and contribution to, relevant bodies of knowledge, as well as critically appraising the study and its research approach, and highlighting opportunities for future research. The chapters are outlined in more detail below.

## **1.6 Chapter breakdown**

Chapter Two focuses on children in the context of choice, voice and agency, exploring the past three decades' unprecedented growth in all matters concerning children and childhood, and the implications for children and their engagement in research. It explores the concept of the 'voice of the child' in relation to the study, establishing it within a context of rights and practices that support agency. It draws on historical perspectives and their legacy in order to frame the present, and outlines current tensions and challenges within the discourses of children and childhood.

Chapter Three discusses the field of dramatherapy in educational settings, and draws on its development in order to outline the areas of strength, tension and challenge that are most relevant to the study. A discourse on children in dramatherapy is presented in terms of how referrals are made, and how services support self-expression of children who are perceived to be vulnerable in some way. Perspectives on the nature of the therapeutic relationship are explored, along with the process and function of reflection in therapy and in dramatherapy. An exploration of diversity in dramatherapy practice is followed by a review of practitioner research in dramatherapy in educational settings – and the tensions that exist in relation to approaching research and evaluating practice within these contexts.

Chapter Four focuses on methodological theory and outlines the design and research methods used in the study, as well as fully exploring the concept of practitioner research and theories which aim to develop and improve practice whilst maintaining client integrity. The seven children who formed the research sample are also introduced in this chapter. The research site is contextualised in terms of the 18

months where data were collected over three distinct phases, and in relation to the theories which aim to invite children to engage as co-researchers through a variety of research methods that draw on creative processes and dramatherapy techniques which are familiar to them.

Chapter Five is the first of two chapters presenting the study's main findings from the analysis. This chapter adopts a thematic approach in order to reveal findings with regard to the ways in which the children engaged as co-researchers, and to present the insights they gained about themselves and their agency. The findings are presented via a series of analytical snapshots, conveying the four main themes identified from the analysis. These themes focus on the children's experiences and engagement with the study's ongoing assenting process (Phase One); choice and use of pseudonyms; selection of and engagement with the research methods, and the content that emerged through their use (Phase Two); significance of the reviewing process and the experiences of co-researching for each child (Phase Three). The findings presented in the themes demonstrate how the research methods and additional resources for capturing reflections provided opportunities for the children to explore aspects of themselves, and how their reflections generated insight and self-knowledge. These findings also illustrate the ways in which each child experienced the reviewing process, including the ending phase of the study.

Chapter Six reveals findings as three case studies, showing individual co-researching journeys as they pertain to a child's insight, life and agency. The narratives of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie have been selected for this purpose, yet the co-researching narratives of *any* of the seven children could have been chosen: all are illustrative of choice, voice and agency in relation to the research questions. The three case studies reveal the unfolding research journeys, and show the insights gained, through their reflections, into the choices and voices of each of these children.

Chapter Seven discusses the overall findings and conclusions, and assesses the study's original contribution to knowledge and its implications for the field of dramatherapy and research with children. The chapter addresses the limitations of the study, as well as its strengths, and reflects on the implementation of the methods and research process. Areas for future research opportunities, which could develop this work further, are identified and the thesis is concluded.

## **1.7 Summarising Chapter One**

This chapter has outlined the thesis and identified the area of research and the theoretical frameworks at its heart. The rationale, research questions and aims of the study have been outlined, and an overview of each chapter has been presented. The originality and significance of the study has been identified in terms of its contribution to theory, practice and research in dramatherapy, and to the body of knowledge surrounding research with children.

## Chapter Two

### The voice of the child: childhood, implications and legacy

#### 2.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters reviewing literature and presenting the key ideas that form the theoretical approach of the study. A range of theoretical perspectives of children and childhood are discussed in this chapter, drawing on influential factors that have shaped developments in the field of child-centred practices, such as rights, agency, voice and research. As the chapter will show, major shifts in matters relating to children over recent decades have increased their visibility in society and impacted on the provision of core services in areas such as health, education, welfare and the family, and leisure. For example, initiatives such as the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UN, 1989) have identified key changes in – and revisions of – the provision of rights for children. In research, participation and consultation initiatives seek to gain children’s views on matters that affect them in many areas of their lives, including school, friendships, family life, health and emotional well-being. What this chapter will show is the level of complexity within the interweaving critical discourses about children’s empowerment and disempowerment, and opportunities for agency and the expression of voice within these bodies of knowledge.

Firstly the chapter locates the study within literature regarding the significant growth and interest in children and childhood, and within the theories that have informed its focus. The concepts of choice, voice and agency are critically explored, and this is followed by a focused discussion of the key aspects of child voice and its development and impact in the lives of children. The inclusion of children in research is then explored, which leads to a discussion of the historical factors that have influenced opinions and shaped cultural developments in relation to children and childhood. This includes an examination of particular themes relevant to children’s representation in literature, as well as a more in-depth view of key issues around children’s rights and listening to children’s voices in research.

#### 2.2 Sociological approaches to children and childhood

This section examines the sociological approaches to children and childhood that have emerged over the last three decades – a period that has seen an exponential growth in children’s participation, and an increased presence of their voices, in all matters

affecting them in their social, public and private lives (Jones et al., 2008; Penn, 2008; Campbell & Broadhead, 2011). During this time, children have been repositioned and recognised as *'competent, capable, and effective reporters of their own experiences'* (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 60). The improvement of rights and entitlements has contributed towards significant changes in the quality of childhood and child-related issues that have been developed and researched (Lansdown, 2005). (Children's rights are returned to in section 2.6.2, page 37 of this chapter.)

Collaborative methodologies which include children in research, such as consultation and participation, lead to the potential for children to become researchers themselves by enabling them to identify topics to research, and which provide a *'new body of knowledge about childhoods and children's lived experiences'* (Kellett, 2010, p. 22). As section 2.5 will show, children and childhood have historically been placed as subjects of adult agendas; the shift from subject to participant in research, which has markedly occurred within the last 30 years, has seen children becoming increasingly engaged as active researchers and co-researchers of their experiences (Armistead, 2011; Ramsden & Jones, 2011) – a shift that has contributed to their empowerment and agency (**The Open University Children's Research Centre**, 2010; Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2007). These developments are influential to the theoretical underpinning of this study.

Historian Harry Hendrick (2008b) has shown how this shift in the positioning of children from incompetent to competent beings has been made possible in part due to the developments in provision and protection rights, which deem children capable of making valued contributions and in turn increases their visibility in society. Helen Penn (2008, p. 13) has described the emerging field of study this reframing has spawned within the sociology of childhood as *'a relatively new area of study which focuses on what it means to be a child in an adult-dominated and orientated society [which...] takes children's own views of their situation as an important source of evidence.'* Sociological discourse has resulted in an active re-thinking of agendas that seek to engage with children and listen to their views.

The findings of recent studies, seeking to establish how children view the world around them, have shown that they want to be listened to and taken seriously by adults who ask them their views (Kellett, 2010; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Hill 2006). A number of research approaches and processes have been employed, including historical research, formative and retrospective ethnographic inquiry, and practitioner-based

research, to gather a range of perspectives on children and childhood (Christensen & James, 2008; Lewis & Lindsay, 2002). The process of consultation sets out to listen to children and act on their evidence through participation, and to thereby liberate their voices (Hill, 2006). These approaches and studies have been conducted as a result of investment in devising methods that enable meaningful ways to encourage children's participation through a commitment to listening to their contributions (Birbeck & Drummond, 2007). The employment of research methods with children is explored in more detail in Chapter Four, section 4.2.4.

One inquiry, commissioned by **The Children's Society** and purported to be the largest independent UK inquiry recorded to date, aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of present-day childhood using a proportion of contributions made directly by children (Layard & Dunn, 2009). '**The Good Childhood Inquiry**' (GCI) based its methodology on consultation with and the participation of children, which gave meaning to individual experiences of their childhoods. The GCI outlined the following in its launch report: 'In order to build a complete account of childhood we need to gauge what children and young people are feeling now, and understand that their experience of childhood is a valid one in itself, rather than seeing childhood as a preparation for adulthood' (Hughes, Pople, et al., 2006, p. 21). This view of children as meaningful narrators of their own experiences is becoming more prevalent; it is also featuring increasingly in policymaking and initiatives, such as the GCI, which deliver findings that aim to support the development of systems addressing children's concerns and needs.

Whilst these approaches and developments set out to enable agency for children, they are not without tensions which challenge their capacity to support agency. Sociologist Viviana Zelizer (1985, p. 7) suggests that research in the 1980s was problematic because it focused on parental motivations only. She wrote: 'Research on the value of children has been dominated by psychologists, economists, and demographers, all similarly concerned with parental motivation for childbearing and its relation to fertility patterns and population policy'. Conducted 20 years later, the GCI has been applauded for drawing significantly on children's views, yet it has also been criticised for the deficiency in the range of solutions it offers in response to the challenges it raises (McGimpsey, 2008). The consultation and participation approach has also been subject to the accusation that it is an agenda designed to harvest children's views with questionable ethics of adult-only motivations (Alderson, 2008). While children are now involved in more areas of life, and being more regularly asked to offer their views, than

ever before, there remain complexities about how these views are being elicited and to what ends they serve. The need to listen to children in ways that are meaningful, and which enable the expression of their voices, is an area that requires further growth and development.

There is scope in research for developing methods which are drawn from children's creative expressions and play processes that are at the heart of human development, and which form a significant part of a healthy exchange of expression for both adults and children (Winnicott, 1971; Booker, 2011). Children's expressions are rooted in play as a natural way of negotiating their worlds and of communicating in ways other than verbal speech (the development of research methods for children are discussed in the context of this study in Chapter Four, section 4.4). Through the development of creative and play-based methods, adults seeking to understand children's experiences could offer ways in which they are able to express themselves, and have their accounts trusted and acted upon. Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (2007) argue that researchers' commitment to listening, hearing and trusting the accounts of children in research has a direct impact on those children, while Helen Roberts (2008) argues that a lack of child-led perspective leads to children being listened to but not heard. Woodhead (1999); Farrell (2005); and Davie (1993) have articulated the need to listen to children with meaning, and to act upon what they express – both of which are key processes that are at the heart of this study's aims. These views prompt the need to develop ways of listening to and hearing children's expressions.

### **2.3 Choice, voice and agency**

This section discusses choice-making, self-expression of voice and agency as concepts supporting personal empowerment, and upon which this study is grounded.

Choices provide individuals with options about how they relate to issues and experiences that concern them, and about how they express themselves in terms of their emotions. Malcolm Hill (2006, p. 85) argues that having choices in research '*maximises the opportunities for participants to choose forms of communication and levels of involvement they prefer*', and Cochavit Elefant (2010, p. 255), in her research into music therapy and communication with children with severe disabilities, suggests that choices could '*help the child take control and responsibility for his or her actions*'. These perspectives show that choices are seen as an integral part of enabling agency for children in research through the understanding and the belief that they are free to make choices and express themselves. In the context of this study, choices relate to

the variety of research methods and the range of available materials and resources in the dramatherapy room. These choices were designed to enable each child to gain an understanding of their capacity to make choices. Choice-making in relation to this study is discussed in detail in Chapter Four (sections 4.11.1), which includes descriptions of the range of method choices and available resources.

The concept of 'voice', and 'giving voice', can refer to the internal self-direction and empowerment of the individual through self-expression, as well as to collective ideas located outside of the politic of individuality (Baker, 1999). In this way, 'voice' cannot be singularly defined because it is changeable and open to multiple interpretations within various contexts of time, place and circumstance. Examples of collective voice are found in movements of power, rights and the unification of beliefs within communities that have been silenced and/or excluded through perceived or actual powerlessness and oppression (Clarke et al, 2011; Beaudoin, 2005). However, this study draws on the perspectives of Bernadette Baker, Laura Lundy, Ann Lewis, and Christine Oliver and Jane Dalrymple, who see voice as the capacity for self-expression, self-insight and agency, as a concept that is located within a framework of individuality.

Psychologist Carl Rogers saw voice in the context of a therapy setting as a means of promoting agency with the aim of realising clients' individual potential. Rogers noted that 'the mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force [...] man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities' (Rogers, 1970, p. 140). Voice becomes a means of expressing that which affects and troubles us as humans, and of acknowledging changes towards increased well-being. This expression is experienced within a framework of collaboration between the client and therapist through their relationship, which prioritises the client's experiences. (Chapter Three, section 3.3, and Chapter Four, section 4.2.2 review the concept of relationship and alliance in therapy in more detail.)

Within the context of this study voice is more than speech – more than a mode of communication through spoken language. It has been described as '*...not just articulations alone [and] not exclusively restricted to physiological inscriptions of vocal or verbal utterances*' (Baker, 1999, pp. 380–381). Voice can be conveyed through spoken word, sound, gesture, movement, image, drawing, action, and other choices of individual expression (Lundy, 2007). Equally, voice can be expressed through silence, which Lewis (2010, p. 20) suggests is '*...not neutral or empty*'. The concept of voice has been described as symbolic and '*... inclusive of a wide range of capacities and*

*models of communication*' (Oliver & Dalrymple, 2008, p. 20). Implicit within the concept of voice is the need to be heard through self-expression. The experience of being heard is one of agency which places the individual in control of making choices about their level of involvement, mode of communication and expression of voice in a given situation or experience.

Agency denotes personal empowerment and an understanding of the self through proactive engagement in one's own life and involvement in the decisions that affect it (Clarke et al., 2007; Kurri, 2005). It has been described as '*establishing [the] self as [the] seat of action*' (Haigh, 2013, p. 14), and as something that allows individuals to be '*...producers of experiences and shapers of event.*' (Bandura, 2000, p. 75). Alongside the individual's role in self-expression, agency requires a listener (or listeners) who is active and effective (Lundy, 2007). This inter-personal aspect of agency fosters well-being and healthy self-expression. Challenges to agency noted in literature include geographical, environmental, political and cultural factors, as well as inequality of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and disability (Whitehead et al., 2007; Baker, 1999).

Even within a context of disempowerment, personal agency can be possible. Therapy is one example of an environment that supports agency; indeed, the concept of agency is central to therapeutic theory. In the context of therapy, agency has been described as '*a core direction of therapeutic interaction*' (Williams & Levitt, 2007, p. 80), and as '*the effort to respect, preserve, and increase the client's personal freedom*' (McWilliams, 1999, p. 15). The therapist operates as the active listener, providing the client with a confidential space in which to engage with their competency and capabilities, and to explore experiences at their own pace. These conditions support the key aim of self-discovery as noted in therapeutic literature, which describes the client's development of well-being through a self-initiated process of change (Langley, 2006; Bettelheim & Rosenfeld, 1992).

#### **2.4 Exploring the concept of the child's voice**

This section critically reviews the concept of child voice within the context of the theoretical developments that have made significant contributions to changing ideologies, with regard to the ways in which children participate in matters that affect them.

Hendrick (2008a) suggests that the emergence of voice has grown out of a *denial* of the voice of children throughout long periods in history, where direct accounts of

children's experiences through their own narration are absent. He also suggests that, prior to the changes brought about over the past three decades, historical authors largely researched and presented accounts of the *conception* of childhood, but were unable or unwilling to develop methods to actually listen to children or even hear them speaking.

The concept of the 'voice of the child' is seen as a combination of physical, psychological, social and political discourses, defined and redefined within each changing time (Lewis, 2010). The term 'voice of the child' has been applied to experiences, ideas and issues present in childhood where privilege is ascribed to children's self-reported evidence and opinions (Penn, 2008; Davie, 2006). Lansdown (2005, p. 40) articulates the need to include children in issues that affect them as follows: *'All people, however young, are entitled to be participants in their own lives, to influence what happens to them, to be involved in creating their own environments, to exercise choices and to have their views respected and valued'*. Impacting on the 'voice of the child' agenda is the UNCRC, and particularly relevant to this study are Articles 12 and 13, which focus on the rights of the child to express their own views *'orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice'* (UN, 1989). These articles support children's use of play and creative expression as representative of their voices; giving voice to children therefore challenges the status of adults as the sole decision-makers in matters affecting them, and invites children to represent themselves and express their views directly addressing their silence and absence by their representation (Jones & Welch, 2010; Lundy, 2007).

The literature pertaining to children's agency argues that adult researchers must be proactive in their commitment to the discourses of children's voice, choice, competency and capacity (Montgomery & Kellett, 2009). This includes a commitment to developing methods and approaches which engage children in all aspects of research in ways that they understand, as shown in the illustrative examples in the next paragraph. Gaining children's agreement to collaborate in the research process – whether as a participant, researcher or co-researcher – is an integral component of the concept of listening. Issues around gaining permission, consent and assent in the study are discussed in Chapter Four, section 4.3.2 to 4.3.4.

Melanie Mauthner (1997) articulates the impact a collaborative research design had on enabling the 'voice of the child' through three studies, which engaged children and

adults in their families in interviews about healthy eating, welfare and communicating health education to children. She describes the content of interviews, and notes how providing time for the children to speak freely enabled them to feel heard and the researchers to introduce questions: ‘One boy talked about how his rabbit had died, another gave a lively account of a police chase he had been involved in, and girls described experiences of being bullied and accidents in the home. These narratives provided a background to the children’s lives at school, openings for the researcher to ask specific questions [...] and gave children their own voice in the interview’ (ibid., p. 20). The semi-structured research methods used in the studies were designed to make an allowance for spontaneity of response from both child and adult participants.

Research that adopts an observational approach includes the seminal folklorists Iona and Peter Opie (1969) who capture the voices of children in their research into the content and function of children’s play, through observing children at play. Haki Kapasi and Josie Gleave (2009) also adopted approaches using functional descriptions of observed play, before any adult interpretation was applied as to *why* children play, in their ‘Playday’ research campaign ‘**Because it’s freedom: Children’s views on their time to play**’. What these studies show is an awareness of children’s capacity to express themselves through play without the intervention of adults, and adults’ capacity to effectively convey what has been observed, and to represent children’s voices without placing bias onto the raw data – which is so often the burden of the researcher (see Chapter Four, section 4.7, for a discussion about bias within the study). These accounts reveal examples of approaches developed in research for listening to others, and note the importance of the research relationship between researcher and research participant.

In the context of this study, voice is the means by which the children’s self expressions as co-researchers are heard by their actions, sounds and words. Choice-making is a further articulation of voice, as it serves to empower children towards self-expression using a range of child-led methods which aim to promote and reveal agency.

## **2.5 Researching *with* children**

This section explores the emergence of children’s voices as researchers and co-researchers, and the potential for them to be active and capable agents of their own lives and experiences. The collaborative nature of the research, and the trustworthiness of data collected from – and with – children, demonstrates voice as a meaningful communication of their experiences. This approach draws on the ‘*with*’ and

'by' developments in research practice, as noted by Mary Kellett (2010, p. 31), which deem children competent and active in matters that concern them, and capable of collaborating as researchers in their own right, thus moving the research agenda away from the silence of exclusion.

This thesis has already identified a number of studies which articulate the importance of repositioning children away from being subjects of research, where their voices are silenced or absent due to adult interpretation. To help develop the presence of children as researchers, Kellett (2005a) has written a children's step-by-step guide to inform them about research, taking them through the process of conducting their own studies and then analysing, writing and presenting their findings. Other works have focused on determining how to undertake research with young children (Jipson & Jipson, 2005); what happens when children are invited to participate in research (Warren, 2002); and how to negotiate the ethics of engaging children as researchers (Alderson, 2005) – which is explored in this thesis in Chapter Four, section 4.3.

Studies engaging children as researchers is becoming established in the field of education, and includes an Australian study in which children researched experiences of school as part of an initiative that engaged both students and teachers as researchers. This study is a clear example of their research potential as revealed through the findings which show how these children's voices developed through creative and active engagement in research, and how this led to their becoming peer-advocates on issues such as bullying (Groundwater-Smith, 2007). This research led to positive outcomes, based on the children's understanding of their ability to be active throughout the stages of the study. Some of the participants described feelings of well-being as a result of their involvement.

Further examples of children as researchers and co-researchers are drawn from **The Open University Children's Research Centre** – a leader in the field of child researchers where academics and researchers support children as they research a range of topics with their peers as well as with adults. Alderson (2008) writes about research studies carried out by children and notes that adults have supporting roles to assist children in developing their research questions and methodologies. Subjects researched by children in recent years include views of religion (Aaron Peck, aged 10, Daniel Oakley and Bailey Shipp, aged 12); perceptions about health concerns (Ruberta Bisson, aged 16); social media (Jack Hedges, aged 12) and technology in schools (Camille Braud, aged 12); recycling and environmental issues (Lewis Watson, aged

10); emotional health and well-being (Isobel Sutherland, aged 11; Nahid Islam, aged 10) (The Open University Children's Research Centre, 2010 & 2013 ). Increasingly, some of these calls to participate in research are being made by children, as researchers, to their peers (The Open University Children's Research Centre, 2010; Groundwater-Smith, 2007; Kellett, 2005b). Conducting research with their peers and initiating studies on matters which concern them are significant ways in which children's agency is revealed.

Aside from the methodological design of studies such as the Australian school-based project referred to above, the literature also reveals evidence of studies, commissioned by charities and policymakers, that present children's views directly in their findings. An example of this representation appears in Helen Bishton's report: 'Children's voice, children's rights' (2007), which explores views on inclusive school practice with children with identified special needs. Director of a specialist educational facility, Bishton reproduces fragments of children's verbatim accounts to convey research findings that have derived using a collaborative approach. The reader discovers exactly what the children said in response to the questions asked (which are also reproduced in script format). The children's agency is revealed through their own words, and the collaborative approach adds to the richness of the encounter with each child.

These sections have explored the ways in which children's engagement in research has developed and how their voices have been enabled through sociological agendas which serve to illuminate children's experiences and contributions. In order to deepen the position of these developments of voice and agency the next section discusses the emergence of childhood as a field of study in itself from an historical context.

## **2.6 Perspectives on children and childhood**

This section (2.6 to 2.6.2) explores the historical perspectives of children and childhood that have influenced the development of the study's theoretical approach, and traces the development of associated theories and ideas, looking back at the past to '*illuminate the present*' (Quan-Baffour, 2012, p. 3). Revisiting events and examining historical perspectives can be '*a way of creating insight and dialog with contemporary concerns in theory, research and practice*' (Jones, 2013, p. 352). This is achieved in the context of this study by focusing on key aspects and changes in society that have led to children being seen as capable of making active contributions.

Childhood is seen as a socially constructed and reconstructed phenomenon that is revisited and redesigned by adults in response to the changes of time (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Montgomery, 2006; Jones & Welch, 2010). Commonly defined as the period of time from birth to 18 years of age, childhood is widely considered a unique developmental period, and has been described from an adult stance as 'a state of being [...] a disputed territory of memory and meaning' (Brooks, 2006, p. 4). Childhood has also been described as a time of being a person 'who once we were, but no longer quite know' (Hendrick, 2008a, p. 65), and as seen as a complex concept that incorporates systems of politics and value (Moss & Petrie, 2005).

Philippe Ariès (1962) is considered to be a seminal author in this area, having charted the progressive history of childhood from medieval times (where Ariès argues childhood did not exist) through a construction of accounts from wide-reaching fields of inquiry. A decade later, Lloyd deMause (1974) approached a history of childhood from the perspective of the parent-child relationship, and in more recent years Hugh Cunningham's history of childhood, which goes up to the final years of the 20th century, has received popular readership, and been serialised as a BBC radio production (**The Invention of Childhood**, 2006). This popularity is in itself an indication of the interest in childhood studies in current times.

Ariès writes about childhood as a construction of society and not a biological imperative; Cunningham (2006) sees childhood as a series of inventions that can be organised to articulate different stages of historical development. Social constructionist Vivien Burr's (1995) understanding of childhood's existence is in a context of history and culture which is constantly evolving and where understanding is relative. Hendrick (2008b) has argued that the absence of individual historical data has led historians to focus on the *concept* of childhood rather than on children as people, which has denied them a voice.

Historians have charted the lineage of childhood and attitudes towards children, from medieval times onwards, through extant manuscripts that document accounts of the times. These accounts of children's experiences have also been gained from in-depth study of diaries and other forms of literature, such as child journals, which include first-hand accounts by the children (Cunningham, 2006). Together, these artefacts provide valuable information about the experience of being a child throughout history from health-related, educational, social, political and leisure perspectives (Hendrick, 2008b). The accounts have enabled historians to develop hypotheses regarding the function of

children throughout the changing times, using examples such as their servitude and their status as the essence of religious symbolic innocence from the 5th to 15th centuries (Ariès, 1962).

In terms of freedoms and restraints with respect to work, social, familial and personal duties, these historical documents have informed the ongoing construction and understanding of what childhood is now, or may become in the future. For example, writing about the 20th century, Cunningham (2006) notes that the changes following the Second World War had an impact on the shape of childhood. These changes included the advent of increased access to technological leisure devices such as television; commercial advertising; increases in car manufacture; and economic availability.

These examples have shown how childhood has developed as a concept and as a discrete phase of the life cycle. Children are no longer seen only through adult eyes; they have become increasingly visible and able to engage with changes in society, as well as having an increased capacity to contribute towards these changes.

### **2.6.1 Representations of children in literature**

The following examples depict children in clinical and fictional literature. They have been chosen to convey some of the ways in which representations of children and childhood have developed over time, from adult-only constructs to children finding their voices as authors. These examples are not intended to suggest that voice through literature is more important than any other creative expression – such as art, film or photography – but growth in the concepts of voice and agency is particularly notable when looking at the field of literature, which is why they are the focus of this section.

Clinical studies documenting individual cases have been published from the 20th century onwards. This format is still well used today, with many texts considered seminal still in print. Fears, phobias and difficulties with relationships are among the themes depicted throughout these accounts, such as in the 1909 case of the five-year-old horse-phobic boy, '**Little Hans**' (Freud, 2001); or the 1964 account of the boy known as 'Dibs', who was experiencing emotional distress and was referred to play therapy by his mother (Axline, 1990). Katie's experiences of foster care and adoption (Hughes, 2006), and, more recently, a collection of case studies about the developments in neurobiology – as told through a therapeutic lens in relation to

children who have experienced trauma and neglect (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006) – are further examples of these publications.

Depictions of children in *fictional* literature is one way of exploring historical perspectives; in the 18th and 19th centuries there was an increase in the portrayal of children and childhood as a result of social reform. For example, Charles Dickens wrote '**David Copperfield**' (1850), which, along with Charlotte Brontë's '**Jane Eyre**' (1847), is attributed with being one of the first novels to use a child as the central narrator (Tomalin, 2011). This development was described as '*a happy cross-fertilization between two great writers*' (ibid., 2011, p. 218), revealing as it did the presence of children as individual beings who were capable of autonomy, as people with feelings and motivations. While this literary device no doubt served to articulate authorial voice, it can nevertheless also be considered a commentary on childhood then and what it was to be a child.

As well as being *about* children, literature has also targeted children as readers. One historical example of this is the publication of a book of poetry called '**Child Whispers**' (Blyton, 1924); the poems are introduced to the child reader in the book's foreword as being '*written entirely from the child's standpoint, and in this they are unique, and hold an attraction for children which is profound and irresistible*' (ibid., p. 2). Twenty years later, the publishing house Penguin pledged to '*make children into readers*' with their launch of the Puffin publishing arm ([www.Puffinbooks.com](http://www.Puffinbooks.com), 2013).

Another area of change and growth in literature leading to the expression of voice and agency is the emergence of children as authors themselves, of both fact and fiction. Perhaps the best-known example of factual writings comes from a diary published as '**The Secret**' (1947). Anne Frank's account of her family's hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam during the Second World War was first published posthumously in the Netherlands following a newspaper article by journalist Jan Romein (1946), and was later renamed '**The Diary of a Young Girl**'. Published with this title in the UK by Puffin since 1997, it has remained a bestseller as both children and adults seek to accompany Anne through her account of childhood, and to experience her through the voice of her writing.

In more recent times, Cunningham (2006) has noted the advent, accessibility and capacity of the Internet and social media in enabling children to launch their own voices through writing on blogs (a form of online diary) and other media platforms. Whilst

heralded by many as a positive means of communication, self-expression and user-led access to information, the presence of modern technology is also problematised, existing as it does in a climate of consumerism and the besieging of information on children from all available technological platforms (Robinson, 2010). Tensions exist in relation to issues of safeguarding children from predatory adults in light of the technological complexity of regulating online systems (Dombrowski et al., 2007).

These examples are drawn from many that show representations of children in literature and the emergence of their voices as authors.

### **2.6.2 A rights agenda for children**

Children's rights, and the influence of a rights agenda, are particularly important to this study as they place the needs of children at the centre of the discourses and issues that affect them, and provide a mechanism for their participation (John, 1996). Commenting on his understanding of rights on a radio programme, a 10-year-old boy said: "I think everyone should have a right to know what's going on around the world. Parents should be telling all their children what's happening, even if they don't ask what's happening coz they should just know what's going on in the world I believe" (**Bringing up Britain**, 2010). This perspective suggests that having the right to information is a shared responsibility between children and adults, and that children value being informed.

The modern-day rights agenda can be traced back to the middle-class society of the 19th century, when pro-rights campaigners declared that a child had 'a right to childhood' (Cunningham, 2006, p. 224). Various rights of protection and independence are referenced in descriptions of childhood during those times, with the home being central to such observations and campaigns (ibid.). The United Nations '**Declaration of the Rights of the Child**' was published in 1959 (UN, 1959), 14 years after the end of World War Two, and emphasised the needs for adults to '*protect, feed and educate children*' (Cunningham, 2006, p. 224). In light of the many changes and improvements in the quality of living that occurred from the turn of the 20th century, children's access to rights were reviewed in parallel with policies that made improvements to working conditions and leisure time for adults. These changes are said to have enabled the general population to be viewed in more individual rights-based terms than in previous times (Hanley, 2007).

The UNCRC has been referred to as the *'touchstone'* for the development of rights around the world (Walker & Jones, 2011, p. 3) and has instigated huge investment in issues affecting children and childhood over the last 30 years. The convention calls upon governments to make 'a commitment to meet the provisions and obligations set out in the Convention and therefore to protect and ensure the rights of children' (Dunford, 2010, p. 76). The rights agenda for children has created a wealth of literature, with contributions from academics, policymakers and reporters of children's experiences (Alderson, 2008; Russell, 1996). Rights-based literature focuses on the core aim of enabling children to be heard with equal weight and respect, and to take part in discussions that affect their lives (Daniels & Jenkins, 2000).

The UNCRC is established in child services in the UK as a mechanism for ensuring participation, provision and protection of all children (Brooks, 2006). There is also evidence of a commitment to communicate the contents of the convention directly to children in ways that are accessible to them, as, for example, in the UNICEF publication **'For Every Child – the rights of the child in words and pictures'** (UNICEF, 2002) (referred to in Appendix 18, page 317), and in a similar text by Amnesty International called **'We are All Born Free – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures'** (Amnesty International, 2008). Both texts place children as their target audience in order to promote the information and empowerment of children's and human rights directly to children and young people. Each publication contains a selection of rights, illustrated by a range of internationally renowned artists, and are designed to be accessible to children.

The child's right to play (Article 31) has been the subject of literature in support of play-led services for young children (Snelgrove, 2005), and has been the subject of a rights-based analysis of play processes (Davey & Lundy, 2011). While this literature shows that rights have developed a language around issues affecting children, there are also tensions surrounding the approach. For example, critics of the UNCRC's impact suggest that it has not been implemented fully or adopted universally, leaving children lacking and vulnerable in a rights-based discourse (currently Somalia and the United States of America are the countries that have not signed the treaty).

In presenting and exploring the key historical factors in relation to children and childhood, these sections have demonstrated the ways in which choice, voice and agency has impacted on children's lives. Identifying the overarching concerns that support – and challenge – the concepts of agency and of seeing children as competent

individuals helps to understand the theoretical context of this study.

## 2.7 Listening to the voice of the child in research

This section addresses the challenges of listening to children's voices within research. These challenges were at the forefront during the design of the study's methodology in order to ensure its ethical integrity. Tensions that challenge children's freedom of choice, self-expression and agency have been discussed in this chapter, such as the need for adults to actively listen to children by seeing them as narrators of their own lives and as '*competent social actors*' (Wyness, 2006, p. 236). Research involving children has been noted as requiring '*a commitment to seeing that children are not separate from the worlds they inhabit*' (Kinney & Wharton, 2008, p. 116); consultation and participation methodologies have been challenged over their engagement of children as agents of adult agendas, and for their minimal scope for recognising and listening to the individual voices of children over the conceptual voice of childhood (Hendrick, 2008b).

Children have been described as '*passive figures against the backdrop of adult life*' (ibid., 2008a, p. 46), with tensions existing between their rights and their needs (Leach, 1994). For example, while the UNCRC has been described as '*the most widely ratified international human rights instrument*' (Dunford, 2010, p. 76), UK ratification is said to have been undertaken with an absence of a press release and minimal publicity (Lansdown, 1996). On publication, the '**The Good Childhood Inquiry**' was criticised for not possessing the capacity to respond to the issues which arose from its resulting banks of data (McGimpsey, 2008), with critics suggesting it reflected society's inability to listen to children – a society described by a leading UK public figure as '*tone deaf*' to children's vulnerabilities (Layard & Dunn, 2009, p. 168). Lobbying groups and independent agencies such as children's commissioners offices and the '**Children's Rights Alliance for England**' (CRAE) (2010) have highlighted these issues of rights and needs, and have called for reviews into what they see as failures in the protection systems for children, and in the realisation of rights issues.

The absence of methodological approaches which respect children's competency signals a failure to address the needs of children once their experiences have been shared, where the inability to support them 'off-stage' can place them in danger (Wyness, 2006). 'Off-stage' areas are seen as those parts of children's lives which fall outside of the remit of a given research study, but which they may have revealed during their engagement in it. This is particularly relevant in this study, which engages

children who may be described as vulnerable as co-researchers of therapeutic process, and raises significant ethical issues (see also Chapter Three, section 3.4, and Chapter Four, section 4.3).

## **2.8 Summarising Chapter Two**

This chapter has discussed the key aspects that form the theoretical underpinning of the study, and which support the argument for including children as active agents capable of expressing their views and opinions through choosing to engage with creative methods. Being heard by researchers who show a commitment to actively listening to children's expressions is also a key part of voice, and one that enables agency. Complex layers that exist around the concept of the voice of the child have been discussed from adult-, child- and rights-centred perspectives in order to explore and support the expression of voice. A series of challenges to listening to children's voices within a framework of rights, and within research approaches, has also been addressed in this chapter; this demonstrates an awareness of the tensions that can threaten active listening and compromise research, safeguarding and the ethically sound provision of services to children if not considered carefully.

The next chapter reviews literature which informs the study's theoretical approach in relation to dramatherapy and its practice with children in educational settings.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Dramatherapy in educational settings**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the practice of dramatherapy in educational settings, providing an understanding of its practice as well as an outline of the key areas of strength and development, tension and challenge relevant to the study. The process of clients' reflection in dramatherapy is reviewed in some detail as it played a significant part in the study's data collection design (see Chapter Four, section 4.10 for details of the phases of data collection).

The chapter begins by discussing the emergence of dramatherapy, and draws upon the wider field of therapeutic intervention to contextualise its history. The ways in which dramatherapy sessions may be conducted are discussed in section 3.4, which is followed by a section about children and vulnerability. A discussion of dramatherapy practice takes place in section 3.5, and the process of client reflection within dramatherapy sessions is reviewed in section 3.6. After this, in section 3.7, there is a focus on the literature covering client voice in dramatherapy practice and research.

In section 3.8 dramatherapy in educational settings is contextualised, along with practitioner research approaches. Dramatherapy research in educational settings is reviewed in section 3.9. A discussion of the tensions and debates within current working practice follows in section 3.10 before the chapter is summarised.

#### **3.2 The emergence of dramatherapy**

Dramatherapy is a recognised therapeutic intervention which places intentional emphasis on involvement in drama, theatre-arts and creative play to provide opportunities for clients to gain a greater understanding of themselves, others and the world around them in times of distress or difficulty (BADth, 2007-2014; Jones, 1996; Pearson, 1996).

Dramatherapy is practiced both individually and in group settings, and has been consistently seen as an intervention that incorporates a range of creative and action-led techniques, such as dramatic role play and embodied physical states, to explore psychological processes and life stories (Gersie, 1996; McFarlane, 2005). There is a

substantial international body of knowledge associated with dramatherapy, with practitioners influenced by additional fields of inquiry such as anthropology (Jennings, 1997); religion and philosophy (Grainger, 2006); developmental psychology, sociology and medicine (Jones, 1996; Casson, 1997; McFarlane, 2005) to inform their practice alongside theatre-arts and dramatic processes.

Dramatherapy developed from the middle part of the 20th century onwards, with British child drama practitioner Peter Slade considered a key figure and pioneer for his engagement with children through drama in educational settings. He is attributed with being the first person to coin the one-word term 'dramatherapy', in a paper delivered to the British Medical Association in the late 1930s (Jones, 1996). Slade wrote the title with one word noting that 'it has more force that way' (ibid., p. 84). (Conversely, US practitioners refer to themselves using two words: 'drama therapists' (Landy, 1994)). While Slade's obituary in **The Guardian** records him as the 'first British Dramatherapist' (Dodds, 2004), it remains widely recorded in dramatherapy texts that no one author or practitioner could be considered responsible for its complete emergence, and that many factors converged at a particular time in history to bring about its birth as a discipline. As dramatherapist John Casson (1997, p. 10) records: 'Recurring strands of theatre, psychology, drama and therapy continue to develop a courtship dance until the marriage occurs mid-century simultaneously in the USA, Britain and Europe'. In addition to Slade, other influential figures have shaped and contributed to dramatherapy's development including drama specialists and educationalists like Dorothy Heathcote, Sue Jennings, Billy Lindkvist, and Gordon Wiseman (Jennings, 1994). Early texts written by some of these practitioners and others focusing on remedial and educational drama with children, many of whom had physical and intellectual disabilities, are now considered seminal in the understanding of the emergence of dramatherapy (Slade, 1965; Jennings, 1978; Wagner on Heathcote, 1979).

In the UK dramatherapy has been formally regulated by the government since 1997, enabling the development and implementation of rigorous codes of practice and conduct that place ethical and legal accountability with individual practitioners (**BADth**, 2007-2014; **HCPC**, 2007-2014). Training is at Master's level, with university courses offered mainly in the UK, in Europe and the USA. Along with art, music, dance-movement and play therapies, dramatherapy is known collectively under the title of 'Arts Therapies'. Each discipline has its own professional association and training syllabus which place emphasis on engagement with the art form itself as an underpinning principle (Jones, 2005; Karkou & Sanderson, 2006).

The formalisation of the profession and its training routes have contributed to the growth of the discipline from the 1970s onwards, as well as enabling the development of a theoretical framework outlining competencies within the practice. This includes the core processes of accessing and transforming the dramatic potential in sessions (Jones, 1996; Emunah, 1994); placing focus on the healing power of myth (Lindkvist, 1997); and drawing from a taxonomy of roles within which it is possible to explore personal distress from a balanced distance (Landy, 1994). The profession's formalisation also integrates clinical supervision as a mechanism for therapists' explorations of their practice towards the maintenance of ethical standards (Jones & Dokter, 2009).

Upon reviewing a small number of published interviews with key practitioners such as Slade, Jennings, Wiseman, Lindkvist, and Robert Landy (Jones, 1996; Jennings, 1994), it becomes apparent from an historical perspective that a core of practitioners working with children using drama and the creative arts were already based in educational settings, as well as having careers in theatre-arts (Jennings, 1994; Meldrum, 1994; Jones, 1996). Often these practitioners were employed as teachers and support assistants in specialist educational units for children with learning and physical disabilities, as well as in mainstream education. The fusion of ideas that became the specific discipline of dramatherapy developed from those early days as a result of practitioners skilled in drama, arts and in education and health – not yet called dramatherapists – meeting in social, informal and ad-hoc settings and sharing and writing about their ideas of theatre and drama practices, and facilitating workshops and creative projects with children and adults (Jennings, 1994). Alongside theatre-arts influences, these practitioners drew on their awareness of the pioneering figures working with children using drama, and of various movements in education encouraging the use of the arts (Karkou, 2010). They were also greatly influenced by the work itself, by their own encounters with children considered emotionally disturbed, where using drama brought about positive changes (Jennings, 1994). Dramatherapy in educational settings is addressed below in section 3.8.

The scope of influences that forms the discipline of dramatherapy is reflected in the diverse skills that practitioners bring into their practice, as mentioned above which can be drawn from fields other than drama and theatre-arts – such as psychological and educational fields of inquiry. A number of dramatherapists are dual-trained as teachers, psychiatric and general nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists and psychotherapists, social workers and care workers, along with a number of religious

practitioners (Gersie, 1996; Jennings, 1992; Mitchell, 1996). Throughout their careers many dramatherapists develop specialist skills that are influenced by clinical interest – as well as the availability of employment and funding. Also of influence in the development of dramatherapy is the scope and availability of continuing professional development forums (CPD), where training, seminars and courses about specialist areas of theory and practice are available (Jones & Dokter, 2009).

Some form of dramatherapy practice is present on almost every continent, in countries including Taiwan, Malaysia, South Africa (Jones, 2010), Australia (Mackenzie, 2013) and Sri Lanka (Smyth, 2010). Dramatherapists are employed in many settings, ranging from large institutions and specialist branches of hospital medicine to private practice (Langley, 1983; Dokter, 1994; Bouzoukis, 2001). Specific client groups that dramatherapists work with include people with addictive behaviours (Dokter, 1994; Jacobse, 1994); refugees, asylum seekers and victims and survivors of war and conflict (Madan, 2010); those with psychiatric and other medical disorders (Haen, 2005; Meldrum, 1994; Holloway, 1996); young people and adult offenders detailed in forensic settings diagnosed with personality-disorders and other categories of mental illness (Ramsden & Guarnieri, 2010; Stamp, 2008; Jennings, 1997); children in paediatric care (Bouzoukis, 2001); and those recovering from traumatic events and disasters (Long & Weber, 2005); with elderly clients (Crimmens, 1998; Kelly & Daniel, 1996), and with child survivors of sexual abuse (James et al., 2005; Cattanach 1992; Bannister, 2003). A significant body of knowledge relates to practices with children and adults with a range of cognitive learning needs and physical disabilities (Haythorne & Cedar, 1996; Chesner, 1994; Jackson, 2011).

### **3.3 Dramatherapy in the wider context of psychological therapies**

Dramatherapy focuses on the engagement of creative processes and psychological techniques in order to effect individual change and increased well-being for clients (Langley, 2006). Along with the other arts therapies, dramatherapy is influenced by a range of psychological therapies developed using different theoretical approaches from the mid-19th century onwards; these approaches have inevitably been influenced by the political, economic, social, moral and ethical changes that have taken place during this period in history. Theories of the conscious and unconscious self (Brown & Pedder, 1979), and of personality (Berne, 1964) and relationships (Clarkson 1995), have been developed, researched and applied within therapeutic fields including psychotherapy, psychology, psychiatry and counselling, which themselves contain a range of specialist fields and diversity both in terms of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches.

In common between these theoretical approaches is the aim of promoting and enhancing well-being for the client through personal change by exploring their needs with them which are in support of agency. Needs which may be mild to severe, temporary to enduring are met by developing communication through the building of relationships (Langley, 2006; Jennings, 1978; Jones, 1996; Pitruzzella, 2004).

A key area noted in literature and considered alongside agency to be at the heart of any therapeutic exchange is the relationship, or alliance, between client and therapist (Elefant, 2010; Brown & Pedder, 1979; Kahn, 1997). This relationship is seen by many as the key method of communication supporting personal growth through learning about the impact of thinking, feeling and action (Cattanach, 1999; Bannerman-Haig, 1999; Cox, 1978; French, 2012). The therapeutic relationship is built upon the therapist's respect for all material brought to the therapy by the client – known as a process of unconditional positive regard (Haugh & Merry, 2001).

Psychological therapies therefore have core processes in common, which aim to foster opportunities in which insight can be gained by the client into their lives and the issues which affect them. These factors include a trusting therapeutic alliance and a therapist that consistently listens to the client's needs. In dramatherapy insight is seen as possible through working with *'dramatic processes [...] in ways which facilitate therapeutic change'* (Jones, 1996, p. 5). The therapeutic alliance in relation to this study is discussed in Chapter Four, section 4.2.2. The ways in which dramatherapists work are discussed below in section 3.5.

### **3.4 Children and vulnerability**

The previous section located dramatherapy within the wider field of psychological therapies; the concept of vulnerability is discussed here in relation to children in order to establish its use within this thesis, and to provide a clearer understanding of the issues and circumstances that might bring children who are classed as vulnerable into dramatherapy.

Vulnerability is seen as a shifting concept. Angela Anning (2011, p. 64) notes: *'Vulnerability is a relative concept – dependent on the cultural norms, socio-economic conditions and expectations/aspirations of host communities and those who serve them'*. The term 'vulnerable' is used in this study to refer to children who experience a range of psychological needs and sensitivities which bring them into dramatherapy,

and which compromise their well-being and capacity to express themselves with agency (Alderson, 1999). The use of the term vulnerable is not intended to disempower children or to locate the vulnerability within them as individuals; it is instead used to describe the context and living conditions that may deem children in need of adult intervention to support their well-being, to listen to their needs and respond to them and foster and promote agency.

A number of issues can impact negatively on a child's world, and on them directly which increase their vulnerability. For example, the personal, economic, geographic and social circumstances of their caregivers or communities are cited as areas in which vulnerability may occur (Carr, 2012; Thomson, 2002; French & Klein, 2012). Individual issues relating to language and learning, as well as physical health, may also increase children's vulnerability, and prompt the need for support within their peer groups and from adults. Likewise, being at risk of coming into contact with the police and custodial services as a result of family or social dynamics can also render children in need of support and intervention. Living with financial and/or emotional poverty; being placed in looked-after care as a result of changes in family circumstances and/or for a child's own safety and protection; geographical changes brought about by leaving one country and residing in another – either as a refugee from conflict or as a result of employment-related migration; living with adults who are not fit to parent due to criminal activities, abusive behaviour, addictive needs or mental illness... these are all factors that can increase children's vulnerability.

Equally, seemingly positive family events – such as a move of house or to a new school; the arrival of a newborn sibling or the re-marriage of a parent – can bring out vulnerabilities in children which may require some additional support from adults (Camilleri, 2007; Howarth & Fisher, 2005; Hayden, 2007). These situations all have the capacity to create vulnerabilities for children, through physical and emotional risk, by placing them in a position of disempowerment and silence. Some circumstances might be temporary, others more enduring.

Views regarding children's vulnerability have shifted and developed in response to campaigns for the provision of rights, social reform and protection laws. An example of this development can be found in a late 1960s educational text entitled '**Children in Distress**', which provides a breakdown of the needs of children in the UK at that time, claiming that in every 1,000 children:

*'...two or three [...] are likely to be not only bedfast all their lives but virtually incapable of being educated. A similar number will never manage to read or write, though with careful training in the education service which they have just joined they may manage to do very limited but nevertheless useful work. Another ten to twenty children will receive special educational treatment. Much money as well as public and private compassion will rightly be lavished on this group, as it includes the blind and the deaf and the crippled, those who are mentally weak, those who for some other reason are failing to learn as normal children learn, and those whose behaviour is so abnormal that they are a trouble to themselves and the community'* (Clegg & Megson, 1968, p. 12).

This description is concerned with parents' inability to cope with the burden of their children's needs, be it to themselves or the wider society, as a result of the resources required. This cultural and social milieu renders children hopeless and incapable; it also denies them a voice, leaving them disempowered. The association of children's vulnerability with physical and mental impairment – seeing it as representative of failure and abnormality – may have been experienced as shaming and excluding for both children and adult family members. While reforms have led to changing ideologies, there remain groups of children who are ostracised as a result of their perceived differences, and who experience emotional and psychological distress as a result. Jones (2009, p. 37) refers to these experiences as 'othering' – *'processes which are seen to limit children and their lives'*. These processes can cause discrimination through stigmatisation of perceived difference in any area of life such as economic, geographical, cultural, social or personal expression.

Vulnerability is seen in the context of this study's aims which is in accord with Anning's (2011, p. 76) claim which empowers the concept of vulnerability as having the potential to be transformed: *'If those routinely deemed to be vulnerable were given a stronger voice, perhaps through the processes of research, they might gain the power to argue against being consigned to the boxes of 'vulnerable' and 'powerless'*. The concept of vulnerability is therefore a key concern in this study due to its potential to exclude from research the voices of children that are considered too fragile to participate, such as children engaged in therapy.

### **3.5 A discussion of dramatherapy practice**

This section reviews some of the approaches and methods used in dramatherapy, and draws on children's accounts of their experiences of dramatherapy to articulate the partnership between creative and psychological inquiry that has already been discussed.

This partnership has been described as 'the intentional and systematic use of drama/theatre processes to achieve psychological growth and change. The tools are derived from theatre, the goals are rooted in psychotherapy' (Emunah, 1994, p. 3). Dramatherapists align themselves with various approaches in their practice, depending on their background, area of skill and special interest and client setting. For example, while Jennings and Wiseman advocate that healing in dramatherapy should be contained wholly within the art form (Jennings, 1994), Emunah, Read Johnson, and Cattanach note the employment of an integrated model that draws on both dramatic and creative language, as well as psychological processes such as unconscious motivation, to incorporate creative and psychotherapeutic ideas (Cattanach, 1994). Whether focus is placed solely on one approach – such as theatre-arts or a combination of drama and psychodynamic factors that enable connections between conscious and unconscious states – the relationship with self and other is explored through play processes and dramatic holding, which can be outside of the bounds of spoken language alone.

In common with the overarching concept of any therapies, what the client brings into the therapy space is what the client and therapist explore together. The client is placed at the heart of the therapeutic alliance (Valente & Fontana, 1993) and from this position retains the choice to engage or disengage with the process. Consistency of time, place, confidentiality and frequency of sessions are fundamental elements in the establishment of a safe and trusting framework, from which the client can grow through the exploration of experience. Additional factors such as funding, scheduling and waiting lists can and do affect the provision of therapy, and these issues are discussed further in section 3.10.

Individual sessions are usually structured around a series of stages – which might include an opening and warm-up stage, an active working stage, a reflection stage and a closing stage – during each session. Examples of these variations include a five-part structure (Jones, 1996), five sequential phases (Emunah, 1994) and a three-part structure (Andersen-Warren & Grainger, 2000). Variation also exists in the way

practitioners work with theatre-arts and drama approaches. Some practitioners advocate use of the client's inner resources through their engagement in embodied states, which requires no physical properties or materials (Read Johnson, 1982); some consider the use of embodied states to be enhanced by the incorporation of projective processes – accessed through equipment and resources – as a means of assisting engagement with the self via dramatic characterisation (Pitruzzella, 2004); while others are influenced by their own creative histories as well as their theoretical understanding of processes that inform their practice.

Having described the framework for dramatherapy from the practitioner's perspective, presented below are examples of children's *direct* experiences of being in dramatherapy (accounts which are notably few and far between, given the extent of the body of knowledge).

When reflecting on her dramatherapy experiences, Sri Lankan school child 'Child S' recalled the embodiment and role play processes used in dramatherapy, and noted the trust she felt within her sessions: *'I liked your trust game [...] now I trust you'* (Smyth, 2010, p. 110). Working with Israeli-based dramatherapist Pamela Mond following an accident at the age of 12, one boy described dramatherapy as being 'about touching and playing with objects, drawing and telling stories and making up plays about them. This lets you collect up and get out the frightening feelings from inside you and doing all this helps you to be calm' (Jennings, 1994, p. 184). Both examples reflect the provision of a safe space and a trusting relationship with the therapist, which in the second example enabled this boy to look at the distress caused by his accident through play languages of his own choosing. His reflection alludes to the resources in a room equipped for the purpose of dramatherapy.

The provision of a room where play materials can be set out is an important factor for most in offering an intervention; such a room enables access to a range of resources that can be utilised through dramatherapy methods including role play, puppet play, storytelling, object work, sculpting and freeze-frame, hot seating, art materials and musical instrument play, and play-world methods using sand boxes. These methods have been described by one practitioner as 'Pandora's box of creativity' (Wharam, 1992, p. 82) and are said to employ the imaginative, symbolic and metaphoric processes of drama and theatre in order to find ways of responding to the struggles and the presenting issues brought by the client – a process that 'seeks to enable the participants to objectify their action and experience in the context of the sessions'

(Dokter, 1993, p. 84). The core process of the life-drama approach (Jones, 1996) can enable connections to be made by the client between their inner and outer worlds; between the play world and their actual reality.

### **3.6 The process of reflection in dramatherapy**

This section focuses on the process of reflection in dramatherapy – a key part of the study's design with each child entering into the co-researcher role during the reflective part of each session. Reflection as a concept is integral to any therapeutic process as the process itself is a space in which to reflect on experiences that have occurred in life outside of the therapy room, and to gain insight into them (Yalom, 1995). However, in the practice of dramatherapy reflection also forms an established stage within sessions – possibly made up of a number of sub-stages, depending on the practitioner's approach.

American dramatherapist Renee Emunah (1994) considers the reflective stage as a time to provide and receive feedback about the emotional journey of the session. Phil Jones (2007, p. 13) refers to it as a time for closure and de-roling which 'marks the ending of the main active work involving dramatic forms'. Jenny Pearson (1996, p. 12). describes reflection as 'bringing [the client] back to a sense of the here and now at the end of sessions'. Sue Jennings (1986, p. 16) describes it as the period of time where the client prepares themselves by entering into 'more restful exercises [...] from the focus of the session back to the focus of everyday activities'. Paula Crimmens (1998, p. 44) describes the reflective phase as 'the stabiliser'. What these descriptions share in common is the value they place on the ending phase of individual sessions as a means of looking at what has just happened, of closing the creative work and preparing for the transition to leave the dramatherapy space and face what dramatherapist Madeline Anderson-Warren (2000, p. 24) calls the 're-entry into the world waiting beyond the stage door'.

Reflection employs both practical and psychological functions, and is seen by Landy (1994) as also the time for the client to tidy up and put away any materials used (which could be argued is a form of reflection in itself). Reflection is seen as a space where action becomes inaction and then stillness; where the client integrates aspects of the session for themselves as well as offering and receiving feedback by reflecting on elements of the ending process. This feedback does not have to be verbal – it might be expressed in metaphorical ideas through physical movement, image-making, story or by being in silence (Jones, 2007). The use of structured exercises using

dramatherapeutic methods, such as de-roling from dramatic engagement, can also be employed to reflect on experiences that are both internal and external to the self, and enable connections to emerge.

As I designed the study I identified the potential for the self-reflection – which occurs during the ending phase of the dramatherapy sessions – to provide an opportunity for data collection, where each child could review the session’s content from their own perspective. This is explained in Chapter Four (section 4.10).

### **3.7 Client voice in dramatherapy**

This section explores the concept of client voice within dramatherapy and reviews the ways in which it is defined and represented within the associated literature. Initially the section discusses the concept of client voice, drawing briefly on a number of arts therapies disciplines to contextualise it as a form of self-expression that is embedded within the therapeutic alliance (as discussed in detail in Chapter Four, section 4.2.2). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for reviewing client voice within dramatherapy literature are outlined and then reviewed.

‘Voice’, conceptualised in relation to this study in Chapter Two, sections 2.3 and 2.5, is located within a framework of individuality as the capacity for an individual to gain insight and agency through their chosen form of self-expression (i.e., by verbal, non-verbal, visual, sensory or aural means). The expression of ‘client voice’ is a theme that has developed more recently and been given more attention to within the arts therapies. For example, within music therapy client voice may arise through engagement in music-making (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006); within dance movement therapy the voice is seen through movement, which has been described as the ‘initial and primary language of the body’ (Tortora, 2010, p. 28); and in art therapy the significance of the client’s image is considered to be ‘the most permanent and powerful voice’ (Dalley et al., 1993, p. 2). Within the client-therapist relationship, or alliance, the client has the potential to express their voice at their own pace and in their own way, and to explore the issues that emerge within the therapy room.

The meaning of ‘voice’ in the arts therapies covers a range of perspectives. Within dramatherapy, Jennings (1995, p. 203) describes the therapist in child work as a figure that must strive ‘genuinely to accept the child as he is, to witness and reflect back his feelings; to trust in the child’s ability to facilitate change in his life, given the opportunity to do so.’ Dramatherapist Frankie Armstrong (1996, p. 77) describes client voice in

terms of a vocal instrument and its connection with an individual's sense of self, and of the development of well-being experienced through its use: '...by feeling that they can make themselves heard and that they have the right to be heard [...] people are so often able to feel an increased sense of well-being, aliveness and self acceptance'. In these examples the therapist is at all times emotionally present and supportive of the potential for self-expression through the investment in therapeutic aims (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006). Client voice within the arts therapies could, therefore, be described as the expression of experiences and associated feelings by the client through their selection of mode of expression, which is witnessed by the therapist and contained within the therapeutic alliance.

In order to establish a theoretical understanding of how client voice is represented within dramatherapy literature, publications from the late 1970s to 2014 were reviewed, using particular search criteria. As the study was designed in such a way that each child's experiences would be documented through partial and full verbatim within the thesis, and through the reproduction of images and photographic artefacts, the literature reviewed was focused within the field of dramatherapy in which clients' voices have been represented as verbatim using text and/or images. In order to gain an understanding of the diversity and frequency of examples of verbatim client voice within the literature, the initial search focused on practices with both children and adults within case study and practice accounts in UK-based publications, but was not limited to UK-based practice or practitioners. These criteria were established in order to contextualise the presence of client voice within dramatherapy literature where the author is either the client themselves or the practitioner working with them. Instances of individual and group therapy processes were included in the search, but therapeutic theatre projects and continuing professional development (CPD) sessions were excluded.

From the literature reviewed, a series of client voice categories were derived, as follows:

- Client verbatim – single sentences or single words
- Client verbatim – single or multiple paragraphs taken from session content
- Client verbatim – in script format, in dialogue with the dramatherapist
- Client verbatim – evaluation and/or research feedback from therapy
- Client voice represented as reproduction of drawings and/or photographs

- Client verbatim – sole-authored or co-authored accounts of experience in dramatherapy
- Dramatherapist-reported and interpreted accounts of client voice

The literature from which these categories were derived covers a range of practitioner contexts, based on both dramatherapy practice and dramatherapy as research. Contexts include children and young people in mainstream and special educational settings; inpatient and outpatient mental health services; community centres and custodial settings; adults in elderly care; forensic settings; and treatment centres for substance misuse and addictive behaviour. The literature did not reveal examples of client voice in accounts from private practice for children, young people or adults.

The review revealed a substantial number of case study and practice accounts that reproduce actual verbatim of clients' words within anonymous accounts of practice. Some accounts record a minimal amount of verbatim, such as single sentences or single words (Bar-Yitzchak, 2002; Jones, 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Min, 2013; Winn, 1994); there is also a number of instances where single or multiple paragraphs of client verbatim are reproduced (Casson, 2004; McAlister, 2011), along with verbatim appearing in play-script format (Couroucli-Robertson, 1997; Read Johnson, 1992). Accounts of verbatim feedback in evaluation and/or research in dramatherapy are also present, albeit to a lesser degree (Casson, 2004; Dokter, 2010; Haythorne et al., 2012; Smyth, 2010). Reproductions of client voice via images generally occur within accounts of practice with children (Jennings, 1998; Mond, 1995; Jones 1996), but reproductions of photographic images taken by clients, as expression of voice, occur more commonly within adult practice (Jennings et al., 1997; Chipman, 2010).

Of the literature reviewed, only a small number of accounts could be attributed to primary-school-aged children engaged in individual dramatherapy in educational settings (Grimshaw, 1996; Ramsden, 2011). A less substantial number of case studies interpreting and representing the accounts of clients purely in the words of the practitioners is located mainly in older literature (van der Wijk, 1996; Scott-Danter, 1998; Holmwood, 2005).

While there is evidence of sole- and co-authored accounts in other therapeutic disciplines (Warriner, 1994; Yalom & Elkin, 1974; Barnes & Berke, 1972), and autobiographies of life experiences where therapy has been engaged in within popular fiction (Dee, 2009; Pelzer, 1995; Lowe, 2008), within dramatherapy only one sole-

authored account was located, and this I believe to be the first and only example of published material of its kind. A member of a dramatherapy group in a secure setting, using the pseudonym 'Alan', describes his experiences of dramatherapy; in his brief chapter, published alongside a companion chapter written by his therapist, he offers a perspective of his therapeutic process in his own words (Alan, 1996; Winn, 1996). Alan describes group dramatherapy as enabling people to 'build relationships with each other and to look outward instead of withdrawing into themselves' (Alan, 1996, p. 172). Alan's account also describes warm-up exercises as 'interesting [...] good fun and vehicles for the group members' sense of humour' (ibid.). In addition to this sole-authored account, the literature revealed one co-authored account by an adult client recalling her past experiences in dramatherapy as a child placed in fostering and adoption services (Vaughan, 2010).

Finally, searching explicitly for dramatherapy practices engaging children as co-researchers reveals that it is unprecedented at this time. This thesis therefore makes a unique and significant contribution to this particular body of knowledge. There is, however, evidence of dramatherapy practitioners beginning to position clients as active agents when evaluating their therapeutic experiences; this evidence runs parallel with changes in adult mental health services, which have shifted the concept of the professional being the expert to the *client* being the expert of their own experience (Repper & Perkins, 2003).

An example of seeking children's views of their progress in dramatherapy can be found in the implementation of an assessment and evaluation tool known as psychlops – adapted for children by Haythorne et al. (2012, p. 185) – which directly commissions children to comment on their experiences before, during and after dramatherapy. Developments such as this are encouraging as they point towards children's active involvement and the direct capturing and representation of data by them about their experiences. In addition, there is evidence of children's collaboration in outcome measurements of their own therapy – another emerging area of inquiry in arts therapies and psychotherapy practice (Midgley et al., 2009).

In summary, the reviewed literature features clients' verbatim accounts in both small and more substantial sections of text, through reproduction of images or as the authors of their own writing about experiences in therapy. This evidence, provided by dramatherapists in practice and research, give a clear indication that clients can experience themselves through the expression of their voices within dramatherapy.

### **3.8 Dramatherapy in educational settings**

Dramatherapy's development in educational contexts with children has already been discussed to some extent in this chapter, along with the ways in which early practitioners combined drama and theatre-arts approaches with therapeutic theories and shared their experiences with others in discussions and publications. In the UK, along with other parts of Europe and the USA, there is still an enduring presence of dramatherapists working in both mainstream and specialist educational settings (Jennings, 1978, 1987; Leigh et al., 2012; Meldrum, 2012). Vicky Karkou (2010) documents growth of therapists working in educational settings within the other arts therapies disciplines, and suggests this body of knowledge, along with the formalising of the professions, to be a contributing factor in the growth of therapeutic services in schools over recent decades. Accounts of practice include publications in areas of special education (Tytherleigh & Karkou, 2010), mainstream education (Quibell, 2010; Ramsden, 2011), work with adolescents (Zeal, 2011; Emunah, 2005; Bannister & Huntington, 2002) and work with children in settings that are in partnership with education, such as bereavement services and those linked to healthcare for life-limiting illness and palliative care (Kelly, 2002; Coleman & Kelly, 2012; Gersie, 1992).

The substantial body of evidence that has been developed within dramatherapy includes accounts and studies of many areas of practice in educational settings that promote its inclusion as integral for the child to their 'educational, emotional and psychological development' (Klein, 2012, p. 63). Dramatherapy in schools has been described as 'a confidential space in which young people can discover a sense of safety and freedom to explore their emotions and inner world through creative art work' (Carr, 2012, p. 91). Children are referred to therapeutic services for a range of reasons – some of which may compromise their inclusion in the classroom and the school's community, as well as their sense of well-being. Art therapist Frances Prokofiev (2010, p. 161) describes referral issues in school settings as including 'acute anxiety [...] challenging behaviour which was an 'acting out' of feelings that were barely manageable'. Literature focusing on supporting the emotional well-being of children in schools documents the developments resulting from the incorporation of therapists into school systems, along with collaborations with other professionals who contribute to maintaining standards of best practice (Klein, 2012; Andersen-Warren, 2012).

There is evidence of the promotion of inclusive services that address the needs of the whole child and not just their education, which suggests that 'educators are finding it

increasingly necessary to address the mental health needs of students within the school setting' (Brent, 2012, p. 13). The increased accessibility of in-house services has also been noted as a positive factor in therapeutic literature, meaning as it does that children can experience support for their emotional needs during the school day, in a place they are legally bound to attend (Meldrum, 2012).

Sessions are most commonly held during term-time on a weekly basis, with the term of intervention ranging from a small number of sessions to long-term work, depending on factors which include the client's needs but also those of the school setting (Ramsden, 2011). Yet, as the accounts of practice show, there is huge diversity in the ways in which dramatherapists are employed and commissioned to undertake work in school settings. This diversity includes their rates of pay, working hours and length of contract. Over the past two decades schools have either employed or contracted the service of therapists and counsellors in-house, developing policies that support their work and providing adequate facilities (Leigh, Dix, Dokter et al., 2012). A noted strength of in-house dramatherapy and counselling services in schools is the proximity of the therapist to the local community, and their ability to foster a good level of communication with parents, which in turn has been said to minimise stigma experienced by the referral and enable children to have sessions – unless absent from school – without the need for travel to external agencies (Klein, 2012).

Karkou (2010) notes that children in an educational setting may be referred to any services accessible to the school, and that therapists – including dramatherapists – are increasingly involved in multi-agency approaches in collaboration with inclusion managers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCo's), and external agencies such as educational psychologists and child and adolescent mental health services (CAHMS) (Klein, 2012). The growth in therapeutic practices and multi-agency services has occurred in parallel with changing government agendas concerning children in educational and social contexts, as well as with changes in the ways in which support for children is viewed in UK society (as discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, section 2.7). Today dramatherapists can be found in a range of school settings, employing specialist skills with the collective aim of supporting children and young people in their lives and empowering them through the promotion of their well-being. Despite the strong history of dramatherapy in educational settings, there are inevitably tensions within the practice, some of which have been alluded to here. Section 3.10 discusses these concerns in more detail.

A range of literature refers to frameworks for setting up services and assessing and evaluating their impact, and draw attention to key challenges faced by therapists in the field of therapy, such as the need to gather evidence regarding practice and ongoing challenges related to funding for posts and services (French & Klein, 2012; Brent, 2012). Dramatherapists' have the capacity to work with a wide variety of complex issues in practice, in terms of both therapy sessions with children and issues present elsewhere in the school setting (Leigh et al., 2012). In addition, Carr and Ramsden (2008) document how dramatherapists can be commissioned, alongside their therapeutic responsibilities, to undertake supervisory roles for education-based colleagues within school settings.

This section has drawn attention to the diversity of dramatherapy practice in educational settings and identified issues in practice which relate to research and practice evaluation.

### **3.9 Researching dramatherapy practice in educational settings**

This chapter has already shown how early practitioners captured accounts of practice, which suggests the value they saw in documenting their work. In 2003 dramatherapist Michael Barham (2003, p. 5) noted this value, suggesting that 'we are an emergent profession [...] which requires us to be articulate practitioners. This includes being able to analyse and write about our own practice in sophisticated ways'. In recent years there has been an increasing expectation to document practice outcomes across all the arts therapies and psychological services (Higgins, 1996). Over time, practice has been documented and dramatherapy processes subject to research into effectiveness of intervention, methods, techniques and frameworks (Jones, 2010). Examples of research are with children in group dramatherapy (Dwivedi, 1993; Quibell, 2010); with individuals (Jones, 2007; Van der Wijk, 1996; Casson, 2004); within specialist units (Tytherleigh & Karkou, 2010); and within mainstream settings (Smyth, 2010; Ramsden, 2011).

Research outcomes are understood to have the potential to change and develop practice whilst maintaining ethically sound service provision (Bradbury & Reason, 2008) through the use of research methodologies such as practitioner research (as discussed in Chapter Four, section 4.2.1). Within dramatherapy, Jones writes about assessment as a means of providing '*a framework through which the therapist and client can understand what is brought to Dramatherapy and what occurs within the work*' (Jones, 1996, p. 268). This type of framework provides a structure within which

practice can be evaluated through research with insights gained by clients.

However, tensions have been expressed by some practitioners who are fearful of the impact of research within the clinical room, and are concerned that *'introducing research into the therapy room may compromise the therapeutic relationship'* (Gardner & Coombs, 2010, p. xi), imposing structures for data capturing that are not client-led and supportive of their agency. Evidence of the increasing development of ethically sound research methods – the like of which can be implemented in collaboration with children in therapy – is explored in Chapter Four (section 4.4), while the contribution this study makes to the associated body of knowledge is discussed in Chapter Seven (section 7.3). Whilst ethical considerations are of course paramount, research into practice will nevertheless help to secure ongoing ethical standards. This is achieved by adding to the body of knowledge that assists practitioners in adopting research approaches which preserve the therapeutic relationship, maintain anonymity and confidentiality, and respect the integrity of the client's reason for entering into therapy.

Practitioners are increasingly researching their own practice to learn more about their clients through developing methods to capture data and generate outcomes which respond to the pressures of funding directives to support practice (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006). Research into practice with children have taken place in the UK and abroad – including countries where dramatherapy is a fledging service, such as Australia (Mackenzie, 2013), or where it is entirely new, such as in Sri Lanka (Smyth, 2010). Practitioner-based research in dramatherapy appears to have a tradition rooted in qualitative approaches (Andersen-Warren & Grainger, 2000, p. 216); there is an increasing body of literature relating to researching in the arts therapies in order to explore qualitative and quantitative research methods (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001; Jones, 2005; Grainger, 1999; McNiff, 1998).

As a consequence of these developments, the term 'practitioner-researcher' is becoming more widespread today among the dramatherapy community (Jones, 2010). In the UK literature that shares insights into practice in educational settings, a stream of new contributions can be identified, including dramatherapist Mary Booker's (2011) work with an intensive interaction approach in special education; Penny McFarlane and Jenny Harvey's (2012) collaboration of dramatherapy with family therapy; Ann Dix's (2012) practice of dramatherapy with medical conditions such as attention deficiency hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and investigations into children and neuroscience (Shine, 2012). These accounts of clinical practice and research show that – as well as

being beneficial to clients – dramatherapy can allow practitioners to collaborate with other professional disciplines and engage in joined-up working practices with families, and that it can be applied in conjunction with ongoing medical disorders as well as being part of innovative practice in new areas of research and development.

This range of inquiries and research into practice demonstrates the enduring nature of dramatherapists' investment in responding to the changing times and needs of the global community. These research accounts show that practitioners explore practice in specialist areas of provision in order to understand what is effective in dramatherapy in educational settings, and that the work of dramatherapists can continue to contribute to the well-being of children. The dissemination of this knowledge needs to be rooted within the core therapeutic theories that place the client's experience as the priority, but practitioners also need to be invited to develop their understanding of ways in which research can be collaborative, supportive of agency and of the integrity of the therapeutic alliance.

### **3.10 Dramatherapy in educational settings: tensions and challenges**

This section focuses on identified tensions described in literature that exist within the field of dramatherapy in educational settings, some of which I have experienced in my own practice. The main challenges relate to varying perspectives on research and how dramatherapists assess and evaluate their practice, and the impact on the availability of funding in the commissioning of services (Karkou, 2010; Gersch, 2012; Holmwood & Stavrou, 2012).

Concerns have been expressed that interventions in schools are not being adequately evaluated, and there are calls for increased rigour in capturing and analysing data (Karkou, 2010). Dramatherapy practitioners such as Jo Christensen (2010) have commented on the absence of evidence in relation to the long-term effects for children and young people of therapeutic services offered in schools. Concerns have also been raised regarding the diversity of methods and approaches practitioners utilise when conducting research.

Yet, as discussed above in section 3.9, there is an existing concern among practitioners that research undermines the integrity of the support offered to clients, precisely by bringing a research and evaluation agenda into sessions (Barham, 2003). Jane Seale and Sue Barnard (2002, p. 152) address these concerns in their reminder to practitioners to focus on the clinical needs of any research they undertake, advising

that 'ideas are driven by clinical practice or the professional literature rather than simply being based on the outcome of an 'intellectual exercise'. The call for practitioners across the arts therapies to enter into research, however, continues to be made (Karkou, 2010; Read Johnson, 1999).

Issues of funding and accessibility of services interweave with these discussions around research and evidence gathering. The lack of statutory status for therapeutic interventions within the UK school system can have a negative impact on the visibility and survival of in-house dramatherapy services; there is evidence in recent years that dramatherapy posts have been reduced – or cut entirely – due to the pressures of cost-improvement savings and changes to the educational agenda, which appears to devalue the services that focus on well-being and emotional health rather than educational attainment (Leigh et al., 2012). Dramatherapists practicing in the current economic climate are particularly vulnerable to cuts and redundancies, with an increasing number working for little or no payment – which undermines the status of the profession, leaves unmet need through waiting-list demands, and places further pressure on external healthcare services (which are also subject to government cuts). Notable in the national initiative '**The Cambridge Primary Review**' (Alexander, 2010) was its failure to acknowledge the presence of any in-house psychological therapies in schools; the report made brief mention of external services offered via community mental health teams and CAMHS, with only a tiny amount of its focus given to the provision of understanding psychological well-being.

The challenges that face the visibility of dramatherapy services based on how individual schools represent their services can make communicating the aims of the intervention to school staff and parents challenging, and can restrict the development of clear guidelines regarding service provision. Concerns around confidentiality and stigma experienced by children, such as that connected with being taken out of class in front of their peers, have been noted over time and continue to cause tension in some settings (French & Klein, 2012). The tensions between educational and therapeutic agendas – which include reservations about sessions taking place during class learning time – have led to a call for more collaborative working, so that educational staff can have the chance to understand that children are not being removed from class as a reward for poor behaviour (Karkou, 2010).

The situation regarding the recognition of services in schools, and the pressures on available funding can leave children who are in vulnerable positions without access to any emotional or therapeutic support, which in turn leaves them vulnerable to behavioural sanctions administered by schools, including temporary and permanent exclusion (Christensen, 2010; Ramsden, 2011).

Complexities can exist in the autonomy given to schools by local authorities, which challenges the capacity for a consistent framework for engaging dramatherapists in school settings – particularly in terms of the therapeutic role and the capacity for assessment, evaluation and research into practice, and to the funding ascribed to this work. These tensions exist despite the ongoing support from the dramatherapy national association's education sub-committee (BADth, 2007-2014; McFarlane & Harvey, 2012).

This section has discussed key challenges facing dramatherapy services, dramatherapists and their potential impact on children referred to these services.

### **3.11 Summarising Chapter Three**

This chapter has examined the field of dramatherapy in terms of its development and areas of current practice in educational settings. Literature illustrating the emergence of drama and theatre-arts in a therapeutic setting with children has been reviewed and discussed; the body of knowledge drawn upon in this chapter is substantial, and reveals a range of perspectives of – and influences upon – dramatherapy practice in educational settings. Practice developments have been discussed in terms of their strengths and tensions with regard to generating evidence through research and securing funding for ongoing practice.

The chapter has shown that dramatherapy is a recognised form of therapeutic intervention which places the art form of drama at its core in the knowledge that this engagement can and does bring about well-being for children. The nature of the therapeutic relationship has been discussed as a key factor in enabling an effective environment within which reflective processes can occur. Focus has been given to the reflective phase within dramatherapy as a key process in relation to data collection for the study.

Interconnections between issues discussed over Chapters Two and Three are returned to in the next chapter, where the methodological theory and research design of the study are discussed in detail.

## Chapter Four

### Methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised in two parts; the first focuses on methodological theory, while the second introduces the seven children who engaged as co-researchers in the study and outlines the design and research methods. The chapter concludes with an introductory explanation of the two findings chapters.

This study addresses the following questions:

1. How can children engage as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions?
2. Can choice-making in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions promote and reveal agency?
3. In what ways can engaging children as co-researchers in dramatherapy inform the field's understanding of both children's agency as co-researchers and the reflective phase in therapeutic process?

Evidence relating to questions 1 and 2 is presented in the findings chapters (Five and Six), with a synthesis of the key learning and the overall findings of the study presented in the concluding chapter (Seven). The third question is fully addressed in Chapter Seven, which examines the study's potential contribution to knowledge through its new insights about choice, voice and agency, and which discusses the implications for theory and practice.

#### 4.2 Methodological theory

The theoretical underpinnings in the study discussed in Chapters Two and Three have shown that children, increasingly, are viewed in many walks of life as socially competent beings who can interpret their social worlds and engage as co-researchers and researchers, rather than merely being the *subjects* of research (Kellett, 2010; Christensen & James, 2008; Alderson, 2008). The importance of creating

opportunities for agency in research with children who are classed as vulnerable, such as those engaged in therapy, has been articulated by educational researcher Sue Snelgrove (2005), who argues for a methodology of inclusion that gives children a voice and assumes them capable of self-expression. This study draws on the body of knowledge that understands the processes of conducting research with children through agency-enabling approaches – such as active and effective listening by researchers (Lundy, 2007) – and which develops a dialogue between theory and practice in research (Kellett, 2005b; Penn, 2008; James & Prout, 2003).

Children were invited to engage as co-researchers using 12 arts-based creative research methods, which were identified and made available to each child from the existing practice of dramatherapy. The methods were designed to enable each child to express their voice through choice-making, in order to reflect on the content of their dramatherapy experiences in terms of their insight and personal meaning. The aim of the study was to foster agency in three key ways:

- i. by drawing on the existing therapeutic alliance of client and therapist with each child as a starting point for the research;
- ii. by inviting each child to engage as a co-researcher of their experiences during the reflective phase in individual dramatherapy sessions;
- iii. by developing a range of research methods based on the dramatherapy techniques and creative/arts approaches already present in the practice.

My position as a practitioner-researcher meant that each child was familiar with me, with dramatherapy as a form, and with the environment of the dramatherapy room and its resources. This meant they could be invited to become a co-researcher by using play and creative processes that were familiar to them within an already established choice-making culture of dramatherapy. Being a co-researcher provided them with the means of being in charge of the outcome of their choice-making in relation to their input in the study. The study was designed in such a way that each child could accept or decline the co-researcher role as an ongoing process in each session, and also in each of the three phases where data were collected (these phases are discussed below in section 4.10). Developing methods from existing practice is an approach that is supported by the writings of dramatherapists such as Anna Marie Weber and Craig Haen (2005), who consider expressions made by children via the drama and arts techniques as meaningful in their own right. By undertaking an audit of pre-existing

dramatherapy techniques and creative methods used in the practice over the years, and of my records of them, I was able to develop a range of child-led research methods that were tailored towards the study and which had been chosen frequently by children within the practice over time. Section 4.4 demonstrates the ways in which the development of creative and child-led methods in research supports self-expression and fosters agency (Clark & Moss, 2001; Armistead, 2011). The chosen methods are discussed in section 4.11.2, and the ethical issues pertaining to the design of research with children in therapy are explored in section 4.3.

In order to deepen understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the study, the following sections (4.2.1 to 4.2.4) discuss practitioner research, the engagement of children as co-researchers and the development of arts-based methods in research.

#### **4.2.1 Practitioner research**

While determining which approach would be best suited to my study, I was soon drawn to practitioner research for its capacity to enable me to deepen my knowledge of the impact of my practice on the children being researched. This approach provided the opportunity to embrace the centrality of its transformative potential, which is noted by Paul McIntosh (2010) as a means of developing and improving practice. A body of research into practice is emerging within dramatherapy and the arts therapies, and is engaging practitioners who wish to develop their practice by gaining insights into it (Andersen-Warren & Grainger, 2000). The fields of arts therapists and other areas of psychological inquiry have seen a growing momentum of the use of practitioner research as a methodological choice, an approach which researcher John McLeod (1999) suggests is carried out as a means of developing practice. Therapists and researchers Vicky Karkou and Patricia Sanderson (2006) are amongst those who have noted this emergence. This growth is illustrated in studies carried out within the field of arts therapies over the last two decades amongst clinicians and practitioners working in a wide range of client settings (Payne, 1993; Jones, 1993, 2010).

Previous studies, which adopted a practitioner research approach and were rooted in therapeutic and social practice, were reviewed (Radnor, 2001; Gardner & Coombs, 2010; Timulak, 2008; Anning, 2011). Focus was given to studies within the arts therapies (Gilroy, 2006; Grainger, 1999; Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001) and these were reviewed in conjunction with research approaches with children (Lewis et al., 2004; Christensen & James, 2008; Jones & Tannock, 2002); with children in therapy (Midgley

et al., 2009); and with children engaged in the arts and play therapies (Daniel-McKeigue, 2007). Jessica Jäger and Virginia Ryan's (2007, p. 440) study seeks to elicit children's views of therapy by implementing a research method called the '*expert show*', where children are invited into a role-played interview and placed in control of choice-making in relation to their feedback.

Key features of these studies were in accord with parts of my own study, such as the task of being active in one's own practice as noted in action research, and of gaining meaning through the processes of reflective practice (Lewin, 1948; Schön, 1987). The majority of these studies consistently adopted either practitioner research, action research or reflective practitioner approaches (Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Grainger, 1999; McNiff, 1993; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The terms action and reflective practitioner in some texts have been used interchangeably to describe the same research approach (Elliot, 1991; McIntosh, 2010) and their promotion of supportive and life-enhancing changes through equitable and democratic means was clearly presented (Springer, 1996). This potential for improvements within the practice was in accord with my wider objectives as a researcher, but with the focus of the study being rooted in flexibility and creativity for each child in the research sample, opting for an overall practitioner research approach which drew upon these aspects of change through action and reflective research supported the aims of the study.

A number of texts on the subject of conducting research point to strengths and limitations which are identified as arising from any research approach (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Bryman, 2001). For example, within practitioner research some literature favours the distanced position of the outsider-researcher, where perspectives are gained through '*a continuous separation from practice*' (McNiff, 1998, p. 63). In contrast, a key strength of the insider-researcher approach is noted as being precisely due to the invested position of the practitioner who has in-depth knowledge of the field of inquiry (Fox et al., 2007). As Jones (2010, p. 20) notes: '*the insights gathered from the practitioner's previous knowledge base and experience deepens the analysis of the findings*'. An existing relationship with the participants is suggested to enrich data analysis (Holloway, 1997; Drake & Heath, 2010). A further perspective within therapeutic research suggests that the therapist, as an insider-researcher, can be supportive of the trust-building process with clients collaborating in research that explores the impact of therapy (Meekums & Payne, 1993).

Dance movement therapist Helen Payne (1993, p. 25) argues that it is '*important for the researcher to be aware of their motivations and identify their vested interest in order to validate the research*'. To enable this trusting process, practitioner insights must include reflexive awareness and transparent research motivations through professional development, which explore the potential of subjective influence (Fox et al., 2007; Clarkson, 1994). This balance can be achieved through a high level of professional training, the practice ethos of equality, and the engagement with clinical supervision which maintains ethical standards of practice (**BADth**, 2007-2014; **HCPC**, 2007-2014; Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001). These views show how practitioners are well placed to conduct research into their practice as result of their knowledge and practice experience, and raise awareness to the support processes that must be in place in order to work with the challenge of researcher bias.

In terms of limitations to the practitioner research approach, this duality of role is also problematised in literature where it is suggested that it can produce conflicting priorities and lead to weaknesses in data collection and analysis (Timulak, 2008; Midgely et al., 2009). For example, as an insider within the research environment, the researcher may show bias and a lack of objectivity and reflexivity between the roles of research and practice. Further tensions and limitations are noted in the lack of generalisability and objectivity, which may impact on the validity of the research (McNiff, 1998; Fox et al., 2007). These limitations highlight the potential for a lack of clear intent regarding the purpose of the research due to practice knowledge and a bias of positionality (Fox et al., 2007; Holloway, 1997). Issues of bias may include the commissioning of agendas such as resource-saving outcomes, which could impact on research integrity and researcher identity. Likewise, boundary confusion between the practitioner and researcher roles may adversely affect the research preparation process. Without rigorous attention to research ethics and the use of reflexive processes (such as supervision), these complexities could compromise the basic tenets of safeguarding and non-maleficent research practice, resulting in a failure to conduct research which is objective and has the interests of the participants or co-researchers as the highest priority (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Grainger, 1999).

The practitioner research approach enabled me to ground the research in my own practice, and to draw upon studies in the fields of arts therapies and psychological therapies that had also adopted this approach. Inviting children to be co-researchers was my chosen method of engagement as I knew this would provide opportunities for

choice-making, not least with regard to the children's level of engagement in the study. Engaging children as co-researchers in research is discussed below in section 4.2.3, following the establishment of the nature of the therapeutic alliance.

#### **4.2.2 The therapeutic alliance**

A theoretical understanding of the therapeutic alliance across the broad spectrum of therapeutic modalities in the arts therapies, psychotherapy and other psychological therapies is reflected in associated literature. 'Alliance' refers to the process between client and therapist (Brown and Pedder, 1979; Elefant, 2010; Wood, 2011), which Yalom (ibid., p. 47) has described as the '*sine qua non for effective therapy*', and which has also been referred to as the '*quality and strength of the collaborative relationship between client and therapist in therapy*' (Horvath & Bedi, 2002, p. 41). Certain common factors are present within the therapeutic alliance, including '*trust, warmth, empathic understanding, and acceptance*' (Yalom, 1995, p. 48). Within this, the client can experience therapy as a space of safety for their self-expression, having established a connection with the therapist on some level (Clarkson, 1995). The therapist meets the client with unconditional positive regard (Haugh & Merry, 2001), and in doing so they remain open to being with the client as they work at their own pace to explore experiences in therapy. Together these factors provide the conditions for a developing bond and trusting relationship between the client and therapist, within which the aims and goals of therapy can be identified, agreed and worked towards (Cooper, 2008).

A meta-analysis of psychotherapeutic literature revealed over 2,000 references to the alliance in accounts of practice (Horvath & Bedi, 2002), while a wider search, incorporating counselling and psychology practice, revealed 4,000 papers cited over 30 years (Cooper, 2008). As well as general references in practice to the therapeutic alliance, these meta-analyses include a number of research studies exploring the nature of the alliance with children and adult clients, drawing on measurement tools selected from a relatively substantial body of scales, such as the Vanderbilt Therapeutic Alliance Scale and the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (Timulak, 2008; Cooper, 2008). While some literature has noted a scarcity in past research into the nature of the therapeutic alliance within child and adolescent services (Digiuseppe et al., 1996), the high number of citations relating to the concept of the therapeutic alliance, and the search to understand more about it and its impact on the client, gives

some indication of its integration and significance within the milieu of therapeutic process across the spectrum of modalities.

This theoretical basis yields an understanding of how the alliance is enacted in therapeutic practice. However, within this study, the therapeutic alliance exists within a practitioner-researcher framework – a combination hitherto unprecedented within the practice. The framework was further shaped by literature pertaining to the alliance, particularly drawing on the notion of the client-therapist relationship as the agent of change – a relationship that is based on an understanding between client and therapist of the nature of confidentiality and of therapeutic boundaries, and within the arts therapies on an investment in the art form as a key factor within this relationship (Karkou & Sanderson, 2006). A therapeutic alliance with children in dramatherapy who are co-researching their therapeutic process within a practitioner research framework is therefore a new area of practice contribution that the study makes.

Practice-based and research ethics shape the alliance, as confidentiality, anonymity and unconditional positive regard towards each child are maintained in accordance with the dramatherapy profession's code of practice and the governing body's code of conduct (BADth, 2007–2014; HCPC, 2007–2014); with literature relating to the ethics of conducting research with children (Alderson & Morrow, 2004); and with the ethical framework of conducting research in counselling and therapies (McLeod, 2006) as a practitioner-researcher (Drake & Heath, 2010).

#### **4.2.3 Engaging children as co-researchers**

I established in Chapter Two (section 2.5) the ways in which children engage as researchers of their lived experiences, and gave as an example Jo Armistead's (2011) work with young children. I also cited the work of **The Open University Children's Research Centre** – the UK leader in the field, which has developed from academics and researchers support of children who research a range of topics with their peers as well as with adults. Engaging children as co-researchers remains a relatively new and emerging field of inquiry, but there are a limited number of studies which have specifically engaged children as co-researchers. One of these is a study based in an educational setting that focuses on exploring ethical practice (Johnson, 2011); another looks at experiences of school (Fielding, 2001). These studies adopt approaches which prioritise the children's experiences by providing them with the means of gathering data to fulfil the aims of empowerment and promoting agency. Within dramatherapy and the

arts therapies my searches did not yield any studies other than my own (Ramsden & Jones, 2011). All of these studies share in common their use of establishing co-researching approaches that highlight and prioritise children's own narratives, and which provide the opportunity to reflect upon the issues and experiences that affect them.

Engaging children as co-researchers has been defined as enabling an equal and collaborative relationship (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2007; Gomm et al., 2000) by '*seeking to follow their agendas and facilitate their exploration of their own experiences*' (Leeson, 2007, p. 139). Kaye Johnson (2011) points out that as co-researchers children can take ownership of their input within an active rather than passive role, through designs that explain the remit of the role and its potential benefits, providing them with choices about their level of engagement as participants in research. Children as co-researchers are equally placed as the decision-makers within research, and the role implies that their voices lead the inquiry. This manifested in this study in each child taking sole charge of the decision to co-research on a session-by-session basis (discussed below in section 4.11.1 and also in Chapter Five sections 5.4.2).

The co-researching approach to research with children is not without its challenges which could be caused by a lack of understanding or knowledge about child-focused research processes, or by an adult bias in terms of the research agenda; both of which fail to listen effectively to children as equal agents in the research exchange (Davie, 1996). In addition a lack of awareness of child-led communication through play processes could limit collaborative research and restrict the co-researching possibilities (Armistead, 2011). Kellett (2010), argues that not including children in the data analysis process also limits the expression of their voices and their understanding of their own data. This issue is returned to in Chapter Seven, section 7.7, where I identify areas for future research.

The power relationship between the adult and child could also limit the success of the co-researching opportunity, through the status of being a 'researcher' or member of staff within a containing environment, such as education and health settings (Jones, 2010). (The dynamics of power are discussed further in section 4.6.) This point is particularly pertinent in a therapeutic context; despite the planning and sensitive preparation of the researcher, children may not experience themselves as having the

autonomy or confidence to acknowledge, recognise or reveal their own agency.

Clearly there are a range of ethical issues to be negotiated within any research, and this is particularly the case within the methodological approach and design of researching with children. Ethical issues concerning conducting research with children, gaining permission to approach children and negotiating assent with them are amongst the key issues addressed below in section 4.3.

Engaging each child as a co-researcher, and giving them control over the decision to engage in research on a session-by-session basis, provided the opportunity to minimise researcher power. As choice-making was already a feature of the dramatherapy practice this approach developed what was already present rather than introduced a new and potentially overwhelming dynamic into the alliance. As the findings chapters will show, this approach had a major impact on all seven children and promoted opportunities for their agency throughout the study.

#### **4.2.4 Arts-based research methods**

Arts- and play-based methods include unstructured play; dramatic role play; puppet-making and story enactment; creating drawings and paintings; using visual media technology to take photographs and capture moving images. These methods are drawn from wide ranging fields which include theatre, play work, arts, and play therapies (Bishton, 2007; Boal, 1979; Jäger & Ryan, 2007). Practitioners developing and implementing these approaches acknowledge their significance as meaningful modes of symbolic expression for children and young people (Kellett, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2001). Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow (2011, p. 14) summarise these methods as a multi-modal approach which is 'participatory' in nature and which promotes '*ongoing dialogue, increasing confidence, developing skills and encouraging children to become more active participants*'. In focusing on lived experiences these approaches share my own methodological position, which recognises children and young people as competent agents of their own lives (Wyness, 2006; Frankel, 2007).

As a dramatherapist and practitioner-researcher I was drawn to developing creative methods that were rooted in my own practice. This decision was informed by evidence of the benefits to children of being able to express voice and understand choice through engagement in creative methods (Daniel-McKeigue, 2007; Jäger & Ryan, 2007). It has been proved and acknowledged that arts-based methods provide

spontaneous opportunities for reflecting on experiences with independent will, not least in research with participatory methods such as the use of photography with vulnerable people (Aldridge, 2007). Maxine Junge and Debra Linesch (1993, p. 62) summarise this potential in a way that is befitting of my own understanding. They maintain that human experience is reflected through diversity and individual identity, and that '*the artistic nature of the work assumes that there are many different ways of looking at the world [...] and that there are many different kinds of knowing*'. Maggi Savin-Baden and Claire Howell Major (2013) describe this utilisation of and familiarity with the creative process as a valid way of capturing and understanding experiences.

In art therapy research the use of client-generated images is noted as being valuable data that can yield rich information about experience (McNiff, 1998). However, in the art therapy studies I examined, I identified that the focus was on *researcher* image analysis to elicit outcomes relating to the client's life and process in therapy (Gilroy, 2006; Schaverien, 1992). These approaches drew on ways of seeing which potentially disable the client's direct voice through their use of image interpretation. Whilst using client-generated images is much suited to my study, the analytical position of researcher dominance concerned me, as I believed it would limit the expression of voice and inhibit each child's capacity for agentic practice. For this reason I drew upon the use of the creative process to guide the development of my research methods, but sought approaches which would enable agency in a more direct way.

I searched for literature that promoted a client-focused and specifically child-centred ideology within research, and identified methodologies that aimed to enable children to convey their views through engaging them with familiar and age-appropriate methods, based on familiarity and accessibility of creative and play-based content (Armistead, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Moss & Clarke, 2001; Punch, 2011). These include Allison Clark and Peter Moss's (2001) seminal work on using play methods in their *Mosaic Approach*; Armistead's (2011) inclusion of young children's wishes to draw or write in her research notebooks; and Jäger and Ryan's (2007) use of dramatic role play and play objects when eliciting children's views about play therapy.

I was particularly influenced by the *Mosaic approach* which was aimed at listening to young children, and drew on similar processes to those used in dramatherapy. This approach provides a creative framework of participatory, verbal and visual methods to reveal young children's perspectives. Methods include children choosing to take

photographs, creating maps and leading tours of their immediate environment. These structured expressions provide a means of listening to the different languages and voices of young children in agentic ways. The Mosaic's multi-modal approach has been much replicated in work with young children and young people, and is well established in research literature (Beresford et al., 2004; Clark & Statham, 2005). I saw a resonance between the techniques and methods of dramatherapy and the Mosaic approach in their shared underpinning of the child-centred stance in enhancing social competency by working in participatory and collaborative ways. These interconnections lent themselves, as a mechanism for developing arts-based research methods, to this study.

A major strength of these studies is their use of creative methods which draw on familiar play languages that enable children to understand for themselves that their input is important. For example, Armistead's findings highlight the benefits of using creative and visual methods with young children in a nursery context; her findings show that the children's voices were liberated through engaging in methods they could make sense of themselves (Armistead, 2011).

There are, however, limitations and challenges in the use of multi-modal, arts and creative methods where choices may generate rich expressions that are hard to capture spontaneously and accurately. Some researchers are said to struggle to describe without interpretation the sequence of events, actions and utterances spoken in research sessions where pre-planned recording and annotating structures either during or immediately after sessions are not implemented (Hoggarth & Comfort, 2010). Developing the rigour of data capturing techniques and recording templates required to capture different aspects of creative expressions may compromise or put under pressure the research time and schedule. Further difficulties when using arts-based methods are noted in translating images into textual description (Gilroy, 2006) and in validating the quality of data (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

The preceding sections have explored the ways in which the practitioner research approach lent itself to the study, and how it enabled me to integrate the research into my weekly client-based practice. This approach also allowed flexibility in the research design whilst prioritising practice needs, as well as providing the capacity to develop data collection methods from the creative practice itself by drawing on arts-based approaches to research.

Within this theoretical approach a number of ethical dilemmas and complexities exist, the most relevant of which are addressed in the following section.

### **4.3 Ethical issues**

This section outlines and discusses the ethical issues identified and addressed as the theoretical approach and research design developed. Key issues relating to gaining consent, assent-choosing, maintaining anonymity, confidentiality and preserving the integrity of the ongoing therapeutic work with each child lie at the heart of the provision of an ethically sound and non-maleficent research environment. As with any ethical issues, sensitive and thorough planning was required to ensure the safety of the therapy and the research.

The following sections (4.3.1 to 4.3.4) discuss how ethical approval was gained and upheld throughout the study; how permissions were gained to proceed with the study from within the research site; and how I went about explaining the study to each child so that they could understand the process of assent-choosing and reviewing. Developing ethically sound research approaches for use with children is also discussed, then protecting confidentiality and maintaining anonymity in the research process is outlined before this section which focuses on the key ethical concerns in the study is concluded.

#### **4.3.1 Conducting ethically sound research**

Full ethical approval for the study to proceed was awarded by the university's ethics sub-committee following submission of an in-depth proposal prior to the three phases of data collection commencing (as per Leeds Metropolitan University research regulations 2007–2014). As a registered practitioner I am governed by the codes of conduct and ethics of the arts therapies regulatory body – the Health and Care Professions Council (**HCPC**) – whose code stipulates best practice via a series of mandatory requirements and guidelines (**BADth**, 2007-2014; **HCPC**, 2007-2014). In addition, as a member of school staff I am required to uphold a duty of care towards all children in my charge and to report any matters of concern to the school's nominated child protection officer. These ethical protocols provided a rigorous level of safeguarding for the children as both clients in dramatherapy and as co-researchers. I also attended regular clinical and academic supervision sessions throughout the term of the study.

My ethical approach was further developed by the seminal literature of Alderson and Morrow (2004), which focuses on the development of ethically sound research that enables voice and makes visible children and their views. Literature supporting agentic practices for children suggests that their self-awareness and perspectives as researchers are key (Kellett, 2010; Lindsay, 2002). Further themes where the capacity for children to understand the potential of their psychological and actual voices about issues that affect and concern them is considered important within the provision of a sound ethical approach (Winn Oakley, 2008).

I therefore adopted an ethical stance which took into account my adult responsibility to uphold the professional protocols, to maintain best practice and place these responsibilities in parallel with the theoretical underpinning of the study, which prioritised children's voices through their choice-making activities.

#### **4.3.2 Gaining school permission and parental/caregiver consent**

In accordance with research regulations, adult permissions and consents were required before I could proceed with the study (as per Leeds Metropolitan University, Research Regulations, August 2007). The ethics around gaining permissions and consents is well documented in general research literature (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Radnor, 2001; Heath et al., 2007). Seeking and gaining adult permission and consent enabled me to approach each child to seek their initial assent and introduce them to the ongoing nature of the assent-choosing process. Firstly, to gain permission to undertake the study in school I arranged a meeting with the headteacher. He then consulted with other colleagues and the school governors before inviting me to make a short presentation outlining my research intentions at the next governors' meeting. Permission was granted with an agreement that I would provide them with a brief annual account of my progress (see Appendix 9 (A), page 290). The changes in school leadership during the 18 months where data were gathered came with some turmoil (described in more detail in section 4.8 along with further information about the research site); however, I contacted newly appointed heads of school throughout this period of time to inform them about the study's continuation in accordance with the initial agreement. In addition I provided a progress update letter to all school staff at the start of the data collection cycle (see Appendix 9 (B), page 292).

Legally informed consent by an adult gatekeeper is required before an assenting

process with a child is entered into. Predominantly, gatekeepers are the parents or primary caregivers tasked with guiding the private and personal well-being of the child (Bryman, 2004; Heath et al., 2007). Having gained institutional permission I developed information sheets and consent forms for parents/primary caregivers. Examples of these sheets can be found in Appendices 1–4 (pages 274–280; they outline the study’s intentions, answer a series of anticipated questions the parents/primary caregivers might have about the study and their child’s involvement, and seek to gain written consent to approach their child). The information and consent sheets were devised in accordance with relevant instructional literature (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001; Coombs, 2010; Wisker, 2001); knowledge of the school’s community led to an awareness of the potential for parents/primary caregivers to feel obliged to agree to the research out of fear of creating an unfavourable impression in the school setting. Sensitivity to this potential has been noted by Rosie Flewitt (2005) when conducting research with young children in school settings.

As a researcher I felt it was important to meet with all the parents/primary caregivers where possible and provide them with information about the study in person. Parents/primary caregivers had previously provided consent when their children were initially referred for dramatherapy by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo – a specialist teacher in school) and were therefore familiar with giving their consent as a process. However, certain parents/primary caregivers did not engage with the school and their information had to be sent home. I had based the estimated timeframe for the consenting process on my knowledge of the school’s community and anticipated that it would take around three weeks. In practice it took two months, which was quite an extended period of time, and clearly more than I had anticipated. During this time, two parents/primary caregivers were not spoken with directly, and a further parent/primary caregiver denied consent. Of the 10 children engaged in individual dramatherapy at the time of preparation for the data collection phase, seven consents were received in all and these children became the sample. Each child for whom consent had been received was then invited to two assent-choosing sessions.

#### **4.3.3 Assent-choosing with the children**

Alderson and Morrow (2004) suggest that competence, in this context, is engendered by the researcher’s understanding of the process of making the giving of consent possible for children, and Flewitt (2005, p. 4) refers to this process of consent gaining as ‘provisional consent’, which takes into account the unpredictable course that a study

may take. I applied the term 'assent' to this process so that it provided a voice through its legitimacy being uncomplicated by legal definitions or associations (as is the case with consent which has legal conditions attached to it). 'Assent' therefore refers to the process of each child giving their permission, and is denoted by their understanding of the co-researching role. There are various definitions of assent but essentially, they all agree on the notion that '*children should give positive agreement to participate in a study before they are included*' (Cuskelly, 2005, p. 100). This inclusion calls for adults to enter into equal exchanges with children which sees them as capable of understanding the choices that are available to them (Groundwater-Smith, 2007). These choices includes their capacity to withdraw from the role temporarily or permanently without judgement, and without it affecting their ongoing dramatherapy. The importance of being able to withdraw from research in therapy from an ethical stance has been noted by Ladislav Timulak (2008).

The aims of the first assent-choosing session were to describe the study to each child, describe assent so that each child gained an understanding of it, and embed the ongoing process of assent choosing. During these sessions all seven children chose to give their assent to join the study. The second session aimed to revisit the assent-choosing process and to introduce assent reviewing along with the 12 main research methods, and to explore them experientially. In both sessions I explained to each child that the co-researching opportunities would take place towards the end of each dramatherapy session during the 15 minutes of reflection time in Phase Two (10 sessions). (See Figure 8, page 97: 'Flowchart of Phases One, Two & Three' which shows the layout and breakdown of the sessions that comprised each of the three phases.)

In contrast to parental/primary caregiver consent, the assent-choosing process was not a single event – rather it was designed and implemented as an ongoing process throughout the three phases of data collection that took place over 18 months. This design aimed to support choice making practice and to enable the expression of voice, promote and reveal agency. This design led to the co-researching decision being the sole responsibility of each child, and was revisited on a sessional basis. The assent-choosing sessions gave the children the opportunity to gain an understanding of the co-researching role and what it might mean to them. This meant explaining that their weekly dramatherapy sessions would not be affected by whatever decision they made, and conveying their right to withdraw at any point and have this accepted without giving

an explanation. Alderson (2008) notes that withdrawing from research without justification is considered a key principle of ethically sound practice.

#### **4.3.4 Insights derived from the permission, consent and assent-choosing processes**

Seeking permission from the school, gaining parental/primary caregiver consent and assent choosing with children raised ethical complexities in relation to power, control and voice. As the practitioner-researcher I was invested in presenting a convincing presentation to the school governors to bring about a positive outcome. This raised some anxieties in my preparations, which I articulated in my ongoing research field diary that year. Likewise, given my knowledge of the complexities and vulnerabilities within the school's adult community (as an insider-researcher), I was aware that the information sheet and consent forms required clarity, simplicity and accessibility in their design, along with a strong interpersonal presentation approach when meeting parents/primary caregivers.

I saw these procedural necessities of gaining permission and parental/care-giver consent as potential barriers to the study's progress and to the emancipation of the intentions behind the concept of 'child voice', which in theory places children at the heart of their decision-making (Davie et al., 1996). This conflict is articulated in the case of one 10-year-old girl whose mother did not engage with the school, or give consent. As a curious and interested child who asked about the study nevertheless, I asked her what she understood about not being invited to join in. She replied: ***"I'm happy to do what my mum thinks is best"***. I note from my field diary that I suspected she would have gained a lot from becoming a co-researcher. In her ongoing dramatherapy sessions she engaged with some of the research resources that were in the room for the duration of the data collection phases and were available to all children engaged in dramatherapy, whether part of the research or not. However, as parental consent had not been obtained, data could not be captured in relation to the choices and reflections she made as she engaged with these resources. As the study had not been explored with this child in any detail, issues around being excluded did not feature, but could easily have been present had she requested more information and found herself wanting to officially engage. It could be suggested that the power – possibly love – of her mother's answer prevented an exploration of her autonomous curiosity.

The process of assent choosing, which was so important in this study, is returned to in more detail below in section 4.11.1 and also in Chapter Seven, section 7.2.1.

#### **4.4 Developing ethically sound research methods for use with children in therapy**

There are many ethical sensitivities to consider when researching therapeutic practice with children who choose to take an active role. Literature instructs researchers to look critically at all aspects of the design to ensure that children's thoughts, behaviours and experiences are considered as much as possible (Jipson & Jipson, 2005) and with research methods determined from a position of ethical influence which are accessible and credible to the study (Aldridge, 2007).

Of crucial importance is the maintenance of the safe therapeutic container and respect for the integrity of the therapy, as well as acknowledgement of the potential for conflict between the research methods and vulnerable feelings evoked in their experience of therapy, as noted by Timulak (2008). The research methods I developed were intended to be child-centred and child-led, and as such were '*...non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory...*' (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 100). In order to be participatory they were designed around familiar child-centred play languages that took into account cognitive and social levels (Birbeck & Drummond, 2007).

Whilst the motivation was therefore for each child to respond within the study from their '*power from within*' drawn on by Gillian Proctor (2002, p. 38), nevertheless the potential for being influenced or wanting to be led by an adult were taken into account. Using play to structure ways of intentionally leading and following, then reflecting on what those experiences had evoked, enabled me to learn about each child within the research framework. As Brian Edmiston (2005, p. 56) notes: '*If we play with a child we can productively use our power to share authority so that we may coexplore the meanings of events in imagined spaces.*' In this way, communicating and understanding power was enabled through the play design processes and the development of familiar child-centred creative methods.

#### **4.5 Data protection, anonymity and confidentiality**

The right to confidentiality and protection under the '**Data Protection Act**' (1998) is a standard requirement within research and is well noted in literature (Flewitt, 2005, Seale & Barnard, 2002). The care and handling of data that was generated, stored

and analysed both during and after the study was meaningfully considered to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity were preserved, research regulations upheld, and therapeutic integrity maintained in relation to images belonging to both the co-researching data and the therapeutic process. I considered each child through the lenses of both a practitioner and a researcher, and remained highly observant of these boundaries regarding the capture of data and the details of the research site (described in section 4.8). The data are stored in line with the university's requirements, with access limited to the viewing of materials by my supervisors (in part) and myself (in full).

The above description of confidentiality and the maintenance of anonymity concludes the main ethical discussions in relation to the study, but others occur throughout the remainder of this chapter as the design is unfolded and additional issues are addressed within its chronological description. However, before the design is described, the final sections of this first part of the chapter provide some brief discussions about practitioner research, power and bias with regard to issues I encountered as I developed the methodological approach. The approach is then summarised and the second part of the chapter opens with a description of the research site.

#### **4.6 Power and practitioner research with children**

This section draws briefly on the power dynamics present within the study and the remit of research with children. Adult power is often considered a sign of Western cultural perspectives, which promote generational seniority (Kellett, 2010). This knowledge of sociological power has no doubt helped a number of researchers to take account of the sensitivities around power when researching with children (Alderson, 2008; Morrow, 2005). As co-authors Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that when working with children the power of the researcher is the biggest ethical issue. As a result, children have started to feature as researchers, co-researchers, collaborators and participants in research with increasing regularity (David et al., 2005; Kellett, 2010). Attitudes towards research environments have therefore been considered from the point of view of children; for example, in school settings the ethics of empowerment have been seen in relation to the school as a 'captive environment', structured by adult agendas such as time, place, task and clothing (Kellett, 2010).

David et al., (2005) suggest that researchers must be sensitive to power, as failure to

implement a design that takes it into account leaves them open to ethical compromises. There is an increased understanding of the potential for children to feel compelled to participate in research projects, in educational and other settings, due to the request coming from adults already positioned as insiders (ibid.). Research with children is perceived as *'requiring great sensitivity and robust ethical consideration[...] maintaining an awareness of the practitioner-researcher as an adult in the child's world'* (Leeson, 2007, p. 129). Concerns have been noted by researchers in relation to children's anxieties via feedback in which they've described their confusion about the nature of the research task. This has been suggested to represent an inability in some children to *'fully appreciate what was being asked of them; or[...] that they would construct the researcher as an authority figure to whom they had to acquiesce'* (Mahon et al., 1996, p. 150). These tendencies are reported to have created an unequal relationship based on age and perceived authority, which has great potential to silence the voices of children (Proctor, 2002; Mauthner, 1997). Flewitt (2005, p. 1) links power to listening as she suggests that *'by listening to and respecting all participants' wishes, it can at the very least help to balance the unequal power balance between researcher and researched'*. The child's need to be listened to with sensitivity and an awareness of potential challenges imposed by their own physical, mental or environmental situation is noted by childhood inquiry researchers Richard Layard and Judy Dunn (2009). Morrow (2005) helps to reframe this vulnerability by suggesting that children may be viewed as a 'category' in need of protection from adult researchers who view them as vulnerable objects. This discussion of power calls for adults to understand the need to equip themselves with the skills and resources to be open to listening with children in equal collaboration and to be committed to engaging with this approach.

My own ethical approach, as a practitioner working with children in therapy, has developed from the perspective of viewing children as competent and the experts of their own experience despite presenting with sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Within the therapeutic arena children are considered vulnerable by definition of their referral to services; understanding the inequality of adult and child roles can be a vital feature in therapy and research, and a child may need to view this as such in terms of developing their understanding of themselves (Proctor, 2002). Proctor writes about the role of power within the therapeutic exchange, which includes the power from within. This inner power is in accord with autonomy and self-expression rooted in a place of self-ownership (ibid.).

Adult power can play a specific role within a therapeutic contract which operates within an educational setting. The contract itself comes with a set of conditions which establish the practitioner's responsibilities with each child and their obligations towards them, which centre around care of their person and situations that may place them or another person in actual or psychological danger. Being able to maintain a professional judgement concerning issues of child safety can mean going against the wishes of a child. Whilst this is a complex power exchange it is nevertheless an authentic acknowledgement of where adult power may need to be in conflict with that of the child. On the few occasions when these situations arise in my own practice I explore my concerns with the child and seek their support in taking the matter forward. If their support is not forthcoming I document their views and prioritise their concerns about disclosure to a third party.

#### **4.7 Practitioner-researcher bias and subjectivity**

To complete my discussion and explanation of the methodological and theoretical approaches, I turn to the issues relating to bias and influence within my role as a practitioner-researcher. Grainger comments on the researcher's role in terms of investment and care, and of the researcher's integrity in understanding their identity and purpose of undertaking the study:

*'In any kind of study your main research instrument is yourself. The integrity of your research depends on your own integrity. It is your personal investment, your ability to care for what you are doing, that will involve other people, convincing them that all this effort is worthwhile and that co-operating with you is actually going to advance the cause of human understanding'* (Grainger, 1999, p. 36).

In terms of the integrity and personal investment Grainger writes of, I was deeply committed to the well-being of the children, and respectful of the vulnerabilities towards children within the school's adult community as a result of my knowledge of their levels of individual need. I exercised a patient approach when engaging with adults and answering their queries about home situations and fielding concerns about their children. However, as a researcher I was frustrated by the protocol which, due to the legalities and nature of seeking adult consent, meant it was ethically prohibited to directly approach each child who was already engaged in a weekly session with me, until adult consent was achieved (Ramsden & Jones, 2011).

The roles of practitioner and researcher were in conflict as the issue could impact negatively on the children, who might realise that I had spoken to their parent/primary caregiver about a process that affected them before I had raised it with them. Whilst in reality none of the children directly raised this, the potential for compromising their trust and their understanding of confidentiality was certainly something I revisited throughout the study. In my field diaries I worried about the nature of research in relation to disrupting the children's inner process and progress, and questioned the ethical and practical dilemmas around the motivation of the research role.

As a researcher the desire to produce good results that reflect well on the practice is noted in literature, focusing on in-service evaluation and research (Hoggarth & Comfort, 2010). Working with these realities, and triangulating the process and progress in clinical supervision, has been one way of ensuring the maintenance of safe boundaries in the therapy. The collection of data enabling an exploration of my own investment, professional integrity and honesty, and allowing the reviewing and re-checking of ethical principles that underpin the study, has also been important (Drake & Heath, 2010). One source of reflexivity has been the use of my field diaries, which are my own account of the research process, where I have documented my journey and additional observations about the content of the research. Field diaries and notes have been described as consisting of *'jottings and writings about experiences in the field [which] are started as soon as the research begins'* (Holloway, 1997, p. 71). I noted, when reflecting on my field notes from the early stages of the process, that I was invested in wanting the study to go ahead and in gaining permission from the school and from parents/primary caregivers so that I could approach the children. Whilst I remained as open and reflective about this bias as I could, it nevertheless led me to making choices such as planning and rehearsing my initial pitch for institutional consent to include a number of influential positive words, promoting to the headteacher and governors the strengths of agreeing to the study more than drawing attention to its limitations. Yet in the study itself it was important to understand this potential so that it did not influence the data collection and silence the children involved.

The ethical issues of power, which are threaded throughout the study, have been anticipated and considered at every stage. I have asked myself and explored with my academic and clinical supervisors: *'How do I empower the children?'*; *'How do I*

*prevent myself from disempowering the children in order to get my data?* Nevertheless this constant challenge has been a reminder of the contribution this study is making to the field in terms of enabling children's voices, partly through the acknowledgement of these complex discourses and through finding ways to work with them.

A range of ethical complexities arises from the design, highlighting that assent choosing is a major way in which each child's voice is given the opportunity for expression. Likewise, the methods that have been developed from existing dramatherapy techniques are recognised as meaningful ways of capturing data.

The second part of the chapter, below, unpacks the design of the study and describes the research site, introduces the children who made up the research sample and reviews the three phases of data and the data collection methods in detail in order to provide a clear description of the design. A section covering the ways in which data were collected and analysed completes the outline of the design before the chapter is concluded and the findings chapters introduced.

#### **4.8 Introducing the research site and dramatherapy practice**

This study was conducted in a mainstream primary school in a culturally diverse and densely populated inner-city locality of southern England. The in-house tracking documents reveal a roll of approximately 390 children aged between three and 11. The children come from 30 ethnic backgrounds and speak 21 languages, with 33 per cent speaking English as a second language (ESL). 32 per cent of the children are registered with special educational needs (SEN); 70 per cent receive free school meals and are in receipt of the Pupil Premium (a government-funded initiative which aims to address inequalities caused by financial disadvantage (**Department of Education**, 2012)). The school has been described as serving 'an area which has high levels of social deprivation [...] has a higher proportion of pupils with learning difficulties than in most schools [and] attainment on entry to school well below that for most schools.' (**Ofsted**, 2007 – in maintaining anonymity a specific reference for this source cannot be fully cited). Ofsted's 2013 inspection judged the school as outstanding; this includes pastoral care and the provision for children who are in looked-after care (LAC), as well as that of children with SEN (**Ofsted**, 2013).

Since the dramatherapy post began 12 years ago there have been five changes of

school leadership, four of which occurred in the lead-up to and throughout the 18 months where data were collected. These changes brought a significant period of unrest and inconsistency for both children and staff. With the exception of the two deputy headteachers, the majority of staffing changes have taken place in the teaching cohort, with other staff groups showing longevity of service.

The first change of leadership occurred when the long-standing head teacher sought a new posting, two terms after the school governors had given their initial consent for the study to take place. His successor was removed with immediate effect in the aftermath of poor key stage two (KS2) standardised test results (SATs) and a 'super-head' was installed for two terms, along with intensive monitoring from the local authority (LA) to raise educational standards. During his two terms the super-head negotiated a federation/partnership with two local primary schools. 'Executive head teacher' and 'head of school' posts were created, advertised for and appointed; the handover period was particularly fraught, with the super-head and executive head teacher refusing to attend meetings together due to professional (possibly also personal) clashes.

Alongside these changes, some members of teaching staff were placed on disciplinary procedures to address a mixture of long-term health issues and in-house investigations into standards of teaching. There was a substantial through-put of agency teaching staff over much of this period, particularly in KS2, and there is no doubt that this impacted on the quality of learning and the consistency of teaching that the children received. Difficulties were also experienced by the board of governors throughout this period, with the majority of the board resigning when the federation was in its first term. Consistency, however, was offered by teaching assistants – many of whom have given considerable years of service in the school.

After completion of the data collection (but during the write-up of the study), the executive head resigned to take up a promotion within an academy and a new executive head was appointed, despite this requiring a sizeable commute from another part of the country. He remained in post for five terms before resigning part-way through an academic year, at which point the head of school was appointed as the new executive head. One of the two long-serving deputy head teachers was subsequently promoted to head of school, and three assistant head posts were advertised and filled by internal candidates. Finally, as these changes came into force, one of the two remaining schools opted out of the federation/partnership referred to above.

Major building works accompanied these staffing changes – including the rewiring of the entire building; the playground being remodelled; and new classrooms created. There were also changes within the school's population in terms of migration, temporary exclusion and transition to special provisions, as well as the annual move for year six to secondary school each July. This was a significant and prolonged period of change which was experienced by children and staff alike. Themes relating to these changes featured for some children in their dramatherapy sessions, and were also discussed informally among staff.

The dramatherapy provision is part of the school's SEN and inclusion services. It began with an initial short-term contract in 2001, in response to the then head teacher's request to provide an in-house therapeutic service to support children presenting with complex emotional and behavioural needs. After a few years the contract became substantiated and time-limited additional funds were secured. These funds provided two days of dramatherapy and one day of art therapy per week, until 2010 when they ended and the post returned to one day per week. On four occasions over the past 12 years the room for dramatherapy has been reallocated in response to increases in the school roll and demands on teaching space. Fortunately the practice room remained the same during the changes of leadership that occurred alongside the collection of data. For the seven children who became co-researchers, and for others referred to dramatherapy, the room and myself as a therapist may have represented one of the few consistent experiences of location, practitioner and purpose within school during this prolonged period of change and upheaval.

Both individual and group dramatherapy sessions are offered within the practice, depending on the needs within the school community. The dramatherapy room is equipped with a range of creative and arts-based resources, some of which can be seen in the photographs of the room's layout which appear in Appendix 10 (page 294). My practice incorporates dramatic and creative processes, enabling clients to explore their concerns and difficulties and to express themselves in ways that are meaningful to them using familiar play, drama, arts and creative processes. A five-part structure shapes the sessions; a check-in and warm-up leads to a focus for exploration during the main part of the session, which is then reflected upon before the client prepares for the ending of the session and their return back to the classroom. This structure is informed by dramatherapy literature, and in particular by the work of UK-based Jones (1996) and USA-based Emunah (1994).

Referrals to the dramatherapy service are made by the children themselves, by their parents/primary caregivers, or by any member of school staff who has concerns about a child's well-being. Referrals cover a range of issues, both temporary and enduring. These include concerns about life within the family or community; physical or/and mental illness; difficulties in school such as anxiety, anger and loss; and difficulties with peer relationships. Individual sessions usually last for 45 minutes, with group sessions being 60 minutes. Individual and group contracts vary in length and can be held over a few sessions, a term, a school year or longer. Each contract is determined and reviewed on a case-by-case basis with each child. Formal meetings with the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) are held and assessment, interim and final reports are provided to the child and the SENCo. The choice to attend weekly sessions, however, is actively given to each child as a means of promoting their agency through choice and ownership of the therapeutic process. This has become an embedded part of the practice over the years, and has greatly influenced and informed the theoretical approach and design for this study.

#### **4.9 Introducing the co-researchers**

This section introduces the three girls and four boys who together formed the research sample. The children in the sample were in different classes in school, despite some of them being in the same year group. Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 has described in detail how the sample was selected from the ongoing dramatherapy practice, and how assent was negotiated with each child.

These introductions have been drawn from a combination of what each child said about themselves, the comments of school staff involved with them at the time of referral, and my knowledge and observations of them during the study. Each child was introduced to the idea of choosing their own pseudonym during the initial assent-choosing session. I explained that this would be the name I would use when writing about their co-researching experiences after the three phases of data collection had been completed. The names that accompany the following introductions therefore reflect their choices. The children are introduced in alphabetical order.

Any verbatim dialogue offered by the children in the following introductions, and in the findings chapters (Five and Six) appears ***italicised and boldened*** to denote their direct reflections and descriptions of their own experiences. This allows each voice to be distinct within the text. The cartoon 'self-portraits' accompanying each introduction

have been illustrated from photographs taken by each child in the role of co-researcher, and selected by each child as representative of their voice as a co-researcher. Six of the seven children chose to represent their voices using images of themselves; one child chose an object that he held aloft. Some children also chose to include objects from the room in their cartoon self-portrait along with images of me. Each cartoon has been reproduced in the thesis with the child's assent (see section 4.13.2 for further details about the cartoon self-portraits, and Appendix 6 (B), page 284, for a copy of the assent form relating to the reproduced of cartoon portraits in the thesis).

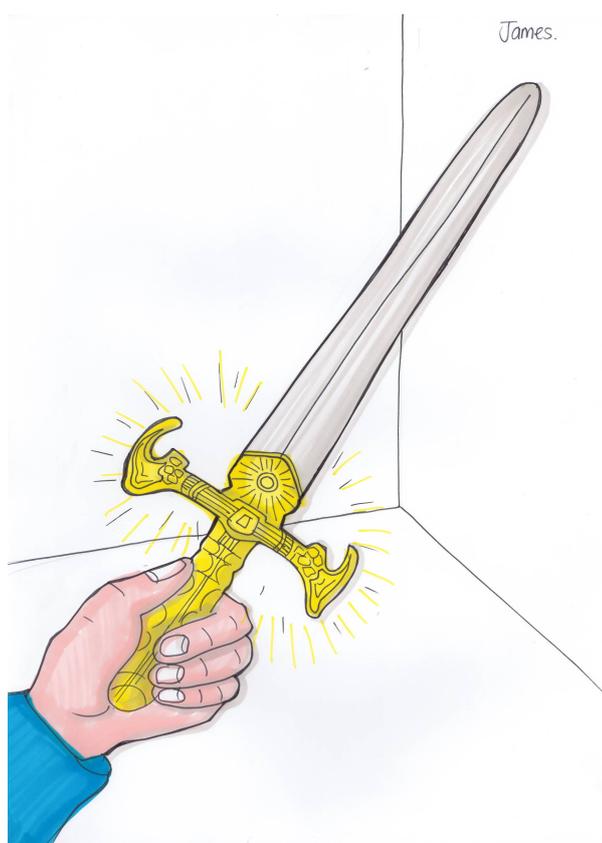
**Ambipom** was eight years old when he gave his assent to become a co-researcher. He described dramatherapy as being *“fun... like no other classroom in the school”*, and had been known to me since he was referred by his nursery class teacher. As a pre-schooler Ambipom had been one of several children and adults who were victims of a traumatic event, which left him with distressing symptoms and difficulty relating to his peers and some adults. Despite his abundance of physical energy, Ambipom had been observed during his nursery year hiding away from others and appearing anxious during times of peer play. School staff had expressed concerns about this play activity in relation to the traumatic event he had experienced, and had referred him for individual dramatherapy at that time. Over the years Ambipom used the themes of hiding and revealing to explore his concerns, and transformed the anxious play into confident play incorporating gymnastic movements, collaborations through story-making, and most notably his energetic and enthusiastic use of musical instruments – particularly the drums. During his time as a co-researcher Ambipom enjoyed wearing some of the resources in the room as if they were garments. This included the large gramophone speaker, which he wore over his head, covering his body to his knees. The language of hiding and revealing remained meaningful for him, and as a co-researcher he often explored these themes to make up stories, which enabled him to express himself by combining his love of acrobatic and gymnastic movement with his creative imagination.

**Figure 1: Ambipom**



**James** had been engaged in dramatherapy sessions for one year before joining the study. He had been referred following concerns from staff and his primary caregiver about his interpersonal isolation from peers, and difficulties communicating with teachers. He frequently chose non-verbal means to express himself, such as full-bodied movements with play objects including toy sucker guns, hoops and balls. This action-based play was fluid and spontaneous. In addition James created images in the sand tray with pebbles and stones, which he would then turn into stories. He frequently played bat and ball as a means of expressing mood and energy. When he spoke his voice was soft and quiet. Answering direct questions would require time, patience and silence for James to think about what he wanted to say. James was nine years of age when he became a co-researcher and described himself as “**a good drawer**”. He created images on paper using coloured pencils, drawing still life pictures using soft animal toys, which he carefully posed.

**Figure 2: James**



**Lady Gaga** was eight years of age when she became a co-researcher. She had been referred a few months before the study began, when staff in school had noted an increasing difficulty in decision-making and a tendency to seek comfort in copying and following the behaviour of others. Difficulties with friendships had arisen as a result of this presentation. The referral was supported by her primary caregiver, who had observed her preference for following others with limited agency and noticed her difficulties when making simple choices. Lady Gaga's primary caregiver suspected these difficulties were shaped by her alleged abusive background. Lady Gaga loved to paint and chose to do so as her main means of self-expression on many occasions, both before and during her time as a co-researcher. She regularly vocalised how much she enjoyed the sensation of engaging in messy play with paints and water, and of covering her hands, arms and the table with paint. With a broad smile she described working with paint and air-dry clay as a co-researcher as being "**mucky and clayey**". Lady Gaga documented her work each week through photography, and provided ongoing and reflective commentaries to describe her experiences.

**Figure 3: Lady Gaga**



**Mia** often chose to play with liquid bubbles and blow-up balloons in her dramatherapy sessions, asking me to tie them off for her. She would string them up against a wall, revisiting them in subsequent sessions to see how buoyant or deflated they had become. At one point there were about 14 balloons on the string in various stages of performance. Mia was 10 years old when she joined the study as a co-researcher. She was an energetic girl who spoke little but laughed often. She enjoyed drawing pictures and making cards for people, and decorating them with coloured glitter. She was interested in how the bubbles, balloons and glitter spread around the room when she used them. Mia constructed and inhabited a den, which remained for many months and was made from tables and blankets with cushions and soft toys inside. Mia had been engaging with the dramatherapy service over several years along with her siblings and parents. With a full statement of educational needs she was considered a vulnerable child in school, and received significant input in her daily schooling from specialist teachers and teaching assistants. Mia had been referred for dramatherapy sessions in order to provide a place to play and support her well-being and emotional growth. As a co-researcher she regularly commented: ***“I love it here”*** when describing her experiences of being part of the study and her time in the dramatherapy room.

**Figure 4: Mia**



**Rocksus** was reported by staff to be a quiet and withdrawn 11-year-old boy who preferred the company of adults to his peers. He was softly-spoken and had been observed by school staff to appear lost in the school community. Partway through his final year of primary school Rocksus had been re-referred to the in-house dramatherapy service as well as to the borough's child and adolescent mental health team (CAMHS). He had previously been part of a dramatherapy group, which he remembered as being "**really fun**". Rocksus regularly used this phrase when he reflected on his play choices during his time as a co-researcher, as he had inhabited hero characters and enacted energetic and creative stories. In the themes of his play, hero characters always defeated their opponents no matter how many there were. Rocksus employed regular delaying tactics at the end of sessions in the hope of staying longer in the room.

**Figure 5: Rocksus**



**Rosie** was eight years old when he became a co-researcher. He was referred for dramatherapy for fighting with his peers and displaying what was experienced as aggressive and angry behaviour in school. His complex family background included violence, mental illness and economic poverty. He had a strong commitment and love for his large family, which he often spoke protectively about. Initially the sessions provided him with asylum from the rest of the school environment. As Rosie started to understand his co-researching choices, which included choosing a girl's name as his pseudonym, his confidence and sense of agency developed and his presentation transformed. Rosie showed a playful, rich and engaging sense of humour and this was often present in sessions. As a co-researcher he enjoyed storing resources in his individual tray, which he would point to and remark: ***"I will use that later on, and that [points at item], and that [points at item]"***.

**Figure 6: Rosie**



**Stargirl** was an eleven-year-old girl in her final year of primary school when she became a co-researcher. She had been engaged in both group and individual dramatherapy during her school career, and had been re-referred the previous year following a resurgence of concerns about various aspects of her home life and ongoing family experiences. Stargirl was considered academically able but her attendance in school was poor, partly due to what was suspected to be her unofficial role as a young carer at home. She was often observed as appearing withdrawn, and the impact of her poor attendance had been noted in the lack of development and maintenance of friendships within her peer group. Stargirl spoke of the value she experienced from individual attention, and would often explore the theme of friendship in weekly dramatherapy sessions. In all the time I knew Stargirl I rarely saw anything but a smile on her face, even when she was quite poorly with a winter cold. However, she often explored the theme of sadness from the safe distance of the characters she had cast herself in during her play, and in story work in sessions. Collaborative play and story-making were her preferred play choices and as a co-researcher Stargirl reflected positively on her own ability to tell stories, which she would tell to a select audience of toys in the soft play area. Towards the end of each session Stargirl would often ask whether she could ***“stay here and have five minutes extra”***.

**Figure 7: Stargirl**



Having introduced the seven children who engaged in the study as co-researchers, the next sections (4.10 to 4.13.2) describe the overall design of the study, including the research methods developed for collecting data and the three phases during which the data were collected.

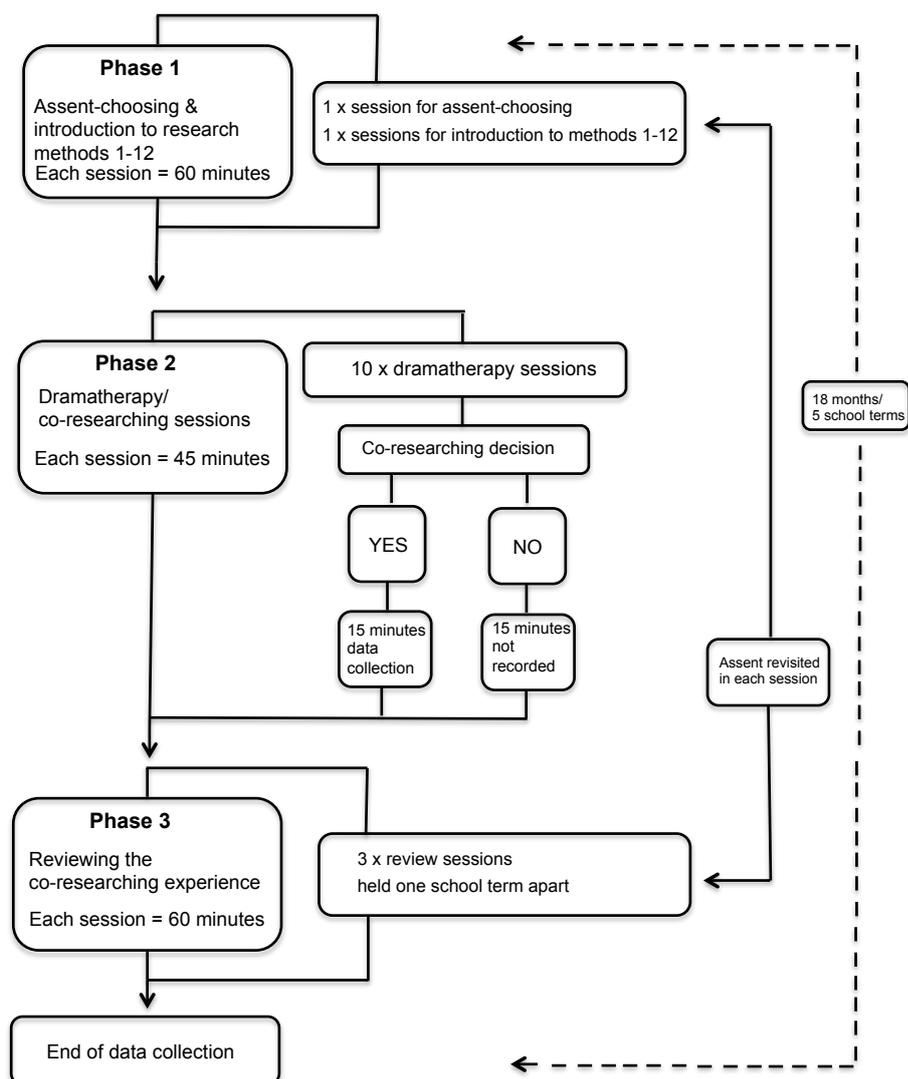
#### **4.10 Phases One, Two and Three: an overview**

The three phases in which data were collected took place over 18 months/five school terms in total. Phase One consisted of two sessions per child, each lasting 60 minutes and held one week apart. During these sessions each child made his or her initial decision to join the study as a co-researcher. Phase Two consisted of 10 sessions per child, each lasting 45 minutes and held over 10 consecutive weeks (apart from Rocksus who joined the study half way through). In these sessions each child made his or her weekly choice about engaging as a co-researcher (assent reviewing), and reflected on the content of their dramatherapy sessions through their selections from the 12 research methods. Phase Three consisted of three sessions per child each lasting 60 minutes, held one school term apart. In these sessions each child reviewed his or her co-researching experiences using three additional research methods designed specifically for the task of reviewing the overall process.

The schedule for collecting data was arranged so that Phases One and Two were held over consecutive weeks, and so that Phase Two was completed before the end of the summer term 2009. The first review sessions of Phase Three were also held by the end of this summer term. The two remaining review sessions took place during the autumn and spring terms that followed. Initial parental/primary caregiver consent letters and information sheets were handed out in the January of 2009, with the first sessions of Phase One taking place from early February. As a consequence of the staggered receipt of consent forms from parents/primary caregivers, the schedule took into account the different starting and ending dates for each child's sessions throughout the three phases.

The three phases are summarised below in Figure 8. This is followed, in sections 4.10 to 4.13.2, by a more detailed discussion of each phase and the additional resources available to each child in the co-researching role. The 12 research methods are described within the Phase Two section, and the three reviewing methods in the section relating to Phase Three.

**Figure 8: Flowchart of Phases One, Two and Three**



#### **4.11 Phase One: assent choosing, introducing the 12 research methods and additional resources**

The two sessions which made up Phase One had a number of aims: to provide each child with information about the study; to give choices about assent choosing; to embed the ongoing process of assent reviewing; and to introduce and experientially explore the 12 research methods along with accompanying resources for selection and use during Phase Two.

To describe the initial assent-choosing process as a phase of data collection may seem unconventional. However, as a result of the richness of each child's responses

during these sessions, once assent was chosen across the sample I also sought assent for these responses to be included as data from each child and retrospectively ascribed them to be included as a data set, to be referred to as Phase One.

#### **4.11.1 Assent choosing: the first of two sessions in Phase One**

The assent-choosing sessions took place on consecutive weeks. They were arranged in addition to the weekly individual dramatherapy sessions and lasted 60 minutes each, with no obligation to stay for the whole hour. The first session explored the information sheet for children which had been designed to explain the study and the co-researching role to each child, and also to provide practical details about the study's length and purpose (the information sheet is reproduced in Appendix 5, page 281).

Before explaining the study I asked each child a series of questions as a means of introducing and establishing the concept of making choices. The questions drew on three areas: self-knowledge (e.g. *'did you have breakfast today?'*); use of physical activity (e.g. *'would you like to move to a place in the room you like to be in?'*); and the capacity to make visual observations (e.g. *'can you see anything new in the room today?'*). Responses to these questions were then unpacked to reveal what had been discovered about how the questions had been asked, answered and experienced. This design aimed to enable each child to understand that their choices would be respected and followed without question, and to prepare them for the invitation to join the study as a co-researcher.

I explained the invitation to each child as an opportunity to co-research dramatherapy experiences during the final 15 minutes of each weekly dramatherapy session, over a period of 10 consecutive sessions. I also explained that I hoped co-researching would provide an opportunity for self-expression and a deeper understanding of themselves, which would in turn allow me to learn more about their experiences in dramatherapy and about their voices. I drew on the concept of making discoveries as I invited each child to identify something they had recently discovered, and for us to record this on the information sheet for children. See Figure 9 (below) for a summary of each child's discovery made during this session. Exploring and establishing the assenting process was of primary focus in this session; it was coupled with clarification for each child that their weekly dramatherapy sessions would continue regardless of their decision about joining the study or reviewing their assent as it progressed. By exploring choices and discoveries I was addressing the ethical dilemma of researcher power, and hopefully minimising the potential for the 'Hawthorne effect' (Jones, 1992), where participants of

research try to please the researcher by anticipating the answers they think they should give rather than giving those they really want to.

**Figure 9: The discoveries made during the initial assent-choosing session**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Ambipom:   | <b><i>“Yesterday I found out when it was my birthday. It felt funny.”</i></b>  |
| James:     | <b><i>“The hoover blows as well as sucks.”</i></b>   |
| Lady Gaga: | <b><i>“The pense. Haw cum’s the pense were ther. Have cum one is ther?”</i></b><br><i>[The pense. How come the pens were there. How cum one is there?]</i>                 |
| Mia:       | <b><i>“The den was moved from last time I was here.”</i></b>   |
| Rocksus:   | <b><i>“I have discovered this work. It is new and I haven’t done it before. I can have fun in school (here) and come and play games and have people to play with.”</i></b> |
| Rosie:     | <b><i>“That virgin media can play any music you want when the music is not playing.”</i></b>   |
| Stargirl:  | <b><i>“The lizard I saw at the zoo was actually a dragon.”</i></b>   |

Minimising the potential of the Hawthorne effect also led me to the design and use of ‘Reggie the Research Frog’ (see Figure 10, below). Reggie was a simply designed, affable-looking green felt anthropomorphic hand puppet, clothed in a turquoise tunic and wearing a green badge that said ‘*thank you for your decision*’. He was operated by me and I assigned him a single movement, which was to nod his head twice, exactly the same way, to indicate ‘*thank you*’ when any decision was made about the co-researching process by each child. His badge was similar to the ‘I’m co-researching’ badges worn by each child, and to my ‘I’m researching’ badge, which were affixed to our clothing when each child chose to co-research in their sessions during Phase Two. Reggie the hand puppet was also designed to receive each child’s initial assenting

decision, with the focus placed on him to minimise any additional pressure that may be experienced or perceived from my facial expression.

**Figure 10: Reggie the Research Frog hand puppet**



Having given their verbal assent to Reggie, the assenting form was completed and signed. This form contained a series of questions which I had anticipated each child might have about the study, along with information that had been explained earlier but were summarised again here in order to revisit points to ensure their meaning had been understood. Figure 11 (below) is an extract showing some of the points included on this form. A copy of the form itself is given in Appendix 6 (A), page 284.

**Figure 11: extract from the assent-choosing form**

| To be completed by the child   | Please write your first name here |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| I understand that my taking part is my own choice and at any time I can stop doing the research and leave without telling Emma why.                                    |                                   |
| I understand that if I do want to do the research I will be called a co-researcher and will wear a badge for part of each session.                                     |                                   |
| I understand that if I tell Emma that I might be hurt, or someone else might be hurt, she may have to tell another adult about it and they will know that I said this. |                                   |
| I understand that if I do not want to join in with this research I can still come to dramatherapy sessions.  |                                   |
| I agree to take part in this research.   |                                   |

The idea that each child should decide on a pseudonym was introduced in this session. This was described as the *'pretend name'* I would use to ensure their anonymity when writing up the findings. Some children chose their names during that session, others decided on them – and in two cases changed them – during future sessions. Exploring assent choosing with Reggie, using badges and choosing pseudonyms, were processes designed to highlight how being a co-researcher was different but complimentary to the familiar confidential dramatherapy process. The findings relating to these choices are presented in Chapter Five, section 5.5.1, and again in Chapter Six throughout the three case studies.

#### **4.11.2 Introducing the 12 research methods: the second of two sessions in Phase One**

Many of the 12 research methods introduced in this session were already familiar to the co-researcher as they had been developed from the techniques used in the existing dramatherapy practice.

The methods had been identified through my analysis of session recordings and practitioner notes during the initial stages of the study's design. I looked at the range of traditional dramatherapy techniques frequently used in the practice to identify those that might become research methods. I arranged the techniques into four broad categories: image-making; projective play with objects and puppets; drama-based techniques including role-play; and embodied states such as sculpting (a common dramatherapy term that describes the creation of poses using the body to depict themes, situations and emotions). From these categories I identified the techniques that were most commonly used and named these as the main methods for the study. I did not look for 12 methods per se; rather I looked for a variety of methods that would uphold the choice-making design and theoretical underpinning. Twelve is therefore an arbitrary number of methods but one that is great enough to enable choice.

Each of the 12 research methods was visually represented in cartoon format throughout Phases Two and Three and displayed in the dramatherapy room on a large wall-mounted noticeboard. Each method is described below, and these descriptions are followed by Figure 12, which depicts the cartoon representations of Methods 2 (transforming imagination dough), 9 (expressing and reflecting with puppets) and 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing). See Appendix 13 (pages 299–304) for details of 12 research methods with accompanying cartoons.

1 **The imaginary 'I' camera**

The co-researcher is in the role of 'photographer' and the researcher is in the role of 'camera'. The photographer moves the camera (whose eyes are shut to represent the camera's shutter) into a position in the dramatherapy room to capture an image of the co-researcher's choosing. Once the position is inhabited the co-researcher gives the instruction for the image to be taken, specifying how long the exposure will be in seconds. The researcher opens her eyes, looks at the scene for the length of time chosen by the co-researcher, and then closes them.

2 **Transforming the imagination dough**

The co-researcher is invited to represent and reflect any feelings or experiences from the session using 'imagination dough', which is an imaginary elastic substance that can be any colour, size or consistency. The dough is made into any object or abstract shape that the co-researcher sees as representative of their feelings or experiences.

3 **Body sculpts**

The co-researcher 'moulds' the researcher, as if she were a lump of clay, into a still image or *sculpt* (a common dramatherapy term used to describe this outcome). The sculpt expresses feelings or experiences that arose during the session. The co-researcher is then invited to look at their creation and reflect on it before de-roling the researcher from the sculpt and inhabiting it themselves. The sculpt is then finally de-rolled and the image reflected on using words or movements.

4 **Pass the facial expression**

Using facial expressions initiated by the co-researcher, feelings that occurred in the session are embodied and re-experienced by being passed to and fro between the co-researcher and researcher.

5 **Statements in the box**

The co-researcher is invited to make statements about experiences from the session. Statements are made either using speech and/or movement, or recorded on paper with drawings and/or text.

6 **Reflecting with sentence prompt cards**

The co-researcher chooses to finish one or more of four incomplete sentences that have been written on large cue cards. They can do this by speaking, moving drawing or writing. The cue cards are:

*'Today I have...'*

*'What I would like to say is...'*

*'I enjoyed...'*

*'I did not like...'*

**7 Saying anything you want to**

The co-researcher is invited to sit and talk about their experiences of the session.

**8 Choosing objects that represent your session today**

The co-researcher gathers together or identifies objects that have been meaningful during the session, and reflects on their choices and what they represent using movement, speech, drawing or writing.

**9 Expressing and reflecting with puppets**

The co-researcher is invited to reflect on their session using puppets. This can include recreating moments from the session, or having a conversation with the puppets about their experiences.

**10 Make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing**

The co-researcher makes a pretend phone call to someone, either real or imaginary, to talk about the session that has taken place. The call is witnessed by the researcher.

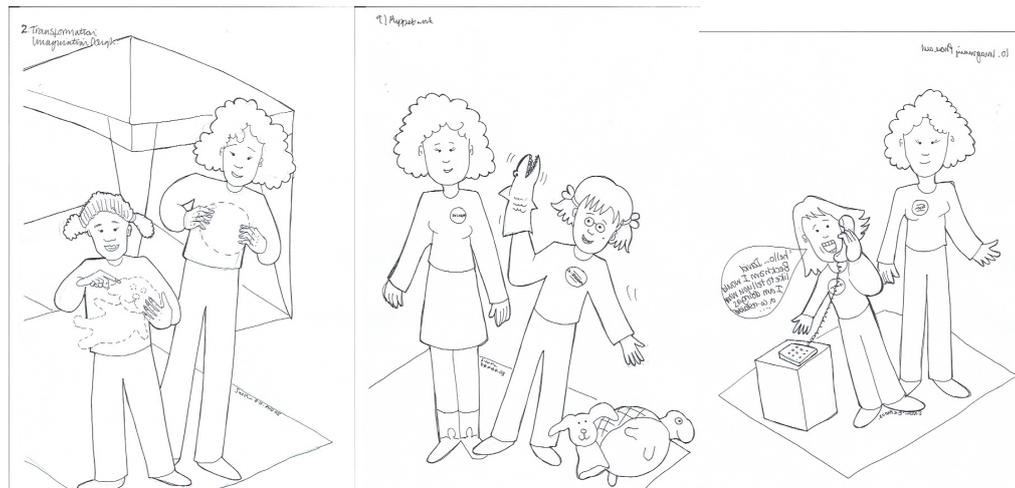
**11 Re-tracing your steps**

The co-researcher leads and revisits the physical journey taken in the room during the session as a means of reflection. The researcher mirrors the process as per the co-researcher's instructions or guidance.

**12 Reflecting with pictures and images**

The co-researcher chooses wet and/or dry art materials to create an image (or images) that represents aspects and experiences from their session. The storage bank of found images (such as postcards and magazine cut-outs) may also be used.

**Figure 12: Research Methods 2, 9 and 10**



#### **4.11.3 Introducing additional resources**

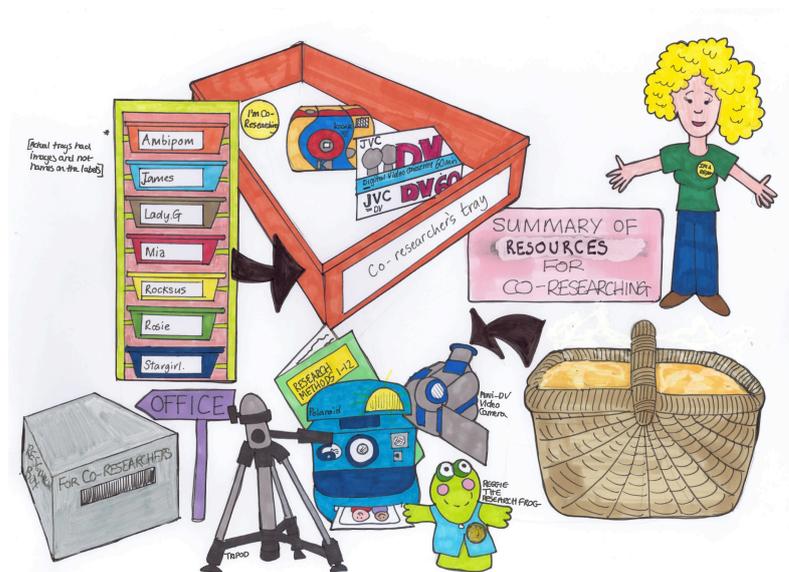
In addition to the resources available in the dramatherapy room, which I have accumulated as a practitioner over the years (such as the large gramophone speaker, a variety of hand puppets, face masks, a sand tray, soft toys and other small objects, and dressing-up costumes), a range of art and media resources were also available for each child's use in conjunction with the 12 research methods during their time as co-researchers. These resources were made available to enable each child to capture aspects of their co-researching reflections, should they choose to do so. Some resources were shared between them, while others were assigned for individual use and ownership. For example: 'Reggie the Research Frog', the video camera and tripod and the instant image Polaroid camera were housed in a wicker 'research basket' and counted as shared items. Also shared was the broad range of wet and dry art materials in the dramatherapy room, and the silver-coloured 'research box' that was kept in the main school reception/administrative area. This box contained dry art materials, paper and envelopes; each child in the sample could write and/or draw reflective messages and place them in the box for me to collect and read between sessions during Phases Two and Three (see Appendix 16, pages 309–310, for instructions to the co-researchers about how to leave messages (A) and examples of completed messages (B)).

Individual resources designed for each child's sole ownership included A4 folders with copies of cartoon depictions of the 12 research methods; disposable 39-shot single-use cameras; individual videotapes and co-researching badges. These resources were stored in each child's individual co-researcher tray, which was kept in a furniture

storage unit in the dramatherapy room. Each child drew an identification label for their own tray, omitting their real names in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, each child had an individual A1 folder for storing any large art images they created. These folders were housed in the drawers of a wooden A1 plan chest, marked 'confidential'.

The choice of cameras was based on two factors: the capacity for empowerment through independent use, and financial cost. This led me to choose videotape and celluloid film instead of the more contemporary and widely available digital kit. The chosen formats supported autonomy as they were simple to operate and required minimal input from me to set them up. Providing tape and film rather than digital memory cards enabled single-use cameras to be used and more than one individual videotape (if needed) per child, all within budget. Figure 13 (on the next page) shows a cartoon representation of these resources. See Appendix 12, page 298, for a list of all these items.

**Figure 13: Additional research resources**



#### **4.12 Phase Two: implementing the 12 research methods during sessions 1–10**

Phase Two was the reflective process during which the main body of data were collected. This phase took place during 10 dramatherapy sessions per co-researcher, held over consecutive weeks and lasting 45 minutes each. The final 15 minutes of each session formed the co-researching opportunity, where data were collected only if the choice to co-research had been made by the child. The decision was designed to be made away from my gaze and potential for influence, and was made mostly from the area where the co-researching trays were kept – an area that had been designated as the co-researcher’s own space (the tray unit is represented above in Figure 13; the location of the unit in the room is represented in Appendix 10, page 294).

When choosing to co-research, each child affixed their yellow badge (which stated ‘*I’m co-researching*’) onto their clothing and found a way to reveal their decision. On seeing this I would affix my own ‘*I’m researching*’ badge, which I kept in my pocket. As a co-researcher each child would make selections from the 12 research methods in order to reflect on the content and responses of their dramatherapy experiences. These reflections could be based on insights and self-awareness gained during the session, or on any thought, feeling or experience that had been evoked throughout it. The range of resources depicted in Figure 13, and described in section 4.11.3 above, was available to each child so they could capture aspects of their reflections, for example in images made using art materials or by creating sculptures. Towards the end of the 15 minutes each child would bring or be prompted to bring their reflections to a close and return their badge, along with any of the resources they had used, to their tray and/or to the research basket. Simultaneously I would take off my badge and return it to my pocket to complete the session, and then I would return each child to his or her classroom.

When choosing not to co-research, the badges were not worn and each child would decide instead how to spend his or her reflective time. This could include choosing any of the 12 research methods, which they did in the understanding that their reflections would not be included as data. In this way each child understood that opting to be in the co-researching role was giving assent for their reflections to be included as data, and choosing not to co-research kept their reflections confidential as part of the dramatherapy contract.

Five of the seven children chose not to co-research at least once during this phase. James opted not to co-research on five occasions; Mia and Stargirl did so on two occasions; and Lady Gaga and Rocksus chose this option once. Ambipom and Rosie chose to co-research in every session they attended (see Figure 19 for statistical summary of attendance on page 130).

#### **4.13 Phase Three: reviewing the co-researching experiences**

Phase Three was the final phase of the data collection cycle. It consisted of three semi-structured review sessions, each lasting 60 minutes and held one school term apart. Data were captured throughout these sessions by way of three additional methods, which were designed specifically for this phase in order to generate reflections that could be recorded on paper. A different one of these three methods was used in each of the review sessions.

The reviewing phase provided each child with an opportunity to look back over their experiences as co-researchers from a summative perspective and review their experiences, including their selections from the 12 research methods, the content of their reflections, any reflective artefacts they had created and captured, and any other experience they wanted to reflect upon. The design of the three sessions facilitated a review of the co-researching journey the week after Phase Two had ended, and then a return to it one term later to look back over the process after the passage of time. The final review session, held a further term later, focused on closing the process, debriefing and saying goodbye to the co-researching role, and acknowledging the feelings and changes brought about by its ending. This phase was also an opportunity for me to remind each child that I would be writing about what had happened, and to document any specific reflections they offered about this. Each child's active input concluded at the end of Phase Three and they were not involved in the writing-up stage. Appendix 7, page 287, details a copy of the letter sent to each child upon completion of Phase Three which thanks them for their time as a co-researcher.

The three review methods used in these sessions had been identified from the analysis that led to establishing the 12 research methods for use during Phase Two. I selected these arts-based methods because I had frequently invited children to use them in the closing phases of dramatherapy over the years of practice, and they had often produced rich and meaningful reflections about their experiences. In addition the methods produced paper artefacts, which I thought would be helpful for data analysis. The three reviewing research methods are described below and illustrated in Figure 14

(examples of completed paperwork relating to these methods can be found in Appendix 14, pages 305– 307). Each of the review sessions is then described in more detail in section 4.13.2.

#### **4.13.1 Three reviewing methods**

##### **1 Review 1: five things about me**

This method was adapted from an unpublished dramatherapy evaluation tool (Hasnip & Coleman for **Roundabout Dramatherapy**, 2006). A stick-figure with a thought bubble, a speech bubble and a big red heart stands next to a suitcase, an unopened present and a rubbish bin. The co-researcher is invited to think of: any thought; any feeling about the research; a present they would give themselves; an experience they would take away in their memory; and something to leave behind or throw away.

##### **2 Review 2: where am I on the blob tree?**

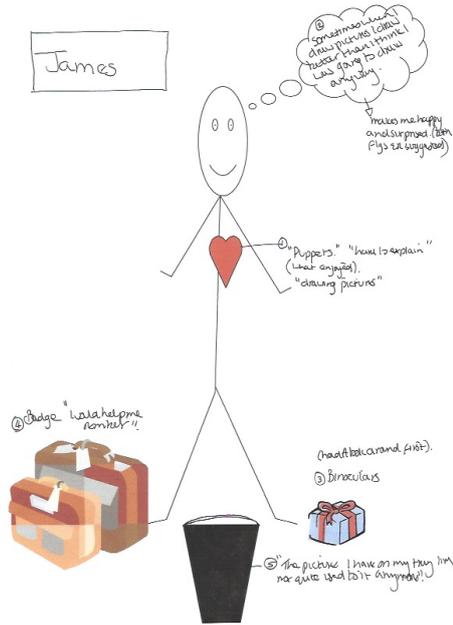
This reviewing method draws on the Blob Tree resource (Wilson, 1988), which depicts a series of blob figures with different facial expressions positioned at different points on and around a large tree. The co-researcher is invited to find positions on the tree that depicts how they felt at the start, middle and end of the 10 sessions in Phase Two, and to colour-in the chosen blobs and write or say a sentence that accompanies their chosen positions.

##### **3 Review 3: self-portrait of a co-researcher**

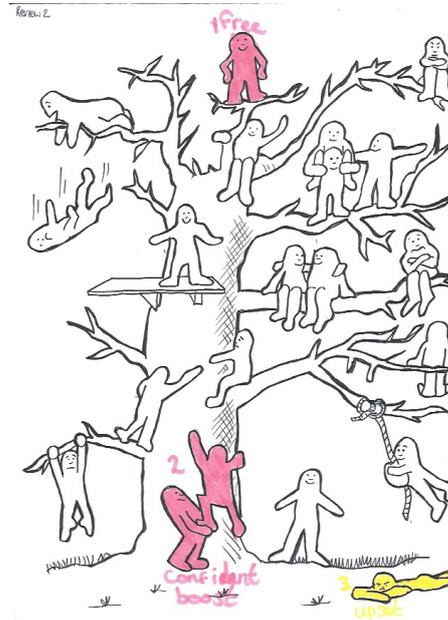
After drawing around the outline of their own hand with a pencil, felt tip, pastel or crayon, the co-researcher is invited to record five statements that they would like to share about their experiences of being a co-researcher:

- 1) Something to remember about co-researching
- 2) What your voice is in dramatherapy
- 3) How being a co-researcher enabled you to be heard
- 4) Something to say about co-researching
- 5) A hope for the future

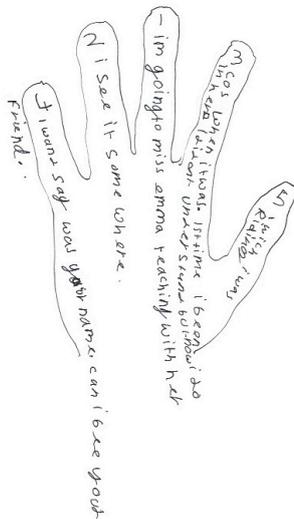
**Figure 14: Phase Three: three reviewing methods**



Review session 1: James



Review session 2: Stargirl



Review session 3: Ambipom (see Appendix 14, pages 305–307 for typed clarification of responses).

#### **4.13.2 Three reviewing sessions**

##### **Review session 1**

The first review session took place one week after the completion of Phase Two. It drew on the '*five things about me*' review method as each child looked back over the co-researching experience. In this session each child reflected on his or her co-researching choices, remembering, among other things, their selections from the 12 methods, their engagement with the methods and research resources, and what their reflections had meant to them.

This session was also an opportunity for those children who had continued in weekly individual dramatherapy beyond Phase Three to explore which, if any, parts of the co-researching journey had been integrated into the ongoing dramatherapy practice, such as the continued use of disposable cameras.

In addition each child also reviewed and titled the processed photographs taken on their disposable cameras, and were given the option to choose up to three images to be made into a cartoon 'self-portrait' (for them to keep) which they felt illustrated an essence of their voices from their co-researching experiences. Three was given as the number of images as this had been agreed upon with the illustration artist who I had commissioned to draw all the cartoons connected to the study (see section 4.15 below for further details about the commissioning of artwork). The idea of creating the cartoon self-portrait for each child had evolved in response to the interest shown by them towards the cartoons of the 12 methods and the use of photography, and in particular their interest in images of themselves during Phase Two.

##### **Review session 2**

This session focused on reviewing the overall process of co-researching with the passing of time, and on making decisions about which artefacts each child would like to keep or leave behind from their co-researching trays and art folders. The '*where am I on the blob tree?*' review method formed part of the creative reflection in this session, as a means of looking at the start, middle and end of the 10 sessions that made up Phase Two. The A3 cartoon self-portraits were presented to each child in this second session and their responses noted; in all cases an interest in seeing the image and responding to it was present for each child (see Chapter Six, section 6.33, case study C – Rosie – for an example of a co-researcher's response to this event).

### **Review session 3**

The final review session was underpinned by my awareness of the need to behave ethically towards the children in finishing this fairly intensive process, which they had engaged in so wholeheartedly with me. The '*self-portrait of a co-researcher*' review method formed part of the creative reflection in this session, which focused on the business of closing the process and saying goodbye to the co-researching role. This included de-roling the pseudonyms, as by this stage in the research I had come to realise, and as my findings chapters will show, how committed to these pseudonyms the children had become. As a result there needed to be a specific opportunity for each child to say goodbye to their chosen name, and to reflect and integrate the experience of the names and the roles they had played during their time as co-researchers.

This session was an opportunity to form an ending to each child's input, to note the transition of roles and to say goodbye to the co-researching. It was also an opportunity to answer any questions that might emerge at this point, such as how to find out about the study in the future should they choose to do so (see Appendix 8, pages 288, for correspondence to each child about inquiring about their engagement in the study on any future occasion). Giving unstructured time to allow memories, feelings and responses to emerge, and to say a final goodbye to the research together, became important aspects of this session.

Having described the three phases of the study, the 12 research methods and three review methods, the following section describes how data were recorded, organised and analysed, and how the findings were prepared for dissemination.

#### **4.14 Recording data across Phases One, Two and Three**

The study generated three main data sets, one pertaining to each of the three phases. This section summarises how those data were collected, recorded and stored over the 18 months of data collection and beyond. As discussed above in section 4.11, Phase One was retrospectively ascribed as a phase of data due to the rich nature of each child's contribution. This first data set relates to what happened when the study was described to each child; their assent choosing and the introduction of the 12 research methods. The data set for Phase Two relates to the co-researchers' choices from the 12 methods during the final 15 minutes of their dramatherapy sessions. The final data

set draws on the three sessions that made up the reviewing phase, where each child looked back over their co-researching experiences on three occasions which took place approximately four months apart.

Data were captured throughout the 60-minute sessions that made up Phases One and Three, and during the 15 minutes of co-researching time during Phase Two. Data generated throughout all three phases consists of words, sounds and sentences made by each child in the role of co-researcher, along with any artefacts generated by them, such as photographs, video footage, drawings and paintings. Data were also created through practitioner-researcher field notes taken from sessions; notes, images and recordings from academic and clinical supervision meetings; creative art images and reflective field diaries.

I sought to ensure rigour in my data-capturing and recording methods in order to minimise the potential conflicts which question the credibility and trustworthiness of the collected data. I noted the guidance in literature suggesting that when collecting data the researcher should take in as much of the live process as possible (Cox, 1988), whilst acknowledging the impossibility of capturing every communication and detail present in the research exchange (Jones, 1996). To produce a faithful and accurate account of what had taken place in the sessions in terms of speech and physical activity, such as choices of play processes and emotional presentation, I completed in-depth field notes as soon as sessions ended with each child.

My notes for Phase One focused on documenting each child's assenting process and their engagement with being introduced to the 12 methods. As these sessions were initially designed to fulfil the procedure of assent choosing, and only retrospectively named as Phase One, the practitioner-researcher field notes are the only data source from these sessions. However, each child's reflections on this phase elicited rich data during Phase Three, at which point their reflections were noted and organised into themes and interconnected ideas. For example, in Phase Three James reflected that being better at drawing than he had previously thought had been his most significant experience. I had noticed that his decision not to co-research had also seemed important to him, yet it is his experience of himself that supports his agency through valuing his self-expression.

After each of the 10 sessions in Phase Two I completed two sets of notes: one relating to the dramatherapy process and the other to the co-researching component (during

the final 15 minutes of each session). Making two sets of notes ensured that I maintained the ethical boundary between the dramatherapy and co-researching processes, as only the co-researching experience had the children's assent to be included in the study. The dramatherapy sessions were recorded on the template in use in the practice at the time; the co-researching template was developed in response to the research questions and aims. In addition to the notes from sessions, I made digital voice recorded notes at the end of each day's practice throughout all three phases. These provided further reflections on the co-researching process. Figure 15 (below) shows extracts from the recording template, which can be seen in full in Appendix 11 (pages 295–297) which shows the full range of themes and processes I attempted to capture following sessions in Phase Two.

**Figure 15: Extracts from the co-researching session-recording template**

|  | Y                        | N                        | Comment: |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Co-researching                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Co-researching methods chosen by child | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Photographs taken                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |

| Areas in the room worked in | Comment on use of space  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Co-researcher               | <input type="checkbox"/> uses available space easily <input type="checkbox"/> confines self to small space |

| Areas in the room worked in | Comment on use of space  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Co-researcher               | <input type="checkbox"/> uses available space easily <input type="checkbox"/> confines self to small space |
| Therapist                   | <input type="checkbox"/> uses available space easily <input type="checkbox"/> confines self to small space |

Artefacts generated by each child during their engagement with the research methods were stored in their individual folders, along with any Polaroid instant image photographs they had taken. Images that were larger than A3 size were stored in their A1 folders in the artist's plan chest. Found objects (items in the room or items brought to the room) that co-researchers had chosen to store in their individual trays were noted down only if they were deemed to be part of the co-researching experience. Data were also generated in-between sessions from messages left in the 'research

box' housed in the main school office (described alongside additional research resources in section 4.11.3). I transcribed all video camera footage captured throughout this phase in order to record each child's choices of framing, and content descriptions of their physical movement patterns in the room and their verbal input. To do this I utilised my skills of annotating film footage, which I had gained both as an undergraduate student studying for a degree in film/drama theory and practice, and in subsequent freelance industry positions prior to training as a dramatherapist.

At the time of the data collection phases all data files and artefacts were stored in locked metal boxes, filing cabinets in the practice site and electronically on my home computer. At the end of Phase Three all data were transferred to my home office where they remain. Computer files are password-protected and back-up files are stored on encrypted data-sticks and an external hard drive, and are stored in a locked cabinet. Online computer clouds (real-time communication networks) have not been used for the storage of data in this study. The stored data will be deleted and destroyed after the required period of time in accordance with the university's research regulations.

#### **4.15 The practitioner-researcher's reflexive process**

This section describes how I explored my own learning as a practitioner and novice researcher. I made daily entries in my practitioner-researcher field diaries. These entries document the ways in which I experienced the research process; they were where I recorded a number of questions and developed ideas about what I was noticing in the data as it was being collected. I also commented on what I was noting about myself and my learning, both as a practitioner and as a researcher.

Having reviewed my field diaries at various points throughout the process, I have noted emerging themes in relation to the research task. Some of these issues are discussed in Chapter Seven, where I review the implementation of the methodology and the limitation of the study. For example, I noted the tensions between the clinical demands of the job and the research needs, and negotiated new territories of learning in understanding these tensions and sensitivities.

Throughout the term of this study I have attended monthly academic supervision meetings with my supervisory team, which have been invaluable for upholding research ethics and for my learning, guidance and support. Throughout the three phases of data collection I also attended weekly clinical supervision with a

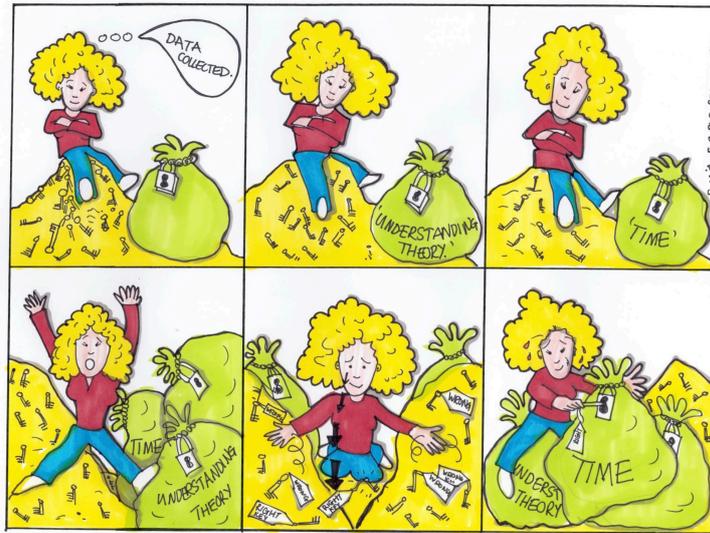
dramatherapy supervisor who is skilled in the field. Clinical supervision is a requirement of professional registration; it is the process during which practitioners explore their caseload with an experienced professional in order to reflect on the client's progress, and in order to continue to support the work and provide best practice (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Jones & Dokter, 2009). Attending regular supervision enabled me to look at the journey as both a practitioner and a researcher. In these sessions I focused on the clinical phenomena to explore what was emerging in the therapy and the research for each child, and how these experiences were impacting on choice, voice, agency, and the therapeutic alliance. I took extracts from my field diaries and digital voice-recorded notes, using the children's pseudonyms, to supervision; the confidential nature of the contract enabled me to triangulate experiences (i.e. to look at the same phenomenon from different perspectives) as a means of deepening my reflections and learning about the client, the co-researcher and the overall research experience.

I was also keen to document my process as an emerging researcher throughout the study, and to capture this in a visual format that was congruent with my creative means of self-expression. I attended weekly therapy as a client myself in order to support the overall process of undertaking the research as a part of my life. I also commissioned an illustrator, Sally Nicholson, to draw a cartoon each month for the duration of the study. She is also an art therapist who works with children elsewhere in the United Kingdom; as such, her understanding and prioritisation of confidentiality was in accordance with my own professional registration, meaning ethical standards of practice were maintained.

There are approximately 75 cartoons in all, following the research journey pre-, during and post-data collection. Each cartoon has been illustrated from the reflexive descriptions I noted and relayed to the artist on a monthly basis. Many of these images are based on the format of the '*six piece story approach*' dramatherapy technique, in which six panels follow a story narrative with key foci in each panel (Gersie & King, 1990; Lahad, 1992).

Figure 16 (below) provides an example of one of the cartoons, commissioned after the three phases had ended while I organised data during the period of analysis. Appendix 17 (pages 311–316) shows a series of 12 cartoon images depicting different aspects of the research journey from my practitioner-researcher reflexive stance, giving an indication of the nature of this creative process.

**Figure 16: Organising data**



#### **4.16 Data analysis**

This section provides the rationale for the method of data analysis employed within this practitioner-researcher study, and describes the strategies used when mining the data sets within the analytical framework in section 4.16.1. The framework within which the main findings are presented, as identified from the analysis, is outlined in section 4.16.2.

Data analysis can be approached in a number of ways, and is an interconnected process that occurs on an ongoing basis even whilst data is being collected. Analysing data requires that the researcher enters into various stages of immersion and re-immersion with the raw banks of data, eliciting themes and patterns linking data into findings that address the research questions. These processes are well noted in research literature (Holloway, 1997; Higgins, 2006), which also describe the analytical process as ‘breaking data into meaningful parts for the purpose of examining them’ (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 245) and analysing those parts using various frameworks (for example phenomenological, discourse, content, thematic, ethnographic or narrative (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Dey, 1993; Bazeley, 2013)). To enable rigour and validity within the analytic process a phenomenological framework was adopted (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

As Rudestam and Newton (1992, p. 33) have noted, a phenomenological framework aims to 'describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience', as it 'attempts to get beneath how people describe their experience to the structures that underlie consciousness'. The framework elicits descriptions about people's experiences and can lead to new knowledge, enabling a focus on individuality – which is key to the overall purpose of the study.

The design of the analysis was shaped by the choices made by each child. Their unaltered words and reflections were selected for analysis in order to ensure their distinct voices were represented, and to learn from their experiences within the research context and identify areas of new knowledge. This has been a challenge throughout the analysis, and is an issue that is returned to in part in Chapter Seven (section 7.8). Data were analysed in two ways: from each child's individual research journey, and through the process of identifying commonalities and diversity of experience across the sample.

A formal process of member checking/respondent validation (where individuals involved in research have an opportunity to comment on a summary transcript to check their recognition of their own experiences (Holloway, 1997)) was **not** undertaken as part of the analytical process; the rationale for this being that it would have been a researcher-imposed structure within a study based on child-led choice-making opportunities. In addition, this would have been in conflict with the therapeutic alliance, which is based on the client working at their own pace (see section 4.2.2 for further details on the therapeutic alliance). However, Phase Three provided an opportunity for a variation of the member checking/respondent validation strategy, as I was able to triangulate the reflections offered by each co-researcher with the codes, categories and themes that were emerging in the analysis of phenomena, which in turn ensured that what was being illuminated was based on each child's selections.

Furthermore, some quantitative analysis of qualitative data was undertaken, focusing on the choice-making opportunities of attending sessions, frequency of each child's choice to co-research and their selection of research methods as co-researchers. The analysis provided findings both in individual cases and across the sample with regards to choice-making (see Figure 19, page 130, and Figure 22, page 150 for an overview of these findings).

#### **4.16.1 Organising and coding the data, and developing themes**

As I collected the data I began to recognise commonalities and the potential for significance within emerging data sets. The artefacts emerging from data collection were being used to construct the data sets, as raw data were organised and catalogued systematically into sets such as co-researcher-generated photographs; video camera footage and art images; research box messages; co-researchers' selections of research method; and practitioner-researcher field notes. This initial ordering and administration can be considered a form of preliminary data analysis (Savin-Baden & Howell Major 2013). I asked myself a series of questions, such as 'what are the data telling me?' and 'what ideas are emerging?' As ideas and themes started to emerge I realised that each child had a story to tell, and as I was examining the data I began thinking of ways to present them in order to make the findings as accessible as possible.

As I catalogued and then started to annotate the data I asked myself further questions about the reflective engagement: 'What are these annotations of circling, noting and thinking telling me about this process; where does it lead and how can I present it?' I was mining the data to find the description of a process, word, method choice and method frequency and what this might reveal. I searched quantitatively for patterns of frequency across the sample, and noted via annotation on transcripts the utterances and decisions made by each child in relation to their choices. I noted interesting patterns and events with one child and sought to discover whether they were also occurring with others. I noted how some single events happened – such as James choosing to talk directly into the video camera on one occasion – and started to see their significance as relevant to the co-researching experience and to individuality. I used triangulation to see how the quantitative data concerning frequency was being represented and how it related to the qualitative data, and noticed that themes such as the commitment to coming to sessions and discussing the co-researching role were occurring frequently. I was beginning to see patterns emerging from the method design and in the choices being made across the sample – in what each child did with their method selections, how they viewed them and how they articulated and reflected or revealed this.

I created lists of both unique and iterative areas of significance from the sets of data (section 4.14 describes the process of data capture) in relation to the research questions, such as the co-researchers' choice-making activities; from here I created preliminary codes for a range of choice-making options (i.e., initial attendance of

dramatherapy sessions, co-researching assent-choosing, choice of research method, use of the room, objects and resources). Patterns began to emerge from the codes and links between data sets, such as the instances of self-portrait photographs being taken; the use of objects to represent reflective experiences; or the descriptions of reflections made through the selection of particular research methods. Analytical reflection on the patterns led to my grouping them into themes such as identity; engagement; and agency through choice-making. Themes were then repeatedly refined before establishment of the final key themes (as presented in Chapter Five). Throughout this process there was a triangulation of data and emerging codes, categories and themes, with the research questions and conceptual framework of the study supporting the robustness of the analysis.

Excel was used to create a database into which this thematic and related information was then loaded, which enabled me to return to particular sections of data as the analytical process developed. By applying computer-generated filters, I could view various strands of one child's co-researching data in isolation from the sample as a whole, and within the context of particular themes or categories such as 'time-keeping and attendance', or 'experience of choice-making'. Whilst I used computers to catalogue data, I made a critical decision to code and analyse the data without the use of specialised qualitative analysis software. The rationale for doing so was my need to experience in as much detail as possible the processes of immersion, reduction, deduction and illumination, which I believed would provide me with a deeper practical and intellectual learning experience than the use of software would. In recent qualitative analysis literature, analysing by hand is referenced as remaining a valid form of analytic induction amidst the rapid technological advances (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

Figure 17 (on the following page) summarises the analytical process, while Figure 18 (on page 121) provides a brief example of the way in which I annotated data with preliminary codes and observations about patterns and occurrences.

**Figure 17: Data analysis flowchart**

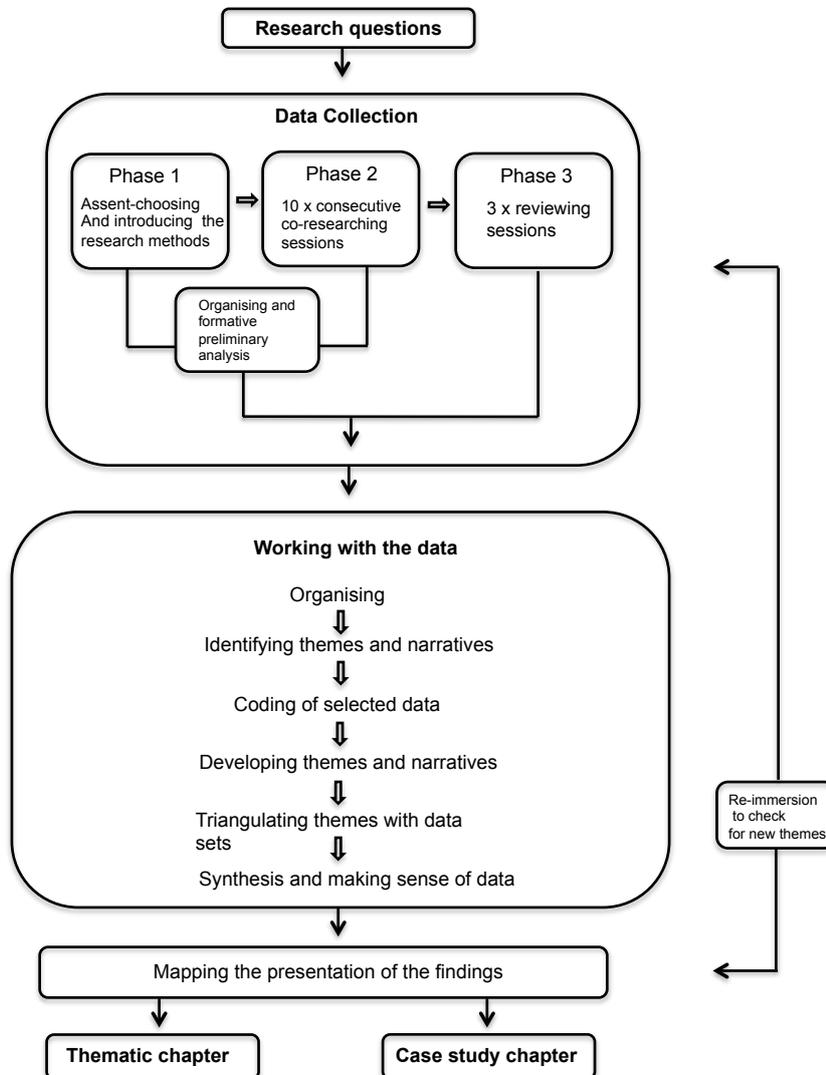


Figure 18: Annotating data

| Column 1<br>Raw data  | Column 2<br>Preliminary codes  | Column 3<br>Observations   | Column 4<br>Data source  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Ambipom:</b> chose to reflect with objects such as puppets, musical instruments and large balls to approach the research noticeboard. Character lines from favourite action movies supported role play reflection 'say hello to my little friend'. Puppet choices were animals - shark, moose, dog. Character embodiment as he played around with the characters of 'gorilla' and 'wolf', howling and grunting at various points in his therapy. 'Good' would often triumph over 'bad' in enacted story themes. Objects would assist Ambipom in overthrowing the 'bad guys'.<br/>Also use of puppets: Mia, Rosie, Stargirl.</p> | <p>±Character embodiment<br/>±Expression through animal puppets<br/>±Choosing a range of items</p>   | <p>What was the dramatherapy session content?<br/>Possible theme: Choice making<br/>This re-enactments 'A' said was "the best bit" of the session.<br/>What this the case for other CoR's?</p> | <p>Field notes/ P2*<br/>Video footage<br/>COR** photos<br/>CoR drawing</p> <p>* Phase (1, 2, 3)<br/>**co-researcher<br/>*** dramatherapy</p> |
| <p><b>James:</b> "Can I draw a new label for my tray?". "I'm going to draw a new label..." James described his image as "Lightening bolts."<br/><br/>Also tray drawings as narrative: Ambipom</p>   | <p>±Relationship<br/>±Identity<br/>±Being in control of choices<br/>±Use of camera<br/>±Use of CoR tray area in the room &amp; privacy</p> | <p>What prompted the change?<br/>This image depicts a narrative shared by 'J'.<br/>What themes were present for others in their drawings?</p>  | <p>Field notes P2 &amp; P3 reflections, James's drawing</p>  |
| <p><b>Lady Gaga:</b> "fun as co-researcher"<br/><br/>Also 'fun': Mia, Rocksus, Rosie, Stargirl</p>  | <p>±Confidence<br/>±Self-esteem</p>  | <p>What does 'fun' represent for 'LG' &amp; others?<br/>Sense of self?</p>   | <p>Field notes P2/3<br/>P3 review tools<br/>CoR photos</p>   |
| <p><b>Mia:</b> "I don't want people to know about today."<br/><br/>On returning from the tray area Mia shook her head. She had spoken out particularly upsetting themes in the dramatherapy part of this session.<br/><br/>Also chose 'no': James, Lady Gaga, Rocsus, Stargirl</p>  | <p>±Agency through understanding choice<br/>±No an empowering choice</p>   | <p>How often said?<br/>When said?</p>  | <p>Field notes P2</p>  |
| <p><b>Rocksus:</b> "I don't want to go to lunch. I want to stay here."<br/><br/>Also Stargirl: when ill stayed for session "5 minutes longer".</p>  | <p>±Engagement<br/>±choice<br/>±Safety<br/>DT/CoR</p>  | <p>Wanting to stay in the room could be DT*** or CoR – what if anything did CoR bring in addition?</p>   | <p>Field notes P1 &amp; P2<br/>Video footage</p>   |
| <p><b>Rosie:</b> Changes noted in self "love room" and being "the smart kid"<br/><br/>Also James: 'important'</p>   | <p>±Important,<br/>±Smart<br/>±Engagement</p>  | <p>What was happening in the DT narrative?<br/>What connections?</p>   | <p>Research box messages<br/>Field notes P2</p>  |
| <p><b>Stargirl:</b> Ending and sadness but future hopes to research again.</p>   | <p>±reflecting on: telling stories feelings future research relationship working together</p>  | <p>What did this phase contribute to the study?<br/>How did the review phase enable reflections?</p>   | <p>Field notes P3<br/>Artefacts from review sessions</p>   |

#### **4.16.2 Developing the models for presentation of the findings**

I had ideas about how I was going to present the findings from a relatively early stage in the study. I wanted to present the evidence to give some idea of how these children engaged with their individual journeys, while also showing the themes that I identified as being significant across the sample. I had started to see interconnecting instances of action across the sample as either signifiers of commonality or signifiers of individuality; I was therefore able to collect these instances together and work towards presenting them as findings. As a result of these inter-connections I decided to present the findings chapters (Five and Six) using two complimentary approaches: a thematic analysis, and a series of case studies. Together these approaches facilitate deeper understanding of the research questions.

The data had revealed four themes. In order to deliver each theme effectively I looked at some of its components, analysed the data and found that naturally there were sub-themes running in parallel through each one. Presenting a thematic analysis enabled me to provide a range of responses. This approach has been described as enabling individuality and commonality across the sample to be articulated (Qvortrup, 2000) and identifying a limited set of ideas relevant to the research inquiry in order to develop a framework for describing them (Wisker, 2001).

While the thematic analysis approach organises the data and provides an opportunity to present those findings in a structured and coherent way, it does not show the children's journeys with the depth afforded by a case study approach. I was aware that seven case studies depicting the co-researching journeys would not be possible in the overall thesis word-count. Combining a thematic analysis with a case study approach would, however, enable me to present a range of additional themes and deepen understanding of them by representing the unfolding experiences. Case studies are seen as a rigorous way of presenting and understanding diversity of responses and strengths of individuality, which are also considered to be of importance in therapeutic practice and research (Gardner & Coombs, 2010; Nisbett & Watt, 1984). A case study approach allowed me to present the entire research journey from start to end; this was important because it would enable the children to come alive on the page where the more distanced approach to a thematic chapter might not do this as fully as possible. The case study approach enabled agency and voice through the telling of each child's journey across the 18 months of their engagement.

The journeys of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie have been selected for case study presentation here. Although these particular case studies are presented here, the co-researching journeys of any of the children could have been selected, as all are illustrative of choice, voice and agency in relation to the research questions. However, presenting seven case studies in the available space would not have provided the opportunity to show the depth of immersion in the co-researching role that occurred for each child. One of the major strengths of the case study approach is its capacity to show the uniqueness of the phenomena arising from analysis within the context of individual experiences. As Gardner and Coombs (2010, p. 53) suggest, the strength can be an *'opening-up of the experience [that] can act as substantive illustrations that enhance understanding'*. Such an approach focuses on the specific, whilst adopting an holistic perspective to describe the whole of the case.

Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013, p. 164) argue the importance of planning and selection as they note that 'initial planning is important, in order to ensure that the correct [...] case(s) are selected, so that the research objectives are met and the study is successful.' Lady Gaga and Rosie's journeys were selected as case studies as they were representative of common phenomena across the sample, such as engagement with the assent-choosing process, selection of research methods, and content of reflection through method choices. I selected Rocksus's journey, however, on the basis that he joined the study in quite different circumstances. Despite his relatively brief immersion in the process, Rocksus's case study shows that he expressed his voice and gained self-insights during his time as a co-researcher.

In mapping these findings I drew on the literature pertaining to case studies, noting their historical place as formalised presentations of client journeys in psychotherapy practice since the late 19th century. This strength of presenting individuality as a research choice is also supported within the social sciences. Together these perspectives articulate the attention to and significance of individual uniqueness (Barlow & Herson, 1987; Gardner & Coombs, 2010). I therefore combined my analysis, using two ways to present the findings so that they could be accessed from two different perspectives, despite both approaches having utilised the same banks of data.

#### **4.17 Summarising Chapter Four**

This chapter has examined methodological theory in the context of the study. It has also introduced the seven children and unpacked the research design, which was developed to enable assent choosing and the expression of voice as the children negotiated their co-researching experiences.

The complex and sensitive ethical issues accompanying these aims have been addressed in detail in this chapter – in more depth than might normally be expected within an ethical discussion – in order to demonstrate that ethical issues are a core component of voice. Voice is enabled through an understanding that choices can be made from a place of autonomy. The practitioner-researcher approach has enabled the study to be rooted in existing practice, and to utilise frequently used dramatherapy techniques as research methods. In addition this study aims to enhance practice through the practitioner research approach, and to make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge of dramatherapy theory, practice and research.

The rationale for the presentation of findings has been discussed above; the findings chapters are now introduced below.

#### **4.18 Introducing Chapters Five and Six**

As already established the study's main findings are presented over the next two chapters using a dual approach: a thematic analysis, and three case studies. Chapter Five looks collectively across the sample whilst Chapter Six presents individual co-researching journeys. Both show the insights, lives and agency of the children in the study. My intention in using these two approaches is to make them accessible from different perspectives, and to provide an authentic reflection of what each child experienced during their time as a co-researcher. To represent their co-researching journeys as authentically as possible, I have established a format that profiles their voice through the words, images and self-reflections they identified as being significant and meaningful for them. Each child's words as they were spoken or written appear unaltered in the text. An example of how this is presented is drawn from Rosie's journey: ***"I will look afgter my frends and family"*** [I will look after my friends and family].

Chapter Five is organised around four key themes, which express the significance and interconnections between certain actions and behaviours. Both commonality and diversity have shaped the analysis for the themes. The four themes could have been five, six or more, but the need for a consensus led me to decide upon four and set about disseminating the findings in relation to these themes and subsequent sub-themes. The key themes are important because they contain what was most meaningful for each child about their co-researching experiences, and examine their impact. The key findings present in each theme are delivered by way of analytical snapshots, which are both individual (relating to one child) and ensemble (drawn from across the sample). These descriptions communicate the content within my analysis; they have the capacity to highlight and therefore reveal client voice directly within its structure.

The case study chapter (Chapter Six) allows me to reveal what had happened during individual journeys. I chose to convey the detailed journeys of three children (Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie), showing the nature and depth of each child's engagement and experiences. This chapter is structured differently to Chapter Five as I cover some additional ground that is not presented in the thematic chapter. Within the case studies, some repetition of the themes presented in Chapter Five is present; this is important to draw attention to. These repetitions parallel themes and experiences returned to by the three children as they reflected on and reviewed their co-researching journeys.

Disseminating the findings across the two chapters ensures that all seven voices are heard and presented with equality. As a practitioner-researcher I place no investment in establishing one child's experience as having priority over another. The findings are presented over the two chapters that follow.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Children's choices and voices as co-researchers: what do they look and sound like? A thematic analysis**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This is the first of two chapters presenting the study's key findings, revealing the impact and significance of the co-researching experiences in dramatherapy for the seven children involved in the study. 'Impact' refers to the ways in which each child reflected on what their co-researching experience had meant to them, the insights they gained and how it had made them feel, while 'significance' denotes what can be learned about children's voices in terms of their diversity and individuality of expression. This thematic chapter is structured around four themes derived from the analysis; each theme is delivered using a series of individual and ensemble 'analytical snapshots', which convey each child's own words or actions as displayed through non-verbal and visual means, and which reveal the impact and significance of their co-researching experiences within each theme. Of the 13 snapshots (A to M), 12 convey qualitative evidence. Each snapshot varies in length according to the evidence being presented.

In developing the analytical snapshots I was influenced by literature relating to the construction of clinical vignettes as a means of conveying critical illumination of significant analytical content and in particular by the work of researcher Johnny Saldaña (2009). Whilst I recognised that the vignette format was not the ideal vehicle with which to deliver my findings, due to its focus on moments in single sessions rather than the bringing together of themes across sessions, I was nevertheless influenced by its capacity to highlight and therefore reveal client voice directly within its structure. I developed the term 'analytical snapshot' as a means of conveying responses from across the three phases of data, rather than focusing on single moments of experience which did not adequately convey the depths and development of a child's experiences. The analytical snapshots present findings from the three phases of data collection, focusing on singular responses from children, sometimes with brief reference to the experiences of others (individual snapshots) and a range of responses from across the sample (ensemble snapshots).

My practitioner-researcher analysis, which follows each snapshot, unpacks its significance. As there is considerable overlap across the themes, conclusions are drawn together at the end of the chapter in a combined summary rather than included after each of the four themes.

## **5.2 Overview of the four themes**

The four themes that make up this thematic chapter are outlined and explained in some detail below. The analytical snapshots contained within each of the four themes aim to convey the richness and depth of each child's co-researching experiences within the study.

The first three themes focus primarily on the first two phases of the data collection cycle, and are based on the children's experiences as they happened (formative stance). In some cases (for example Theme One, Snapshot C), retrospective material from Phase Three is included to support the findings. However, the final theme focuses exclusively on the reviewing phase (Phase Three), where I move with each child to reflect retrospectively on his or her overall experience (summative stance). Phase Three sought to elicit each child's views about the impact and influence of the co-researching experience (see Chapter Four, sections 4.11 to 4.13.2 to return to a description of the three phases).

### **Theme One: assent choosing and reviewing**

- Snapshots:
- A Developing an understanding of assent
  - B Assent choosing: joining the study
  - C Assent reviewing: revisiting assent throughout Phase Two

### **Theme Two: developing pseudonyms and signatures**

- Snapshots:
- D The significance of choosing a pseudonym
  - E The importance of providing a signature

### **Theme Three: making choices as co-researchers**

Snapshots: F Quantitative overview of research method choices 1–12

G Selecting research methods as a co-researcher

H Reflecting with the method selections

I Recording reflective choices

### **Theme Four: the impact of being a co-researcher**

Snapshots: J Reviewing photographs

K Reflecting on the experiences of co-researching

L Sharing experiences with significant others

M The co-researching role comes to an end

Theme One focuses on three elements: making choices about how to give assent; assent choosing; and assent reviewing during each session of Phase Two. This theme is presented across three analytical snapshots (one individual and two ensemble), which reveal the impact and significance of the initial assent-choosing processes. The snapshots illuminate each child's engagement with the choice-making activities, and illustrate some of the ways in which these choices helped to introduce them to and develop their understanding of the co-researching role.

The ensemble snapshots that make up Theme Two convey how the process of actively choosing pseudonyms – and providing assent-choosing signatures on the research paperwork – was personally meaningful for each child, and how their agency was enabled through their choice-making. Choosing a pseudonym to protect anonymity is the focus of the first snapshot (D), and the approach each child took to providing a signature is illuminated in the second snapshot (E).

Theme Three focuses on the selections each child made from the 12 research methods during Phase Two. The first ensemble snapshot (F) offers a quantitative

analysis of their choice-making activities, and is followed by an ensemble snapshot (G) from across the sample that reveals how research method choices were made. Snapshot H (individual) shows how Stargirl applied one of the research methods during her co-researching experiences. An exploration of how reflections were recorded from across the sample is presented in snapshot I (ensemble), which shows how each child documented the content of their reflections.

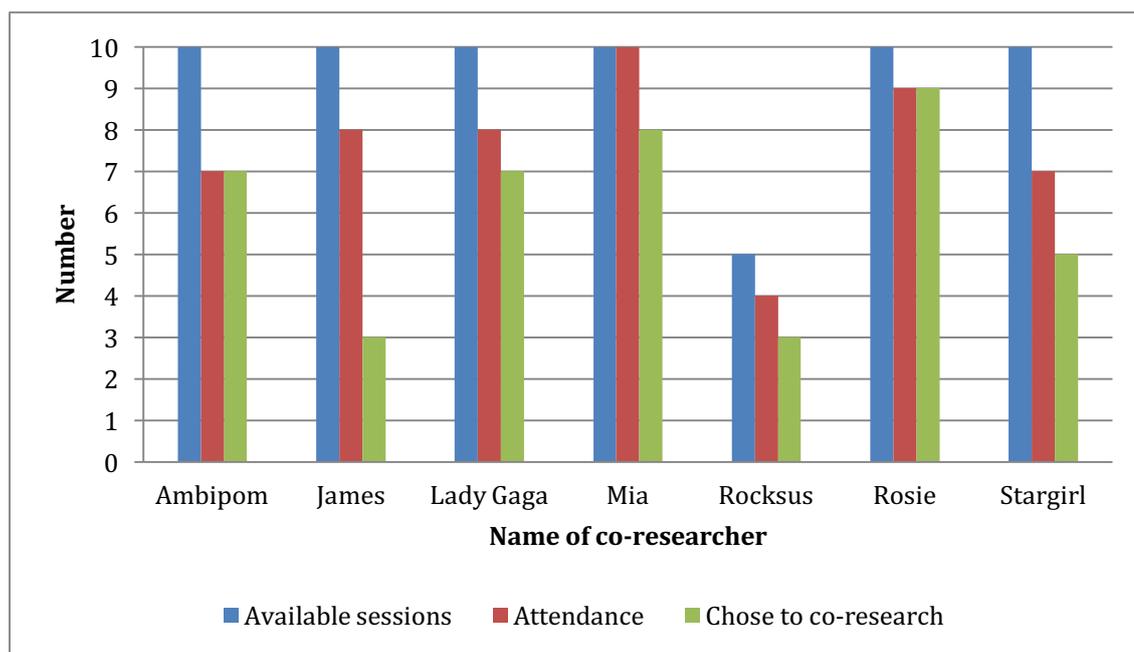
The final theme is somewhat different to the previous three; rather than describing what was happening as it happened, these ensemble snapshots focus on the reviewing phase (Phase Three) and take each child's self-reflections of words, images and actions to reveal what they found significant about being co-researchers, and what the choices they made revealed about them during the study. The final snapshot (M) focuses on how each child approached and engaged with the final session of Phase Three, which marked the end of their active involvement in the study.

### **5.3 Attending sessions and co-researching: Phases One to Three**

This section provides an overview of the session attendance and co-researching activity during Phases One and Two of the study (February–July 2009). With the exception of Rocksus, the children were already engaged in weekly individual dramatherapy sessions when the study began. Rocksus joined at the halfway point of Phase Two following his re-referral to the dramatherapy service (see Chapter Six, sections 6.14 to 6.24 for Rocksus's case study, which reveals in some detail his research experiences). The assent-choosing sessions with each child were scheduled to take place once parental/caregiver consent had been received. As already established in Chapter Four, these sessions became known as Phase One in retrospect.

The data shows that seven children attended all the sessions in Phase One and Phase Three (three reviewing sessions). Figure 19, below, presents an overview of the attendance findings and co-researching choices during Phase Two, showing the number of available sessions (blue), attendance of the 10 dramatherapy sessions (red) and each child's choice to co-research within these sessions (green).

**Figure 19: Individual attendance of dramatherapy sessions and decision to co-research during data collection (Phase Two)**



The findings reveal that the median attendance across the sample was eight sessions and the average number of sessions attended per child was 7.6; the median number of decisions to co-research was seven, the average being six. However, Rocksus only had the option of attending five of the 10 sessions as he joined the study partway through (and indeed one of those sessions he was unable to attend due to being on a school trip with his class. Figure 19 makes reference to a total of five available sessions). Choosing to co-research across the sample therefore occurred 70% of the time.

Non-attendance of sessions was due either to being away from school on day trips or being absent from school for sickness or other social/family reasons. When in school, all children chose to attend their sessions with one exception (this being Rosie, who was involved in a school play and unable to attend a session due to that commitment). Mia attended all her sessions; Rocksus attended all of the four sessions where he was available to attend. The findings reveal that Ambipom and Rosie chose to co-research in all the sessions they attended; Lady Gaga, Mia, Rocksus and Stargirl choose to co-research on all but one or two occasions and James choose not to co-research on five out of eight occasions. James’s choices of co-researching is discussed later in snapshot C, pages 137-140).

The analysis of this data shows that all seven of the children chose to join the study and to attend the majority of their dramatherapy sessions during this period. The attendance figures also reveal that each child made diverse choices as co-researchers, which are explored across the 13 analytical snapshots that now follow.

#### **5.4 Theme One: assent choosing**

This theme provides an analysis of the assent-choosing processes across the sample throughout Phases One and Two. The three analytical snapshots focus on developing an understanding of the assent choosing and reviewing processes: the first two snapshots (A and B) reveal the significance of the assent-choosing process, and the final snapshot (C) demonstrates how assent was reviewed throughout this phase of the study.

##### **5.4.1 Snapshot A: developing an understanding of assent**

This individual snapshot focuses on the first part of the initial assent-choosing session with James, where I asked a series of questions for him to answer which aimed to increase his understanding of the choices available to him and of his capacity to make choices and participate in the study as a co-researcher. We explored a series of creative questions together, focusing on self-knowledge, visual observations and physical activity (see Chapter Four, section 4.11.1 for further details about this session). Once the questions had been asked and James had made his choices, we reflected upon the process together as I asked him what thoughts and feelings he had about his choice-making experiences.

The initial assent-choosing session was held on a cold and wet winter's day; sitting in one of the two armchairs in the dramatherapy room, I asked James how he had decided where to sit. He replied: ***"I chose here because it is comfy and I like the red cushion."*** James then made choices based on a series of questions about his experience of himself, such as: "Did you have breakfast today?" At the end of these questions I asked: "So what does saying 'yes' mean here?" and he replied: "It's hard to say..." then paused before adding: ***"It means saying what you're doing. Saying what's true for you, like, I am wearing socks – yes."*** The next sequence of questions focused on inviting James to make choices about items and resources that he could see in the dramatherapy room, such as: "Choose an object you are interested in playing with." James chose a toy sword.

During the final sequence of questions (relating to physical activity) I informed James that I was going to take on a pretend role, and, after checking that he was comfortable with that, I adjusted my body posture to appear eager, excited and full of physical energy. I asked James: “Would you like to go outside for play-time today?” This question was posed with a smile on my face and accompanied by my continuous head-nodding. James looked puzzled and his cheeks reddened. He paused. He looked at me, and then looked away. He started to smile. He looked towards me again and said in a loud voice: “**No!**”, whilst also laughing gently, shaking his head and scrunching up his forehead, still a little puzzled. I de-rolled by returning to my natural and open body posture and talked through this process with James as I did so. I then invited him to deconstruct my question and his response to it. I spoke of having been in a role of trying to influence his decision, and asked:

Emma: “So what does saying ‘no’ mean here?”

**James:** “***I don’t want to do it!***”

Emma: “Is that telling what is true for you too?”

**James:** “**Yes.**” [Face relaxed]

Emma: “Even when I looked excited to go outside?”

**James:** “*Er...*”

[Pause]

Emma: “I saw you shook your head at the same time, like this [shakes head] – what did that mean?”

**James:** [Smiling] “***Double no.***”

Emma: “What if I said it would be fun to go outside in the rain and carried on nodding my head and smiling. Would you still say no because that would be true for you?”

**James:** “*ERM... I don’t know...*” [Pause] “***I guess I wouldn’t want to disappoint you.***”

Emma: “So you might change your mind even though you would prefer not to?”

**James:** [Shrugs]

Emma: “You shrugged your shoulders like this.” [Shrugs]

**James:** “***Yes, coz I don’t know. I might. I’m not sure.***”

A few moments later I asked James: “What did we just find out about you and saying yes, no and making a choice?” He replied: “***Sometimes I want more time to make up my mind, because I’m not sure right then.***”

We established that for James shrugging his shoulders was one way to articulate this need.

James was not the only child to offer non-verbal answers when engaging with this exercise. Mia also shrugged her shoulders when she was asked questions she later identified as not having understood and was unsure about answering. Lady Gaga preferred to answer non-verbally by nodding for yes shaking her head for no, and by shrugging her shoulders while presenting her hands palms-up to indicate ***“I don’t know.”*** She commented that answering the ***questions “has more than just yes and no.”*** What began at the start of the assent-choosing sessions as spoken choices of ***“yes”*** or ***“no”*** by each child, developed over the course of the questioning to include verbal answers of ***“maybe”, “I don’t know”*** and ***“ask me later”***, and non-verbal answers of shrugging shoulders, shaking and nodding of heads.

### **Analysis of Snapshot A**

This snapshot reveals some of the insights James gained by answering questions and reflecting on what he perceived to be his available choices. James said he had learned that some questions could be answered easily (such as where to sit in a familiar room), while others were not so straightforward and needed more time and thought. This was particularly the case when being asked questions where he felt there was an agenda and he was being influenced to answer in a particular way.

James also revealed in his reflections that some answers were given in words – they used gestures that communicated his needs non-verbally. Reflecting with him on his use of verbal and non-verbal responses generated moments of self-awareness. For example, when he shrugged his shoulders I closely observed and visually mirrored this action back to him without interpretation; James was then able to note what he saw in his own communication, which led him to articulate the importance of having more time. James subsequently negotiated for more time on many occasions as a co-researcher. He asked in a confident and relaxed manner, and seemed comfortable taking the time to sit and think about his decision before making it.

When reflecting on his experiences of the series of questions he had been asked, James articulated his feelings of confusion and discomfort with regard to leading questions, which I had observed in his physical presentation. Unpacking the questions and his responses to them enabled him to articulate the difference between

his needs and what he thought he *should* do. Establishing this response could have helped James to recognise that the dramatherapy and the co-researching role were opportunities to have his choices prioritised, irrespective of other perceived agendas. Equally James may have felt put on the spot through being directly asked questions which he may have experienced as confusing or meaningless and possibly disruptive of the play he often initiated during his time in the dramatherapy room. Exploring the ways in which he experienced the questions, as well as their unpacking, appeared to have a positive impact on the development of his confidence with regard to assent reviewing throughout Phase Two. This highlights the value of listening to both verbal and non-verbal communications as expressions of choice and articulations of voice.

This snapshot shows how important it was to dedicate a session to discovering the assenting process with each child. Presenting a range of choices, and exploring them in different ways, enabled a deeper understanding of assent-choosing and choice-making opportunities. Offering choices also minimised the potential for adult influence and in turn supported self expression and agency.

#### **5.4.2 Snapshot B: assent choosing (joining the study)**

This ensemble snapshot is also taken from the initial assent-choosing session and reveals how each child made their decision to join the study. In order to introduce the co-researching role as an opportunity for self-discovery, I invited each child to think of a discovery they had made in the last day or so, or to discover something in the room, and to note this down on the information sheet (Appendix 5, pages 281-283). For example, James discovered *that “the Hoover blows as well as sucks. I discovered this by accident yesterday”*, and Ambipom discovered that *“yesterday I found out when it was my birthday. It felt funny.”* These discoveries enabled each child to reflect with me on the process of finding out about themselves and their environments. The discoveries were made at the mid-point of the 60-minute session, and were followed by a voyage of discovery in the dramatherapy room to experience what being a co-researcher might be like. Following this exploration in the room, I asked: “Are you ready to make your decision about joining the study?” Accompanying me at this point was ‘Reggie the Research Frog’: the hand puppet dressed in a turquoise tunic, attached to which was a green badge that read ‘thank you for your decision’ (see Chapter Four, section 4.11.1 for more details about Reggie).

Ambipom moved around in his seat at the large table in the art-making area. He looked excited and impatient, as if he had made his decision and was keen to make his answer known. Whilst appearing impatient he was also focused on the question that was being asked, and had a big smile on his face as he looked towards Reggie (operated by me). With wide eyes he interrupted the question with an assured confidence and a loud: **“Yes”**. He followed this immediately with a question: **“What do I do now?”** Lady Gaga was also focused on what would happen after choosing to give her assent. She looked towards Reggie and declared: **“Yes. I would like to be a co-researcher with Emma.”** [Pause] **“What’s next?”**

Stargirl was sitting tall and still at the large table with her eyes also fixed on Reggie. I had explained that he would nod his head twice whatever her choice, and Stargirl had nodded to indicate that she understood this. She answered confidently and with a clear voice in a measured tone. There was a sense that she was taking part in an important and dramatic act: **“Yes I would like to be a co-researcher with Emma”**, she said, and Reggie nodded twice. Stargirl stroked him down the back of his head and giggled. **“Do I sign my name now?”** she asked.

Mia was swinging her legs freely to and fro on her chair during her initial assent-choosing session, and was keen to engage with Reggie. She looked towards him as I asked whether she was ready to make her decision. She continued swinging her legs and looking towards Reggie. A few moments later she said: **“Maybe”**, and, looking towards me, asked: **“Can I play first?”** Having already experienced a short play break earlier in the session, Mia returned to the same activity of blowing bubbles at the other side of the room while sitting on a large body-ball. She did this for a minute or so, and then looked at the bubbles and asked:

**Mia:** **“If I say no, do I have to stop coming to dramatherapy?”**

**Emma:** “No you don’t. Whatever answer you give your weekly dramatherapy sessions will still be there for you.”

**Mia:** **“Oh.”**

Mia blew a few more bubbles and then secured the blowing wand in its base container and called from across the room: **“I’m ready now.”** She began to bounce up and down on the large body-ball, steering herself across the room to the table and the paperwork. She said as she moved: **“I think I’m going to say yes.”** Still on the ball,

she manoeuvred herself to the side of the table and I asked once again if she was ready to make her decision. She replied whilst smiling and looking directly at me: **“Yes. Yes. I’m doing it.”**

James, like Mia, had requested **“some time to play”** so that he could **“have more time before deciding”**, and chose to play a game he had said was his favourite during an earlier play break: ‘guess the mime’. In this game he mimed an activity and I was tasked with guessing what it was. He mimed playing tennis, walking a dog and eating a meal. During the mime game, without prompting, he said: **“I want to play and then make my choice today.”** Following the next mime of walking to school he said: **“I’m ready. You can ask me now.”** When asked for his decision, James spoke in a quiet but firm voice: **“Yes, I would like to become a co-researcher.”** All seven children chose to become co-researchers during their individual assent-choosing sessions.

### **Analysis of Snapshot B**

This snapshot reveals the diversity of individual engagement that each child offered as they made their choices to join the study. Ambipom was eager and excited to give his affirmative answer, while Mia returned to the safety of blowing bubbles before making her decision. James asked to play a guessing game that was familiar to him before deciding. Mia and James both revealed that having play breaks was an important part of making their decisions. The play breaks represented time alone to think about what they wanted to do. The freedom to move around the room and to engage with the resources helped their self-expression and self-awareness by providing a moment of pause, and possibly some relief from the focus of their decision-making.

Reggie was a new puppet at the start of the study and his inclusion aimed to encourage authentic choice-making acting as a symbol to each child that their decisions were valid and important, and would be accepted without question. Each child was informed that Reggie would nod his head twice to represent ‘thank you’, no matter what decision they made. This was my attempt to minimise the ‘Hawthorne effect’, where the research participant tries to answer in ways they perceive the researcher will favour (Jones, 1992).

Having an established therapeutic relationship with each child – i.e. in a known environment with a known researcher – seemed to enable safe play and exploration of the invitation to join the study. I noted that each child was relaxed and accepting of

the invitation to attend the initial session; their presentation during these sessions was unanimously engaged, and they were curious to find out about the co-researching opportunity. This acceptance could have been an indication of compliance and a feeling of disempowerment that they were unwilling or unable to share; however, their alertness to non-verbal communications – and a therapeutic focus on open and authentic exchanges – suggested the relaxation signified comfort and engagement.

This snapshot has shown a range of responses offered by each child during their initial sessions. Some children were ready to make their decision to join the study immediately while others built in play breaks to create more thinking and/or playing time, moving away from the task to inhabit a different part of the dramatherapy room and spend some time alone.

#### **5.4.3 Snapshot C: assent reviewing (revisiting assent throughout Phase Two)**

This ensemble snapshot shows what was significant to each child as they reviewed the assenting process throughout Phase Two on a session-by-session basis. The snapshot presents the way each child engaged in this process in order to convey their wishes, and reveals some of the diverse experiences they had.

During her dramatherapy sessions, Lady Gaga frequently looked at the wall clock and asked: ***“How much time have I got left?”*** Rosie often stated in his sessions: ***“It is time to make my choice.”*** Without exception, Rocksus and Ambipom did not ask about the time at all during their sessions; there was a sense that they wanted to stay in the room as long as they could, and that this might be possible if they did not acknowledge the time. On occasion, Rocksus communicated his desire to stay in the room ***“all the time.”*** He was not the only child to explicitly convey this sentiment.

Rosie sometimes spoke of wanting to become a co-researcher as soon as he arrived in the room. Mia, in some of her sessions, went directly to her co-researching tray on arrival in the room, took out her co-researching badge and affixed it to her cardigan. James often spoke about his decision en route to the dramatherapy room after I had collected him from his classroom. He would tell me he was thinking about the decision, or had already made it prior to being collected. For example, on one occasion he said: ***“I’ve been thinking about being a researcher this week.”*** On another he said: ***“I’ve made my decision today before coming to the session.”*** Arriving in the room

for his fifth session, he said: ***“I’ve chosen not to research today. I’d like to end with miming though.”***

With the exception of Lady Gaga – who made her decision by painting a ‘Y’ or an ‘N’ onto the tables with her fingers – when the time came to make their decision each child did so whilst standing by or near their individual co-researching trays, which were kept against the wall at one side of the room. (Appendices 10, page 294 and 12, page 298 contain details about the room and research resources). Spending time by their co-researching trays provided some of the children with an opportunity to engage in solo play. For example, Mia, Rosie, Ambipom and Rocksus often looked through the contents of their trays, which contained play objects taken from the room’s resources or which had been made by them using art-making materials (such as different varieties of soft modelling clay, paper, felt or cloth). I sensed that spending time by their trays, and playing with the contents, supported the choice-making process and provided them with an opportunity to be by themselves and to take as little or as much time as they needed to make their decisions.

For other children, time spent at the co-researching trays signalled an opportunity to talk to me whilst looking through the contents they had collected. For example, Stargirl would talk loudly whilst walking to her tray, addressing Reggie as she did so: ***“No looking, you naughty frog!”*** Reggie – operated by me – would sometimes look over the top of the chair in response to Stargirl’s playful admonishing of him. She would often think aloud while she was at her tray, saying, for example: ***“It’s hard to make up my mind today.”*** She later reflected that she found making her weekly decision “fine”, but also that it was sometimes ***“a bit awkward to decide if I wanted to carry on what we were doing or become a co-researcher.”*** Mia also thought aloud while standing at her tray, commenting on what she was doing and thinking: ***“I’m looking at my folder... there’s lots of glitter in here.”*** [Pause] ***“I’m going to make it now [the decision].”***

Five of the seven children chose not to co-research on at least one occasion during Phase Two. For example, in her sixth session Stargirl returned from her tray to the chairs where I was sitting with her hands clasped together, and opened them to reveal empty hands. I reflected her choice: “We aren’t co-researching today.” ***“No,”*** she replied before adding: ***“Sometimes it’s scary to make a choice.”*** In her penultimate session, Mia asked before walking to her tray: ***“How much time have I got left?”*** Her

question coincided with the time to make her decision, and she said: ***“I don’t know what to do today.”*** She remained by her tray for approximately two minutes before bouncing the large pink body-ball by her side, and returned to me shaking her head: ***“I don’t want people to know about today.”***

During Phase Three, when reviewing her time as a co-researcher, Lady Gaga commented on the occasions when she had decided not to co-research. As the following dialogue shows, she remembered making this choice, but not the reason why:

Emma: “You chose to co-research every time but one.”

**Lady Gaga: *“I didn’t want to do it.”***

Emma: “Can you remember why?”

**Lady Gaga: *“No.”***

Emma: “Can you remember why you did want to co-research when you’d painted ‘yes’?”

**Lady Gaga: *“We have the table painting, and I would make my decision on the table. We have fake badge when we were claying as our hands were mucky and clayey.”***

Emma: “What was it like making the decision?”

**Lady Gaga: *“Really, really, really, really, really fun. We did number twelve and we done number twelve and number ten, and... That’s it – number twelve!”***

James chose not to co-research in five of the eight sessions he attended. To be able to choose not to co-research was something he later reflected as being important and empowering for him. He wrote: ***“It made me feel speicle [special] and I felt more of a part of it.”***

The analysis shows that making and revealing decisions was a playful and intentional process that each child understood in their own ways. For example, Ambipom, Mia, Stargirl, Rocksus and Rosie employed playful ways of revealing their decision each week, which often involved hiding the badge or themselves and then revealing themselves and their decisions. This happened either by being found in a ‘hide and seek’ game (by sneaking up behind the chair where I sat), or by using an object from

the room (such as a ball or a soft toy) to obscure and then reveal the badge's location on their body.

The gramophone speaker – which stood over a metre tall and was a permanent object in the room – became a popular hiding place for Rosie, Ambipom and Rocksus (see Appendix 15, page 308 for images of the gramophone speaker in action during the study). On more than one occasion Rosie would call out: **“Come and find me!”** and at first glance would be nowhere to be seen. On closer inspection, however, he would be found hiding in the gramophone speaker, which he had placed on its side. He would make noises from within the speaker – sometimes singing, but often laughing. He would then crawl backwards out of the speaker, open his arms and reveal his decision as denoted by the presence or absence of his badge.

Ambipom also enjoyed ‘wearing’ the gramophone speaker, which came down to his knees and restricted his gait. With the speaker in place he would waddle back to the chair before slowly lifting the speaker up and revealing his decision. When not wearing the speaker he also enjoyed holding cushions in front of him and sitting in the rocking chair, then throwing the cushions out of the way with gusto to reveal his decision. Mia also experimented with hiding and revealing her choice, preferring to place either a large body-ball or a large cuddly toy in front of her torso to momentarily obscure her decision, before revealing it with excitement.

#### Analysis of Snapshot C

This snapshot reveals the creative and diverse ways in which the choice-making process was reviewed by each child on a session-by-session basis, and how reaching these decisions was an active and engaging process for them. The snapshot also shows how some children re-arranged the time for making their decisions, in some cases to take place as they arrived in the room at the start of their dramatherapy sessions. This reveals that their decisions were considered important, and were theirs alone to make.

As I analysed this data I noted that even when the decision was reported to be difficult or scary, not one child asked for help in making it. The findings therefore show the importance of having choices to make, regardless of the outcome. Saying ‘no’ was an important research choice that reflected the wishes of the children who chose not to co-research in some sessions. Choosing not to co-research could also suggest an

awareness of the research audience outside of the room (as can be seen in Mia's journey of not wanting to share her experiences in one particular session). Whilst in Mia's case this reflected an empowered choice to keep reflections held within the dramatherapy contract, the awareness of the outside audience could indicate a fear of the consequences of disclosing negative or uncomfortable feelings and experiences – and a failing in the design to understand assent-choosing as choice and agency.

Negotiating the weekly decision was an engaging task for each child. I noted a repetition in my field journal where I had recorded the sense of achievement I had perceived in each child throughout the sequence of sessions; this sense of achievement occurred regardless of the decision they had made during the session – rather it was about the process of getting there and of expressing their choices. The assent-reviewing decision also provided an opportunity for playfulness, and the use of objects and play resources is evidenced in the familiar play patterns and games such as 'hide and seek' which were drawn upon by the children. The findings show the ways in which each child expanded the scope of the assent-reviewing process by incorporating resources and items from their individual co-researcher trays into it.

### **5.5 Theme Two: developing pseudonyms and signatures**

This theme focuses on how each child went about providing a signature to confirm their assent to join the study, and how they developed a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. These processes were designed to enhance each child's assent-choosing capacity. Both processes were new experiences for them, with the exception of Stargirl, who said she had signed her name before but could not recall where or why. Theme Two reveals these processes as a means of individual self-expression, and shows the level of thought and preparation that each child put into them. Each child's explanation of their choice of pseudonym(s) revealed that the names were not arbitrary or randomly selected, but based either on people that inspired them or personal qualities they desired in others or recognised in themselves. I did not anticipate how important these two processes would be when I designed the study, nor how they would be revisited on many occasions throughout Phases Two and Three. Before presenting the two snapshots that reveal the significance of these processes, I will list each pseudonym below, along with a summary of each child's reasons for their choices:

- Ambipom:** This boy initially chose the pet name given to him by a close family member. He later renamed himself with his own variation of the name of a character from a pack of picture cards he collected as a hobby.
- James:** This boy initially chose his real middle name. Following a discussion about anonymity, he changed this to the name of an adult he liked but did not know well.
- Lady Gaga:** This girl chose the name of a contemporary emerging global pop star.
- Mia:** This girl chose a name that represented an infant in her family's social circle, who she displayed great fondness towards.
- Rocksus:** This boy changed his name three times in response to a person he knew and two hero characters that appeared in computer games and films. He embodied these hero characters during his dramatherapy sessions.
- Rosie:** This boy chose a girl's name so that people may think more favourably of him.
- Stargirl:** This girl revealed that her choice of name expressed how she saw herself in the dramatherapy room.

#### **5.5.1 Snapshot D: the significance of choosing a pseudonym**

This individual snapshot reveals how Rosie engaged with the invitation to choose a pseudonym, and how he understood it as a means of protecting his anonymity in the study's write-up. This was something that was important for each child to understand. Rosie revealed his interest in the idea of anonymity and the lengths he might go to preserve or expose it. Reflecting on his reasons for choosing his pseudonym with my dramatherapist knowledge of him, it seemed he was thinking about his perceived identity in school.

Rosie had expressed a desire on various occasions in his dramatherapy process to escape from what he saw as his reputation of being a *“trouble-maker”*. He spoke of having *“poor behaviour”* and not enjoying classroom learning. He had appeared to

hold a sense of hopelessness that he was seen as an angry and aggressive child. He was often viewed by adults as appearing angry and scornful, and of being destructive in his actions.

Rosie was sitting on a plastic chair at the table as he completed the assent paperwork during the initial session. As we worked through the assenting form he sat straight-backed, giving me direct eye contact, holding a pen in his hand. The form contained a series of statements relating to the study; space for comments; a signature and the date (see Appendix 6 (A), page 284 for examples of the assent-choosing form). Rosie's visual focus had oscillated between the paperwork and my face. As he heard the invitation to make up a "pretend name" to be identified by, where "no-one would know who you are", his eyes widened and then narrowed. A frown formed on his forehead. With an almost immediate energetic retort, he said: **"Everyone knows me!"** This was followed by a pause, then a returning smile accompanied by a small jump in his chair, and a declaration of the name: **"Rosie!"** "Rosie," I repeated, mirroring his intonation as best I could. **"Yeah, then people think I'm a girl,"** Rosie said in a thoughtful, gentle and possibly wistful manner.

Still smiling, and with a playfulness and humour in his voice, Rosie articulated that girls **"don't get into trouble as much"**, and that **"people are kind to girls"**. Rosie indicated a return to the paperwork and continued to work through the questions, placing ticks, crosses and comments in the co-researcher's column to indicate his choices and answers. When revisiting the business of choosing a pseudonym during Phase Three, and reminded of its function to protect his privacy, he replied: **"I don't mind if everyone knows it's me."**

### **Analysis of Snapshot D**

This snapshot reveals the depth of meaning that choosing a pseudonym held for Rosie, and shows that he was reflecting on the process and his needs even while he was choosing to assent to join the study when deciding on his pseudonym. He saw his choice of name as a means of liberating himself from his reputation, and of empowering and enabling his self-expression in a different frame of reference. His use of a girl's name could suggest an opportunity for him to accomplish his desire and be seen in a more favourable way by school staff, which he often experienced as being unfair and unkind towards him. Possibly the name enabled him to see himself as a different person, and to enjoy the qualities this brought, whilst making his choice within

the context of a therapeutic relationship which was already established as a space of active listening by myself as therapist.

As a researcher I was confident that inviting each child to find their own name was an important process, but it was only when the process was underway that the richness and complexity of how they interpreted this opportunity started to become apparent. Having established the pseudonyms, some of the children referred to themselves by their chosen names throughout Phases Two and Three. This engagement signalled the need to allocate time and focus to de-roling the names at the end of sessions, and acknowledging what they meant to each child when reviewing their co-researching experiences in Phase Three. In-depth findings relating to the name choices and the de-roling towards the end of Phase Three can be found in the three case studies in Chapter Six.

### **5.5.2 Snapshot E: the importance of providing a signature**

The following ensemble snapshot focuses on how each child provided their signature on the assent paperwork using their real names, after they had given their verbal assent during the initial session. Providing their signature added another layer of meaning to the assenting process, and was a further articulation of their individuality. Some children chose to revisit their assent forms and signatures throughout Phases Two and Three, commenting on changes they noticed in themselves (as this snapshot reveals).

The space for a signature was incorporated into the assent form, as illustrated in the extract on the next page:

**Figure 20: Extract from the assent-choosing form**

**Agreement:**

I have decided to join in with this study and be a co-researcher, even though I know that I do not have to do this. Emma has answered all my questions.

Signature of co-researcher: .....

printed name: ..... date:

Signature of researcher: .....

printed name: ..... date:

(see Appendix 6 (A), page 284 for a copy of the entire form)

Initially, James appeared unsure of what to write or where to write it on the form. He sat silently in a still posture. His attention was focused on the signature section of the document, which I had indicated towards by pointing. He continued looking at the paper for a few seconds. He then looked towards me and back to the paper, tapped the pen gently on the paper at the start of the dotted line and asked: **“Here?”** “Yes,” I replied. He took a few more seconds to look at the form before placing his left arm on the paper to keep it still, and gently, possibly tentatively, placed the pen at the start of the dotted line and began to sign his name. He recorded his first initial, followed by a full stop and then his surname. James repeated this writing in the ‘printed name’ section and dated the document. He smiled as he did so, remaining focused on the paper. Once complete, he slowly and gently put the pen down by the side of the paper and continued looking towards it.

Ambipom's focus was drawn to the pen he had chosen, which was silver and had tiny mirrors glued all over it. While I explained what a signature was he remained focused on the pen. He moved it from one hand to the other, put it down and picked it up again. He then held it to his cheek and wiggled his left foot up and down rapidly with his leg bent on the chair seat. The following question indicated that he had heard the explanation and made some understanding of it:

**Ambipom:** *“Shall I put both my names down, or just my first name?”*

Emma: “Either way is fine.”

**Ambipom:** *“Erm... A-ha!”*

With this declaration he sat up in the chair with a quick movement, put the pen to paper, and without hesitation started writing. He signed his first and middle names in the 'signature' section and placed his last name in the 'printed name' section. He then pushed his chair back a short distance and looked at his signature. He nodded as he continued looking at the paper, and putting the pen down he said: *“There!”* I understood this statement as an indication of Ambipom's completion of the task.

Four of the seven children signed their names in the signature space (James, Mia, Stargirl and Rosie); two signed their first name in the signature space and their surnames in the printed name space (Rocksus, Ambipom); and Lady Gaga signed in the printed section and printed in the signed section.

These signatures were reviewed during Phase Three, where without prompting or invitation four of the co-researchers decided to re-sign their assent forms (Lady Gaga, Stargirl, Rosie and Ambipom). In doing so they expressed a wish to either compare their original and new signatures, or to confirm a continuation of their assent by re-signing. For example, Stargirl commented that her writing *“has changed since then,”* and expressed a wish to compare the original signature with her current one. Rocksus, James and Mia also chose to revisit the signatures on their assent forms, but did not re-sign them. Mia thought her form *“looks fine”* as it was. Rocksus and James revisited their forms briefly and confirmed that their assent was still valid. Ambipom re-signed his form twice; he also requested to see his paperwork during a non-research dramatherapy session and commented: *“I like my name.”* Lady Gaga chose to re-write the word 'signature' and produced *“Sing”* followed by a more developed signature marking.

During Phase Three, James commented with a sense of amazement and pleasure: ***“My writing has got smaller.”*** Stargirl noted with a smile and a sense of confidence: ***“My writing is more grown up now and I’ve grown a bit taller, but not too tall.”*** Mia, who did not re-sign her name, looked at the assent form and asked:

**Mia:** ***“Did I sign that?”***

Emma: “Yes you did.”

**Mia:** ***“Wow. That’s good.”***

### **Analysis of Snapshot E**

This snapshot shows that the signature task enabled each child to think about themselves, their names, their pseudonyms and their relationship with these choices, and to revisit them at their choosing. The findings show that in providing their signatures, each child required some assistance – possibly due to it being new to them. Signing their names could have provoked thoughts of the adults in their lives and times where they may have witnessed others providing a signature. This could have led to remembering experiences in formal settings where signatures seemed important, such as in the bank, the post office, or when receiving postal deliveries at home.

Snapshot E reveals the interest, time and care each child put into providing and reviewing their signatures. Their focus suggests that thinking about their names and who they were was important to them. Reviewing the signatures enabled focus to be placed on particular aspects of themselves, such as physical growth (a theme that was revisited many times by the co-researchers throughout Phases Two and Three) and changes in the appearance of their handwriting, e.g. neatness and letter size. I noted how complex and important this seemingly simple task had proved to be, and how much meaning each child had given to providing their signature. I also saw these reflections as an indication of the potential for agency as each child focused on the developments they noted in themselves as being important and worth giving time to.

### **5.6 Theme Three: making choices as co-researchers**

This theme is presented across four ensemble snapshots, revealing the range of engagement as each child made choices from the 12 research methods as co-researchers in the reflective phase of their dramatherapy sessions.

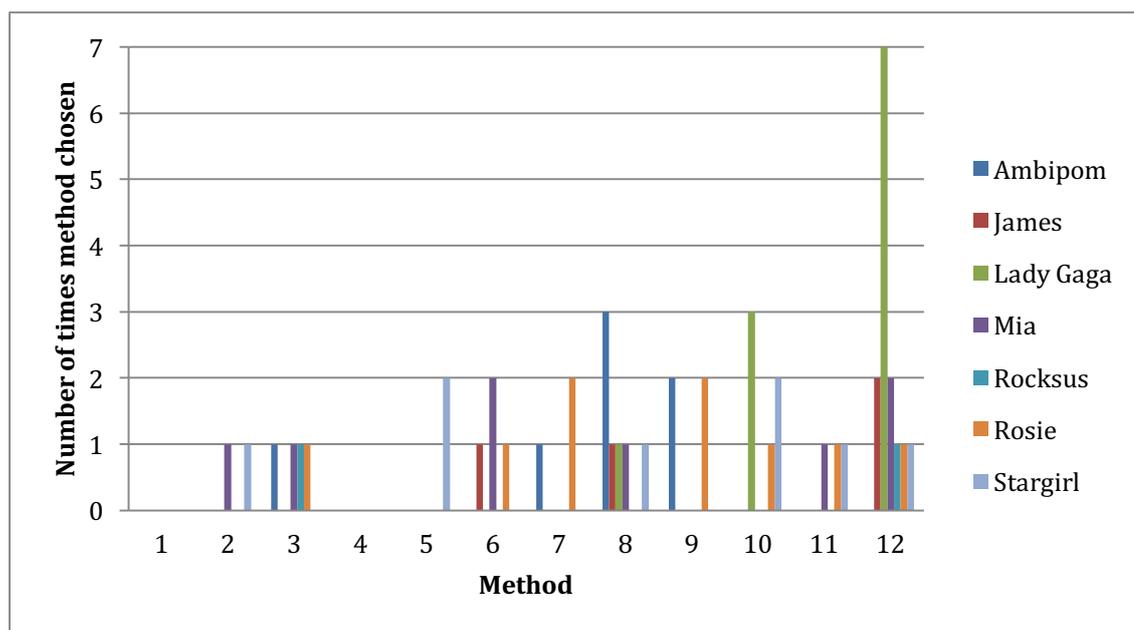
Snapshot F reveals and unpacks the quantitative findings relating to the range of research method choices, and the frequency with which they were made, across the sample. Snapshot G, also taken from across the sample, reveals *how* the research method choices were made. Snapshot H shows how Stargirl applied one of the methods during her co-researching experiences, and an exploration of how reflections were recorded from across the sample is presented in snapshot I, which shows how each child documented the content of their reflections.

### **5.6.1 Snapshot F: quantitative overview of research method choices 1–12**

The 12 research methods were the means by which each child reflected on the impact of their dramatherapy experiences when choosing the role of co-researcher in the final 15 minutes of each session in Phase Two. The two figures below reveal the quantitative findings regarding frequency of choice. Figure 21 focuses on how many times each co-researcher chose from the 12 methods; Figure 22 details the overall selection of the methods.

What the findings show is that all but two methods were selected at least once, with Methods 1 (the imaginary 'I' camera) and 4 (pass the facial expression) being the two that were not chosen at any point in the study. Some methods were selected with more frequency than others, with Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images) being selected the most. However, comparing the frequency of choice with the amount of co-researchers making that choice reveals new information. For example, while Method 12 was selected by all but one of the co-researchers, Lady Gaga selected this method on seven of the 14 occasions it was chosen overall.

**Figure 21: Frequency of methods selected by individual co-researchers during Phase Two**

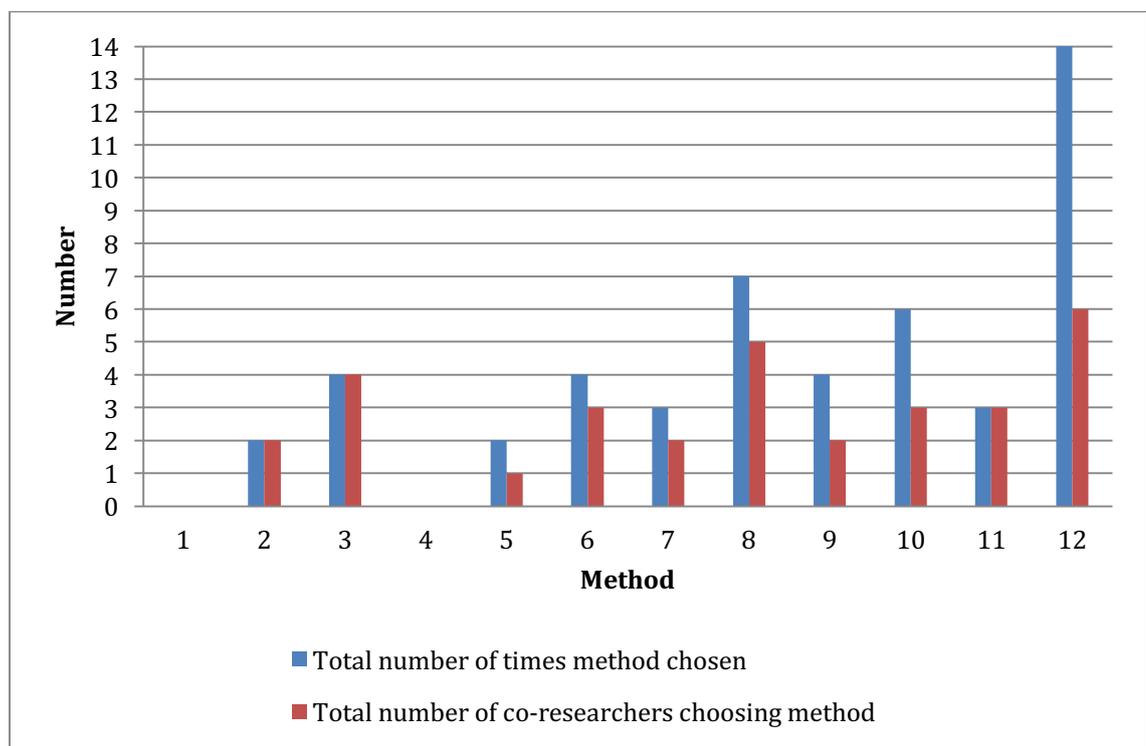


| Method | Description  |
|--------|--|
| 1      | The imaginary 'I' camera                                 |
| 2      | Transforming the imagination dough                       |
| 3      | Body sculptures  |
| 4      | Pass the facial expression                               |
| 5      | Statements in the box                                    |
| 6      | Reflecting with sentence prompt cards                    |
| 7      | Saying anything you want to                              |
| 8      | Choosing objects that represent your session today       |
| 9      | Expressing and reflecting with puppets                   |
| 10     | Make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing |
| 11     | Re-tracing your steps                                    |
| 12     | Reflecting with pictures and images                      |

(The 12 methods are described in full in Chapter Four, section 4.12. In addition Appendix 13, pages 299–304 contains the same text accompanied by the corresponding cartoon image for each method.)

What Figure 21 reveals is that three research methods were chosen the most: Method 8 (choosing objects that represent your session today); Method 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing); and Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images). However, they were not chosen by the greater number of co-researchers.

**Figure 22: Frequency of method selection across the sample during Phase Two**



As illustrated in Figure 22, research Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images) was chosen 14 times during Phase Two. Method 8 (choosing objects that represent your session today) was chosen seven times, and Method 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing) was chosen six times. Method 3 (body sculpts) and Method 9 (expressing and reflecting with puppets) were both chosen four times; Method 7 (saying anything you want to) and Method 11 (re-tracing steps) were chosen three times; Method 2 (transforming the imagination dough) and Method 5 (statements in the box) were chosen twice, and Method 1 (the imaginary ‘I’ camera) and Method 4 (pass the facial expression) were not chosen at all.

These quantitative findings provide insights into the range of choices offered, and were drawn upon when reviewing the study and identifying limitations and strengths in the methodology and research design (see Chapter Seven, section 7.4.2). They show the wide-ranging engagement with the research methods across the sample. The remaining snapshots in this theme, presented below, illuminate the qualitative findings from these method selections. Snapshots G and H (one ensemble and one individual) reveal how each child made selections from the 12 research methods, and what their reflections revealed about their experiences; Snapshot I focuses on how each child captured reflections using media resources such as photography and artwork. The snapshots reveal the uniqueness of each child's engagement whilst also noting common experiences.

### **5.6.2 Snapshot G: selecting research methods as a co-researcher**

This snapshot reveals how choices were made from the 12 research methods, and focuses in some detail on Ambipom's experiences before briefly showing how methods were selected across the sample. Ambipom returned to the theme of creating and overcoming real and imaginary obstacles, hiding and revealing himself in relation to his assent-choosing decisions throughout his experiences. Key moments from two sessions are presented to illuminate the significance of his experiences. Firstly, Session 7 focuses on Ambipom making his selection from the 12 methods, and then in Session 10 he makes his assent-choosing decision known and selects a research method to reflect with.

#### **Session 7**

With his yellow 'I'm co-researching' badge pinned to his jumper, Ambipom put his nose in the air and began smelling. After a few seconds he declared: ***"I can smell a mountain in the way."*** He paused, then pointed into the room and said: ***"There it is... we've got to climb it to get there."*** With clear play cues of looking and beckoning towards me, Ambipom led the ascent of the invisible mountain, utilising the nearby tables and chairs. His mimed movements and facial expressions depicted that the going was slow and tough; I followed his lead. He looked at me at various points, possibly checking that I was still there and climbing the mountain with him. Indeed Ambipom looked directly at me on a few occasions and beckoned me onwards in this shared endeavour. After at least two minutes of continual movement, he reached the mountain's peak where he stopped and beckoned me to keep climbing. Once I had

reached the top he pointed towards the notice board, which was now clearly visible to him, and began a quick descent down the other side of the mountain.

Having returned to the bottom of the invisible mountain, and now standing on the floor, Ambipom looked back up towards his mountain and smiled with satisfaction. He looked at me and nodded – maybe in recognition of his feeling of the success of his (or maybe our) accomplishment. No words had been spoken throughout the mountain climb. Without looking at the notice board, he pointed towards it and exclaimed: “Seven!” (Method 7: saying anything you want to). This choice revealed that Ambipom had chosen to reflect by talking about his experiences of that session. He reflected on the feelings he had brought into the room about a recent holiday to a nearby seaside town; he recalled getting there via “*Egypt, Russia and Africa.*” I asked what kind of journey it had been, to which he replied: “*Very long and big.*” “Like the mountain?” I wondered aloud.

### **Session 10**

Hiding was a recurrent theme for Ambipom. His preferred place to hide was inside the large gramophone speaker. During session 10 he revealed his decision from inside the speaker, which was on the floor in the soft play area. I took my badge out of my pocket, affixed it to my jumper and said: “So we are co-researching this week.” Ambipom stood up, placed the gramophone speaker over his head and set off in the direction of the notice board (see Figure 23 below). Wearing the speaker removed forward vision and changed Ambipom’s normal walking gait into a waddle (i.e. moving with short steps and a swaying motion). He negotiated his way around the room, probably by looking down towards his feet from within the speaker. Had he not done so he would surely have bumped into many objects on his way to the notice board. From within the speaker I heard sounds: some were of Ambipom talking to himself, others of him singing or making rhythmic vocal and drumming sounds.

He arrived at the notice board and said in a quick, loud voice: “*Nine!*” before removing the speaker and placing it on the floor. Then, looking directly at the Method 9 cartoon (expressing and reflecting with puppets), he moved quickly towards the puppet storage area and chose the shark and rabbit hand puppets. He seemed to know exactly where on the notice board to look, and what he wanted to do next. This sequence had featured in earlier sessions when he had also made choices from the seclusion of the gramophone speaker.

**Figure 23: Ambipom sets off on his journey to choose a research method**



Lady Gaga also made choices without looking at the methods. However, whereas Ambipom had pointed at the notice board, Lady Gaga would simply say a number (usually “12”) to represent her choice. Choosing Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images) provided her with an opportunity to continue using the art materials she had chosen to engage with during the majority of her dramatherapy sessions.

Mia, Stargirl and James observed the notice board more closely and took their time when choosing methods. They explored the cartoon images time and again. James looked particularly closely at each image whilst walking side-step along the three or so metres of the notice board. He also took his time to consider his method selection – sometimes a few minutes. On one occasion he asked: **“Can I take a photograph of you in front of the cartoons?”** and on a later occasion photographed all the cartoons in sequence. Mia favoured using crayons, pencils, glue and glitter in both her dramatherapy and co-researching roles, and decided to colour in the large cartoons which were displayed on the notice board whilst making her selection each week. When colouring in the figures of girls she often said: **“This is me.”**

Like Mia, Stargirl and Lady Gaga also identified with the cartoon characters. On one occasion she smiled and pointed at one of the child figures, saying: **“That’s like me.”** Stargirl thought the cartoon figure looked **“friendly and helpful”**. Being friendly and helpful were qualities Stargirl saw in herself. Seeing this reflected in the cartoon figure suggests that she may have felt good about herself.

### **Analysis of Snapshot G**

This snapshot illustrates how the methods were selected at the start of the 15 minutes of co-researching time during Phase Two. Focus has been given to Ambipom's engagement, showing how he chose to use imaginative play to make his method selections, and how he sought collaboration during his play experiences. Ambipom's focus and engagement when making his research method selections suggest that he enjoyed having choices to make, and that some of the methods had meaning that enabled him to reflect on his dramatherapy experiences. The invisible therapeutic bridges (such as the mountain) he built to negotiate the start of the co-researching experience could have been his way of keeping himself safe, by creating time to make his choices. Ambipom seemed to enjoy embarking on these journeys and making his method choices in each session. Being invited to take charge of making decisions that focused on his own experiences seemed empowering for him.

Analysing data across the sample reveals that some children recalled their favourite methods by number and chose them without looking, while others took time over method selections and studied and reviewed the 12 cartoons on a weekly basis before making their decision. Colouring in method choices with crayons, or photographing them (or me in front of them) also featured as ways of choosing methods. Across the sample, each child made his or her choice alone without seeking prompting or advice. This suggests they had ownership and had gained insights in their understanding of the choices available to them. Each child's engagement shows a sense of ownership, as can be seen in the identification with the cartoons. For example, the three girls identified the cartoon children as being like themselves. Whilst the boys did not explicitly reflect on identity themselves in cartoon pictures of children (which does not mean they did not), they referred to the cartoons as a helpful means of interpreting the techniques depicted in each method, preferring to follow the pictures rather than the titles of the methods.

#### **5.6.3 Snapshot H: reflecting with research Method 10**

This individual snapshot provides an insight into the ways in which one particular research method was used during the co-researching time, and focuses on Stargirl's choice of Method 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing), which she selected on two occasions.

A regular theme of Stargirl's dramatherapy process was that of making phone calls using the decommissioned telephone that featured in Method 10. She selected this method on two occasions when choosing to co-research. On one of these occasions she decided to make a telephone call to **"Nemo who lives under the sea."** Smiling and looking towards me, she said: **"We've been exploring lots of things today about how I feel."** She went on to tell Nemo that **"I've been co-researching with Emma again today. It's been good. I'm going to see if I've grown at all before I leave."** Stargirl was referring here to the height-measuring chart, which she checked herself against regularly.

Choosing the method again in a later session, during a time when she had returned to school following a short illness, she chose to telephone **"Barack Obama"**, informing him **that "I've been sick. I'm better now. We've been playing with the doctor's kit today... I'm talking to you from a sleeping bag in the cosy area"**, and ended the phone call by saying: **"I hope you enjoy your job."**

During the same session Stargirl also phoned the **"Queen of England"**. Whilst speaking to the Queen she put the call on hold and told me that she would like to speak to the siblings she knew she had in real life, but had not met. She said: **"It would be really nice to do that. I hope that it happens one day."** [Pause] **"Do you know if it will?"** She was silent for a few moments, then smiled and said cheerfully: **"Probably. And I'd like to phone JLS and speak to Ashton."** I asked: "What would you say?" **"I don't know,"** she said. **"I had a dream that I saw them outside Macdonalds."**

### **Analysis of Snapshot H**

This snapshot reveals how Stargirl chose Method 10, which included the play telephone that she often chose to use during her dramatherapy sessions. Her use of the phone shows that the telephone calls enabled her to talk about what she had found important about her sessions, as well as revealing her hopes for the real-life family events that had been tentatively brought to the session. In this instance the reflective quality of the session enabled her to state explicitly her hopes, which she then returned to more directly in the following session. This research method enabled Stargirl to play with ideas of who she would call if she had an opportunity, and to practice what she might say to them. Stargirl enjoyed expressing herself with words, and often reflected

on the content of each session in order to assess for herself where she had been and what she had felt, before measuring her height against the wall.

#### **5.6.4 Snapshot I: recording reflective choices**

This ensemble snapshot focuses on how each child chose to document their session reflections from the available resources, and reveals what they identified as being significant about their choices and reflections. These reflections can be organised into four main categories:

1. Images generated using art materials
2. Static photographs, taken with either individual disposable cameras or the Polaroid instant camera
3. Moving images, captured with the video camera on individual tapes
4. Reflections of experiences with no lasting artefact generated

Photographs and artwork that have received the children's assent, and which maintain their anonymity, are used to illuminate this snapshot.

#### **Using the disposable cameras**

Each child had a 39-frame disposable camera for her/his sole use. A shared Polaroid instant image camera and a video camera were also available and housed in the shared research basket. The analysis reveals that a range of rich and varied reflections was captured on these cameras across the sample, with the exception of Ambipom who mostly chose to reflect on his experiences by creating embodied sculpts, and used puppets to recreate moments and themes from his dramatherapy process without generating a physical artefact. On one occasion, early on in Phase Two, he commented that he preferred to *"just remember it."* The photographs he took as a co-researcher were mainly of the resources in the room that he said he wanted to remember, as well as items he had played with and said he liked.

Mia regularly directed me to photograph her, either as she posed in the embodied sculpts she had created as reflections of her sessions, or as she drew reflective pictures. For example, during one session she created a sculpt using the large body-balls and holding as many soft toys as she could manage, and commented that the image showed the *"best"* areas of the room where she felt happy. On another

occasion she directed me to photograph her standing and smiling next to some art materials she had selected, including glitter, glue and bubble containers. Mia spoke of wanting to display her images for her mum to see, and brought in a used photograph album from her home to place them in once they had been developed.

Lady Gaga used her disposable camera to photograph the paintings she had created on the surface of the tabletops, which reflected her co-researching experiences after choosing Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images). She wanted to keep a copy of each image before she washed the paintings away at the end of each session (see Figure 24: table paintings), and also spoke of looking forward to sharing her images with others when she took them home towards the end of Phase Three. Photographing her paintings gave Lady Gaga the opportunity to create a physical document of each image, which she revisited once the photographs had been developed.

**Figure 24: Lady Gaga's co-researcher photographs**

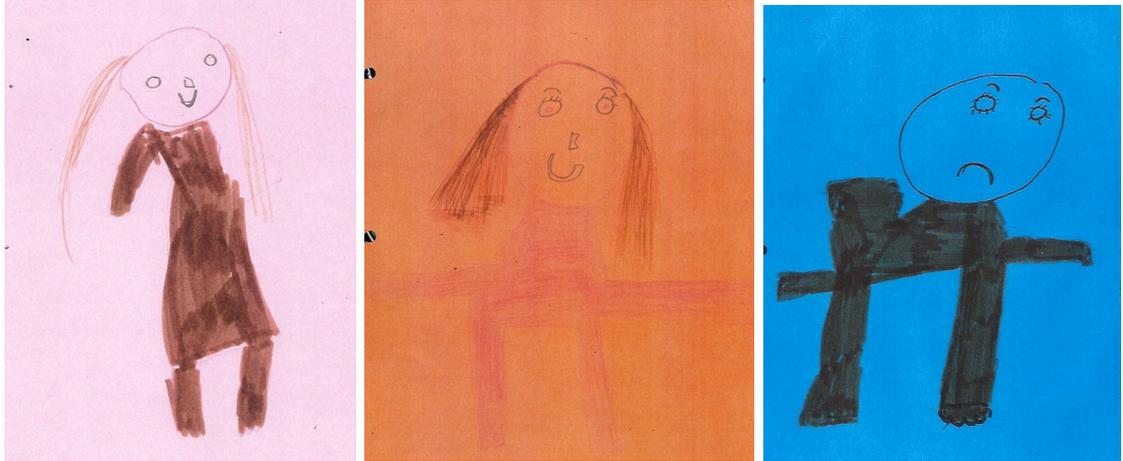


Mia and James both chose to reflect on their dramatherapy experiences by drawing images with dry materials such as pencils, crayons and coloured pastels. Three of Mia's images are shown below in Figure 25, and depict self-portrait images from different stages of Phase Two. In two of the images Mia drew reflections of her feelings of happiness; in the third she chose to record a reflection of a difficult situation she had experienced in school, which had left her feeling miserable and unhappy and had formed the basis of the dramatherapy process that day.

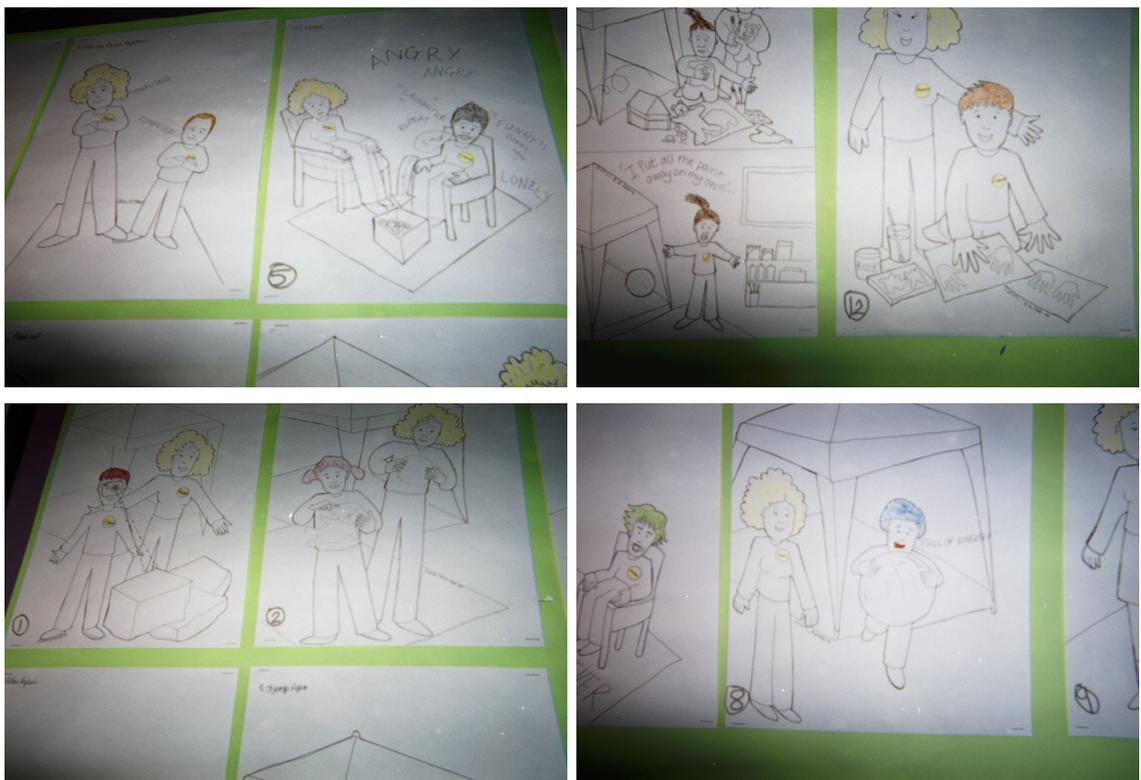
Both Mia and James chose to photograph their images, despite understanding that they could choose to take them home to keep during Phase Three along with their photographs. In addition, James, Rosie and Rocksus chose to photograph the notice board displaying the cartoons of the 12 research methods. Again, this was with the knowledge that they would be given A4-sized copies of the cartoons in their individual folders to take away and keep at the end of Phase Three. A selection of James's

photographs of the research method notice board are shown below in Figure 26, composed from his point of view. James later reflected that these images were amongst his favourites as they would help him to remember being a co-researcher.

**Figure 25: Mia photographs drawings she created as a co-researcher**



**Figure 26: James photographs the research methods on the notice board**



### Using the instant image Polaroid camera and the video camera

My guidance for using the Polaroid camera was different to that for the single-use disposable cameras due to the high financial cost of each 10-exposure film. Each child

was advised that they had “*approximately five*” shots at their disposal during Phases Two and Three; rather than seeing this as a negative restriction, I noted that each child looked after the Polaroid camera, treating it as a valuable and precious item in their own unique way.

The camera itself was an old model from the early 1990s, and was probably unfamiliar to them as an object; possibly this appearance could have contributed to its perceived specialness. Rosie’s reflection about the Polaroid camera articulates this wonder clearly. He remarked that he loved the camera, adding with excitement: ***“It’s old isn’t it? They used to have it in the olden days.”*** Having this equipment from the ‘olden days’ seemed to enhance the special feeling, suggesting that he may have seen himself as special by having free access to it. My analysis of the data regarding how many images each child took reveals that Rosie took the most Polaroid images, having questioned what “approximately five” meant. I also note that photographs were carefully and thoughtfully composed when using this camera, in contrast to the energetic and often speedy way images were taken on the disposable cameras. The final unique feature of the camera was its instant processing of images and immediate despatch of the photograph out of the bottom of the unit. Without exception, each child held the image in front of them once they had discovered this process, and remained transfixed on the developing image.

In addition to the use of still images, the video camera was frequently selected as a method for capturing reflections. Video footage was often recorded and then immediately reviewed through the small in-built viewfinder. Each child recorded these reflections (or ‘visual voices’) in a unique way. For example, Mia captured footage from an authorial point of view by placing herself in the role of cameraperson and making directorial choices about what to capture. She instructed me to recreate her physical poses, which expressed the reflections she wanted to record. These included sitting at the table with glitter and glue, or lying down as if asleep in the soft play area of the room. Mia often captured footage whilst bouncing on one of the large body-balls that she used as her primary method for negotiating her way around the room.

James mounted the camera onto the hot shoe at the top of the tripod (camera stand) and angled it to view the table, where he then sat silently in the role of protagonist, drawing images on paper with coloured pencils. He also remained in the role of cameraman and director as he framed the shots and pressed the ‘record’ and ‘off’

buttons when capturing footage. The images he drew at these times depicted him and myself engaged in warm-up games – predominantly a game he had named “*badmingtonennis*”. While James was happy for his images to be described to the research audience, he preferred not to share the pictures or the photographs he took of them.

Rocksus also took a directorial role when using the camera – which he secured to his wrist using the Velcro safety strap before pressing record and swinging it around his arm. He moved the camera up and down and from side to side to capture spontaneous and non-directed images of the room, himself and me. He watched the camera as he swung around his arm, and provided a verbal commentary about his experiences in which he often described what the camera was doing and the enjoyment he felt.

### **Analysis of Snapshot I**

This snapshot shows how six of the children regularly used the cameras to create artefacts of the reflections they had drawn on paper or sculpted using themselves, the room’s resources and me. The snapshot presents the wide variety of subject matter and composition of these reflective images, captured both with still cameras and the video camera. Some children offered a commentary linking the process of their dramatherapy sessions and their co-researching reflections. Others did not articulate their thoughts or interpret their images, but I noted in my research journal the connections and themes that may have been present for them, such as friendships, relationships, life conflicts and challenges.

Of particular note from this part of the analysis was the realisation that more reflective images were created using art materials during the co-researching time than had been in the dramatherapy process alone. The co-researching role seemed to have generated a desire in the children to produce an increased number of physical documents based on their reflections and experiences.

While I had purposefully designed the use of tape and film for these resources rather than the digital image-making technology so prevalent in modern life, I could not have fully anticipated the engaged and expressive ways these resources were used.

### **5.7 Theme Four: the impact of being a co-researcher**

This theme focuses on the analysis of Phase Three, where each child reviewed their experiences as co-researchers over three one-hour sessions, each held a school term apart (a gap of approximately four months) to review the process of co-researching. Session 1 was held immediately after Phase Two had ended. The cartoon 'self-portraits' and decisions about resources and artefact took place in the review session 2 along with a review of the co-researching role, and a third and final session to look back over the entire process and say goodbye. Four snapshots are presented, revealing how the children saw the co-researching role and themselves within it, and showing moments of impact and influence that emerged from their self-expressions and reflections. Interconnecting the snapshots is each child's sense of investment and engagement in the co-researching role, along with evidence of their capacity to reflect deeply on their experiences and to reveal the meaning and significance of their reflections in their own unique way, as the snapshots reveal.

Snapshot J returns to the use of cameras, and focuses on the reflections made as the photographs and artworks were reviewed at the start of Phase Three. Insights were offered into co-researching experiences as each child reviewed their images. Snapshot K focuses on verbal reflections offered from across the sample, identifying what the children had found meaningful during their time as co-researchers. Snapshot L describes how some children articulated the desire to share their co-researching experiences with important people in their lives, and Snapshot M reveals what happened for each child when the time came to say goodbye to the co-researching role and end their formal engagement in the study. During these final review sessions, each child seemed to express a desire to extend the co-researching time, or expressed the hope to do more research in the future. This demonstrates the meaning and value they had invested in their experiences.

The attendance data for Phase Three reveals that each of the seven children attended all of the three individual review sessions. This includes Rocksus and Stargirl, who had moved to secondary school after the first review session and had already ended their individual dramatherapy contracts.

### 5.7.1 Snapshot J: reviewing photographs

This ensemble snapshot focuses on how each child undertook the process of reviewing photographs captured on the disposable cameras. The photographs had required laboratory celluloid film processing and were despatched and returned in time for the start of Phase Three. Each child had a wallet of up to 39 developed photographs (depending on how many they had taken). They were presented with their wallet of photographs during the first review session, and invited to review the images and create comments or titles to accompany some or all of the individual photographs as a means of further reflection.

Their comments and titles were written down on sticky labels, which they or I affixed to the back of each image. Each child led the review of photographs without any verbal prompting or suggestions about their images from me, so that they could review and respond to the material in their own ways. All seven children were engaged in this task and seemed eager and excited to see their photographs, and to offer comments and titles to describe them. For example, Rosie grouped his images into categories of his own choosing, placing together all the images he had taken of the doll's house. He later identified these as his favourite images as they represented the family stories he had devised with the figures during dramatherapy sessions. Family was an important theme for Rosie – one that he said made him feel proud. He spoke regularly of the love he had for family members (see Chapter Six, case study 'C', pages 215–233).

Both James and Rocksus chose to shred some images that they did not want to keep. Rocksus said he was shredding one image because it was *“too dark”* as the flash had not been switched on, while James thought one image was *“horrible”* and not worth keeping. Stargirl titled one of her images *“Camping tent”*; it depicted the soft play area where she had created a story and built a makeshift tent. In that session she had reflected on an imaginary phone call (Method 10) she had made from inside the tent. Ambipom was drawn in particular to one of his images, which featured him sitting in one of the two armchairs wearing the gramophone speaker over his head. He said: *“I like making loud noise because it look[s] like I'm a mushroom head.”* Mia commented that some of the images showed *“the things that were important.”* As she spoke she was looking at a photograph she had composed of all the toy animals, cushions and blankets, which she had gathered together in the soft play/relaxation area.

For Rocksus, the memory of dramatically embodying action roles was evoked by looking at some of his images: ***"I remember running around and stuff in the picture,"*** he said, in response to a photograph of the area in the room that housed the majority of the hand-held play objects he frequently chose (such as toy swords, magic wands and toy police equipment). James said that he admired the quality of the objects depicted in some of his photographs, commenting: ***"This one's got good graphics,"*** in response to an image of a toy silver and gold sword complete with shining jewels, which he also chose as his cartoon self-portrait image (as seen in Chapter Four, page 90). Examples of these images and other photographs, with accompanying titles, are offered below:

**Figure 27: Co-researcher photograph  
– Stargirl**



***"Camping tent."***

**Figure 28: Co-researcher photograph  
– James**



***"This one's got good graphics."***

**Figure 29: Co-researcher photograph  
– Mia**



***"... the things that were important."***

**Figure 30: Co-researcher photograph  
– Rocksus**



***"I remember running around and stuff in the picture."***

**Figure 31: Co-researcher photograph – Ambipom**



***“I like making loud noise because it look[s] like I'm mushroom head.”***

Further titles given during the review of photographs:

**Mia**

***“This one went wrong as well.”***

***“This is when we was doing researching.”***

***“This is when I had the pink thing on my head and it is colourful.”***

***“This is when we was looking at the stuff.”***

**Rosie**

***“This picture looks like when you go to the party and you go in a face mask.”***

***“I like these two pictures.”***

***“This picture – I look like my brother.”***

***“I like my shoes.”***

**Ambipom**

***“I like acting like a wolf and it scares people sometimes.”***

***“I like Swiss balls because they're very funny and it makes me laugh.”***

***“I like the gramophone horn because it makes loud noises.”***

### **Analysis of Snapshot J**

The content of the photographs and the titles given to them reveal that each child was engaged with the reviewing task, and that they found it interesting to see themselves and their choices of composition and to remember the events of the previous months. For example, James commented on a photograph he had taken of his Polaroid

photographs: *"It turned out a bit blurrier than I expected. But blurrier it looks quite good"*; while Stargirl titled a photograph *"Say please"* as it reminded her of the role-play about friendships which she had initiated.

As each child reviewed their images I noticed the level of detail they offered, suggesting a rich engagement with the co-researching process, and that it had stayed active and present in their minds. In their individual reviewing sessions each child offered a range of memories relating to how they had composed the photographs, what they depicted and their feelings about them. The children enjoyed looking at their images and responded with surprise, laughter and enthusiasm to seeing themselves, me and the resources they had selected to photograph.

The content of the images and the rich comments each child ascribed to them reveals a wealth of experiences and individual expressions. Some common themes can be traced across the sample, such as the frequent use by the boys of the gramophone speaker for hiding in and wearing, and the holding or arrangement of soft toys and puppets, or photographs of the research method notice board and resources such as Reggie the Research Frog. Diversity is also present in the photographs, as unique expressions of choice and voice can be clearly seen in the selection of images presented above.

### **5.7.2 Snapshot K: reflecting on the experiences of co-researching**

This ensemble snapshot draws together the reflections made across the sample on the experience of being a co-researcher. Interconnecting this theme is the level of engagement demonstrated by each child, showing their interest in the co-researching experience and articulating its importance in its own unique way. Figure 19 (page 130) supports the findings around engagement as it shows the overall attendance of sessions and co-researching choices during Phase Two.

When each child was invited to comment on what they recalled of their dramatherapy session attendance and co-researching choices, there was almost total accuracy in their recall of these attendance figures. This further suggests their level of active engagement and awareness of the process they had been part of and the choices available to them. These findings are also important in understanding how the choice of *not* to co-research was seen as an integral part of the overall experience rather than being a disengagement from it. For example, when James reflected on his

experiences as a co-researcher, he noted (in writing) that the choice to say 'no' "**made me feel speicle** [special] **and I felt more of a part of it**". This sense of belonging was important to him and he spoke of it on more than one occasion. As a co-researcher James shared that he was "**more comfortable saying things I wouldn't normally say. Makes the voice get in a higher pitch so that it can be heard by Mum, family and teachers hear it. People like you.**" He also said that choosing 'yes' had made him "**feel quite clever.**" Feeling 'clever' on those occasions had been important to him, as had been saying 'no'.

Feeling 'clever' was also a theme for Rosie, who as a co-researcher regularly chose to wear a pair of large green-rimmed glasses with yellow fly-eye lenses from the dressing-up resources. When reviewing his photographs he commented that the glasses made him look like "**the smart kid**", and he giggled aloud on seeing himself wearing them. As well as feeling 'smart', Rosie also recorded feelings of relief in the co-researching role, which he described as "**tack in** [taking] **away the temper**".

Lady Gaga had reflected at the start of her co-researching experience that she "**looked forward to the next time**". She consistently offered this reflection as a co-researcher during Phase Two, which suggests that she valued being in the dramatherapy room and wanted to stay for longer or return before her next scheduled session. Evidence of how she held the sessions in mind can also be found through her use of the research message box, which is presented in some detail in Chapter Six, case study 'A' (pages 179–198). When reviewing her co-researching experiences, she wrote: "**That is verry fun to be a coriescher** [co-researcher]". This view was shared by Mia, who commented that being a co-researcher was "**fun**" and that it had helped her to "**tell them what's wrong**". Rocksus wrote that in co-researching "**you were acherlee lesnin** [actually listening]", while Ambipom mimed an energetic thumbs-up gesture when asked what it had been like to be a co-researcher.

Stargirl said that being a co-researcher had made her feel "**free**", and that she had enjoyed the "**one-to-one time**". As an unofficial young carer in her life outside of school, it seemed being the sole focus of attention was restorative both in terms of the dramatherapy experience and the co-researching opportunities. Stargirl chose to record her reflections on paper using pink felt tip pen, and wrote that being a co-researcher had given her a "**confident boost**". She added that she had enjoyed the role "**because I found out that I was good at telling stories and re-telling them**",

and that this knowledge had made her happy. She also revealed that she had shared her stories with her younger brother at home and he had enjoyed listening to them. On one occasion Stargirl became ill when she was at school, but was firm in requesting that office staff did not contact her mother to collect her until **after “my dramatherapy session and co-researching time.”** These reflections reveal the importance of the dramatherapy space as well as the co-researching experience for Stargirl, and how she may have experienced them as discrete spaces that inter-connected with each other.

Sometimes the reflections offered in the co-researching role related to important themes that had not been explored or raised during the dramatherapy process. For example, as a co-researcher Rosie spoke on two occasions about **“the rats”** in his house, wishing they would go when the **“men come round to catch them”**. He was asked whether there was anything he wanted to do with this worry outside of the confidentiality and anonymity of the work. He replied: **“Everyone knows about the rats, even the teacher.”**

Mia’s dramatherapy process was dominated at that time by issues outside of school, which staff knew about but which made her vulnerable as she had no control over them. Mia brought these issues to her dramatherapy sessions each week and seemed relieved to be able to talk openly about them, albeit in a limited way. However, as a co-researcher she chose not to reflect on these themes, opting instead to focus on tasks and skills she felt able to do such as blowing, counting and popping balloons, or reading and singing the alphabet. During one session, where her dramatherapy process had been particularly upsetting, she said: **“I know my A, B, C.”** What seemed important for Mia at times was having the choice to reflect on her achievements and the things that made her feel good, which were sometimes unrelated to the content of her dramatherapy process. Equally, for Mia, having a choice to actively avoid looking at the things that made her sad - and which may have silenced her voice - could have been a factor in her choice-making and co-researching expressions at these times.

### **Analysis of Snapshot K**

The review sessions in Phase Three enabled an in-depth level of self-evaluation that had not previously been present in the co-researching journey; this phase engaged each child in the co-researching role throughout the whole of the three sessions and

not just in the final 15 minutes. In addition, each session was offered one school term apart, which meant looking back over quite a significant period of time. During the three sessions the children put into their own words and actions their experiences of themselves, through recollections and recounted events from the co-researching sessions. They seemed to enjoy being asked questions about what they remembered, and showed pride in answering them.

Reflecting on the co-researching role elicited a series of positive responses, which in itself was a voice-enabling process. This included choosing not to co-research. Each child spoke in their own way about feeling a part of the study and of having positive and self-esteem-boosting feelings when in role or when making their weekly choices. This included a sense of relief from angry feelings for one child. The sense of change, choice, voice and growth seemed to be noted by the children in their own ways. I noted that the children had remembered a lot of details about their experiences during the co-researching phase, including how many sessions they had attended; their choices of co-researching through assent-reviewing; and in many cases their choices of research methods and data capture resources (e.g., the cameras). This conveys a further sense of belonging to the study and feeling heard within it.

Being able to engage in successful tasks and experience positive feelings can be clearly seen as important to some of the children on occasion, with examples given for James, Rosie and Mia, who were experiencing difficult therapeutic processes but who chose to reflect on achievements and feelings of success. This suggests an awareness of the research audience and how they wanted to be seen by these unknown people who will listen to their stories and learn about them.

### **5.7.3 Snapshot L: sharing experiences with significant others**

This ensemble snapshot reveals what happened when some children spoke of wanting to share their co-researching experience – such as artwork, photographs and stories about the process – with important people in their lives. Taking artwork home was part of the ongoing dramatherapy contract prior to the study; it usually took place at the end of a school term and at the end of the overall intervention. However, inviting people to the session and showing them video footage and artwork as the sessions were underway was a new area of experience, brought about by the co-researching opportunity. Sharing experiences demonstrated how the children saw themselves and

how they wanted to share their achievements and communicate with those who were important to them.

During Phase Two some children had spoken about wanting to share what they were doing with certain people in their lives. In many cases they took photographs, or I was instructed to do so, so they could show what the co-researching had been about. Most notably, Mia and Rosie spoke on various occasions about wanting to share their experiences; Rocksus and Ambipom made reference to wishing a parent could see what they were doing; Lady Gaga spoke of wanting to take her photographs home and put them on her bedroom wall where she could be selective with her invitations of who to share them with; James reflected that he would remember all the photographs that he had taken and appeared pleased to take a copy of them home. He had chosen to photograph many of the objects in the room that he had played with, along with the research method cartoons. He spoke of wanting to remember and be able to share experiences and reflections with members of his family.

After Mia brought in a photograph album (described in Theme 3, Snapshot I on pages 156-161) to store her images in, she expressed a desire to invite her mother into the dramatherapy room to show her what she did as a co-researcher. She spoke of wanting her mother to see the photographs, and talking her through them as well as the video footage she had directed and appeared in.

Having discussed this further with Mia an extra session was arranged and she drew an invitation, which she took home to her mother. On the agreed day and time, a very excited Mia arrived with her mother. Mia toured her mother around the room, showing her all the elements of the research that were important to her. These included the large body-balls she would often bounce on, the bubble-blowing equipment and the store of fresh balloons. She also showed her the research basket, her co-researching tray and the research method notice board where she had been colouring in the cartoons. In this session Mia's dialogue flowed as she explained with ease and confidence the processes that were important to her. She was clearly delighted to share these experiences with her all-important visitor. Equally, her mother – who I had met on many occasions over the years – listened quietly and with interest to what her daughter was explaining. I noticed her wiping tears from her eyes as she walked around the room behind Mia. I acted as a participant observer in this process and sat in one place in the room. It was one of the golden moments of the research journey for

me, and was incredibly moving given my in-depth knowledge of Mia and her family, and my involvement with their case over the years. Mia and her mother both looked proud as Mia spoke of her co-researching experiences with self-knowledge and a new-found confidence.

Rosie wanted to share his experiences with his class teacher; he wanted her to see the photographs he had taken – in particular the one he was the proudest of, which depicted him as a “*smart kid*”. He wanted to show his teacher the areas in the room where he spent his time, and to point out the resources he chose to play with. Sadly, for a number of reasons, it was not possible for his teacher to attend a session, so instead Rosie made a folder where he put some photographs so that she could “*enjoy looking at them with me.*” He instructed me to take additional images on the Polaroid camera of him in story character roles so that he could show her, as best he could, what being a co-researcher was about for him. He also made a card for his teacher, which he asked me to help him with and pass to her on his behalf. His teacher agreed to sit with Rosie in the classroom one playtime and look at the photographs with him. I was not present at this meeting, but I did hear from Rosie that it had gone well and he had felt proud to show her and tell her about his successes in his co-researching role.

### **Analysis of Snapshot L**

The co-researching role created an opportunity to think about the unknown research audience who would meet each child through their pseudonyms, and also the known audience of the people each child considered important to them in their everyday lives. This type of reflection brought about questions and requests to share parts of the co-researching experience, which suggests it was one of pride and achievement. For some children, sharing experiences meant taking the photographs home and showing them away from the dramatherapy room; for others it meant being witnessed directly by important people in the room.

Mia had not wanted to share anything outside of the sessions before the study. Coming from a busy house, having space was so important for her that she revelled in the fact that the sessions were hers alone. However, the co-researching role changed that. I believe this is because she enjoyed it, and moreover because she felt she could understand and do it, and she wanted this to be witnessed by her mother. Similarly for Rosie, who believed he was only experienced in school as angry and aggressive,

having the chance to show his teacher that he could do something well and without conflict made him proud and happy.

Sharing experiences of the co-researching role was referred to across the sample and signalled pride and achievement in being part of something special. I suggest that the need to share came from a place of understanding choice-making, and of the potential to develop new choices within the co-researching experience, which also suggests a deep creative and imaginative development, and with it changes in self-confidence and wellbeing.

#### **5.7.4 Snapshot M: the co-researching role comes to an end**

This final ensemble snapshot focuses on the last review session, during which each child's active engagement as a co-researcher came to an end. This session was designed as an opportunity to reflect on and close the co-researching process by de-rolling the pseudonyms and the co-researching role, and by saying goodbye to the research. Each child was invited to reflect on their experiences and to negotiate how they would like to end the session and leave the room.

The session was also an opportunity to explore – for those in continuing therapy – any processes from the co-researching experiences they wished to incorporate into their ongoing dramatherapy sessions. The final session was slightly different for Rocksus and Stargirl, who had already ended their dramatherapy sessions two school terms previously. Instead of focusing on ongoing dramatherapy, they explored whether any of their co-researching experiences had gone with them into their secondary school careers. The final research review method (self-portrait of a co-researcher) was introduced in this session (see Appendix 14, pages 305-307 for details of the review methods).

The desire to remember being a co-researcher and the various activities undertaken in that role were themes present across the sample. The co-researcher resources were also universally reflected on. Some children spoke of wanting to remember being in the sessions with me and of the collaborations during the co-researching time. Each child in some way spoke of wanting to carry on with the research. Some children were tearful as the review sessions concluded; others seemed excited and proud to have completed all the sessions. Some presented with a mixture of the two.

Spontaneous feedback about what the experience had meant was offered in these sessions. Stargirl said: ***“It was fun and I would like to do it again”***, while Ambipom asked: ***“Is your job the most important in school?”*** James shared his view of how being a co-researcher had made him feel: ***“The resletch [research] was fun and it made me feel more smart”***. For Rocksus the role had enabled him to ***“do thing can’t do in rill [real] life”***. Ambipom commented: ***“I’m going to miss emma teaching with her”***. Lady Gaga wrote that she would like to ***“to do more resorching [researching]”*** and ***“that is verry fun to be a coriescher [co-researcher]”***. For Mia it was ***“good and nice.”*** Mia and Lady Gaga also focused on what they had transferred into their ongoing weekly sessions from their co-researching experiences; each child spoke of wanting to continue using the cameras.

When de-roling the pseudonyms, Mia communicated her understanding of it by commenting that it would ensure ***“so people won’t know who I am”***. Ambipom said: “I like my name”, and Lady Gaga wanted to ***“keep using it”*** (which she did). James said he was ***“happy to leave it now”***, and Stargirl remembered it was based on ***“how I feel when I’m here”***. Rosie laughed and smiled as he de-rolled his name by taking off an imaginary suit of clothes. Given the choice to throw the imaginary suit away or fold it up and keep it in his tray, he chose the latter. Rocksus said he was ready to ***“change it now”***, noting that he wanted to carry on being a co-researcher and create a new story.

Each child was engaged and focused in their individual ending sessions. The emotional feelings in the room were charged and there was a sense of pride and achievement present in all seven sessions. In almost all of the sessions I had to bring the time to a close in the knowledge that the children did not want to leave the room. Stargirl was drawing with crayons on paper as her session drew to an end; as I commented that she would soon be moving to secondary school, she moved forward in her chair, looked at her drawing said: ***“Oh, I know – I’m a bit upset.”*** She had reflected on various occasions throughout Phases Two and Three that she had enjoyed being in a ***“one-to-one session”***, and that the sharing of the individual space was something she would miss. In these final moments of her co-researching experience she reflected on her engagement, saying she was sad to end ***“coz I liked being here. But when we had to finish I knew that I would be moving on as well and leaving here at the end... I had skills to take with me.”***

Mia ended her final session sitting at the art table. As she stood up she laughed and sprinkled glitter from a plastic tube around the table and onto the floor. Lady Gaga wanted to leave her table painting on the table and not wipe it off, instructing me to do it at the end of the day instead. Rocksus walked out of the room with his shoes in his hands (which he had never done before), and in doing so awarded himself some extra moments on the bench outside the door to put his shoes back on and prepare to leave for the last time. Stargirl stood by the door and looked back into the room, pointing and waving at various objects and parts of the room and towards Reggie. Ambipom raced towards the door, bouncing one of the large body-balls, and left with gusto. James walked out quietly, having first put away the bat and ball he had been playing with. Rosie checked with me that he would be collected the next week for his dramatherapy session at the usual time. The way each child chose to end his or her final session deepened further their sense of individuality, and communicated their unique engagement and expression of voice through the co-researching role.

When all the final review sessions had ended, I tidied the dramatherapy room and its resources and returned items back to their original storage locations. I cleaned the paint pots and put away any artwork not taken into the confidential storage. I sat at my desk and documented in my field journal the fact that Phase Three had concluded. I felt sad, relieved, excited, exhausted, and a little overwhelmed by the next part of *my* research journey. I wondered whether my feelings represented the parallel process for the children, who were moving onto the next part of *their* journeys. For some this meant continuing with me in individual dramatherapy; for others the ending of the research had signalled the formal end of their connection with the school. In both cases, what was clear from their engagement in the review sessions was that we were all taking away unique experiences of having been co-researchers together.

After the sessions had concluded I sent each child a letter to formally acknowledge that the co-researching role had come to an end and to thank them for their input (see Appendix 7, page 287 for a copy of this letter).

### **Analysis of Snapshot M**

This snapshot presents findings from the final session, and reveals the uniqueness of each child's engagement as they prepared for and negotiated the formal ending of the co-researching process. The snapshot shows a universal level of engagement, and

presents some of the rich reflections that were offered concerning self-knowledge and the experiences of the ending process.

The snapshot reveals the level of emotional investment each child had placed in their experiences, as denoted by the unique ways they chose to end the work and leave the room. They all articulated a desire to either continue with the study or undertake a new study in the future, which showed that the co-researching role had been one they had welcomed and grown attached to. Some children spoke about processes they wanted to continue using, such as the use of cameras to express visual voices.

The attendance during the review sessions was 100% across the sample. This included Rocksus and Stargirl, who had already transitioned to secondary school some months earlier. The level of commitment and enthusiasm to complete the process was evident in these sessions, with some children expressing pride about having completed the three phases. The sense of personal achievement was obvious during these ending sessions, along with the success of the co-researching experience. This snapshot has revealed how most of the children did not want the experience to end but were accepting of it nevertheless. For others, being able to move on signalled that they had accomplished something they felt was important, and that they were ready to move forward.

### **5.8 Summary of the four themes**

The four themes outlined in sections 5.4 to 5.7 through analytical snapshots A to M, along with the findings related to attendance, have sought to convey, as a presentation of the analysis of commonalities and diversity, the depth of co-researching experiences in relation to the study's research questions. Together these themes have provided insights that deepen understanding of the constructs of choice, voice and agency – primarily in their demonstration of the children's capacity to express themselves in authentic and diverse ways. The themes of choosing and reviewing assent; selecting pseudonyms and creating signatures; making choices from available research methods and resources; and reflecting on experiences as co-researchers were all key ways in which the children expressed their voices, as summarised below and then explored in further detail in the study's overall findings, which are drawn together in Chapter Seven.

In Theme One, findings relating to the elements of *choice-making* at different stages in the study revealed its importance for the co-researchers in the *expression of voice*, and in the experience of possessing agency. Theme Two illustrated how *key decisions* about identity were experienced and developed through the invitation to *provide signatures* and to *develop pseudonyms*; these findings also reveal an understanding of the ethical competencies children engaged in therapy have within a co-research framework of choice-making. Theme Three focused on the *co-researching experiences of selecting and using the research methods*, and of applying them to the reflective phase of weekly sessions. This theme revealed the diversity of expression made by the children, and showed that the methods were interpreted and understood by them in unique ways. Theme Four focused on the ways in which the co-researchers *reviewed their experiences*, and revealed *depth of self-reflection* and *connections to the co-researching role* and its opportunities.

These findings have shown that choosing and reviewing assent as a co-researcher throughout the three phases of data collection, and knowing that they could do this freely, were key processes for each child. Providing children with choices about participation in research – and upholding their rights as researchers by challenging the assumptions of informed consent – are ways in which agency can be supported (Hill, 2005; Danby & Farrell, 2005). The business of saying ‘no’ is therefore an important part of the conceptual understanding of the expression of voice; it is an equal and valid response to the assent-choosing and assent-reviewing processes. The findings have shown that the detailed design, which prioritised provision of opportunity to explore and revisit the initial assent-choosing process, enabled each child to understand what these things meant to them over time, and established the co-researching invitation as a place of choice-making based entirely on their own wishes. The findings have shown the benefits of creating the space and time for assent-choosing and assent-reviewing, and that the available methods and resources allowed the children to make choices, thus enabling voice and agency. They contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the conceptual understanding of the importance of the child’s right to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and to the understanding of how this right influences practitioner research design in general, as well as within specific therapeutic research practices.

The findings presented across the four themes have demonstrated the study’s focus on ethical competencies, such as the protection of the identity of individuals and consideration of the feelings of child participants in research – through the use of

pseudonyms, for example – as described by Kellett (2005b) and Johnson (2011). But while these accounts draw attention to the activity of choosing pseudonyms with children, they do not explain its impact on the children in research in the way this study does. Here, choice of pseudonym became an integral part of the co-researching journey; the names chosen held personal meaning for each child, to the extent that they required thought and care and a review session within which they could actively reflect on, and de-role from, the names and what they had represented. The findings in this chapter have shown that the choice and use of pseudonyms provided opportunities for agency, particularly in relation to voice through growth and exploring identity.

The sadness experienced by some of the children – as demonstrated in their wishing to continue in the study as Phase Three drew to a close – has also been illustrated; the personal issues contained within the children’s reflections reveal their understanding of choice and engagement with the available methods. The final theme has highlighted the importance of reviewing and closing research processes in therapy, as well as the need to provide time for reflections to emerge. The awareness that looking back over time maintained the empowerment of the co-researchers over their data helped to direct the analysis by keeping it focused on the meanings they had gained for themselves – as opposed to meanings derived from adult interpretation.

## **5.9 Summarising Chapter Five**

This chapter has revealed findings across four themes, showing the level of involvement of each child throughout their co-researching experience and the emotional effect of their therapeutic journey. These outcomes reflect the goals of dramatherapy work (enjoyment, increased self-confidence and feeling important). The findings have also shown that the methods and resources available to the children – the different ways in which they were able to express their voices – helped them to inhabit their identity, and to develop and empower their voice. Arts-based methods are proven ways of helping children to communicate (Clark & Moss, 2001; Bishton, 2007; Jäger and Ryan, 2007); the findings in this chapter have shown that they are of particular importance in enabling voice and agency in dramatherapy. Play, role play and image-making have been brought together in particular ways to enable children to inhabit their voice, providing opportunities for agency through their connection to children’s creativity and playfulness.

**Children's choices and voices as co-researchers: what do they look and sound like? A case study analysis of the journeys of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie**

**6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings as three case studies, showing the individual co-researching journey as it pertains to a child's insight, life and agency. The journeys of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie have been selected for case study presentation in this chapter. The rationale for their selection is described in Chapter Four, section 4.16.1. However, it should be noted that the co-researching journeys of any of the children could have been selected, as all are illustrative of choice, voice and agency in relation to the research questions.

The case studies illuminate the ways in which each of these three children experienced the co-researching role by focusing on their individual journeys and expressions of voice through the choices they made. The insights gained in this way include an understanding of what they found significant about their choice-making activities as they reviewed their time as co-researchers during Phase Three. My observations and practitioner-researcher analyses are presented towards the end of each case study, as a means of drawing together the significance in the children's journeys in relation to the study's main research questions. A final summary draws together themes from the three case studies and completes the chapter.

Each case study has generated its own structure. These structures convey the individuality and uniqueness of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie's co-researching journeys. Some subheadings are consistent throughout the case studies; others are specific to each individual case. The case studies include some intentional repetition of evidence from the previous chapter: this mirrors the way Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie returned to certain meaningful and significant themes throughout their co-researching reflections.

The case studies are presented in alphabetical order. As with the previous chapter, all verbatim dialogue offered by the children appears *italicised and boldened*. My own dialogue appears italicised only. Any dialogue written by the children is directly reproduced from their written accounts. Sentences with corrected spellings which

appear in [square brackets] following the children's accounts are provided to clarify their intended meanings.

The cartoon 'self-portrait' images of Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie, which first appear in Chapter Four (section 4.9, Figures 3, 5 and 6), are presented again at the start of each corresponding case study. These images have been produced by a professional illustration artist and were selected from photographs chosen by each child in response to the invitation to convey their voices as co-researchers.

The photographs were selected and the portrait composition arranged by each child during Phase Three (the reviewing phase). The cartoon format protected each child's anonymity by disguising their features and making slight alternations to key aspects of their appearance. Each illustration has been reproduced in the thesis with the child's assent, which was given during Phase Three after it had been made clear that the image would be for them to keep but in addition they could choose to agree to its reproduction in the thesis (see Appendix 6 (B), page 286, for a copy of the assent form relating to the reproduction of the cartoon images). The illustration artist, who is also an art therapist, understood the nature of anonymity, confidentiality, and the need for sound ethical practice in relation to the contracting of the artwork.

In addition to the cartoon 'self-portraits', photographs taken by the co-researchers – or on their behalf – are reproduced in the case studies, along with messages that consist of drawings and writing, which were posted by the children in the research box that was kept in the main school reception/administrative area (the research box for leaving messages is described in Chapter Four, section 4.11.3). These artefacts were generated during each child's time as a co-researcher to convey their reflections during the sessions in Phase Two and the messages posted throughout all three phases of data collection outside of session times.

## 6.2 Case study A: Lady Gaga

Figure 32: Lady Gaga's cartoon 'self-portrait'



When selecting photographs for her cartoon 'self-portrait', Lady Gaga chose three images which she said were her **"favourite ones"** because they showed three aspects of her time as a co-researcher: making her co-researching decision (**"all close up"**); creating a table painting (**"Lady Gaga's feelings"**); and showing her paint-coloured hands (**"my squidgy hands"**). When directing the composition of photographs during Phase Two, Lady Gaga had been specific about the framing of each image; this included moving the 'say whatever you want' prompt card (Method 7) so that it appeared in the frame of one of her chosen photographs. The self-portrait and its construction is an example of Lady Gaga expressing her voice through creative choice, revealing her engagement and enjoyment with her co-researching choices.

### 6.3 Finding out more about Lady Gaga as a co-researcher

This case study presents Lady Gaga's co-researching journey in some depth in order to reveal the significance of the reflective choices she made, and to illustrate how her choices enabled the expression of voice that she experienced as personally empowering. A prime example of this is the way in which she selected her pseudonym, which indicates that she saw choice-making as a meaningful activity – as the following account reveals.

Lady Gaga's eyes widened and she smiled as I introduced the idea of choosing a 'pretend name' as a means of protecting her identity during the writing up of the study. She looked around the room but said nothing, perhaps looking for inspiration in the play objects and resources. She remained silent for a few moments, seemingly deep in thought. Then, looking back towards me, she said with great enthusiasm and clarity, and with a widening smile: ***"I want to be Lady Gaga."*** She opened out her arms and stretched them above her head as she spoke. Lady Gaga is the name of an American musician who was rapidly acquiring popularity within youth culture at that time, generating worldwide media attention. She was receiving plaudits in major music events and award ceremonies for her image, originality and musicality.

**Lady Gaga:** ***"Do you know who she is?"***

Emma: "The pop singer?"

**Lady Gaga:** ***"Yes."***

Emma: "Is she the singer of 'Pokerface'?"

**Lady Gaga:** ***"Yeah! She's great. I love her."***

This dialogue reveals Lady Gaga's positive interpretation of her choice of name. This name may have been a reflection of how she experienced herself and the invitation to join the study. It may also have evoked aspirational feelings. Lady Gaga interpreted being a co-researcher as an opportunity to refer to herself by her pseudonym, which made her smile. She always referred to herself by this name when co-researching, and signed ***"Lady Gaga"*** on most of her paintings, messages, and on the back of photographs of her artwork. During Phase Three of the data collection I invited Lady Gaga to reflect on what her pseudonym meant to her and to document her thoughts by writing them down. She wrote: ***"It mack's me fel happy being a corishercha"*** [it makes me feel happy being a co-researcher]. Her reflections show that being a co-

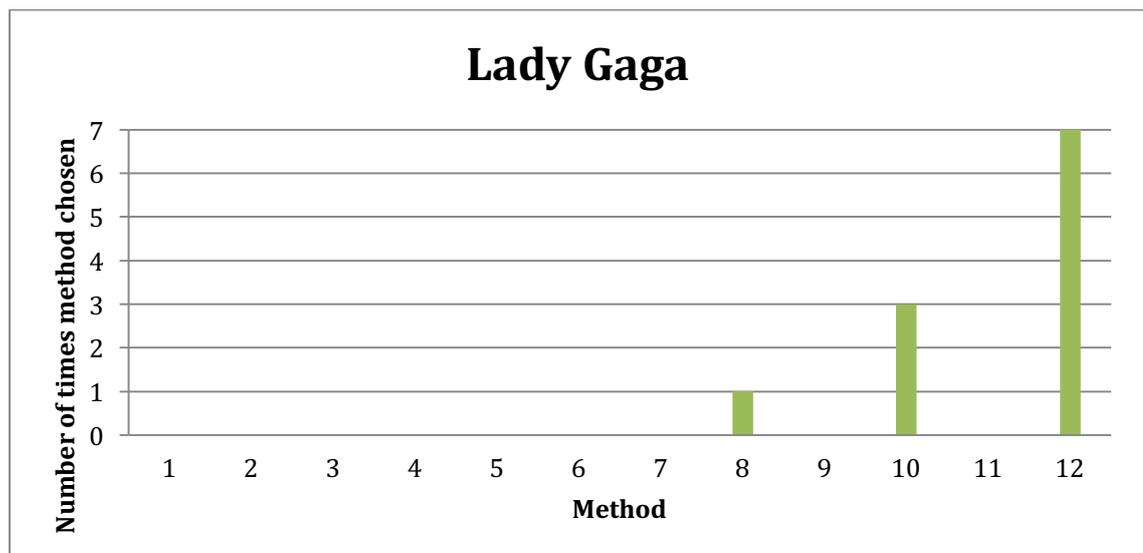
researcher and her pseudonym were processes she had linked together, and which gave her positive feelings.

#### 6.4 Summary of Lady Gaga’s attendance and choices as a co-researcher

This section draws on the quantitative data to reveal Lady Gaga’s choices in terms of her session attendance and research method selections. The data shows that she attended the majority of the sessions offered, the only absences being due to factors out of her control. She chose to co-research in the majority of sessions, and selected specific methods, returning to one method in particular on multiple occasions.

Lady Gaga attended all of the sessions in Phase One (assent-choosing) and Phase Three (reviewing), and eight of the 10 sessions in Phase Two. Her two absences resulted from a family holiday and a school trip. Lady Gaga chose to co-research in seven of her eight sessions. Figure 33, below, shows the range of research methods she chose.

**Figure 33: Research methods chosen by Lady Gaga in co-researching sessions**



This data shows that Lady Gaga selected three of the 12 available methods, and chose more than one method in some sessions. She selected from these methods on 11 occasions. Research Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images) was chosen in all seven sessions and enabled Lady Gaga to reflect on her experiences using art materials and cameras. She chose to use her camera in every session to capture images of herself and her artwork. In addition she chose Method 10 (make an

imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing) on three occasions, and Method 8 (choosing objects that represent your session today) on one occasion.

### **6.5 Key areas of significance for Lady Gaga**

In this section the main choices that Lady Gaga made to express her voice as a co-researcher are introduced; they are then unpacked in the subsequent sections (6.6 to 6.12). Her choice-making is reflected in the way she chose her pseudonym; engaged with art making; offered verbal reflections; sang; photographed; recorded; recalled and reviewed her co-researching experiences.

The introduction to Lady Gaga's case study suggests that attending dramatherapy sessions, and choosing to be a co-researcher on all but one occasion, were choices she wanted to make. The analysis of her reflections illustrates the fact that she experienced the co-researching role as a positive opportunity to make choices in an environment where she felt empowered. As she reviewed her co-researching experiences in Phase Three, Lady Gaga spoke of how being a co-researcher had allowed her to make new choices and to express her voice in a number of ways. She reflected that being a co-researcher was **"very, very, very, very, very fun"**. Her new choices included moving from creating paintings on paper to using the tabletops; this development in her self-expression gives an indication of how she experienced a freedom in making choices and having them accepted without challenge or a need for justification.

Lady Gaga predominantly chose to express her voice through image-making. Key areas of significance are in the unique ways she chose to express herself through the use of paints, and in the ways she experienced the research methods and media resources. For example, on the majority of occasions she revealed whether or not she wanted to co-research by painting her decision onto the tabletop. In the role of co-researcher she represented herself in a series of self-portraits in the mediums of paint, pencil and photography, and made known that she was the subject of her images: **"That's me."** Creating images allowed Lady Gaga to show and comment on aspects of herself. Part of her ongoing commentary was in the changes she made to her images and how to capture them on tabletops, paper, photographic film and video tape. She chose to take photographs of her table paintings in each session, and captured video footage of the painting process on some occasions.

When composing table paintings, Lady Gaga chose to communicate using a mixture of non-verbal signs and single words (which she spoke or sang). For example, during her initial assent-choosing session Lady Gaga indicated that she was ready to make her decision by nodding her head. She had acknowledged earlier in the session that making choices had various options, which were not limited to 'yes' and 'no'. Throughout her time as a co-researcher, Lady Gaga continued to communicate using a mixture of verbal and non-verbal cues to narrate and express her experiences. However when reviewing her sessions in Phase Three she made different choices and spoke in full sentences rather than with the single words offered during Phase Two.

In Phase Three Lady Gaga was invited to title the photographs she had taken and directed during Phase Two, and to review the video footage she had captured. Her titles offer rich insights into what she selected to capture as a co-researcher. For example, in addition to her table paintings Lady Gaga had photographed the notice board where cartoon descriptions of the 12 research methods were displayed. She also chose to photograph resources she had engaged with. Image titles included: ***“This is our questions that we asked and what we want to do”***; ***“This is the boing balls”*** and ***“This is Lady Gaga with a co-researcher badge on”***.

An additional way in which Lady Gaga chose to express and comment on her co-researching experiences was via the messages she composed and posted in the research box between sessions. These messages were comprised of self-portrait images with accompanying text that described either her co-researcher reflections, or personal news she wanted to share. Each time she had posted a message, Lady Gaga checked that I had received it. Her choices of communication included using research Method 10, in which she made pretend phone calls to her primary caregiver and articulated her experiences as a co-researcher. Being heard and seen was an important and positive experience for Lady Gaga.

Lady Gaga's understanding of her freedom to interpret and express her co-researching selections in her own ways, and to communicate them as empowered choices, grew over the sessions. These reflexive experiences were of therapeutic benefit to her, and they also provide insights into her use of co-researching as a research approach in dramatherapy. These insights and benefits are drawn together at the end of the chapter in section 6.38.

The following sections unpack the themes introduced in this section in more detail, and provide evidence that supports the claims regarding what was significant for Lady Gaga as a co-researcher.

### **6.6 Lady Gaga paints her co-researching decision**

Lady Gaga revealed her ongoing assenting decision through her use of paints on five of the seven occasions she chose to co-research. Making her choices in this way allowed her to interpret the process of revisiting assent-reviewing in her own way, and to communicate her intention to co-research. Her actions also show a level of comfort and creativity, and an acceptance that the meaning of her actions had been understood by me. Understanding that her actions were accepted may have contributed to developments in her confidence about choice-making, leading to further creative explorations as the research progressed.

On three occasions Lady Gaga gave her co-researching decision by squeezing yellow paint from the plastic bottle onto the painting table, and made a large co-researching badge with a “y” written in the middle of the image with her finger. On another occasion when she had been painting during the dramatherapy process she mixed together paints in her palette and wrote: “Yes” on the table. She then asked me to photograph the image (see Figure 34 below). In another session she painted a yellow badge onto her apron with a paintbrush and scribed a “y” in the middle of it to indicate her decision.

**Figure 34: Lady Gaga reveals her “Yes” decision to co-research in paint**



### **6.7 Lady Gaga’s table paintings using research Method 12**

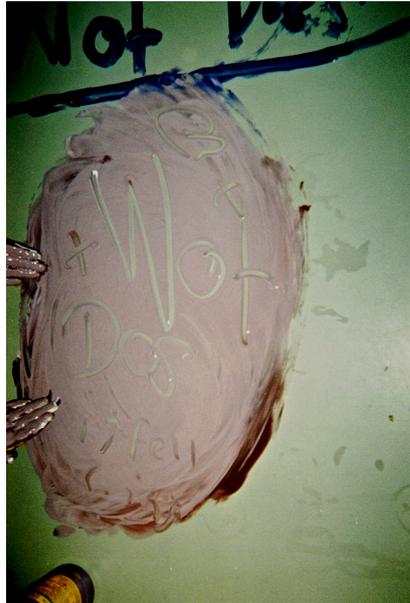
Lady Gaga referred to her paintings as “table paintings”. She produced them using poster paints and water. The top of the art tables was her canvas, and her hands the

paintbrushes. Artistically these images could be described as abstract, and were created by merging colours from her palette using her **“mush hands”**. She reflected on several occasions that she enjoyed the sensation of the paint on her hands, **“because when you put paint on your hands it’s really really squidgy.”** Squidgy was one of many words Lady Gaga offered as she engaged with these tactile experiences.

When choosing from the research methods, Lady Gaga would either say the number **“Twelve”**, or paint the number onto the table with her finger or a paintbrush. She would then begin to paint an image on the tabletop, and would sometimes narrate her process with single words. As described in 6.4 above, these words were both spoken and sung, and included **“squidgy”, “mucky”, “mushy”, “gooey”, “scribble”, “smudgy” and “gloopy”**. When singing words she repeated them many times in a soft-sounding melody. She explored different volumes and speeds with the words as she sang them, whilst looking at the table and focusing on her paintings. In one session she painted the response to the feelings she said she had experienced in her dramatherapy session. She painted: **“Wot does it feel like”** [what does it feel like] on the table, then answered by saying **“smudgy”**, and asked me to photograph this image (see Figure 35 below).

Throughout her reflections Lady Gaga did not comment directly on what these words meant to her, yet I noticed her smiling face and harmonious singing tone when using them – predominantly when in the co-researching role. I suggest they represented positive feeling states and were an indication of how she was experiencing her reflective painting process.

**Figure 35: Lady Gaga paints her feelings**



Lady Gaga's tabletop painting often began with the preparation of applying different coloured paint to each of her hands. As she engaged with the tactility of her art-making, she recharged the palette in the course of a single painting and refilled it with a selection of colours, scooping up into her hands as much paint from the palette as she could. Her paintings often finished as a mixture of all the palette's colours, and were comprised of dark tones (grey, brown and black). Sometimes as she painted she compared the image before her with recollections of paintings from previous sessions.

Lady Gaga could be entirely focused on her painting to the extent that I prompted her with a time-keeping update as the co-researching time was drawing to a close. On some occasions she would look up and ask: ***"How much longer have I got?"*** As the sessions drew to a close Lady Gaga would either direct me to take a photograph of her and the image she had created, or she would take her own photograph of the paintings. This pattern was repeated in every session.

Exploring her experiences through self-portrait reveals Lady Gaga's interest in watching herself grow and change through her time as a co-researcher. Image-making was the dominant way in which she chose to express herself and to document these changes. She also used physical measurement as a metaphor for personal growth; she was particularly pleased when the reading on the wall she was measured against revealed that she had grown in height, and disappointed when it did not. Lady Gaga

had requested her height to be measured in her dramatherapy sessions prior to the study; incorporating this activity into her co-researching time, and narrating the process with comments such as: ***“This is me getting measured”***, suggested she was anticipating an audience being witness to this activity.

Another way in which Lady Gaga gained insights into her experiences was in her use of the research cameras: this is unpacked in the next section.

### 6.8 Lady Gaga photographs her images

Many of the self-portrait photographs were directed and composed by Lady Gaga, and taken by me at her request. On occasion, however, she captured her own image by holding the camera out in front of her and facing it towards herself. She reinforced her interest in exploring her own image through this activity, and documented parts of her journey by capturing video footage, and by taking some instant Polaroid photographs. She particularly enjoyed seeing her image emerge over the three-minute exposure time. When taking photographs of her table paintings, she would add her commentary using single words and short phrases from the words already described above. These phrases included: ***“It’s sticky”***, ***“This is mush hands”*** and ***“I’m all squidgy”***. As with her use of single words, these phrases articulated her experiences in the moment, and were offered with laughter and enjoyment.

Lady Gaga chose to take all of the 39 available images on her disposable camera. Twenty-seven photographs were direct self-portraits depicting whole body images, either with or without her paintings; a further seven images were taken by her of the paintings on their own. She took the remaining images of the research methods notice board; the rocking chair where she would start each session; the wall where we measured her height each week; and of her artwork being placed by me into the chest of drawers where it was stored for confidential safe-keeping. As a co-researcher Lady Gaga was documenting the aspects of her experiences that she had focused on. These parts of the room had been identified as belonging to her co-researching experiences. All her images are a form of self-portraiture as they reflect selected parts of Lady Gaga and her experiences.

During one of the final co-researching sessions in Phase Two, which came towards the end of the school year and summer term, Lady Gaga asked: ***“Am I coming back next year?”*** I confirmed that her dramatherapy sessions would start again the following

September, to which she replied: ***“Can I have another camera to use then?”*** This request implied that having a camera and taking photographs was a significant part of the co-researching role that she enjoyed undertaking. Interestingly, at the point of her asking this question she had not yet seen the developed images from the disposable camera. Nevertheless she had given meaning to the process of taking the images, and I suggest she experienced pleasure from the activity, making it clear she wanted to repeat it in the future.

The next section shows what she revealed about herself and her reflective experiences whilst reviewing the photographs during Phase Three.

### **6.8.1 Lady Gaga reviews her photographs**

When the time came to review her photographs, Lady Gaga looked excited and was keen to talk through the memories triggered by the images. She gave titles to every image, and referred to herself in the main by her pseudonym. Many of the titles were descriptive; they include: ***“This is Lady Gaga’s squidgy picture”***; ***“This is Lady Gaga with a co-researcher badge on”***, and ***“This is Lady Gaga’s mushy hands – sticky.”*** Lady Gaga clearly enjoyed seeing the images again, and reviewing her table paintings. She commented on the paintings she remembered creating during the dramatherapy parts of sessions that took place before the co-researching time each week. These images were usually underneath the images depicted in the photographs. For example, she remembered: ***“This was me with the butterfly”***, and ***“This one was with the flowers”***. She titled other images with a combination of the words she had used frequently, such as: ***“This picture is Mr Squidgy”***, and ***“This is my squidgy hands”***. She gave her opinion about her artwork through her titling: ***“Lady Gaga’s lovely picture”***, and provided a commentary about parts of the process. For example, she titled the image of her co-researching decision: ***“That’s Lady Gaga’s decision”***. She appeared proud of her work, titling one photograph: ***“That’s my work”*** (see Figure 36 below). This picture depicted me storing some of her recent self-portrait images in the plan chest.

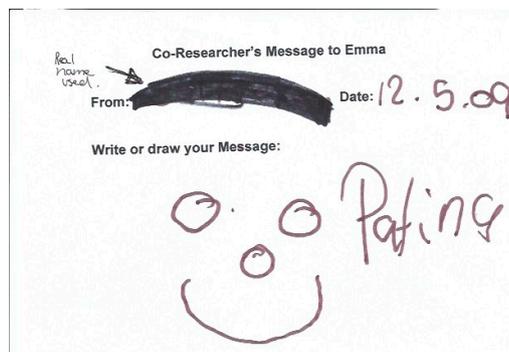
Figure 36: Lady Gaga reviews her photographs – “That’s my work”



### 6.9 Unpacking Lady Gaga’s research box messages

Posting messages to me in the research box provided the opportunity for each child to enter into the co-researching role outside of session times, should they wish to comment on their thoughts or feelings as co-researchers. Lady Gaga chose to engage with this invitation, and posted five co-researcher messages which were all self-portraits. All but one of the messages was accompanied by text. She decorated the envelopes using felt tip pens, and drew patterns featuring stars and squiggles. In the first message she drew two eyes, a nose and a smiling mouth and wrote her real name. Next to the image she wrote a single word: **“Pating”** [painting] (see Figure 37 below).

Figure 37: Lady Gaga’s first message in the research box

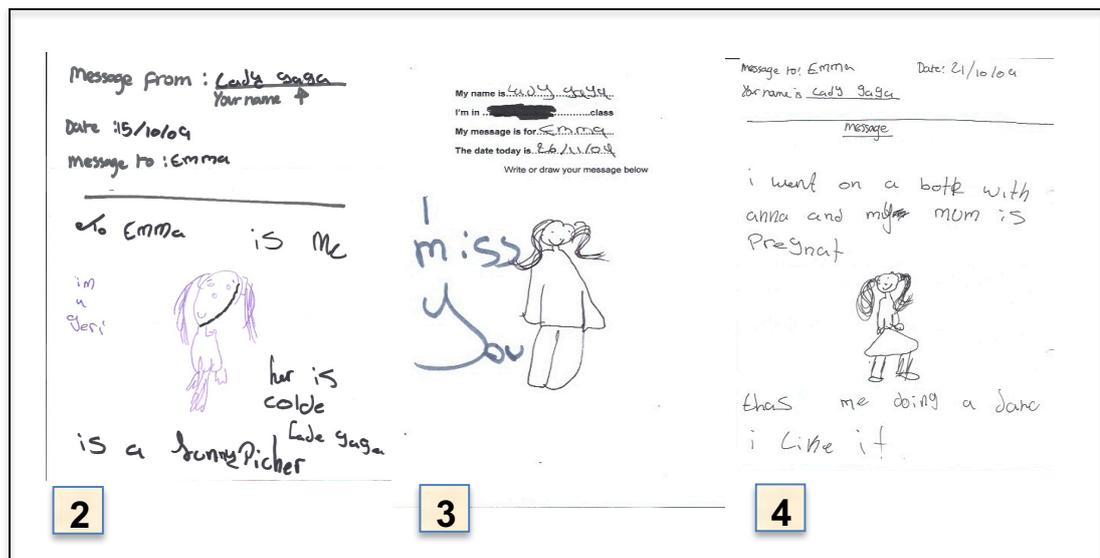


Of the remaining self-portrait messages, three had smiley mouths and one wore a straight-line mouth. One image drew attention to the figure as Lady Gaga: **“Her is lade g is a funny picher”** [here is Lady Gaga, it’s a funny picture]. The accompanying text in her third message read: “Thats me doing a dane I like it”

[that's me doing a dance. I like it]. In the same message she revealed: **“My mum is pregnant.”** She drew herself in the centre of the paper with a smiling face. Lady Gaga was letting me know that her mum’s news made her feel happy, and probably proud as well. The news may also have enabled her to feel important within her peer group as she shared it with them (see Figure 38 below).

Lady Gaga’s penultimate self-portrait message was posted after Phase Two had concluded, but at a time where she continued having weekly dramatherapy sessions. Lady Gaga posted this message in the period of time between the first and second review sessions, and it read: **“I miss you.”** Maybe Lady Gaga missed the ‘me’ that was a researcher with her, and maybe she missed herself as a co-researcher and took this opportunity to make contact between sessions, and have this shared with the research audience. I return to the theme of research box messages in section 6:13 as I document my observations on Lady Gaga’s key findings.

**Figure 38: Lady Gaga’s research box messages two, three and four**



Lady Gaga’s final research box message is somewhat different to the others. She posted it a fortnight before her third and final review session. Still in weekly dramatherapy sessions, Lady Gaga had spoken of being aware that the final session was imminent. This message was her final self-portrait and was notable for its absence of any accompanying text, and for the presence of a straight-lined mouth – as shown below in Figure 39. This message indicated that she felt differently than in her previous compositions and that she was communicating a

different narrative. I wondered how this message contained her sadness and loss about the end of the research.

**Figure 39: Lady Gaga's final research box message**

My name is.....  
I'm in .....class  
My message is for.....  
The date today is.....  
Write or draw your message below



Overall, the analysis of Lady Gaga's messages suggests that she wanted to stay in contact with me, and with herself as a co-researcher, through them. The important themes for Lady Gaga are revealed through her sharing of information and feelings about family news, and in her reflexive comments such as those regarding her enjoyment of dancing. Her feelings surrounding the conclusion of her weekly co-researching sessions were also revealed in the content of her penultimate message. This message suggests that she wanted me to know what was happening for her. Maybe she was worried that I would forget her in the time in-between the review sessions, or how she has expressed herself as a co-researcher. She may have experienced the time between sessions as being long. Her final message shows her without words and with a very different choice of mouth to all the other images. The message seems to speak of her feelings about the ending of the co-researching role and of her wish not to be forgotten, and also of a wish to continue telling me about herself and her experiences, as she had done with the news of her mother's pregnancy. The co-researching role may have represented a freedom to share information about herself that she had not felt able to share in the dramatherapy sessions beforehand.

#### **6.10 Other research methods chosen by Lady Gaga**

Figure 33 on page 181 shows that Lady Gaga chose two other research methods during the seven sessions she co-researched in. This section of the case study

illustrates the process that emerged as she engaged with Method 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing). Lady Gaga chose this method for co-researching in three sessions; she also chose this method during other sessions towards the close of her co-researching time, but not in the co-researching role. However, the difference here was that she either removed her co-researching badge or cleaned the painted badge from the table before making her choice. Her actions suggest a level of awareness and understanding of the implications of sharing and withholding her reflections with the research audience – as a co-researcher or as a dramatherapy client only. The following description explores this issue further.

Lady Gaga looked at the notice board, having already created a reflective table painting, and photographed it. Choosing **“Ten”**, she walked to the play telephone, picked it up and dialled a number. The same pattern emerged in the next session, where Lady Gaga recreated her badge on the table in yellow paint. She then made her pretend phone call, and returned to clean the table after it had finished. All the phone calls Lady Gaga made were to her primary caregiver. She told them what she had been doing in the session, and how much she had enjoyed it: **“I’ve been painting with mushy hands. I had my picture taken”**, and reminded her caregiver: **“Don’t forget to bring my swimming costume with you.”** Before replacing the receiver, Lady Gaga commented that the session had been **“really, really, really, really fun”**.

In the next session Lady Gaga removed her co-researching badge, and replaced it in her tray before going to make her phone call. I understood her actions to be an indication that she wanted to take part in the pretend phone call activity, and have it witnessed by me, but did not want this included as part of the research data. Taking her lead, I removed my badge to indicate I had seen her communication. By removing my badge I ended my practitioner-researcher role, and returned to my practitioner role. Her actions show that she understood the choices she was making, and as a result her reflections were not recorded as data.

This example shows that making choices for Lady Gaga was also about choosing which conversations and reflections were shared out of the room, and which stayed in the room. I noted that her table paintings were mostly created as a co-researcher, whilst the majority of the verbal reflections were undertaken as a dramatherapy client and therefore excluded from the research data. In sharing her positive thoughts and describing her experiences to her primary caregiver, Lady Gaga was showing that she

experienced her co-researching actions as being worthwhile enough to relay to those closest to her.

### **6.11 Lady Gaga reviews her time as a co-researcher**

During Phase Three Lady Gaga reflected that she experienced the co-researching role as an opportunity to make new choices, which would be accepted without question. The case study has shown that many of these new choices involved her use of art materials, and particularly the use of paints. Lady Gaga said that being a co-researcher had allowed her to use paints more, and to talk about what she did with them. Painting self-portraits onto the table, and photographing the images, was an important choice for her that had personal meaning. She recalled: ***“When you put paint on your hands it’s really really squidgy, and you get to do hand prints on the table, or on a piece of paper then say why you did them.”*** Lady Gaga rubbed imaginary paint into her hands as she spoke about her experiences of table painting. She smiled as she recounted these tactile experiences, and remained focused on her memories of using paint.

Lady Gaga was expressing her voice through her use of paints, and experiencing positive feelings in understanding the freedom of her choice-making. This theme of self-expression through awareness and engagement with art materials is deepened further when recalling her focus during the initial session in Phase One. Here she was invited to record on paper something she had recently discovered. This was my way of introducing the concept of co-researching to each child, by likening it to finding out new things and commenting on their experiences. Making reference to a large pot of coloured felt tip pens, which were usually on the art table but had been moved to another table in the room, Lady Gaga recorded: ***“The pense. Haw cum’s the pense were ther. How cum the pense is tere.”*** [The pens. How comes the pens were there? How come the pens are there?].

This focus on art materials continued into Phase Three, when I asked Lady Gaga if she would like to throw anything away or leave anything behind from the experiences that she did not need, or did not like. Her reply was immediate and quick: ***“I don’t have nothing.”*** This was followed by a pause, after which she added: ***“Empty paints.”*** During the final review session she reflected that her use of art materials was the most significant part of being a co-researcher. When asked what she would remember about being a co-researcher she replied: ***“Painting.”*** She said she would remember

all her paintings, and was keen to take away **“our pictures”** to remember the co-researching experience by.

Whilst reviewing her time as a co-researcher, Lady Gaga said she would miss it, and recorded on paper that co-researching had given her a **“verry happy voseie”** [very happy voice]. Lady Gaga said she wanted to incorporate all of the elements from the study into her ongoing sessions. She continued expressing herself with paints, taking photographs, and making imaginary phone calls to her primary caregiver long after the study had concluded.

Lady Gaga’s final two messages, posted in the research box, revealed both her sadness of the loss of the co-researching role and her acknowledgement and possible acceptance of it. I wondered whether no longer having an outside audience had changed her engagement with these methods, notwithstanding their continued use. These thoughts became themes in the ongoing dramatherapy process as she explored being seen and heard by significant people in life. Lady Gaga’s reflections on missing the co-researching time led to important insights over the term of this ongoing process, and are returned to in the next section.

#### **6.12 Lady Gaga returns to the dramatherapy room two years later**

By the time Lady Gaga’s weekly dramatherapy sessions had ended, the long summer break was approaching, which would signal the end of her primary school career. She walked past the room one day and by chance the door was open so she knocked and came in. She walked around a little, and remarked that everything looked small. She was keen to locate the resources that she had often engaged with as a client and as a co-researcher. These included the blowing bubbles, the height-measuring chart and the **“cushion that hugs you”** (a fabric cushion with arms and hands). She asked: **“Are there any co-researchers now?”** I told her there were not. She nodded. **“My self-portrait is on my wall at home.”** She paused before adding: **“I liked coming here.”** I smiled. Lady Gaga walked to the door. She looked around the room for a few moments and waved her hand. She said: **“Bye”**, and left the room. Being a co-researcher had been important for Lady Gaga, and I think she wanted to take a final look at the room to remember it for herself, for me to remember her, and also to let me know that she would remember her time in the room with me, and possibly her time as a co-researcher, as she moved on to secondary school.

### **6.13 Practitioner-researcher analysis of the key findings for Lady Gaga**

In this section I will draw together the key findings that have been presented in Lady Gaga's case study. These findings show how being a co-researcher was empowering and insightful for her, and how it enabled her to express her voice as a co-researcher.

Lady Gaga's case study reveals the ways in which she interpreted the co-researching role so that she understood it, and so that she could express herself in empowered ways. This is seen initially through her choice of pseudonym, and also in the way she revealed her co-researching choices through painted badges, and in her decisions to create a series of self-portrait images. Through her actions Lady Gaga revealed that she was aware that the choices were hers to make entirely by herself, and in her own time. She also appeared to understand that she could change her mind, or decline to make choices if she wished. This is evidenced by her choice not to co-research in one session, and by ending her co-researching time with a few minutes to spare in order to undertake a further reflection that was not included as data. This self-knowledge brought with it confidence for Lady Gaga, and was reflected in the way she recalled making her decision as being enjoyable and fun.

Having a range of choices led Lady Gaga to develop new ways of engaging with familiar creative processes of self-expression. These new experiences were notable in her transition from paper to tabletop as the canvas for creating her table paintings. Prior to the study she had chosen paper and brushes when painting, which may have felt restrictive. Lady Gaga reflected that having a camera to photograph her images had liberated her actions onto the tabletops, and had supported her use of hands instead of paintbrushes. Her engagement with this tactile process brought pleasure that she was in control of.

Controlling her physical activities as a co-researcher was of therapeutic benefit to Lady Gaga. This included the way she spread the paint on the tabletop canvas. In doing so she was experiencing being in control of boundaries relating to her body, and being in control of her choices, both of which had been unavailable to her at other points in her life. Her use of single words and short phrases which she had identified as having positive intent, and the decisions she made about photographing and cleaning away her painted images, supports this sense of enjoyment and empowerment. Drawing on my practitioner knowledge of Lady Gaga I could see how these experiences were

important for her, and that in entering into these processes she was making unconscious connections about other areas of her life, which appeared restorative.

Lady Gaga explored and expressed her feelings and thoughts simultaneously via her body language and her artwork. She said that the co-researching role had enabled her to talk about what she had done in her sessions, and that she enjoyed talking and explaining her choices. Her reflections included creating different self-portrait images as her response to the dramatherapy sessions. I suggest that these images were her primary means of reflection and expression about how she felt and experienced herself at those times. So too were the single words and short phrases of narration that she spoke and sung whilst creating her images. She was showing her feelings through her use of words such as **“squidgy”, “mushy” or “gooey”**. The use of these words has already been established as representing one way she expressed her enjoyment of the tactile application of paint.

Lady Gaga was revealing parts of herself through the documents she was creating and the ways in which she was recording her image-making. For example, she noted how she might paint the images differently if given the opportunity to do them again, and spoke about the different coloured paints she might choose. She also expressed her enjoyment of seeing signs of growth such as having her height measured against the wall, and reviewing the changes to her signature and handwriting (see Chapter Five, section 5.5.2, regarding changes to signatures). Drawing attention to changes enabled her to reflect on the signs of maturation she was noticing in herself.

Making choices about creating her images was also a significant way in which Lady Gaga communicated how she felt about herself. These choices included the ways she captured her paintings. Sometimes she photographed the images herself, other times she instructed me to be the photographer, with her sitting or standing alongside her paintings. Lady Gaga’s understanding of what she wanted to share as a co-researcher and what she wanted to keep confidential as a dramatherapy client can be seen in the way she revisited the assenting process. In some instances she co-researched until the final minute or two of the weekly time, making sure she had those minutes to choose a further research method and keep the content within the confidentiality of the dramatherapy session. I have noted earlier that these reflections were usually imaginary phone calls to the adult she considered closest to her. Alongside her

awareness of what to communicate, Lady Gaga also had an awareness of how she wanted to be seen and heard, and by whom.

Lady Gaga offered many of her reflections through the eyes of her pseudonym, which she said was a very good name to have. I am reminded of the pop artist Lady Gaga, and of her confident persona, use of bold visual imagery and unconventional costume and set designs. Choosing Lady Gaga as her pseudonym may have served to remind this child of positive feelings through her knowledge of the pop star. This could suggest that the co-researching role enabled her to review her image-making from a positive stance, and developed her confidence and self-awareness of the parts of herself she also loved. I do not know what qualities the child Lady Gaga might have admired in the adult pop singer as she did not offer any direct commentary. Originality, creativity and musicality were among the attributes cited in global media about her at that time; I suggest that Lady Gaga's use of the co-researching role to create new ways of expressing herself could be seen in relation to these popular opinions.

Lady Gaga's anticipation of the end of the research is further evidence of her awareness of it and of herself within it. Her research box messages and verbal reflections during Phase Three communicate her feelings of sadness, and possibly her acceptance of the ending. As I have shown, these expressions led her to discover ways of integrating elements of the research into her ongoing dramatherapy sessions. Her reflections about wanting to research again in the future strengthen the view that being a co-researcher had been positive and meaningful to her. She said she missed the researching over the months that followed, and remembered it with clarity two years later. Being a co-researcher enabled Lady Gaga to express her voice in her own creative language; my practitioner knowledge led me to believe that her expressions were important to her wellbeing and her sense of self, and were of therapeutic benefit to her as a co-researcher.

As the co-researching experience drew to a close, Lady Gaga once again voiced her sadness that it was ending. She also expressed her awareness of the future choices that were available to her. This can be seen in the comments she made about looking forward to taking home her photographs and images, and storing them in her bedroom where she could choose who to share them with. As the research ended, Lady Gaga gave clear and empowered reflections about her capacity to make choices, and to be heard and listened to as a result of making them.

Lady Gaga's case study has shown how she engaged as a co-researcher and how she considered the role important. She reflected that being a co-researcher was fun, that it had enabled her to express herself through table paintings, which she loved, and had given her the opportunity to photograph her images or be photographed with them. Choosing her pseudonym was also important to her, and it became a role she adopted throughout the three phases of data collection as a means of communicating aspects of herself, which she did by leaving messages in the research box.

The choice of name, the co-researching role and Lady Gaga's understanding of the research audience, in addition to the freedom of self-expression, were factors that she reflected she would miss as the study came to an end. However, the opportunity to capture memories of her time as a co-researcher in the form of photographs, and the cartoon 'self-portrait' as a co-researcher, enabled Lady Gaga to share experiences with the significant people in her life, and to be reminded that she had been involved in something that made her feel confident and important – which is possibly the way she considered her famous namesake. The case study has reflected these themes and experiences and revealed the strength of Lady Gaga's voice, as well as the agency that was enabled through her choice-making and creative expressions.

## 6.14 Case study B: Rocksus

Figure 40: Rocksus's cartoon 'self-portrait'



When selecting photographs for his cartoon 'self-portrait', Rocksus chose images which depicted him as "a hero" whilst holding his "***favourite things***". He reflected that he "***looked strong***" in the photographs he had chosen, adding: "***I like seeing myself with my socks on***". Rocksus chose images which cast him in roles he had embodied in dramatherapy sessions and which he had sculpted as a co-researcher, whilst engaging with his favourite objects from the room – all of which appear in this cartoon illustration.

## 6.15 Finding out more about Rocksus as a co-researcher

Rocksus's co-researching journey is presented here, and reveals how he expressed his voice as a co-researcher through the choices he made. Rocksus joined the study partway through. Creating a case study for a child who attended only a few sessions might seem unusual; however, his co-researching journey and reflective responses had a richness and an intensity to them that made me feel they were important to study and share in this chapter.

Rocksus had been on the waiting list for the dramatherapy service for some months when the study began, following re-referral by the school's inclusion manager. Soon after, a space for weekly sessions became available, and with it the opportunity to invite Rocksus to attend a session where the research could be introduced. He gave an excited and loud **“yes!”** when I said: “I’d like to invite you to an extra session next week...”, before I’d even revealed the subject of the invitation. Once I spoke of the research, Rocksus repeated his affirmative answer with the same excitement. The immediacy and eagerness of his reply shows that he experienced the invitation as a positive event; it may also have revealed his feelings about his return to individual dramatherapy.

In each session Rocksus chose to reveal his co-researching voice through collecting and wearing large resources from the room at the start of each co-researching time. For example, during the initial assent-choosing session, after removing his shoes and placing them by the rocking chair he picked up a large body ball and balanced it on his head. Holding the ball with his right arm, he slowly sat in the rocking chair. He particularly enjoyed the large gramophone speaker to hide in, to speak through, or to place next to him whilst he co-researched. He referred to this speaker as **“the trumpet”**. He also expressed his experiences, on occasion, using a self-selected scale of happiness. He said: **“I am one in school. I am ten in dramatherapy, and I am TEN in dramatherapy co-researching.”** Rocksus seemed to welcome the opportunity to be a co-researcher and to make choices that were offered to him, such as choosing from the research methods, and choices of his own invention like the happiness measurement scale.

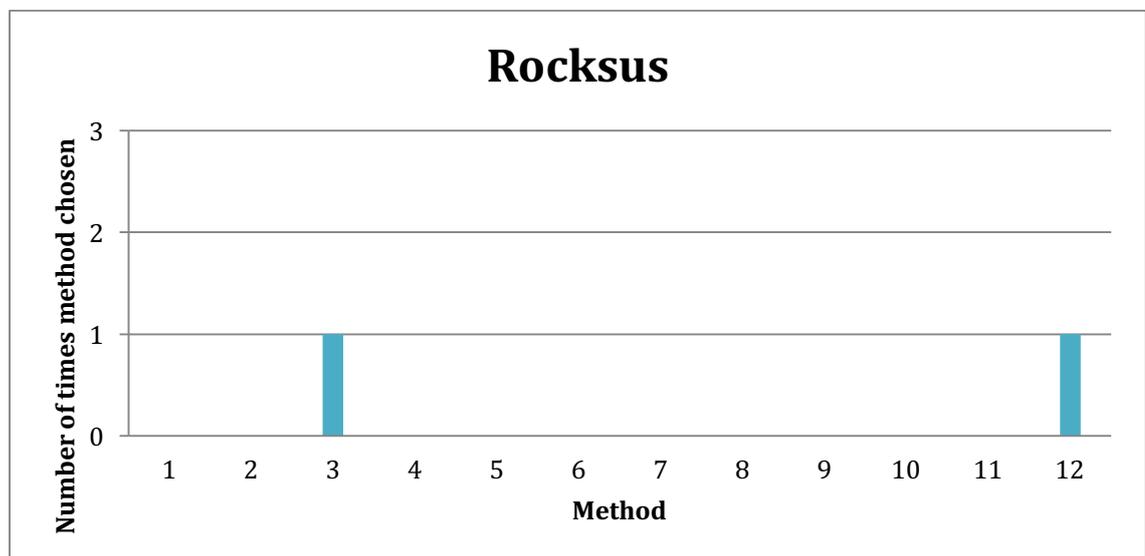
Also during the initial assent-choosing session, Rocksus was invited to identify a discovery he had recently made. He chose to reflect on the newness of the role as he said: **“I have discovered this work it is new and I haven’t done it before. I can have fun in school here and come and play games and have people to play with.”** This discovery reveals the enjoyment he experienced during this session, and the newness that he identified as being part of the co-researching experience. Rocksus reflected that his co-researching role was an opportunity to talk, saying: **“It’s a space where I can talk about my feelings that I did in the dramatherapy today.”** After his first time as a co-researcher he reflected: **“It’s fun being here today. I enjoyed the session and being a co-researcher.”**

As the case study will show, Rocksus chose to record his co-researching experiences using the video camera in each session. This provided him with valuable opportunities to re-experience himself through the playback of the tapes, where he offered rich reflections about his actions. The recordings also formed a valuable dataset for recalling the events and reviewing the footage with him. Rocksus's reflections and my analysis reveal how he chose to be the cameraman, director and subject of the footage he captured, and reveal what he found to be significant about these processes. For example, he spoke of enjoying the contact and control he had when composing photographs that involved me. He also reflected on the magical powers he could think of having in real life as a result of his story-making in dramatherapy, and videoed reflections of his stories as a co-researcher.

### 6.16 Summary of Rocksus's attendance and choices as a co-researcher

This section draws on the quantitative data to reveal Rocksus's choices in terms of session attendance and research method selections. The data contained in Figure 19 on page 130 shows that he attended four of the five sessions available to him in Phase Two. His absence was due to a school trip. Rocksus chose to co-research in three of the four sessions, and also attended all three of the reviewing sessions in Phase Three. Figure 41, below, shows his choice of research methods.

**Figure 41: Research methods chosen in co-researching sessions by Rocksus**



This data shows that Rocksus selected two research methods during the three sessions he chose to become a co-researcher, and chose research methods 3 (body sculpts), and 12 (reflecting with pictures and images). In addition he chose to capture

each co-researching opportunity on the video camera. In one session he nominated the video camera as his choice of method.

### **6.17 Key areas of significance for Rocksus**

In this section the main choices that Rocksus made to express his voice as a co-researcher are introduced; they are then unpacked in the subsequent sections (6.18–6.23). These choices of self-expression concern the way he felt listened-to as a co-researcher, and how he used it as an opportunity to talk about his feelings. They also concern the way he experienced his co-researching time as one of companionship, and reflected on it through the hero characters present in his story-making.

Rocksus's introductory journey shows how he felt he was having new experiences as a co-researcher, and that the newness was fun. He saw these experiences as an opportunity to learn about himself and as being different to his schoolwork. Rocksus said he was excited to try out the new experiences that the co-researching role brought, such as taking photographs of his story-making characters and looking at them.

Throughout his time as a co-researcher Rocksus made particular selections from the resources and objects, and reflected on his choices as the case study will show. He chose to accompany his co-researching activities with an ongoing spontaneous commentary, in which he articulated his feelings about choice-making. For example, he said in one session: *"It's fun doing this"*, and in another: *"I like playing."* *"Play"*, *"perfect"* and *"fun"* were words Rocksus used frequently to articulate that his feelings and experiences were of therapeutic benefit to him as a co-researcher. He enjoyed being seen and heard by me which seemed to enable self-expression and an awareness of agency for Rocksus. He described feeling as though he was in the company of *"friends"* amongst the toys and myself, and that we were listening to him.

Rocksus also chose to see and hear himself in the co-researching role. He did this most notably by videoing himself, taking Polaroid instant images and using his disposable camera. As well as capturing footage, he made specific choices about reviewing the footage in each session, and providing a further commentary about his experiences of filming and reviewing the footage. Rocksus laughed a lot when he reviewed footage, and made declarations including: *"Look at me!"* with excitement and self-interest.

Also significant for Rocksus was the way in which he referred to himself as a co-researcher. He chose three pseudonyms from characters he had embodied or created during his confidential dramatherapy time. He decided on his first name during the assent-choosing session. He spoke of each character's positive qualities when changing his name, and said they would *"help me"*. He chose not to articulate directly how they would help him, but I note that one of the name changes occurred after his story-making at the start of his co-researching time, and the other during one of the review sessions after recalling story-making memories. The names appeared to be connected to the positive feelings these characters had evoked in him. The narrative in 6.18 below unpacks these selections, and provides a commentary based on the ways in which he experienced them.

The final key area of significance for Rocksus concerns his engagement during the review sessions in Phase Three. Rocksus revealed that reviewing the work was *"a good bit"*, as it allowed him to see *"what I did"*. He also made it clear that it gave him an opportunity to come back to the room and remember his experiences. He said during the second review session that he could *"see all the stuff. I can remember stuff, like that stuff, and other stuff: I can't remember"*. Retracing his steps and re-engaging with familiar objects and the memories they evoked was as significant to him as seeing things he did not remember. The final theme to be explored is that of ending the co-researching review sessions, which signalled the end of Rocksus's formal ties with his primary school.

This section has introduced the main ways that Rocksus expressed his voice as a co-researcher, and reveals that he experienced fun, enjoyment and self-learning in the role. These themes are unpacked in further detail, and with supporting evidence, in the following sections.

### **6.18 Rocksus's use of pseudonyms**

Rocksus selected each of his three pseudonyms for a particular reason. During the initial assent-choosing session he chose *"Triple X"*, which he explained was because *"he is confident and got the bad Mexican guy"*. Triple X was the character he had embodied during the play break in this session. As 'Triple X' he wore a black fedora and held two toy guns in an 'x' shape across his chest. In his second co-researching session Rocksus said: *"I'm going to change my name."* "What to?" I asked. He

answered: **“Ramone.”** “What does Ramone mean to you?” I inquired. **“I know him. He’s someone I knew. He’s good. I like him.”**

Then, during the first review session, Rocksus said: **“I want to change my name to the one from the story coz it’s the same as in my game.”** He was referring to the character in the story he had reviewed on the video camera from the previous week’s session. He had used this name as the central character in a made-up story we had enacted. This character also appeared in a computer game he had spoken about playing at home.

Emma: “Which character’s name do you want to use?”

**Rocksus: “Rocksus.”**

Emma: “How do you spell that?”

**Rocksus: “Rock and sus.”**

Emma: “So it’s the character you played in the story?”

**Rocksus: “I’ve got this game and he goes on adventures and the adventures have bad guys... He has this key blade which opens forbidden doors that only he can open. He has magical powers that are unknown. I can co-research as Rocksus.”**

Rocksus said this character was **“strong and always won”**. Choosing this name led Rocksus to talk about his love of action films, in which **“pure good fights against pure evil”**, and where hero characters have **“huge powers and can do magical things”**.

Rocksus chose to adopt the persona of his pseudonyms when co-researching, and used costumes and props to achieve this. When reviewing his pseudonym choices he described them together as being **“perfect”**, and recounted the skills and powers he saw in each character. In taking on the character names he may have been consciously aware of maintaining the positive feelings associated with their story successes. I recorded in my observatory notes that each character he played had the power to rejuvenate after being defeated or injured within the story-making. Rocksus described how the characters could help him to find solutions to problems he faced as a co-researcher. This was most notable with the issue of time, and his desire to expand it to replay sessions and stay in the dramatherapy room longer. For example, one character had the power to freeze time, but was able to continue moving within a

frozen environment. As in the story-making, Rocksus froze time in his co-researching reflections, commenting that it would allow him to **“stay in the room forever”**.

Changing his name allowed Rocksus to express qualities, feelings and experiences that had featured during his story-making, and which he had considered meaningful and worthwhile. The names may also have represented the inner resources that he either felt he had or aspired to by inhabiting the characters. The characters were all indestructible ‘good guys’ who defeated ‘bad guys’; they solved problems and were always there in times of need. With my practitioner knowledge I noted how important the idea of playing with others and being seen was for Rocksus, and how it brought about changes in his body language such as increased eye contact and physical energy. Being the hero of the stories was clearly positive and enjoyable for him.

### **6.19 Rocksus’s choices of research methods**

This section shows what was revealed by Rocksus’s research method choices and the content of his reflections. He chose from the 12 methods in two sessions, and recorded his reflections using the video camera. In his final session he chose the video camera only, and described this as his choice of method for that session. With each method, he explored aspects of the story-making he had created and enacted in the time leading up to the co-researching part of each session.

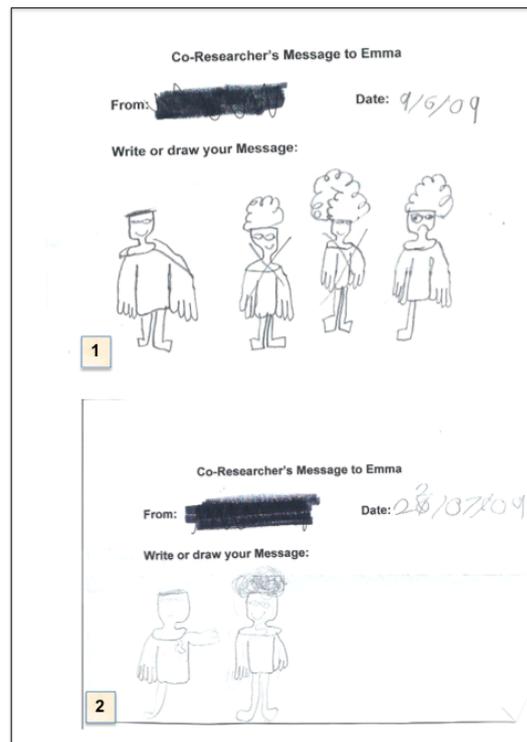
Rocksus chose to create a body sculpt (Method 3) based on a moment of conflict from his story in which the hero and the bad guy were face-to-face. Rocksus chose to name this sculpt: **“Evil or good: choice deciding.”** He chose to play all the parts, equipping himself with play resources and dressing-up clothes. Without speaking he moved around the room in slow motion, changing from the ‘bad guy’ to the ‘hero’, slurring his speech to represent the slow motion. He came to a pause in the main open space in the middle of the room and asked me to photograph him. He then told me to take on the hero character at the moment of triumph that he had depicted. He gave me the play resources and told me what to do, and moved me into place as he composed the photograph. He said in his familiar gentle voice: **“Keep still”**; **“Move to that side”**; **“Hold your arm out with the magic wand”**. He then photographed the image and said it was **“perfect”** (see Figure 42 below). I asked him what recreating and being in the image had meant to him and he said: **“I liked it. I like controlling stuff like... erm... doing that and putting the arms round the self”**. At this point Rocksus motioned moving his arms and starting to mould them into the sculpt shape.

**Figure 42: Rocksus directs Emma in a body sculpt which recreates a moment from his story**



In another session Rocksus asked me to help him draw a picture of the scene that he had been acting out that week. He called this image: ***“The sword fight at HQ”***, and took two attempts at drawing it on either side of a large piece of sugar paper. Two characters were depicted, representing a ‘good guy’ and a ‘bad guy’. Each had a speech bubble, with the bad guy saying: ***“You’re going down”*** and the good guy defiantly retorting: ***“I’ll never be defeated.”*** Rocksus finished the picture and without a moment’s breath folded it as small as he could, saying he was ***“taking it with me today”***. At the time I wondered whether he felt insecure about his image-making and wanted to take it away and not include it as data. However, it became clear the following week that he had taken the image away in order to draw a picture of what appeared to be the same characters, and posted it as a message in the research box. A few weeks later he posted another image of similar characters, which he was keen to talk about during his first review session (see Figure 43 below).

**Figure 43: Two images Rocksus posted in the research box**



His action of taking away the picture to base his subsequent messages on could suggest that the story he had enacted had been significant for him in some way, along with the artefacts he had generated. Maybe he wanted to create an image based on his first picture at his leisure, without the boundary of the session time. In the second message a rubbed-out figure is present which had been re-drawn. This could indicate that he had a firm idea of what he wanted to convey. These figures depicted the themes of good and evil that he returned to in each of his stories. Rocksus wanted to bring the messages into the session and explain his drawings. His explanations led him to revisit selected parts of his story-making; this involved the moments where the good guy overpowered the bad guy in each case that Rocksus had called “perfect”. He was expressing his voice through the metaphor of his story-making, and possibly showing that he felt heroic, and maybe successful in his co-researching role.

Rocksus chose not to co-research in one session, which was the third in the sequence of the four he attended. On his way to the session that day he had raised concerns about his transition to secondary school, and referred to a welcome day he was due to attend that week. In his session he created a story that appeared to echo the themes

he brought, and which reflected his vulnerability. He chose not to co-research possibly as a means of self-protection and privacy. In accordance with the research design, he was not asked to justify his choice. He did, however, choose to compose and direct a photograph that he asked me to take and include in the research file. Rocksus was aware that only he and I would ever see these photographs, and that he could take them home if he wanted to at the end of his active involvement. The photograph reflected his sensitivity that day. During the review session he said that the title of the image could be included in the study; he had titled the photograph “Me and doggie” (doggie was a large soft toy dog). Being in a vulnerable place led Rocksus to make the choice to keep his feelings private in the moment of the session, but on later reflection, and being in a different emotional place, it became apparent that he wanted an essence of that day to be reflected in his overall research journey.

## **6.20 Rocksus uses the research cameras**

In the remaining session he chose not to select from the 12 methods. He captured his reflections instead on the video camera and by taking photographs, which he said was “just perfect”. I have already established that he captured all his co-researching reflections on video camera and viewed them via playback before ending each session. Rocksus laughed as he reviewed his footage, and always seemed to enjoy the experience of seeing himself on film. His use of the word ‘perfect’ often accompanied his reviewing of footage, and seemed to encapsulate the essence of his enjoyment.

During this final session Rocksus mounted the camera on its tripod and pressed record. As he had spoken with enthusiasm and enjoyment about using the video camera on each occasion, I wondered privately if he had chosen it as the method in this session in order to explore it in more detail, and to be more hands-on with it.

This proved to be the case, as Rocksus secured the camera to his wrist with the Velcro safety strap (which had been demonstrated and explored during Phase One). He switched the camera to record and, playing the hero role, captured a recreation of his story-making from the hero’s point of view. In this story the hero Naruto defeated Sarstey who had stolen an electricity-making weather machine from the King of Askerban. Rocksus recreated the moment where Sarstey had turned the weather cold all over the world, and Naruto electrocuted him with his sword. The camera footage

depicts the fight at close quarters from the point of view of the hand holding the sword of the hero Naruto, with an imaginary Sarstey in the concluding scene.

After capturing the content of his reflection Rocksus was keen to replay the footage once again, and was genuinely impressed with his abstract cinematography, noting: “It looks cool.” I had been careful to select equipment for the study which could be easily used by all the children (see Chapter Four, section 4.11.3 for more details) and noted how this had empowered Rocksus to be the sole agent, or, to use a parallel cinematic term, the Auteur (in which the film and footage reflect the director’s creative vision) of his own film-making. This process made him feel confident and was entirely engaging for him as a co-researcher.

Alongside his use of the video camera, Rocksus took all 39 photo shots on his disposable camera, as well as a series of Polaroid instant images. Twelve of the photographs depicted him in an active hero pose with props and costumes; five of these images, he reflected, depicted him *“in battle”* with an imaginary opponent. He directed me to take 10 Polaroid images that showed him in a series of characters in addition to those mentioned below in section 6.21. These characters included a double-handed gunslinger wearing a hat; a red and green fly-eyed hero who could *“see everything”*, and a champion boxer ready for a world title bout. Rocksus gave a commentary whilst watching these images develop during their three-minute exposure times. For example, as the gunslinger he reflected that: *“I’d have got them sooner if I’d been in the story.”* He remained focused on the positive aspects of his story-making, and linked his image-making to the story themes of devising narratives with triumphant plots for the hero characters.

In the final session of Phase Two, Rocksus was invited to photograph anything that had been important to him. Along with the resources already mentioned, he took photographs of objects he had used during his story enactments. These included jewellery, head-crowns and costumes. He photographed the research method cartoons on the notice board; he also photographed the Polaroid images he had taken depicting himself in character roles. Capturing everything in the room appeared to be his intention. He would later reply: *“Everything”* when asked what he would remember of his co-researching experiences. Capturing it all was his primary concern towards the end of his co-researching time.

### 6.21 Rocksus reviews his co-researching photographs

Rocksus reflected on his images as he took them, and also when he reviewed them as a body of images during Phase Three. He made reference to all the characters played by both of us and captured in the photographs. He also commented on the areas of the room he had taken photographs of, and spoke about the play resources in the images (see Figure 44 below). He referred to these items as **“some favourite things”**. These images included swords, guns, wands, large toys and the giant gramophone speaker. He also photographed the puppets and toys he had used as a co-researcher, referring to them as his **“friends”**. When reviewing the series of images that depicted him along with his favourite object – the giant gramophone speaker – he said: **“This one looks very funny [he laughs]. The thing’s on my head!”** Rocksus enjoyed seeing himself and sharing these images with me. Companionship and collaboration were significant processes for him and he reflected on them directly (see Appendix 15, page 308 for further images featuring Rocksus and his choice-making with the gramophone speaker).

**Figure 44: Rocksus identifies his favourite resources**



When reviewing the images he had asked me to take of him as the central hero characters of his stories, he offered comments and titles for them such as: **“This looks like I’m a Samurai person.”** On another image of him holding toy guns and pointing them towards the ceiling, he commented: **“This one looks like – yeah – I’m shooting a gun into the air and I’ve got bullets.”** On another image where he is holding a pose with an imaginary sword facing towards the camera, he noted: **“This one looks like I’m fighting and I’m very angry and stuff.”** Rocksus chose three images for his cartoon self-portrait that depicted him in hero character roles. When the self-portrait was returned during the second of the three review sessions he looked delighted to

receive it; he enjoyed seeing himself in the images and commented that it was ***“me but not me. I like it”***.

## **6.22 Rocksus reviews his time as a co-researcher**

Rocksus recorded in writing that being a co-researcher had been meaningful ***“because you were acherlee lesning”*** [actually listening]. Listening had made him feel good and had been of significant therapeutic benefit to him as a co-researcher. He reflected on his feelings about the role and said: ***“Because it makes you feel like you’re learning something – not just school work. Learning to be something that you are not, but that you can be.”*** He described researching as ***“learning more about me”***, and ***“having fun with the person and just being the person as well”***.

Throughout the three review sessions Rocksus’s experiences of co-researching were very obvious as he displayed in-depth detailed recollections of his story-making. He spoke in these sessions of wanting to return to the room to ***“do more thinking”***, and to have ***“more sword fights”***. He spoke more widely about the dramatherapy sessions enabling him to ***“be something what I couldn’t be in real life, what I could here”***, and identified ***“hope for the future”*** for himself. His responses show that he engaged with the co-researching role as a time to reflect on the themes that had emerged in his ongoing therapeutic process, and to talk about what they had meant to him and what they had enabled him to do.

In the second review session we explored which artefacts he wanted to keep and which he wanted to leave behind. I was surprised to learn that he did not want a copy of his video footage (which I would have transferred to DVD had he expressed a wish to keep it). Rocksus said: ***“I love my square pictures”*** (the Polaroid instant images), which depicted him holding up various objects and play resources such as the gramophone speaker, Reggie the Research Frog, a sword and shield, and other puppets. He commented that the images ***“tell me everything I need to remember. Hermit the frog for remember the camera and doing the pictures, and the turtle, and the trumpet”***. Capturing his image had been important and had enabled him to express his voice and reflect on it by reviewing his video footage and photographs.

At the end of every session throughout the phases of data collection Rocksus said he did not want to leave. He wanted to ***“stay longer”***. I have shown how he invested in photographing as much as he could so that he could remember. I asked Rocksus what

it had been like to be a co-researcher and he gave me a big thumbs-up sign. In the final review session he reached into the brown wicker research basket where the shared cameras were stored, and said as he picked up the video camera: ***“It’s got a bit of dust because we haven’t used it for a long while.”*** Rocksus was commenting on the time that had passed since he last used the camera, as well as showing that it was an important part of him and his voice. We wrapped the camera in a cloth together, and I encouraged him to think about future times when he might have the chance to appear on video or film again.

### **6.23 Rocksus de-roles his pseudonyms and says goodbye**

Rocksus had de-rolled his pseudonyms at the end of each session in Phase Two because he had inhabited the names as story characters. De-rolling at the very close of each session allowed us to acknowledge the need for him to keep himself safe and remain empowered in his daily life. To frame the de-rolling activity each week I invited Rocksus to think about which of the characters’ qualities and skills he would like to take away, and which he would like to leave behind. I had suggested placing emphasis on leaving the external hero attributes behind (the props) and taking the inner resources with him (the feelings and positive thoughts). At the end of the final review session I asked Rocksus the same question, and made reference to all three pseudonyms. He spoke of wanting to take away skills that included stopping time and saving people with magical powers, and reflected that he did not want to leave anything behind.

The final review session also meant it was his last official time of returning to his primary school, now that he was in secondary school. There was a reluctance to end the session, and for the first time he did not put his shoes on until he had left the room. He commented that being a co-researcher had enabled him to be “more confident”, and would help him ***“learn to have more fun”***. He spoke of being sad that it was time to end the co-researching opportunity, and I wondered aloud if he had any concerns about future opportunities to play hero characters. Rocksus listened but did not offer an answer.

He went around the room saying goodbye to puppets, props and play resources and taking in the room as a whole. He had already taken home his photographs and his co-researching folder, which he said he had looked through a few times. He said he kept the folder ***“somewhere safe”***. As he prepared to leave the room I asked him

what experience he was taking away this final time, to which he replied: ***“being the hero”***.

#### **6.24 Practitioner-researcher analysis of the key findings for Rocksus**

In this section I draw together the key findings that have been presented for Rocksus. These findings reveal how he felt heard as a co-researcher; how he identified the role as an opportunity to talk about his feelings and to reflect on what he was learning from the research opportunity, often in the role of the hero. The content of his reflections shows that he chose to recreate aspects of his dramatherapy process by focusing on the key moments in stories. Often these key moments involved the evil or bad characters being defeated by Rocksus in the role of hero; in each case the story-making was concluded with good triumphing over evil.

The case study has also shown how Rocksus experienced seeing himself by reviewing the video footage he captured as significant. When looking at himself and his actions, Rocksus often laughed and drew my attention to his enactments, sharing his experiences with me. A sense of companionship and collaboration had emerged as an important part of the co-researching experience. I noted how Rocksus had represented us both in his reflections of methods (the sculpt and the drawing). Sharing his thoughts and sharing his play process could have evoked feelings of nurture and happiness for him, which may have been of great therapeutic benefit. Rocksus reflected that being a co-researcher made him feel as though he had friends and could play and learn about himself. Having friends, belonging and being heard, were areas of significance he also identified during his reviewing of the co-researching process in Phase Three.

I noted how much detail Rocksus remembered about his co-researching experiences. This was demonstrated during his final review session, which was nine months after the main sessions had ended. He remembered where he had sat, and what he had said at various points. His sense of happiness was evident in his physical presentation both at the time of the sessions and through his recollections during Phase Three. He had taken photographs in order to remember his experiences, but my sense was that he remembered irrespective of the images he had captured. The ease and flow with which he recalled wearing the gramophone speaker (***“the trumpet”***), choosing props and hero costumes, composing photographs and re-enacting moments of significance from sessions supports this idea.

During Phase Three Rocksus identified how being a hero and having companionship within his role-playing had been significant, and had allowed him to express himself and also to reflect on what the role-taking had meant to him. When de-roling the characters he was invited to think of what needed to be taken away with him from individual sessions. I had a sense that he had become aware of some feelings and skills the characters had brought, such as success and positive attention from others. Rocksus made choices about photographing himself in a range of roles, and about reviewing his images and sharing them with me. He also reflected on the characters that had been his pseudonyms, which he said had been important for him.

Though Rocksus had transitioned to secondary school at the end of the first review session of Phase Three, the case study has shown that the opportunity to return and re-engage with the co-researching experience was important to him. Despite the brevity of his engagement in the study as a whole, the depth of his understanding and the significance of his co-researching choice-making is clear from the analytical process and presentation of evidence.

This case study has shown that being in the dramatherapy room was of great importance to Rocksus, and being a co-researcher equally so. It has also shown that Rocksus interpreted the co-researching role as a place where he could feel like a hero, and that he made new choices which enabled him to express his voice, to experience each moment as special, and to feel empowered that each moment was being heard.

Reflecting as a co-researcher, Rocksus spoke of dramatherapy being a place where he could play and find someone to play with, and try out different ideas about himself through the roles of his pseudonyms and his story-making. He reflected that being a co-researcher has enabled him to choose names and to see himself in photographs which had made him laugh and which he had enjoyed. Although he did not want to leave as the co-researching and study drew to a close, Rocksus nevertheless spoke of feeling good about himself as well as feeling sad, and he took away photographs to remember a time he made clear he would never forget.

## 6.25 Case study C: Rosie

Figure 45: Rosie's cartoon 'self-portrait'



For his cartoon 'self-portrait' Rosie selected photographs which he said showed **“one of me [...] one of you, and things that we played with”**. In the illustration Rosie is dressed as a character he described as **“the hero for the family,”** and is standing next to the image of people figures in the doll's house he had cast as his own family. He chose to wear various facemasks on a number of occasions as a co-researcher. He often wore masks that had featured in his dramatherapy sessions as he took on character roles or expressed his feelings. Rosie had asked me to wear the mask on my face for a photograph so he could see what it might look like if he was wearing it. Together, these images represented positive experiences to Rosie as a co-researcher. “That's cool,” he remarked when he saw his cartoon illustration.

## 6.26 Finding out more about Rosie as a co-researcher

Rosie's case study reveals the significance of his co-researching journey and shows how he expressed his voice through his selections and understanding of the choices available to him. This section aims to introduce Rosie and does so through a description of the theme of anger, which was the lens through which

he saw himself as the research started. Anger had become a large part of his life at that time; the following description shows a glimpse of the transformation that occurred through the co-researching process.

Rosie had been engaged in weekly individual dramatherapy sessions for just over two years and had been exploring the theme of anger for some months prior to the study commencing. He had revealed that he saw himself as angry, but had spoken of not being able to understand his anger. As a practitioner I thought he appeared stuck and confused in his anger. He was considered to be angry by school staff and other people in his life, and this knowledge was problematic for him. Rosie spoke of the importance for him to be seen as happy and calm – and not angry – by the people he identified as being close to him. These people included members of his family and his class teacher.

During the initial assent-choosing session I spoke of his anonymity being a means of protecting his identity within the research process. As I did so Rosie scowled, and said in a loud, sharp voice: *“Everyone knows me.”* His response revealed an important insight into his poor self-image, and his belief that he could not escape his angry reputation. However, throughout his co-researching choices Rosie noted for himself a transformation in the way he engaged with the story around his anger, and what he could do about it. His choices led him to understand their impact on his sense of self and his aspirations, and he said they brought about the happiness and calmness that he spoke of wanting others to see in him. When reviewing his time as a co-researcher, Rosie said that it had allowed him to *“not be scared and say what you want to say”*.

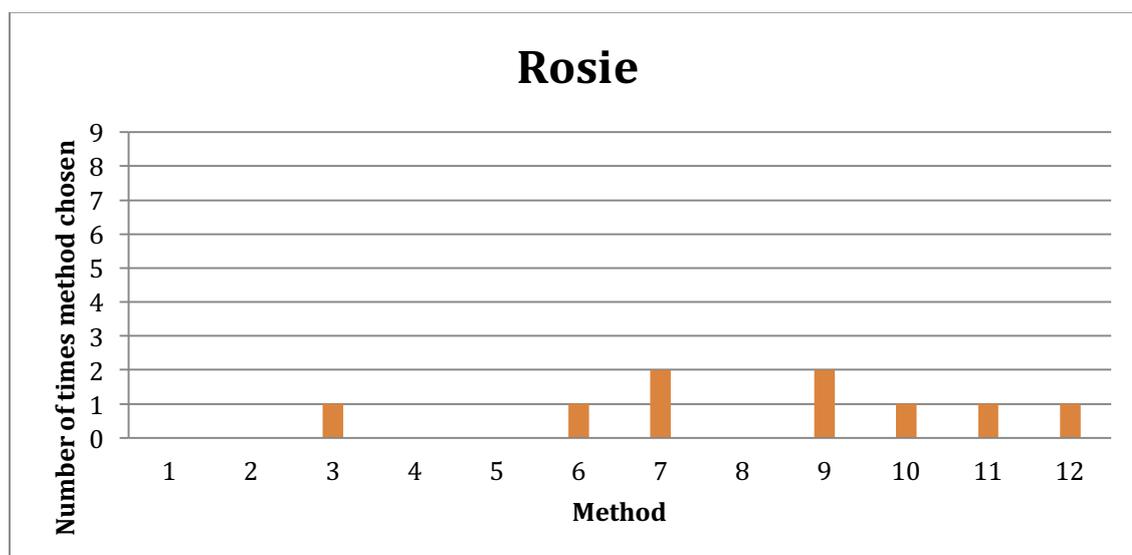
The choices Rosie made as a co-researcher included storing a range of items in his co-researching tray for *“safe-keeping”*. These items included shapes and objects he had made out of play-doh; a bean bag; a large blue torch and a selection of miniature people-figures. *“I love the torch”*, he said, and revealed that it was his favourite item and an important part of making his weekly decision, as it marked the start and end of the 15 minutes of co-researching time. Rosie would switch it on when making his decision, and off again at the end of each session. This illuminative metaphor guides this case study, which shows how Rosie reflected on how he experienced being a co-researcher during Phase Three.

### 6.27 Summary of Rosie's attendance and choices as a co-researcher

This section draws on the quantitative data to reveal Rosie's choices of session attendance and his selection of research methods which are shown in Figure 46 below.

Rosie attended nine of the 10 sessions in Phase Two, and chose to co-research in all of them. His absence was as a result of his compulsory involvement in a school production, which on later reflection he revealed he would have preferred to miss in favour of his dramatherapy session that day.

**Figure 46: Research methods chosen in co-researching sessions by Rosie**



The data reveals that Rosie chose seven methods during the nine sessions he attended. He chose more than one method on some occasions, and also chose to use the video camera as a method on another. He selected Method 3 (body sculpts); Method 6 (reflecting with sentence prompt cards); Method 10 (make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing); Method 11 (retracing your steps) and Method 12 (reflecting with pictures and images). Each of these he selected once. He selected Method 7 (saying anything you want to) and Method 9 (expressing and reflecting with puppets) on two occasions each.

### 6.28 Key areas of significance for Rosie

In this section the main choices Rosie made to express his voice as a co-researcher are introduced; they are then unpacked in the subsequent sections (6.29–6.36). These choices of self-expression concern the way Rosie saw the co-researching opportunity as a chance to inhabit different qualities and play with being seen in a more favourable

light by others. His choice-making also shows that being a co-researcher was seen as important for Rosie in the development of his self-esteem, which enabled his empowerment and the ability to find his voice.

Rosie's engagement with choice-making was clear from the start. He monitored the clock each week to remain aware of when the co-researching decision was approaching, and chose to co-research in each session. He selected from the available research methods a different way of capturing his co-researching experiences in almost every session. Rosie reflected that having a range of choices was "**heaven**", and included his particular selections about which items to store in his co-researching tray in this description.

His engagement with the co-researching role created a greater reflexivity in him, which transformed the way he perceived himself. This transformation began with the invitation to join the study, and continued when he was invited to choose a pseudonym later in the assent-choosing session. Realising that he could choose any name he wanted enabled him to move into a place of increased possibility and creativity. I have shown in Chapter Five (section 5.5.1) how significant it was for Rosie to choose a girl's name in order to inhabit a role he believed would enable other people to see him more favourably.

Rosie identified that being seen by others in a positive way was a key theme during his time as a co-researcher, and showed his awareness of a research audience through his commentary during his co-researching reflections. As the case study shows, when Rosie was in the role of co-researcher he frequently made reference to other people, speaking of how they might perceive him if they were watching his choice-making activities. Exploring this narrative and the insights he gained may have liberated him from being held within his anger, as he inhabited a more positive role that was free from anger.

When reviewing the co-researching role Rosie wrote down a hope for the future: "***I will look afgter my frends and family***" [I will look after my friends and family]. Rosie framed many of his reflections within the context of his family and made it clear they were of major importance to him. His family were often the main area of concern during his dramatherapy session, but they were also an area of celebration. He reflected that he understood his choices better if he related them to what his siblings

and cousins might do in his situation. Rosie also made choices about what to share about his experiences in the sessions with his family once he got home, and took photographs so he would be able to explain his co-researching time to them when he took the photographs home during Phase Three. Rosie explicitly spoke of his pride, commitment and love for his family in the co-researching role, and communicated his deep sense of responsibility towards protecting and providing for them. Within his dramatherapy process he was more focused on exploring school-based issues, which often contained conflict and anger.

Another area of significance for Rosie was his use of verbal reflections: he frequently chose to talk about what he was discovering about himself through the co-researching role. He did this in a number of ways, including narrating his experiences of the methods as he encountered them on a session-by-session basis. He also offered unprompted comments towards the end of individual sessions about how he had experienced his co-researching time. For example, in the fourth session he said: *“I love coming here”*, and in the eighth: *“Today’s been cool.”*

This section has introduced the main ways in which Rosie expressed his voice as a co-researcher, and how he saw himself in the role in relation to his family. These themes are unpacked in the more detail in the following sections.

### **6.29 Assent-choosing with Rosie**

Rosie was sitting in the rocking chair and sucking his thumb at the start of the initial assent-choosing session. In previous dramatherapy sessions I had noticed this self-comforting activity when he was listening to me or had spoken of being anxious. Rosie looked at me wide-eyed as I explained the study to him, and slowly removed his thumb from his mouth and began to smile. He sat still, listening intently, and asked: *“I’m being invited?”* His question was posed in a way that suggested he was surprised at this invitation, and was seeking confirmation that it was genuine. My sense was that Rosie rarely felt he was invited to participate in positive activities in school. As a practitioner I knew this was also the case outside of school. Although he did not articulate it directly, his non-verbal communication during this session suggested that he sought some reassurance.

Rosie was smiling as he gave his full engagement to the choice-making activities in this session (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.2 for findings about each child’s responses

to the assenting choice). One choice Rosie made related to his entitlement to withdraw from the study without having to say why, which was explained to him whilst looking at the assenting form (see Appendix 6 (A), page 284). Rosie initially declined to tick the box agreeing to this entitlement; when asked if he wanted to say why, he replied, seemingly disgruntled: *“I’d like to tell why [I would withdraw]”*. His paperwork was amended to reflect this change.

Rosie appeared positive and excited as he answered *“yes”* when asked for his decision about joining the study. Having moved to the front of his chair he leaned forward and appeared keen to learn more, and to look through the paperwork. He was also keen to provide his signature on the assent form. This presentation was markedly different to his ongoing dramatherapy sessions, where he frequently presented as angry, hopeless, disengaged or lacking in energy. The co-researching role seemed to open up a new and more positive way of relating for him.

### **6.30 Sustaining assent with Rosie**

During the 10 consecutive sessions of data collection in Phase Two, Rosie’s growing awareness, and his exploration of what he saw to be the choices available to him, may have increased along with his understanding of them. Rosie described making his choice as: *“It means you either do it or you don’t.”*

Rosie assigned himself the role of *“timekeeper”* in relation to his co-researching role. During each dramatherapy session he either watched the clock or asked me whether it was time to make his decision. He would state: *“It’s time now!”* and go to his co-researching tray, which was away from my gaze. He clearly enjoyed the experience of making his decision without being seen. He also enjoyed having his actions and his choices accepted without question. I would hear noises while Rosie either took items out of his co-researcher tray or collected more items from around the room. Sometimes he hid items under cushions and furniture, and then returned to them as a co-researcher (items such as magic wands, balls and play-doh). He also hid his co-researching badge, and on occasion hid himself then beckoned me to find him in the role of seeker. Rosie’s choice of time-keeping suggests that he saw the co-researching decision as important, and may have indicated his desire for the time to arrive to make his choice. I have established earlier in this case study that he chose to co-research in all the sessions he attended. What this description suggests is that he enjoyed the process of choice-making and the opportunity to co-research.

In one session, whilst at his tray, he called out: ***“Emma come here. I have something to show you.”*** When I stood up from the chair and turned around, Rosie was nowhere to be seen. After scanning the room for a few seconds I noticed his legs and feet curled up at the base of the large gramophone speaker, which was lying on its side next to an array of soft toys, bean bags and sleeping bags. Rosie was in the speaker, shining his torch into it. He looked towards me, then motioned that I should get onto the floor, which I did. He said excitedly: ***“Look what I’ve discovered!”*** Lying next to him and looking into the gramophone speaker I saw the beam of the blue torch illuminating his co-researcher’s badge. “So, we are co-researching today”, I said, and Rosie nodded repeatedly.

Having the freedom to move around the room like this and to have an awareness of new choices that were available as a co-researcher brought a more relaxed quality to Rosie’s physical presentation, and a sense of enjoyment of the extra space he was given. This notion of extra space included his own co-researcher tray and making choices away from my gaze. I also note that this space came with trust and the responsibility to self-regulate his choices and actions, which he did with self-respect and creativity. I noted that Rosie’s self-assigned ‘timekeeper’ role was consigned to the start and not the end of the 15 minutes, despite his choice of wanting to mark the end of sessions by turning off the blue torch. This was often with prompting from me. Without exception, Rosie was engaged in his co-researching time and did not seem to want it to come to an end. However, with me as timekeeper, and with prompting, he was able to respond healthily to the ending of sessions.

An example of this prompting can be seen in the sixth session, where Rosie had chosen to reflect on his dramatherapy experience using Method 9 (expressing and reflecting with puppets). Rosie had cast us both as outer space planetary explorers, along with some of the puppets. He enacted a puppet conversation in which he talked about the family snap game and the doll’s house play that had been important to him in his session that day. Rosie reflected that his little brother would love the game, and that he wished they had a big room to play in like the ones in the doll’s house. Rosie spoke of our being in outer space, and of the different foods that creatures in space eat. As the time to bring his reflections to an end approached, he remained engaged in the process. As a means of holding the boundaries and letting him know that it was time to end, I spoke in the role of the explorer and said: *“We don’t have much air left in*

*our special suits, or much time left on the planet before we need to get back to Earth.”* This not only provided Rosie with a series of choices about the outcome of the imaginative moment, but also prompted him to make a decision for himself about how to end his reflection. Once back on Earth he switched off the blue torch and, preparing to leave the room, returned his badge along with other items to his co-researching tray. On more than one occasion Rosie asked me to **“make sure no one sees in my tray”**. As he left the room he said: **“Will it [the room] lock?”** I showed him my key; sometimes he chose to lock it himself, other times he would point to the lock, inferring that I should lock it. Keeping his co-researching belongings safe and away from other people was important for Rosie. His actions are an indication of the importance he placed on keeping his co-researching experiences safe between sessions, and, I suggest, also keeping himself safe and keeping the room safe.

### **6.31 Rosie’s choices of research methods: voicing concerns**

Rosie chose widely from the research methods and spoke about liking his choices. He chose two of the methods twice each (Method 7: say anything you want to, and Method 9: expressing and reflecting with puppets). I noted that five of his method selections provided him with an opportunity to talk about his experiences and reflections. He reflected that he liked the cartoon and cue card for Method 7 (say anything you want to) because **“it has the writing on that says ‘say whatever you like’; so I can say anything and I like that”**. This indicates that being able to offer any reflection, and having it accepted, was explicitly noted by Rosie as enabling his voice.

When saying what he wanted to, Rosie chose to reflect on the themes that he saw arising from his dramatherapy process. These centred on issues at home, where Rosie experienced many challenges. He talked about how these concerns troubled him, and that he saw no helpful solution to them. Sometimes the concerns he shared had been evoked by his story-making and object-play, which led him to wonder about the wellbeing of a family member, or another situation he had experienced out of school. Rosie articulated his desire to be heard and seen by members of his family through his verbal reflections. For example, he started some reflections by making reference to his own playful processes, saying: **“My brother would love to have done that.”** Framing reflections in this way enabled him to go on to raise concerns. Within these concerns I sensed an awareness in Rosie that, for many reasons, being heard and seen by family was not always easy or possible. Having the freedom to understand that what he said would be accepted may have enabled Rosie to articulate

his distressing thoughts and experiences. This acceptance could have been a key factor in enabling him to express his voice through his co-researching disclosures and reflections.

Rosie returned to the Method 7 cue card almost every week during Phase Two, reading it out loud: **“Say whatever you like.”** I recorded in my research notes that he offered verbal reflections with a ‘spontaneous and uninterrupted rhythm’. I was noting how his journey was unencumbered by self-consciousness or insecurity. I wondered if he was both reminding himself that he really could say whatever he liked, and also experiencing relief because this invitation was a means of expressing concerns and unburdening himself.

### **6.32 Rosie’s choices of research methods: being reflexive**

Rosie reflected directly on his experiences and feelings about being a co-researcher, and commented on more than one occasion that it had made him feel **“like a smart kid”**. Feeling like a ‘smart kid’ was a hugely positive experience for him. He created a costume for this smart kid (which included a pair of large green-rimmed fly-eye novelty glasses), and asked me to photograph him standing tall and smiling. When Rosie reflected on the subsequent photograph he laughed and smiled, declaring: **“That’s cool. I’m the smart kid.”** Rosie’s response suggests that he enjoyed looking at this image he had created of himself, that it made him feel good. He may have felt a sense of achievement that he was doing important things. This theme is returned to in section 6.35, below, as Rosie’s review of his co-researching role is described.

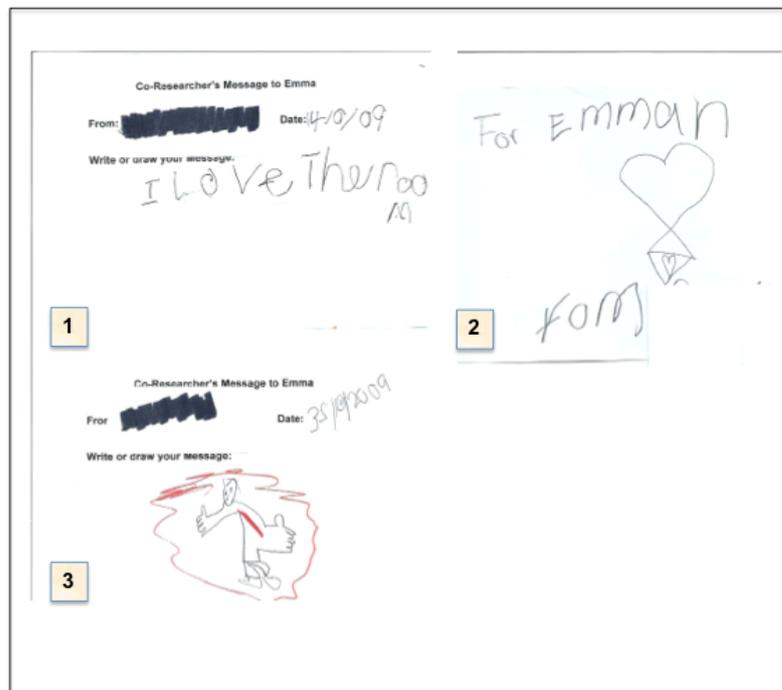
Rosie also chose to capture video footage of himself on a few occasions. In one session he selected this as the research method. Picking the video camera out of the research basket, he said: **“I’m using this thing to say it to today.”** Rosie placed the video camera onto the tripod’s hot shoe and switched it to record. He stood in front of the lens and said to camera: **“Today we are going to do something really great.”** He then detached the camera from the tripod and placed it in the gramophone speaker, where the torch beam was illuminating his badge. He filmed this for a few minutes and spoke about his choice of activity, saying: **“I told you I was smart. I love coming to this room.”**

When using the camera, Rosie arranged the small figures from the doll’s house so they could watch him choose his methods and make his co-researching reflections. He

addressed the figures directly through his play. On one occasion, for example, he looked into the doll's house and said: **"Hi guys – what are you up to?"** Once the camera had stopped filming, he gave some of the figures names and tasks to do in the doll's house. For example, he said: **"You go to your room, Jeremy. And you all go and look after him."** Rosie said that the family figures were his favourite objects. I noted he created family narratives, which were oppositional to those he talked about experiencing in his own family. I wondered about the restorative properties of his arranging the family figures so that they watched him co-researching; this activity may have represented his unconscious calling for his own family to see and hear his choice-making and his positive engagement.

Rosie also commented reflexively in the content of the three messages he posted in the research box during Phase Two. In the first message, using a mixture of pencil and felt tip, he depicted a figure with a thumbs-up hand gesture and a smiling face, surrounded by a red circle. The second message was written in pen, and expressed his feelings about the room. In it he wrote: **"I love the room."** The third message was written and drawn in pencil and addressed: **"For Emma from Rosie."** This image depicted a heart with a diamond shape at its tip, which also had a heart within it (see Figure 47 below).

**Figure 47: Rosie's three research box messages**



Rosie checked I had received his messages at the start of each subsequent session, and would ask to see them. He would hold each message in his hands and explain what he had drawn and written. The content of the messages, and his explanation of them, reveals that being part of the research and having toys and resources to play with and time to talk was important to him. Rosie also revealed that he wanted other people to see his messages, and seemed to understand clearly that posting them would include them as research data. The messages were a further way for Rosie to express his voice and be seen as positive, smart and not angry.

### **6.33 Rosie's photographs: taking and reviewing them**

Rosie took all 39 shots on his disposable camera, along with a range of Polaroid instant images and the video camera footage that has already been discussed. When taking photographs, Rosie noted: ***"I'm doing it all without your help."*** His reflection showed how he felt empowered by being in charge of taking photographs, making decisions about which camera to use and deciding on the subject matter. Rosie photographed objects and resources in the room and in his tray, and instructed me to photograph him in his own compositions.

Rosie was particularly focused on photographing the doll's house family referred to earlier. He composed photographs of them in different family scenes, and reflected: ***"I want to photograph the whole family."*** He took photographs of the family sitting in the lounge watching television on four occasions. He also photographed them sitting around the dining table in the kitchen. As he composed these shots he gave the figures instructions, such as where to sit and what to do: ***"You're all watching TV now."***

When reviewing these photographs in Phase Three, Rosie displayed a range of responses including laughing, smiling and making positive comments. He laughed at the images that depicted him blowing bubbles and throwing bean bags into the large gramophone speaker, which had been part of a game he had made up in a previous session. When looking at one self-portrait image he had instructed me to take, he said: ***"I like my shoes."*** Rosie looked through all 39 of the images twice, then laid them out on the large table in a pattern of his own design and looked at them a third time. His attention was drawn to one self-portrait in particular, where he noted: ***"I'm the smart kid."***

When choosing three images for his co-researching self-portrait, Rosie's initial selection included the smart kid photograph. The rationale he gave for his selections was that he had **chosen "one of me... coz I pick one of each... me, one of you, and things that we played with."** However, when the self-portrait was presented to him during the second review session in Phase Three he looked unhappy and somewhat angry. I invited him to talk through his feelings, and he told me that he didn't like the smart kid on the self-portrait and wanted to change it. He selected an image that he had titled: **"This looks like my little brother"**, in which he wore a black fedora hat and a Zorro-style eye-mask (as is shown at the start of this case study in Figure 45). The image he selected had been composed in a session where he had played an action hero character. His choice of a replacement image, and requesting a second self-portrait be drawn, demonstrates that he was seeking an expression of the positive internal experience he saw in the chosen image, the title connecting him to his family and the love he had for his younger brother. Whilst he had felt like the smart kid, he wanted to look like a strong hero, possibly with the knowledge in mind that the research audience would also see it. Being seen as the hero may have been more helpful to him than looking like the smart kid. When presented with his second self-portrait in the final review session, Rosie looked pleased and commented: **"That's cool."**

#### **6.34 Rosie reflects on his feelings of anger**

As a co-researcher, Rosie had appeared to transform his anger through the eyes and actions of his pseudonym. He seemed to gain insight into his relationship with anger through the distance of the role. The following descriptions of the way he worked with this theme are evidence that the co-researching role enabled him to re-frame himself in relation to the aspect of anger, and of his capacity to comment on it from the outside whilst in the role of co-researcher.

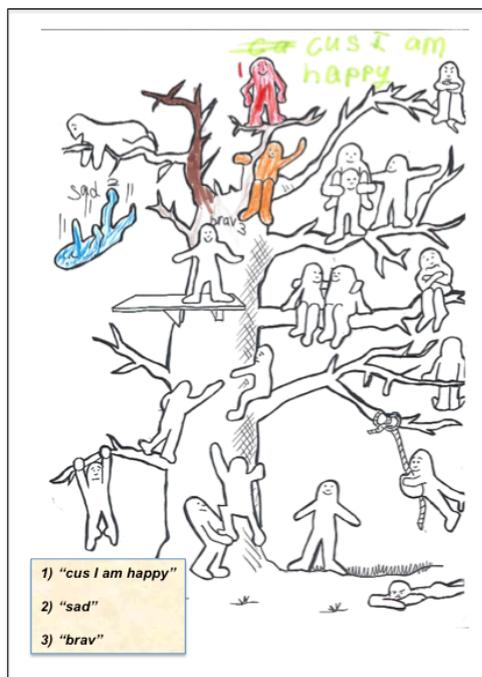
When choosing research Method 3 (body sculpts), Rosie sculpted me into a shape that he said was angry, and in the same session he chose Method 6 (reflecting with sentence prompt cards) to say: **"Stop being angry."** He recorded his reflections in answer to my asking how co-researching had enabled his voice to be heard, and wrote: **"Tack in away the temper"** [taking away the temper]. Rosie reflected on his feelings of anger through his use of research Method 7 (say anything you want to), which he identified had been important to him. He said he chose this method

**“because sometimes I’m angry”**. I asked: *“And then you’d talk about it?”* To which Rosie answered: **“Yeah.”** *“And what would that be like?”* I asked. **“Better”**, he replied. During the review sessions I asked Rosie how being a co-researcher might be helpful to other people. He replied: **“By helping them and making sure they don’t have any anger management [issues].”** This reflection shows Rosie’s capacity for mindfulness towards others as a result of reviewing the insights he gained about himself through his co-researching activities. His capacity to think of other people and their need for support seemed to become more present through the co-researching role.

### **6.35 Rosie reviews his time as a co-researcher and says goodbye**

As his co-researching time drew to an end, Rosie recorded how the role had made him feel using the ‘where am I on the blob tree?’ review method (see Figure 48 on the next page). He coloured in the top two figures on the central tree trunk. Both had open-body postures and smiling faces. One figure was seated on the tree, waving, with one arm holding onto a branch; the other stood at the very top of the tree with an open-body posture. Rosie coloured in the figures and wrote: **“brav”** [brave], and: **“cus I am happy”** [because I am happy] next to each one (see Chapter Four, section 4.13.1 for a description of this method). He also picked the blob figure, which was falling from the tree, and coloured it blue, writing: **“sad”** next to it. This was in response to my question about how he felt now that the co-researching sessions were coming to an end.

**Figure 48: Rosie completes the blob tree**



Rosie located the feelings of happiness and bravery into two of the blob figures which appeared to express happy and calm faces. Rosie's choice of blob figures, colouring in and words, reflect that he was aware of the feelings he had experienced in terms of his happiness when expressing his voice as a co-researcher, and also shows that he felt the sadness when thinking about the fact that it was coming to an end. This sadness is a sign of his understanding of the co-researching experience and what engaging with it had meant to him.

When asked in the final review session what his voice meant to him, Rosie replied: ***"It can mean something else... It can mean, erm, erm, if I'm looking well. If I feel well. If I don't feel well. If I can see. If I'm hungry. If I want to play. If I want to research. If I want to do everything."*** Rosie reflected that making his co-researching decisions was ***"fun and it was exciting and I really liked [making] it."*** Reviewing his decision and being a co-researcher had allowed him ***"not to be scared and say what you want to say."*** He described the dramatherapy room as ***"blissful"***, which is an indication that he felt calm and free within the room and possibly within the research.

As the sessions came to a close, Rosie said he was sad that the research cartoons would be coming down from the wall, and that he was pleased to know there had not

been any co-researchers before him. When asked what he would remember about his time he said: ***“I will remember everything. The painting, the giant thing, this [video]... EVERYTHING!”***

### **6.36 Rosie’s final research box message: one year later**

Approximately one year after the end of Phase Three, Rosie’s individual dramatherapy sessions also ended. By this time I had replaced the research message box with a green metal post box, which was affixed to the outside door of the dramatherapy room. Blank message sheets hung next to it, along with a pot of felt tip pens and coloured pencils. A sign invited any child (or adult, as it turned out) wanting to leave a message for me to do so. One day there was a message from Rosie that depicted two smiling stick-figures, one taller than the other. A speech bubble came from the smaller figure, reading: ***“I miss the room.”*** I saw this image as reflecting how Rosie had felt safe and free to make choices as a co-researcher and reflect on how he had experienced the choice-making process and been empowered by it. Whilst he had been interested in the resources in the room, it was the quality of the relationship both with himself and with me that he took away. My hope, rather than what I know, is that both the smart kid and the hero within him composed that message.

### **6.37 Practitioner-researcher analysis of the key findings for Rosie**

This case study has revealed how being involved as a co-researcher provided Rosie with new opportunities to talk about how others saw him, and to re-frame how he saw himself. Rosie’s own reflections show how being a co-researcher led him to understand that the choices he made were entirely of his own choosing, and his actions show that he enjoyed making choices. The newness of the role brought him knowledge that liberated him from being stuck inside his angry persona. As a co-researcher, Rosie was able to create a distance from which he could view his anger through a different lens which was in part fulfilled by casting himself in a girl’s persona through his choice of pseudonym. This illuminated the way he perceived himself, and helped him to understand the perceptions that others had about him.

Feeling important was a positive and empowering experience for Rosie. This is demonstrated by his asking whether there had been any co-researchers before him, and by his happiness – and possibly even pride – when hearing that there had not. His questioning suggests that he saw dramatherapy and co-researching as different to dramatherapy alone. I noted before the study that Rosie had appeared uncomfortable when I arrived each week to collect him from his classroom. I had been working at

developing a strategy that did not evoke what could have been his negative perceptions of being taken out of class in front of his peers. Rosie may have experienced being taken out of class individually for his dramatherapy sessions as disempowering, perhaps feeling that it exposed a need for support on some level and made him anything but the 'smart kid'. His reflections suggest that as a co-researcher he experienced this event in a different way, and was able to leave the classroom looking happy and excited, and wanting his peers to see him as I came to collect him each time.

Rosie identified expressing himself with words as being meaningful to him; his awareness that his words would be accepted without challenge was evident in his choice-making. Being able to express himself verbally led to Rosie unburdening himself of difficult personal themes, and to reflect on worries and fears about life outside of school. Being able to say anything he wanted was key in enabling him to express his voice. These expressions may have helped him feel less frightened about some of the issues that were outside of his control.

Making his own choices, and operating the research resources on his own, was empowering for Rosie. He appeared more relaxed through his choice-making activities. This included the way he chose both the research methods and the content to reflect on, and how he selected and engaged with the objects and resources he adopted and stored for safe-keeping in his co-researcher tray. The case study has revealed that Rosie expressed feeling positive, and important as a co-researcher through the choices he made and the personal process he disclosed and explored. He reflected feeling "**happy**" on many occasions, both in his sessions and in the research box messages he drew and wrote. His image depicting two figures (one tall, the other small) could be seen as an expression of his positive and healthy feelings in the sessions with me. Being witnessed was also important for Rosie, whether by me or the family figures who lived in the doll's house. The theme of family and relating experiences to them was consistent throughout his time as a co-researcher. As I have shown, he often related his experiences to what his siblings might say or how they might engage with the research methods themselves. He spoke clearly about belonging to his family group and having responsibilities towards his cousins and siblings.

Rosie's sadness that his co-researching time was drawing to an end reveals the importance of his investment in it. This investment suggests that he experienced being seen as calm and happy, as someone smart who could achieve important things. In these possible experiences lies the restorative therapeutic process. At the start of the research, Rosie's rationale that the positive qualities he sought to acquire were only possible for girls, led to him identifying his pseudonym. His choice of pseudonym could suggest that he felt excluded from these experiences as a boy and was unable to find a way to gain them, remaining locked in self-perceptions of anger. His reflections and his physical presentation show that by engaging as a co-researcher he became empowered both in and out of the role of 'Rosie'. The messages he sent in the research box were written in his real name; this supports the view that he had started to see himself as calm and happy. The confidence and agency I saw in him as a co-researcher led me to believe that he saw within himself the realisation of his desire to be seen favourably even when using his own name.

This case study has demonstrated the ways in which Rosie engaged as a co-researcher, and how his choice of name enabled him to identify parts of himself that he wanted to develop and be known for. Rosie brought the outside audience into the room through his exploration of his pseudonym and how it might lead to him being seen more favourably; this expression of his co-researching reflections led to him seeing himself in a different way. Rosie's sadness as the research ended was an indication of the agency he had experienced as a result of being involved in the study, which had made him feel proud and important.

### **6.38 Summarising Chapter Six**

This section summarises the key findings of the three, in-depth case studies presented in this chapter. The case studies have shown that the research was led at a pace defined by the children, which empowered them to engage under their own terms. The unfolding of their co-researcher journeys has shown that Lady Gaga, Rocksus and Rosie's understanding of choice-making led them to feel heard, listened to and empowered as co-researchers. The uniqueness of each case study conveys the significance of the children's experience of the choices they made, and of their self-expressions and self-discoveries that followed over time through their developing relationship with the co-researching role and the therapeutic alliance.

Case studies can reveal findings that thematic analyses do not. For example, each child's engagement unfolds over the course of their journeys via their expression through arts modes, through play, and through their creation of patterns of experience within the research relationship. It became apparent to me as a practitioner-researcher while compiling and analysing these case studies that being a co-researcher had shifted the world in a particular way for these three children: it seemed to enable a sense of belonging for them, which brought with it self-confidence and possibly a sense of being important and having a voice about their feelings, experiences and concerns. The pseudonyms became companions within the research, providing opportunities to re-frame perspectives and ideas about themselves. As revealed in Chapter Five, the act of choosing a new name represented the opportunity to be seen in more favourable, heroic, or caring ways by people outside of the dramatherapy room.

The 15 minutes of co-researching time seemed to bring vitality to the children through a different way of seeing themselves. This observation is supported by each child's reflections during Phase Three, where they articulated positive feelings about being a co-researcher; it also demonstrates that expression of agency is enabled through choice-making – which in this case the children interpreted as meaning the choice to be themselves in the knowledge that there was no agenda but their own, and the choice of what to share with the research audience and what to hold within the contract of dramatherapy. Being seen and heard through active and effective listening is claimed in literature to enable agency (Lundy, 2007; Hendrick, 2008b; Clarke et al., 2011), and contribute to the body of knowledge that promotes children's engagement as co-researchers of their own experiences (Johnson, 2011; Kellett, 2010); however, engaging children as co-researchers of *therapeutic process* is an original contribution which this study makes to the theory, practice and research in dramatherapy.

The insights gained from each child's choice-making activities, and the nature of their engagement with the research methods and resources, indicate that the co-researching experience was of value in increasing their agency in therapy, and in the development of feelings of importance, companionship, engagement and empowerment. The insights also suggest that being in control of choice-making was also a powerful tool in supporting each child's sense of agency, wellbeing and expression of voice.

The freedom of choice included the right to decide whether to keep experiences confidential or share them as research data; this created an awareness of the research audience and was therefore empowering of the children's voices as co-researchers. A range of feelings and emotions was reflected upon by each child, suggesting positive engagement, ownership and enjoyment of the co-researching opportunity. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding children's capacity to make choices in research (Flewitt, 2005) – including research concerned with children's experiences in therapy (Jäger & Ryan, 2007) – yet they are distinct in providing insights into the ways children make choices as co-researchers in *therapeutic* research.

The study also contributes to the understanding of the client-therapist relationship (Axline, 1990; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006) and its importance to clients. Also in how engaging children as co-researchers in therapy can promote client-centred research approaches that preserve the integrity and ethics of the therapeutic relationship (French & Klein, 2012), and which place the client at the centre of the research practice, as demonstrated in this chapter.

Therapeutic listening draws parallels with the concept of active and effective listening (Clarke et al., 2011; Lundy, 2007), both of which frame 'voice' as a set of experiences that are explored and communicated in a wide range of ways. In the study each child offered sensitive reflections and disclosures of worries about themselves and how they may be perceived by others, along with concerns about the care of other people in their lives. The research environment as a trusted space protected the therapeutic intent – an area of practice research noted by Yalom (2002). The findings in this chapter have shown that having a trusted space enabled each child to make choices about what to share and what to keep private, which suggests that their engagement and choice-making as co-researchers supported their expressions of voice through their awareness of the potential for agency.

## **Choice, voice and agency as revealed by co-researchers**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This final chapter assesses the ways in which the research questions have been addressed by discussing them in relation to the study's overall findings that have been identified from the analytical process. These findings are shaped by the conceptual frameworks of choice and voice as a mechanism for self-expression, self-insight and agency (Lundy, 2007; Oliver & Dalrymple, 2008), and they reveal what the theory and practice of dramatherapy can learn about the choices children make – and how their choices impact on the expression of their voices as co-researchers of the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions.

Future research opportunities are identified from the overall findings and discussed in terms of their implications on theory, practice and research for dramatherapists and other practitioners working with children, along with the wider implications for associated bodies of knowledge. The chapter addresses the limitations of the study – as well as its strengths – and reflects on the experience of working with the research methods within the context of the overall process, and what has been achieved as a practitioner-researcher.

The research questions were as follows:

1. How can children engage as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions?
2. Can choice-making in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions promote and reveal agency?
3. In what ways can engaging children as co-researchers in dramatherapy inform the field's understanding of both children's agency as co-researchers and the reflective phase in therapeutic process?

The first two of these questions are discussed, in relation to the study's findings, in sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.4, with the final question being addressed in section 7.3 to 7.3.2 – which also assesses the overall contribution the thesis has made to the body of knowledge surrounding theory, practice and research in dramatherapy.

## **7.2 Discussion of the overall findings**

The overall findings presented in this thesis are as follows:

1. That reviewing assent on a session-by-session basis provides opportunities which empower children, as co-researchers in dramatherapy, as they chose whether or not to share their reflections with the research audience.
2. That by providing a variety of co-researching methods and resources to choose from, which incorporate dramatherapy techniques and creative arts processes, children are given the tools with which they can reveal their authentic voices in dramatherapy research.
3. That children's agency is revealed to them through the insights they gain about themselves when expressing their voices as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions.
4. That being in the co-researching role whilst reflecting on dramatherapy sessions is of therapeutic benefit to children.

The findings reveal the extent to which children in dramatherapy can be insightful about themselves and their lives when presented with opportunities to express their voices with personal authenticity; when they believe their capacity for agency can be realised through the choices that are made available to them, or which they can make available to themselves. This includes creative and arts based methods being developed for use with children (Clark & Moss, 2001, Jäger & Ryan 2007). The practitioner-researcher who adopts a framework of active and effective listening (Lundy, 2007) supports this potential for choice-making and facilitates the expression of voice through the realisation of agency.

The findings have the potential to aid development of dramatherapy practice, as well as that of other practitioners offering services to children, through their contribution to the body of knowledge which supports the creation of opportunities for children to make choices about their lived experiences – and thus to understand and experience themselves as equal and active beings (Kellett, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Jones, 2009). Furthermore, the findings are of value to the body of knowledge pertaining to practitioner research within therapeutic practice – which aims to deepen clients' self-knowledge and increase their autonomy and agency whilst also enabling practitioners to improve practice and contribute to the evidence base (Gardner & Coombs, 2010; Bor & Watts, 2011) – as well as to practitioner research in general, which focuses on

identifying and implementing changes in practice through research of this kind (Drake & Heath, 2010).

The four overall findings are discussed individually below in order to highlight their meaning and significance as new areas of knowledge, and their connection to literature. This is then summarised at the end of each section.

### **7.2.1 Assent-choosing and assent-reviewing are processes which empower children as co-researchers in dramatherapy**

For children to choose and review their assent as an ongoing process provides them with opportunities to express their voices and to understand that they are the sole choice-makers of their co-researching decisions. Introducing these processes at the outset of research embeds the choice-making potential for each child throughout the study. The children experienced this choice-making potential as empowering; it deepened their understanding of themselves and created opportunities for their expression of voice. Empowerment was experienced through the children making choices without the need to justify them or be challenged about them. This understanding led to their authentic expression of voice (discussed below in 7.2.2). The findings from the assenting process add insights to the field of ethical practices with children (Morrow & Richards, 1996); assenting processes with children in research (Kellett, 2010); and understanding power and ethics in research in the therapeutic space (Proctor, 2002; Daniel-McKeigue, 2007). However, choosing and reviewing assent in dramatherapy with children as co-researchers is an entirely new area of practice, and in this way the study makes a seminal contribution.

The diversity of responses given by each child is striking as they approached the question of assent as an ongoing process of review and not just a single event within the context of their engagement in the study. This diversity, both in individual cases and across the research sample, shows that the assent-reviewing process was seen as important despite it feeling difficult at times for some of the children (when they were unsure of what choice to make, for example). The reviewing of assent enabled each child to reflect on their feelings and experiences in relation to the therapeutic process throughout the study.

The findings show that some children chose not to co-research during dramatherapy sessions in which they felt sad, or to which they had brought difficult themes to explore. Had assent in the study been designed as a single event rather than a process, these expressions of choice might have been missed, or even have hindered self-expression within the therapy, as the child may not have trusted or understood their right to change their mind. These particular findings show the importance of the child's right to say 'yes' or 'no', developing the conceptualisation of voice within the study as each child learned and understood for themselves through an exploration of assent choosing and reviewing that expressions of choice would be accepted without question. This evoked positive feelings and supported their understanding of being the agent of their own choice-making, and being listened to.

### **Summary of the finding's relationship with literature and contribution to the body of knowledge**

This finding parallels the literature that aims to support children in having choices to express their voices and to gain agency as equal members of society (Walker & Jones, 2011; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2007) by making self-initiated decisions which are unrestricted by adult agenda (Landsown, 2005), in areas such as research (Kellett, 2010; Alderson, 2009; Jipson & Jipson, 2005) and in therapeutic practice (French & Klein, 2012; Leigh et al., 2012; Proctor, 2002).

The finding offers new insight into the process of assent-choosing in dramatherapy research, and in the ethics of choice-making for children who are considered vulnerable and are referred for arts and play therapies or other supportive interventions (Daniel-McKeigue, 2007; Hayden, 2007; Jäger & Ryan, 2007; Jones, 2005; Carr, 2012).

### **7.2.2 Creative co-researching methods in dramatherapy provide children with the tools for their authentic expression of voice**

By providing a variety of co-researching methods and additional resources which incorporate creative arts processes, and dramatherapy techniques, children are given the tools to reveal their authentic voices in dramatherapy. Authenticity enables depth of meaning for both child and therapist through the shared understanding of each child's expression of feelings and experiences which they want to share. The study's variety of research methods and resources for capturing reflections enabled diversity of self-expression and a deepening of therapeutic self-knowledge; this contributes to the

body of knowledge in the field of research with children, drawing on creative methods that enable children's expressions and facilitate their agency using familiar processes such as puppet play, role-play and arts-based methods (Clark & Moss, 2001; Armistead, 2011; Jäger & Ryan, 2007).

The findings show that having 12 research methods (and three additional methods during Phase Three) provided each child with the potential for choice-making and enabled selections based on their personal preferences. The range of ways in which the children interacted with the methods suggests their ownership of them, and an understanding that they could support self-expression. Colouring-in the cartoon depictions of the methods; negotiating imaginary obstacles; and making choices while hiding in a large object or while looking away were some of the diverse ways that the methods were selected, as shown in the findings chapters.

Through their selections and reflections, emotional states were revealed, expressed and transformed by each child. In addition as a therapist I gained a greater knowledge and understanding about each child in terms of their well-being and their capacity to express their needs.

### **Summary of the finding's relationship with literature and contribution to the body of knowledge**

This finding contributes to both existing knowledge about the use of arts-based methods when researching with children (Clark & Moss, 2001; Jäger & Ryan, 2007; Armistead, 2011) and their impact on individuality and the expression of authentic voice (Lundy, 2007; Clarke et al., 2011; Kurri, 2005), and to that regarding voice within therapy (Ramsden & Jones, 2011; Jäger & Ryan, 2007; French & Klein, 2012). The finding also offers new insight into the use of these methods in dramatherapy in research with children in the role of co-researcher. In addition, selection and use of the dramatherapy techniques and research methods provides further insight into their use in dramatherapy practice, contributing to the field's understanding of children's experiences and the impact of their use (Leigh et al., 2012; Jennings, 1995).

New methodological insights have been gained within the framework of practitioner-research (Drake & Heath, 2012; Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2007; Mauthner, 1997), specifically through approaches such as phenomenology, which enable researchers to listen with equality when researching with children (Kellett, 2005b;

Woodhead, 1999; Davie, 1993), within therapeutic practice (Gardner & Coombs, 2010; Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001), and in researching dramatherapeutic practice with children in an educational context (Meldrum, 2012; Ramsden, 2011; McFarlane & Harvey, 2012).

### **7.2.3 Insights are gained by children through their expression of voice as co-researchers in dramatherapy**

Giving children the opportunity to express their voices as co-researchers in dramatherapy increases their capacity to gain insights into their own lives. These findings contribute to the relatively new and emerging body of knowledge that supports children as researchers and co-researchers of their own experiences, as a means of empowering them and promoting their agency (Kellett, 2010; Armistead, 2010; Groundwater Smith, 2007). The findings also make a seminal contribution to the similarly new body of knowledge advocating the engagement of clients as co-researchers in dramatherapy theory, practice and research.

These findings show that each child engaged with, and interpreted, the co-researching role in ways that were unique to them – for example, by choosing to post research messages between sessions in order to comment on the role or the dramatherapy room, or to share news of events in their lives; by recording physical growth against a wall-chart, or forming an attachment to certain resources such as Reggie the Research Frog puppet; or by spending time alone beside the co-researcher trays. These findings also reveal commonalities across the children's experiences, primarily in their positive feelings about being in the role; feeling important, and involved in the study.

Being a co-researcher and having a pseudonym was meaningful for the children in diverse ways. Positive experiences were also present across the sample in each child's choice of pseudonym, which in every case reflected certain characteristics that they either possessed or desired. The children's choice to co-research was the single factor allowing the research audience access to the process. The use of pseudonyms was a key way that the children's confidentiality as clients in dramatherapy was upheld, which they understood.

The children were also able to extend the opportunity to see into the process to people in the own lives, through sharing artwork, showing photographs, or making an invitation to come to the room, and this engendered some meaningful

encounters. Overwhelmingly the findings reveal that, no matter whether they chose to co-research or not, the act of being a co-researcher was important to and significant for each child.

### **Summary of the finding's relationship with literature and contribution to the body of knowledge**

This finding makes a significant contribution to the knowledge surrounding the nature of the reflective phase in dramatherapy (Jennings, 1986; Crimmens, 1998; Jones, 2010) and children's experiences of this phase as they encounter a range of creative methods with which to frame their reflection upon. This knowledge also links to literature regarding the nature and impact of the therapeutic alliance (Yalom, 1995; Timulak, 2008; Elefant, 2010), and offers new insight into its nature in practice with children (French & Klein, 2012) and in dramatherapy (Emunah, 2005; Tytherleigh & Karkou, 2010). Further contribution is made by this finding through insights gained into the integration of the therapeutic alliance within a practitioner research framework (McLeod, 1999; Haythorne et al., 2012; Jones 2010).

#### **7.2.4 Children gain insights when reflecting as co-researchers in dramatherapy that is of therapeutic benefit to them**

The children's reflections throughout the research phases created opportunities for them to gain insights about themselves and their experience of dramatherapy. The findings relating to their reflections contribute to the body of knowledge that seeks to gather evidence of experience directly with children from all stages of the research process, seeing them as agents of their own experiences (Layard & Dunn, 2009; Bishton, 2007; Armistead, 2010).

The reviewing phase brought depth of meaning for the children as it enabled them to look back over the dramatherapy process that had just taken place as co-researchers (Phase Two), as well as to look back over the experiences of being co-researchers and what this meant to them (Phase Three). The findings from Phases Two and Three reveal how the children understood that the co-researching role brought new elements to the dramatherapy process such as the use of pseudonyms and awareness of the research audience who would know about their experiences when reflecting as co-researchers (and was different to reflective phase in non-research dramatherapy sessions). This awareness in turn promoted agency through the choices of assent reviewing and method selection. In addition the findings reveal how each child felt the need to share with certain people close to them – as themselves rather than as

pseudonyms or anonymous research participants – parts of their experiences as co-researchers. The reviewing process had contributed to each child connecting with an understanding of others who listen through care, be they known (family/friends) or unknown (the research audience).

While the reviewing phase was the end of each child's co-researching role in this particular study, there is potential for developing co-researching opportunities in future studies (discussed below in section 7.7). The findings from Phase Three reveal that the sessions were characterised by an intensity of emotion; some children noted changes in themselves, such as in their appearance, feelings and self-perceptions. The experiences had evoked a sense of achievement, and the children wanted others to see these positive states and share in the happiness that accompanied them. Each child's active participation in the reviewing phase, and the strength of feeling expressed as it came to an end, is evidence of engagement with the co-researching role and the choices it entailed. The findings show that each child was invested in the aims of this process through the diverse and positive ways in which the ending was experienced. Some reflected that being involved in the research had been important; some wished it did not have to end; while others hoped to be able to research again in the future.

### **Summary of the finding's relationship with literature and contribution to the body of knowledge**

Choice-making and the expressions made by children using creative methods as a means of accessing voice (Clark & Moss, 2001; Armistead, 2011), and an understanding of children's agency, are key contributions within this finding (James & Prout 2003; Penn, 2008; Birbeck & Drummond, 2007). It also contributes to the dramatherapy field's understanding of client voice (Dokter, 2010; Casson, 2004; Alan, 1996) and the nature of change within dramatherapy (Langley, 2006; Haythorne et al., 2012; Ramsden & Jones, 2011). Insights concerning children's therapeutic process are revealed within the reflective phase by their direct accounting of experience; this is an area of innovation offered by the study.

The therapist as researcher, by engaging in active and effective listening (Lundy, 2007; Snelgrove, 2005; Clarke et al., 2011), contributes to a deeper understanding of processes within the therapeutic alliance in dramatherapy and within the context of therapeutic research, as demonstrated by this finding. This contribution is particularly

pertinent in deepening the understanding of how children classed as vulnerable are able to contribute to the decisions that affect them through active choice-making. It is a contribution that has implications for theory, methodology and potentially policy.

### **7.3 Implications for dramatherapy and research with children**

The findings from this practitioner research study has the potential to make important contributions to the theory, practice and research in dramatherapy to assist the field in developing practice and research, that draws upon the theoretical approach that is concerned with enabling children's agency through their engagement as co-researchers and choice-makers. These potential contributions are discussed below.

#### **7.3.1 Implications for dramatherapy theory, practice and research**

This is the first study of its kind that engages children as co-researchers of their therapeutic process during the reflective stage of dramatherapy sessions. The study's originality lies in the choice-making design, which, as I have shown, provided each child with key research choices, such as their initial and ongoing assent; their selection of research methods; choices about the content of their reflections; and choices of methods for capturing reflections using cameras and additional resources. Each child's reflections during the agreed 15 minutes of co-researching time has been shared with the research audience. The analytical process is based purely on these reflections rather than my own selections from their co-researching data. Whilst a child may have revealed deep understanding of themselves at other times during their dramatherapy sessions, this information has not been made public. The safety and integrity of the pre-existing therapeutic contract protected each child's confidentiality and anonymity.

The study could help therapists – and other professionals working and researching with children – to develop processes based on this design and its focus on choice-making and reflection using creative and arts-based methods as processes for expressing voice. This in turn would increase children's opportunities to experience agency through being listened to by adults who are committed to hearing their voices in whatever form of expression they choose. The findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge concerning ethically sound dramatherapy research into practice in educational settings (Daniel-McKeigue, 2007; Mackenzie, 2013; Haythorne, 2012). The provision of an assent process, using creative arts-based methods, has implications for practitioners engaging with children in dramatherapy; it supports children's understanding of assent, and, as this study has shown, can be useful in

enabling authentic voice and facilitating the ending process by providing ample opportunities for reflection.

The overall findings show that adopting a practitioner-researcher approach is an insightful way of conducting research in dramatherapy, and that it can increase understanding of how children perceive themselves and how they make meaning of the content and impact of their choices. The research design has the capacity to help dramatherapists develop practitioner research projects with children as co-researchers of their own experiences, using techniques and processes that best support their therapeutic aims.

The study's design places the importance of actively listening to children as co-researchers within a therapeutic context, and prioritising them as valuable and meaningful agents of their own experiences. The findings show that methods based on familiar dramatherapy techniques can support the concept of listening to and enabling these expressions; for example, in the extent to which each child engaged with the choice of pseudonym, and in their experiencing aspects of their identities – by exploring different characters – that brought about positive feelings and self-noted changes.

### **7.3.2 Implications for the field of research with children**

In addition to their implications for theory, practice and research into dramatherapy, the findings have potential for the development of knowledge about research with children for practitioners working in the fields of children's health, social care and education. They may also impact on adults in other professional roles who wish to develop equal and active ways of working with children in research, by giving them a range of options about how they engage with and support children to express their voices and maintain their well-being. Positions of competency and equality can support children in understanding the choices available to them, and can assist practitioners in developing research and practice which recognise the competency of children to reflect on their experiences (Wyness, 2006; Hendrick, 2008b).

Many of these processes – such as pseudonyms and active listening and the use of creative and arts-based methods – could be applied in a variety of settings; of particular note to the general field of research is the in-depth design of the assent-

choosing and assent-reviewing processes, which draw on theories of conducting research in therapy practice (French & Klein, 2012; Christensen, 2010).

The children in this study have revealed their agency coherently, cogently and consistently in very different and unique ways; this research is convincing in its presentation of findings that show agency through the expression of voice, which was made possible by the choices available to them. The overall findings have revealed a view of children's engagement in therapy that would not normally be seen by anybody outside of the practice; this was achieved expressly through their role as co-researchers, and through their ability to choose and review their individual assent. Engaging children in therapy as co-researchers – in the right space with the right resources and relationships – empowers them. The findings of this study demonstrate that children's expressions are valuable to them, and help practitioners and researchers to better understand their vulnerabilities and potential.

#### 7.4 Limitations of the study

This section discusses the key limitations that were encountered during implementation of the study. The first area relates to the process of gaining consent from parents/primary caregivers, which preceded Phase One in which the children were approached to give assent. This is followed by a discussion of the challenges experienced while working with the research methods during Phases Two and Three, which highlights the complexities of conducting research in an ongoing therapeutic process, and which addresses the potential for power imbalance and the need to keep the study's theoretical approach – the prioritisation of choice-making opportunities for children – at the centre of the design and implementation of the study. Specific reflections about the process of being a practitioner-researcher, and the challenges arising from it, are addressed separately in section 7.6.

##### **7.4.1 Limiting factors in consent and assent choosing**

This section discusses the challenges that were faced when negotiating gatekeeper consent, which proved to be both a limitation of the study and an area for future research opportunity (as discussed in section 7.7).

Due to the legalities and nature of seeking consent, it was ethically prohibited to approach the children directly until parent/primary caregiver or gatekeeper consent had been achieved. This issue has been discussed in Chapter Four

(section 4.3.4) in relation to one girl for whom consent was not granted, but who incorporated some of the research methods into her ongoing dramatherapy practice as a result of inquiring about the content of the study. While this child spoke of wanting to do what her mother thought was best, there was nevertheless at times a tension in her presentation regarding this arrangement. The necessity of gaining adult consent when working with children in therapy – in other words, the mandatory handing of power to a gatekeeper – raises concerns around the potential for power imbalance; this remains a tension and a limitation of the study's design.

A further limitation, which involves parents/primary caregivers, relates to communication with the three families who did *not* grant consent for their children to take part in the study, and for whom English is a second language (ESL). Efforts to speak directly with members of these families failed, as in all cases adults did not accompany their children to or from school (this duty fell on other adults or elder siblings, neither of whom had the right to grant consent). Had the opportunity to meet with them arisen, such a meeting would only have been possible with an interpreter present – and this would most likely have been their child. This would have compromised the assent-choosing process for the child, as there would have been an inevitable concern for their family member's reaction, and possible complications due to translation. Issues here relate not only to the language needs but also to the lack of engagement with the school community of families with ESL; to the quality and accessibility of services for these families, and to the impact on choice, voice and agency for the children and adults in these families. This is another area for practice development, returned to in section 7.7.

#### **7.4.2 Working with the methodological design**

This section reviews the strengths and challenges of implementing the methodology and capturing data using the 12 research methods (Phase Two) and the three reviewing methods (Phase Three). As the following discussion will show, the use of a large number of methods brought about challenges in terms of capturing and analysing data.

The theoretical approach underpinning the design enabled each child to make choices as co-researchers, promoting and revealing agency by seeing them as capable beings in their own right. Each child's choices about how they captured their co-researching

reflections were described as accurately as possible in my field notes, with a view to reproducing their descriptions in the findings. Ten of the twelve research methods in Phase Two were chosen on multiple occasions by a variety of co-researchers (see Chapter Five, section 5.6 to 5.6.4 for more details); these methods, and the additional reviewing methods used in Phase Three, provided the children with insights into their own lives which they expressed and reflected upon through a range of means. These include insights into their engagement as co-researchers, which in turn generate wider insights into the ways in which children can engage as co-researchers through their selection of research methods.

Recording and capturing the qualitative data during Phases Two and Three presented challenges from a practitioner-researcher perspective as it required memorising descriptions of action, choice-making and content until each session's close, and then capturing them as faithfully as possible. In order to address this I developed annotating, recording and cataloguing structures to use throughout the 18 months during which data were collected. These structures provided rigour during the analytical process, where the immersion and re-immersion into annotated data yielded codes and categories, which in turn led to themes being established and findings constructed (see Figure 18, page 121 for an example of annotated data).

The large number of research methods, and the detailed notation, would be difficult to replicate for a researcher acting alone as they may not have the necessary time or resources at their disposal. During the 18 months of data collection, my working days (a combination of co-researching sessions and other clinical commitments) averaged 15 hours in order to complete all the post-session annotation and other practical research duties, along with regular caseload responsibilities. Should this type of study be replicated I would suggest this as an area for redesign, but in such a way that did not compromise the theoretical approach (which in this study saw the children's deep engagement as a result of the variety of methods available to them). Finding ways of reducing the annotation and additional tasks of data capture – again, without reducing the choices available to the children – would be a helpful starting point in future design.

## 7.5 Strengths of the study

This section briefly reviews other strengths within the design and implementation of each phase of the data collection period.

As a result of Phase One being a time to explore the concept of assent, and to introduce the study and the research methods, the notion of assent as an ongoing process was embedded with each child, as too was the understanding that their choice-making would be free from adult direction or suggestion and would progress at their own pace. Introducing the children to the research resources – and giving them autonomy over the items – was a particular strength that is reflected in the range of creative expressions captured in the raw data.

Developing the 12 methods from dramatherapy techniques and pre-existing play processes was also a distinct strength of design, as each child had an understanding of these modes of self-expression before the study even began. The inclusion of a camera as a resource proved significant as this was frequently chosen for use by each child; technology that could be left and engaged with by them without any adult intervention enabled voice and agency, as reflected in the findings (each child had sole responsibility for their own research resources whilst in the dramatherapy room). The majority of the children were quick to learn how to operate this technology, and excited by its potential – most being particularly keen to watch the Polaroid images emerging.

Phase Three proved also to be a successful and insightful opportunity to deepen the children's reflections about their engagement. This was an emotionally intense period for each child who gave rich reflections about themselves; about how much they valued the co-researching role and about how they experienced their dramatherapy process.

## 7.6 Reflections as a practitioner-researcher

This section draws together key reflections on conducting this study as a practitioner-researcher, which enabled me to research my own practice and re-frame my knowledge in relation to the developing theoretical frame. The study has led me to consider perspectives on how children with vulnerabilities are provided for, and how therapists who provide these services are viewed in an educational context. Researching knowledge in fields parallel to therapy – such as childhood studies and children as researchers – has helped me to better understand the complex multi-layers

of practice and research, and has equipped me with the necessary skills to conduct further research in order to deepen understanding of the lives of clients and their needs within the theoretical context of choice, voice and agency.

The study has also significantly deepened my knowledge of each child in the sample by understanding more about them as individuals, as well as by providing the means to gain detailed insights into their experience of the process of dramatherapy. Processes central to the study's design have been incorporated into my ongoing practice; these include offering increased opportunities for children to make choices about their levels of engagement in dramatherapy, as well as a broader range of techniques with which they can reflect on their ongoing experiences. Additional resources for children in dramatherapy, such as cameras and the inclusion in school of a post box for messages to myself and the learning support mentor, have been drawn from aspects of the study's design (e.g. the use of the Polaroid camera and the availability of the research box).

Throughout all three phases – as well as during the pre-study preparation and the subsequent write-up – the supervisory relationship and academic support has been a significant strength to both the practice and the research. It has provided me with reflective and reflexive opportunities to deepen my understanding of the study, while increasing my knowledge of the paradigm of qualitative research through monthly academic consultations with my supervisory team who are leaders in the fields of dramatherapy and research with children.

Throughout the term of the study the dramatherapy post faced three separate rounds of redundancy as the leadership of the school changed and so did the funding priorities and cost improvement strategy. Instrumental in preventing redundancy on each occasion were changes in the employment law, and the support from the school's senior management team. These factors exemplify the benefits of undertaking research in educational settings where dramatherapy services are not statutory and are therefore vulnerable to cuts –and to being misunderstood within the overall focus of educational goals. As a field of inquiry, research is seen as an area of rigour, supporting educational excellence and providing the best opportunities for children in school settings; as such the topic of research provides a common language for discussing aims and outcomes, which in turn can be of benefit to communicating the need for therapy in school settings.

Combining the roles of dramatherapist and researcher as a lone practitioner had its challenges. These include the ongoing tensions throughout the study between the practitioner caseload and the research agenda, and the requirement to respond to practice needs during the 18 months of data collection by rearranging other practice-based concerns so as not to jeopardise the schedule of sessions. Developing and maintaining a balance between keeping the momentum of the post-data-collection processes going and continuing to uphold professional standards of proficiency required thought and planning, and this balance was not always possible.

The analytical process and writing-up of the study was demanding both in terms of the practice needs and my own learning. The following reflection by Charles Darwin, in correspondence to his friend and mentor John Stevens Henslow, offers a poignant parallel to my own experiences of the challenges brought about by the masses of data that were generated: *'You cannot think how delighted I feel at having finished all my Beagle materials except some invertebrata; it is now ten years since my return, and your words, which I thought preposterous, are come true, that it would take twice the number of years to describe, than it took to collect and observe'* (Darwin (1846), cited in Gribbin & Gribbin, 1997, p. 37).

As a practitioner-researcher I have discovered that involving children as co-researchers is a vital way of developing knowledge and gathering evidence about their engagement in dramatherapy. I have explored the duality of being a dramatherapist *and* a researcher; the study's design has deepened my understanding of what it means to engage children in assent-choosing and assent-reviewing processes, and enabled me to develop a choice of creative methods for reflection during the closing stage of dramatherapy sessions. These discoveries have implications for future research, as explored below.

#### 7.7 Future research opportunities

The limitations of the study, as noted earlier in this chapter, highlighted a failure to engage parents and caregivers for whom English is a second language. None of these families gave consent for their children to be approached to join the study, and this was partly due to a flaw in the study's design, which failed to accommodate their language needs adequately. This would be a significant area

of practice and research development, exploring diversity and inclusive practice for parents with a view to providing more accessible information about the services offered to their children. Future research would also provide the potential for ESL children to research their experiences and disseminate findings in languages accessible to them.

Kellett (2010) argues that children are disempowered by their exclusion from the analytical process in research and the dissemination of findings, and calls for researchers to include children in all stages of the process. This study exemplifies this inclusive approach, and it is certainly an area for future development within therapeutic practice. The ethical complexities of researching with children could be negotiated through a process-led approach to assent choosing and reviewing, enabling them to represent themselves first-hand during the analytical and writing-up processes, as well as in the dissemination of research findings.

An area of ongoing development is that of increasing awareness of dramatherapy and arts therapies practice, and how they may support children who are experiencing difficulties and develop their emotional well-being in school environments. This can be achieved through therapeutic alliances that promote and reveal agency, and by engaging with methods that empower children – as demonstrated in this study. The development and implementation of research practice using dramatherapy methods – and the dissemination of findings using a language that educationalists can relate to, but which remains positioned in the theory and practice remit of dramatherapy – is also an area for future research.

The requirement for meaningful dialogue between school staff and other professionals highlights a vital area of research – whether it is in dramatherapy sessions or elsewhere in services and areas of professional practice that engage directly with children. Developing ways of listening actively and effectively is essential to hearing children's views and providing services that support their needs.

## 7.8 Final words

In the role of co-researcher each child made reference to the research audience in both direct and indirect ways, with some wondering how the things they had said and done during their sessions would be experienced by others. My responsibilities to present this thesis to the research audience so that each of the seven children's voices could be heard – and to uphold the co-researching agreement to do this – were key motivations in completing the write-up of the study, as this was the only part of the process that the children were not directly involved in.

The main strength of the study is that the seven individual voices come to life through their reflections, and that the analysis of their journeys as co-researchers is done in such a way that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained (whilst remaining identifiable to the children through their self-selected pseudonyms). Achieving these methodological aims was difficult at times: adult interpretation can so easily influence utterances and actions made by children, even in the hope of making meaning that supports them but which in effect only silences and suppresses their voices.

From this study, dramatherapists and other professionals working with children who are deemed vulnerable may develop dialogues with them, and with each other, about how to capture experiences through the development of sound assent-choosing and reviewing processes, and through research designs that provide children with opportunities to make choices that promote and reveal their agency.

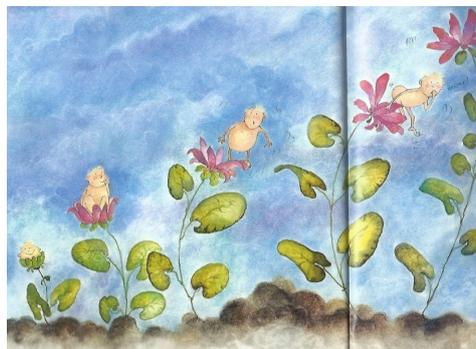
Looking back over the study, one question I wish I had asked each child during their time as a co-researcher is: *“If you had the choice to describe yourself now for the reader of the long essay I will write, and you chose to do so – how would you do it?”* I recognise this question reflects my need to ensure that right until the last moment it is *their* words, *their* reflections and – above all – *their* voices that come through the loudest and the clearest, and which form the legacy of the study.

Without Ambipom, James, Lady Gaga, Mia, Rocksus, Rosie and Stargirl, this research would not have been possible. My final thoughts are with each one of them, as I acknowledge that the study captured a sustained moment of time in their lives that is now a moment in history. Their time as co-researchers provided them with insights into

themselves, and their findings in turn provide insights for the theory, research and practice of dramatherapy and research with children.

I resolve to share these findings far beyond the remit of this thesis, and to present case studies for each child at some future point. The privilege of witnessing each child's journey as a client in dramatherapy and as a co-researcher has significantly redefined my professional identity. My heartfelt hope is that the benefit to each of the seven children is at least double that of mine, and that their voices in life grow strong and healthy through the choices they make.

*“All children should be allowed to live and to grow... and grow... and grow...”*



UNICEF (2002), illustrated by Babette Cole.

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**AUTHOR'S GUIDANCE NOTES on the PDF version of this Thesis:**

- Please note that the reproductive photographic quality of co-researcher artefacts and cartoon images has been compromised in the electronic conversion of this document in PDF format. To view images as they are intended by the author, please visit the Thesis reading room at Leeds Beckett University library (formerly Leeds Metropolitan University).
- Minor layout, formatting and text spacing anomalies are present in this document as a result of format conversion.

## Appendix 1: Letter to parents/primary caregivers, January 2009

Dear Parent/Primary Caregiver,

### **Re: Invitation for your child to participate in research**

Your child currently has a weekly dramatherapy session with me in school, lasting 45 minutes.

I am writing to request your permission for your child to be invited to join a research study I am about to start in school. I hope the research will be an opportunity for the participating children to learn about themselves and develop their well-being. I also hope it will help adults working with children to develop improved ways of offering therapeutic services to children and their families.

This study will explore the ways in which dramatherapy can help children to develop their identity in a positive way, and find their own voice to express themselves. The study is part of my doctoral research at Leeds Metropolitan University.

If you agree for your child to be invited to join the study, it will take place during the dramatherapy session they already have. Your child will be invited to become a 'co-researcher', which means we will be researching together. Each week they will be able to choose whether or not they want to engage as co-researchers.

If you give your consent, your child will be given a choice to join the study before the co-researching sessions begin. This work will be creative and will use the techniques already present in the dramatherapy sessions.

All research is carried out **anonymously and confidentially**. Your child will not be identified **at any stage** of the research, and neither will the school. Attached to this letter are information sheets for you and your child, which I hope will provide answers to any questions you may have. There is also a consent form attached for you to complete and return to school office as soon as possible.

I would be happy to meet with you to talk further if necessary, and could meet you at your home or in school – whichever would be better for you. If you would like to meet with me, please ask XXXX or XXXX at the main school reception to book a time for us to talk, or see me in the playground before or after school to arrange a time that suits us both.

I hope you will consider giving your consent for this important research study; if you do, **I look forward to receiving your signed consent form, which you can hand in at the main reception.**

Best wishes,

**Emma Ramsden  
School Dramatherapist**

## **INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/PRIMARY CAREGIVERS**

### **AN INVITATION FOR YOUR CHILD TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH**

**Title of the study:**

**A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting**

**Please contact Dr Sue Warren if you have any queries or concerns regarding this research:**

**Dr Sue Warren  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education  
Fairfax Hall  
Headingley Campus  
Leeds  
LS6 3QS  
Tel: 0113 823616**

## Appendix 2: Information sheet for parents/primary caregivers

Page 2 of 3

My name is Emma Ramsden. As well as working at school as a dramatherapist I am a research student at Leeds Metropolitan University. I am undertaking research in order to explore and understand the ways in which dramatherapy sessions can help children to develop, articulate and understand their own voice. Having a voice and knowing that it is heard can help children feel supported and valued by others. Having a voice can also raise children's self-esteem and build confidence.

I am trying to learn how children express themselves in dramatherapy so that I can support their health and well-being. I would like to learn *with* the children who join the study. With this in mind, I would like to invite your child to become part of the study as what is called a **co-researcher**. This means that together we will explore their experiences in dramatherapy and look at how they understand themselves and how they communicate this understanding. As a co-researcher, your child will be in sole charge of making decisions about what they share as research and what they choose to keep confidentially within the dramatherapy contract.

With their permission, some of their dramatherapy sessions may be recorded on DVD camera. Together, your child and I may explore their voice and their experiences in dramatherapy. When I write about the study and what we found out, **both your child and the school will be anonymous; neither your child nor the school will be identified or recognised in any way.**

### **What will the research do?**

My hope is that the findings from the research will be of benefit to your child and support their growth and well-being. They may also enable more children to have dramatherapy sessions in the future.

### **Why has my child been selected for this study?**

All children who are currently in individual dramatherapy are being invited to take part.

### **What is a co-researcher?**

This means that your child and I will explore together their experiences of the dramatherapy sessions and how they understand themselves.

### **What will be expected of my child?**

Your child will have their individual dramatherapy session each week for 45 minutes. Of this time, 30 minutes will consist of dramatherapy, and the last 15 will form the research part. There will be 15 sessions in total.

## **Appendix 2: Information sheet for parents/primary caregivers**

Page 3 of 3

In the last 15 minutes of the session your child will be invited to be a co-researcher, and together we will explore what happened in the session by talking together and by using creative methods like drama, art and movement. These 15 minutes may be recorded on a DVD movie camera.

### **What happens to the video footage?**

Only your child and I will see the footage, unless they ask for you or someone else at home to come and watch some of it. If this happens we will set up a meeting time where we will sit together and view the footage. No one else will see or hear any of the recordings. All the recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet when not in use in our sessions. I am the only person who uses this cabinet. None of the recordings will be made available for anyone to view other than your child, and you will not be able to request any of the footage to keep.

### **What happens if I don't want my child to take part in the study?**

Your child will not be invited to join the study if you do not give your consent.

### **But won't they lose their ongoing dramatherapy sessions?**

No. They will carry on as usual.

### **What happens if I decide to withdraw my consent after the study has started?**

Then you can withdraw your child from the study. If you do want to withdraw after the research has started, I would encourage you to talk with your child about this beforehand to hear their point of view.

### **But won't my child's dramatherapy sessions stop too?**

No. They will still carry on.

If you decide that your child can become part of the study, I will invite them to two initial sessions where I will explain the research and creatively explore what may happen. In these sessions I will seek to gain their permission to take part (this is called assent-gaining).

**If you would like your child to take part in the research, please fill in the attached consent form and return it to me in school within the next two weeks.**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH**

**Emma Ramsden  
Dramatherapist**

### Appendix 3: Parents/primary caregivers consent form

Page 1 of 2

**Title of the study: A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting**

**Name of Researcher:** Emma Ramsden

**Please return this form to the school office**

| <b>To be completed by the Parent/Carer</b>   | <b>Please initial each box</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet, dated January 2009, for the above research and have had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher, Emma.   |                                |
| I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason to Emma, the researcher.  |                                |
| I understand that if I or my child withdraws consent, then any information that has been collected about my child relating to the research will be destroyed if either of us requests this.  |                                |
| I understand that if my child gives assent to take part in the research, they will be doing so as a co-researcher.   |                                |
| I understand that my child's identity will be protected at all times unless s/he tells the researcher about something that puts him/her or someone else at risk of harm.   |                                |
| I understand that the researcher will write about the research and might talk about it at conferences.   |                                |
| I understand that my child's personal details and the information s/he provides will be kept in a secure place and will be destroyed after the research has finished   |                                |
| I agree that the researcher, Emma, may use biographical information from school files and other documents held in school for writing purposes. I understand that neither my child nor the school will be identified <u>at any time</u> . |                                |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Page 2 of 2</p> <p>I understand that part of some sessions may be recorded on a video camera. I understand that nobody other than the researcher, Emma, and my child will see this material unless my child requests that family are allowed to view it. If so, I understand that I will be able to do this in school only, with Emma and my child being present. I understand that I will not be able to request this DVD footage to keep or view on my own at any point during or after the research.</p> |  |
| <p>I understand that if my child does not want to take part in the research, their place in dramatherapy will not be affected.</p>   |  |
| <p><b>I agree that my child can take part in the above research.</b></p>   |  |

Signature of parent/primary caregiver: .....

print name: .....

date: .....

**Appendix 4: Parents/primary caregivers consent letter for review sessions June 2009**

Dear Parent/Primary Caregiver,

**Re: Research study attached to Leeds Metropolitan University  
*A practitioner-researcher inquiry of choice, voice and agency: co-researching individual dramatherapy experiences with children***

Following the consent you gave for your child XXXXXXXX to participate in this school-based research study, I write to inform you that the current phase of the study is coming to an end in mid-July. I believe that all the children who have participated in the study have benefitted from doing so. The main experiences (findings) from the study are what I will now be putting together. I hope these findings will go on to help children express their voices in the future, including your child. I also hope they will help professionals to develop their skills in listening to children and working with them towards achieving their goals and meeting their needs. As you may remember, the children have been exploring the research questions with me as co-researchers, where their input has been the most important part of the work.

I would like to invite XXXXXXXX **to attend two review sessions over the next two terms. The first would be held in September, here at XXXXXXXX.** The session would last an hour and it would take place on either a Wednesday or a Thursday. It would be held at a start time that would enable XXXXXXXX to make the journey to XXXXXXXX from her secondary school.

I hope this is something you will agree to. I have already mentioned the possibility to XXXXXXXX, who has expressed an interest in attending.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that the all research is carried out **anonymously and confidentially**. XXXXXXXX will not be identified **at any stage** of the research, and neither will the school.

If you are happy for XXXXXXXX to attend this session, please sign the slip at the bottom of this letter. I will then contact you at the start of the autumn term by telephone to arrange a suitable date for the session.

Thank you once again for agreeing to XXXXXX becoming a co-researcher in this important research study.

Best wishes,

**Emma Ramsden  
School Dramatherapist**

-----  
**I agree that for XXXXXXXX may attend a research review session during the autumn term**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Information sheet for children

Page 1 of 3



**WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A CO-RESEARCHER?**

**A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting**



**INFORMATION FOR  
CHILDREN**



**LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

**If you have any queries, please contact:  
Dr Sue Warren  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education  
Fairfax Hall  
Headingley Campus  
Leeds  
LS6 3QS  
Tel: 0113 823616**

## Appendix 5: Information sheet for children

Page 2 of 3

Hi – I'm Emma. Maybe you know me already. As well as working at school as a Dramatherapist I am also a research student at Leeds Metropolitan University. This means I am studying like you do here at school. I'm trying to find new things out about the ways you and other children learn about yourselves in the dramatherapy sessions.

I would like to invite you to take part as a co-researcher in the research I am doing.

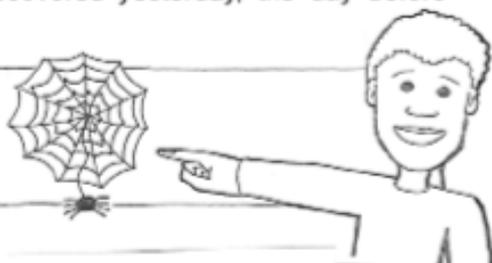
### WHAT IS A CO-RESEARCHER?

This means that you will be doing some research (which means finding out) with me, so that together we might learn more about you and how you learn more about yourself.

### WHY DO I WANT TO KNOW THIS?

I am trying to learn about this because it has not yet been studied in dramatherapy. Discovering something for the first time can be really important. Can you think of something new you discovered yesterday, the day before yesterday or even today?

Something you have discovered today:



### WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH DO?

This research (the finding out) might help more children, like you, to have dramatherapy sessions in the future. It might also help people in your life to understand you more and in different ways.

### WHY HAVE I BEEN CHOSEN?

All children who have dramatherapy sessions on their own have been invited to take part.

### WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?

You will have your dramatherapy session each week as usual, but instead of 45 minutes it will be 30 minutes, and then we will spend 15 minutes as researchers, just you and I, in the same room. We will explore what happened in the session by talking together and doing creative things like drama, art and moving around. These 15 minutes may be recorded on a DVD movie camera if that is alright with you. You can switch it on and off and be in charge of it during those 15 minutes.



## Appendix 5: Information sheet for children

Page 3 of 3

then you, me and that person from home will all sit together and watch some of it. All the recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet when not in our sessions. Only I have the key for this cabinet, which is kept at my home.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T WANT TO DO IT AT ALL?**

You don't have to. It is your choice.

### **BUT WON'T I LOSE MY DRAMATHERAPY PLACE?**

No. That will carry on as usual.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T WANT TO DO IT AFTER A WHILE?**

Then you can STOP. Just like that! You don't even have to tell me why.

### **BUT WON'T MY DRAMATHERAPY SESSIONS STOP TOO?**

No. They will still carry on. Just as they will if you decide not to become a co-researcher.

Your parents or carers have had to say it is OK for you to be part of the study too and I have written to them and they have said "yes Emma, that's okay with me/us". So now it is your turn to think about it:

**If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that is OK. You can stop at any time.**

If you decide to become part of the study I will invite you to come to two 'exploring research' sessions so that you can explore how it might work and look at the DVD movie camera that we may use.

If you have any questions about being a co-researcher you can leave me a message in the **Research Box** which is kept in the school office. If you have a message for it, ask Mrs Watts or Mrs Goddard to get it for you.

I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.



If you would like to join in with the research please fill in the assent form.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH.**

**Emma**



## Appendix 6: Child assent-choosing form (A)

Page 1 of 2

**Name of Researcher:** Emma Ramsden

| <b>To be completed by the child</b>  | <b>Please write your first name here</b> |
|--|--|
| I have read the information sheet dated January 2009 and asked Emma any questions I had about it, and I understand that we are going to be researching together as part of my dramatherapy sessions.   |  |
| I understand that my taking part is my own choice and at any time I can stop doing the research and leave without telling Emma why.  |  |
| I understand that if I do leave, Emma will get rid of anything I have made, written or recorded in the sessions.   |  |
| I understand that if I do want to do the research I will be called a co-researcher and will wear a badge for part of each session.   |  |
| I understand that nobody outside of the room will ever know who I am, and anything that we make or write about me will have a pretend name.  |  |
| I understand that if I tell Emma that I might be hurt, or someone else might be hurt, she may have to tell another adult about it and they will know that I said this.   |  |
| I understand that Emma might talk to adults who sit and listen in a big group to tell them about what we have found out so they can learn about it and help other people. If Emma does this it won't be in school or in the local area. Even then, nobody will ever know who I am. |  |

**Appendix 6: Child assent-choosing form (A)**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Page 2 of 2</p> <p>I understand that anything I make or write down with Emma or on my own will be kept safe and nobody will see it except for me and Emma. She will lock things away in a cabinet. This includes any DVD movie camera we might record onto, or photographs we might take. If I want to, I can ask for people at home to see it, but they will have to come into school to watch it with me and Emma.</p> |  |
| <p>I understand that when it's all over, things that are about me that I do not want to keep will be put through a big shredder by Emma so that nobody gets to see them anymore.</p>  |  |
| <p>I understand that if I do not want to join in with this research I can still come to dramatherapy sessions.</p>  |  |
| <p>I agree to take part in this research.</p>   |  |

**Agreement:**

I have decided to join in with this study and be a co-researcher, even though I know that I do not have to do this. Emma has answered all my questions.

Signature of co-researcher: .....

printed name: ..... date: .....

Signature of researcher: .....

printed name: ..... date: .....

**Appendix 6: Child assent-choosing form (B)**

I agree for Emma Ramsden to publish my cartoon photo in her hand-writing task which she has explained is a long essay called a thesis.

Co-researcher's signature:

Print name:

Date:

**Appendix 7: Post-data collection thank you letter sent to each child**

July 2010

Dear XXXXX,

Now that our co-researching review sessions have come to an end, I am writing to say a big thank you for taking part in the study and for being a brilliant co-researcher.

I will now write lots of words based on what you and I found out during our co-researching about your experiences. Remember that your identity will always be protected (so nobody will know who you really are) and I will use the pretend name you chose for yourself when I write about you.

Together we have found out things about your dramatherapy experience that nobody in the world has found out before. I am sure you will agree that this is exciting. I hope you are proud of yourself for taking part. I am certainly very proud of you.

As we discussed during our final review session in June, I will keep the video we made for the next 10 years. If you would like to see it again, please contact the school, who will be able to put you in contact with me.

I wish you very well in your school life for next term. I also wish you a safe and hopefully fun time during the long summer holiday.

Emma  
Dramatherapist



## Appendix 8: Letter addressed to each child: future access to individual data

Page 1 of 2

July 2013

Dear [child's name],

### **Re: Co-researching in dramatherapy 2009–2010**

You are reading this because you have shown an interest in remembering the research study you took part in while you were a student at XXXXXXXXX primary school. This study formed part of my work for a research degree at Leeds Metropolitan University, which I completed in 2014.

You may remember that as we ended our co-researching time together, I informed you that I would do my best to arrange for letters to be placed in the school safe so that you could find out about your involvement in the study, should you choose to do so at a future date. This is that letter.

I hope you are well and happy in your life, and that you are expressing your voice in ways that are meaningful and empowering for you.

If you would like to learn more about the study that you took part in, you can do this in a number of ways, which I've outlined below:

1. Search on the Internet using my name and key words such as 'dramatherapy', 'co-researching' and 'children'.

2. Go into a library and request the book whose details appear below, which has a chapter written by me and my university supervisor in it based on the early stages of our work together. It will probably take a few weeks for the library to get hold of a copy via inter-library loans, and you will need to pay a small fee of around £3 to borrow this book. You can also borrow this book whilst in the British Library if you become a Reader (member), which is free of charge. You will not be able to take the book out of the British Library but you can read it in the building.

The book is called: **Working with Children and Young People: Ethical Debates and Practices Across Disciplines and Continents.**

It is edited by: Campbell, A. & Broadhead, P

My chapter is called: Ethics, children, education and therapy: vulnerable or empowered.

Published: (2011) by Peter Lang publishing house (Germany)

As we agreed during our co-researching time, you will find yourself referred to by your pseudonym which is the name your pseudonym, which makes sure you are anonymous.

You may wish to contact me and ask directly about your involvement. You can do this through the British Association of Dramatherapists website, where you will find a contact email and telephone number for me. The website address is: <http://badth.org.uk/>.

## **Appendix 8: Letter addressed to each child: future access to individual data**

Page 2 of 2

The study was very important for the field of dramatherapy, and I take this opportunity to thank you for being a co-researcher. Your input led to discovering some really valuable things about how the choices you made enabled you to feel positively about the way you communicated and were listened to. You may remember we found out that being a co-researcher brought fun and happiness as well as the opportunity to think about some difficult experiences and personal challenges. Finding this out together has enabled me to continue to offer dramatherapy to other children by learning from what you and I found out about you.

Over the time since the study began, other dramatherapists and adults working with children have also learned a lot from these findings. I hope what you learnt about yourself has helped you to be healthy, and to continue to make informed choices about the issues that affect and interest you.

Very warm wishes for future well-being, safety and happiness.

Emma Ramsden  
Dramatherapist



## **Appendix 9: Update of progress for school governors June 2010 (A)**

Page 1 of 2

Dear Governors,

### **PhD update for XXXXXX Board of Governors meeting 14 June 2010**

The purpose of this brief statement is to inform you of the current status of the doctoral study, which is registered with Leeds Metropolitan University under the directorship of Professor Pat Broadhead.

I apologise for not being available to speak with you in person as I have done in previous years.

#### **Study overview**

The study, titled '**A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting**', is about to conclude its third year. The project involves seven children who are engaged as co-researchers. Five of these children are KS2, and two are now KS3.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How can children engage as co-researchers in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions?
2. Can choice-making in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions promote and reveal agency?
3. In what ways can engaging children as co-researchers in dramatherapy inform the field's understanding of both children's agency as co-researchers and the reflective phase in therapeutic process?

#### **Study update**

Whilst the main 'data set' – which consisted of co-researching during 10 dramatherapy sessions from January 2009 – concluded last July with a review session, this academic year the children have been invited to engage in two further review sessions. One was held in the spring term and the final review, which is currently ongoing, will be completed by the end of June.

These sessions provide additional data from the children's perspective about their reflections on their own well-being, their agency and their experiences in dramatherapy in relation to the research methods (12 creative methods designed to engage the children as co-researchers in finding opportunities to express insights and articulate 'voice').

The 'writing up' phase of the study is now underway. This is a long and involved task that will allow me to learn about the analytical process as well as about writing and presenting a thesis. A viva will follow a thesis submission, followed no doubt by some re-writing (hopefully minor). The end result will be the award of doctor of philosophy, and with it the opportunity to disseminate the findings in a variety of ways, including publishing further materials and speaking at conferences.

## **Appendix 9: Update of progress for school governors June 2010 (A)**

Page 2 of 2

### **Publications and conferences**

Material relating to this study is due to be released towards the end of the year in the following publication:

Ramsden, E. & Jones, P. (2011) Ethics, children, education and therapy: vulnerable or empowered. In: Campbell, A. & Broadhead, P. eds. **Working with Children and Young People: Ethical Debates and Practices Across Disciplines and Continents**. Germany, Peter Lang.

I will be presenting material about the study at two conferences in September. The first will be in Durham at the British Association for Dramatherapists (BADth) annual conference; the second is in Oxford at the Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA) international education conference.

I would be most happy to present findings at a future date to school staff in the form of INSET or/and after-school sessions for anyone who might be interested.

### **Acknowledgements**

I continue to be grateful for the patience and kindness extended to me by all staff at xxxxxxx in relation to this study, and to the Board of Governors for supporting this work.

I am particularly thankful to my line manager, xxxxxxxx, for her continued support and belief in the drama and art therapy work that takes place in the school – particularly in relation to my making changes to work days this academic year in order to comply with the requirements of Leeds Metropolitan University regarding a) monthly supervision, and b) my contracted teaching remit on a BA and MA programme in Childhood Studies at the university.

These thanks also extend to xxxxxx (SENCo), xxxxx (EP) and xxxxx (outgoing LM), along with many teaching assistants and members of teaching staff. Also to the administrators, xxxxxx and xxxxxx, for their support and help in contacting parents, and in other administrative matters connected to the project.

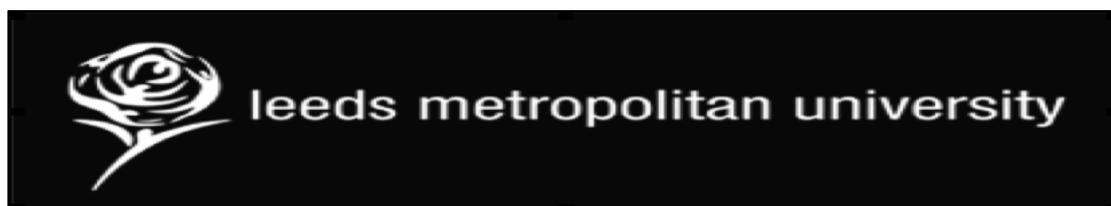
If you have any queries regarding this study, please contact me. My work day in school for the next academic session will be Tuesdays. I am available on email or via telephone xxxxxxxxxx.

Best wishes,

**Emma Ramsden**  
**Dramatherapist**

## Appendix 9: Information sheet containing an update of progress, handed to school staff and governors prior to the data collection commencing (B)

The following handout was prepared for all school staff for their information, and was distributed prior to the start of the three phases of data collection.



Page 1 of 2

### A practitioner-researcher inquiry into choice, voice and agency in individual dramatherapy sessions: co-researching with children in a primary school setting

#### Researching for a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) with Leeds Metropolitan University

- Central to a PhD thesis submission (approximately 85,000 words) is the concept that the candidate is making **an original contribution to knowledge**. Therefore, the area I am researching has not been researched before in my profession.
- In this research I will be working as a **practitioner-researcher**. Practitioner based research emerges from action-research (developed by Kurt Lewin in educational settings), where the aim is to **reflectively research processes that occur in order to improve practice**.
- Engaging with **collaborative inquiry** developed by John Heron & Peter Reason), I am inviting children to participate as **co-researchers** in order to explore the concept of the **child's voice**. The research will be **anonymous** and **confidential**.
- Working with children in this way is innovative in the fields of education and therapy.
- This research is influenced by changes in governmental policy that aim to support the '**voice of the child**', such as the United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1992) and Every Child Matters, which comes from the Children Act (2004), as well as the intervention of the Common Assessment Framework, more recently developed from this base.
- There are some interesting texts and websites covering this area, including:  

Davie, R., Upton, G. & Varma, V. (1996) **The Voice of the Child**. Abingdon, Routledge Falmer.
- As part of my PhD, and as Associate Staff member at Leeds Met, I teach on two courses: the BA (Hons) and the MA in Childhood Studies.

#### The Research Questions are:

1. How do children engage as co-researchers of their own reflective processes in dramatherapy sessions?
  - 1a. What **choices** do children make when they engage as co-researchers?
  - 1b. How do children express their **voices** as co-researchers?

## **Appendix 9: Information sheet containing an update of progress, handed to school staff and governors prior to the data collection commencing (B)**

Page 2 of 2

2. What impact does engagement with the reflective process have on each child as an individual when co-researching in dramatherapy?
3. In what ways can engaging children as co-researchers in dramatherapy inform the field's understanding of therapeutic process?

The research takes place **in the therapy sessions, with children who give their permission on a session-by-session basis only**. They become co-researchers for the final 15 minutes of each session. A total of 20 sessions per child will form the basis of the **research sample**.

### **SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TO DATE (September 2007 – July 2008)**

1. Currently one third of the way through the doctorate.
2. Entering the data collection cycle – which means carrying out two terms of fieldwork with children as co-researchers in school.
3. Ethical approval granted in June 2008 by Leeds Metropolitan University Ethics Committee (panel of 20 academics); document commended as exemplary.
4. Research proposal assessed by way of a two-hour viva (interview with a panel of five academics) in June 2008 and approved.
5. Senior Management Team approval in school.
6. Board of School Governors informed of the research via presentation. No objections raised.
7. New room set up and equipped with range of materials for ongoing work with children.

### **THE NEXT STAGE (September 2008 – July 2009)**

1. Gaining of consent, by way of meetings with parents, for children currently being seen and on the waiting list for dramatherapy.
2. For those children whose parents give consent, assent-gaining will be sought from each child directly.
3. Gathering recording equipment for data collection and finalising creative methods to be used.
4. Commence the data collection cycle through the autumn and spring terms (and possibly some of the summer term).
5. Continue to speak at conferences about the research, and write articles for publication.
6. Monthly meetings in Leeds with my academic supervisory team regarding the research.

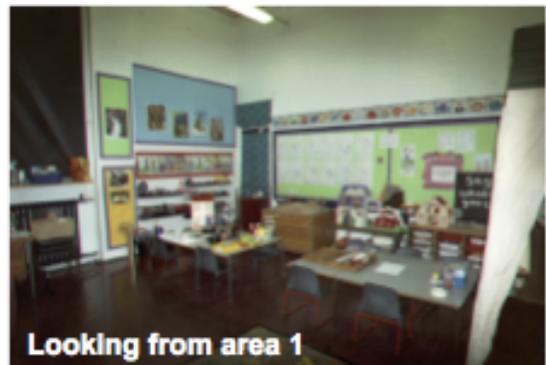
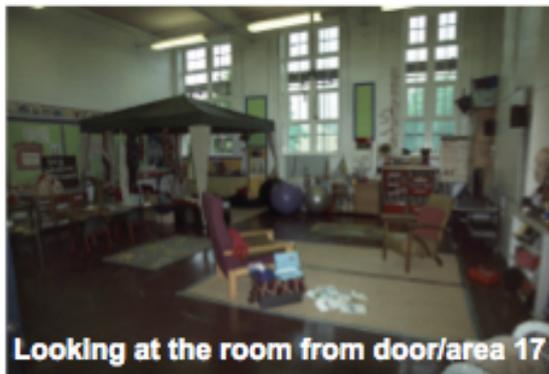
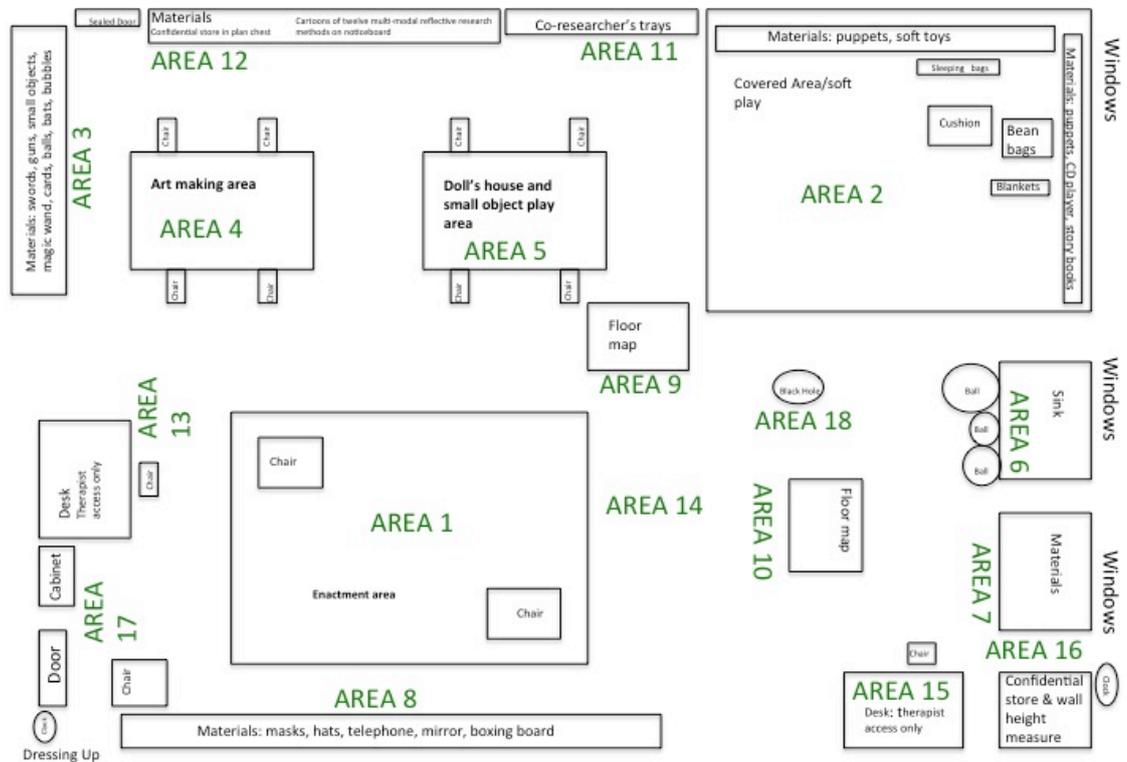
Dramatherapy work with children outside of the research sample **will continue to take place**. The dramatherapy service will continue in its usual way with the addition of the research study. I will be in school more than the two days I currently work over the academic year. **The school is not paying extra for this**. From time to time I may ask some of you to engage in interviews with me about the research subject; you will have every right to decline any invitation without repercussion. **Participation in research is always at the discretion of the participant (co-researchers in this case)**.

I am happy to talk with anyone about this research at any stage. You may be interested in finding out more, or asking how the research is going as time passes by.

Emma Ramsden  
Dramatherapist

## Appendix 10: Diagram of dramathery/research room layout and photographic images

The following diagram details the dramathery/research room layout along with accompanying photographic images below:



**Appendix 11: Practitioner-researcher recording template for co-researching sessions**

page 1 of 3

|  | Y                        | N                        | Comment: |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Co-researching   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Co-researcher develops own way of revealing their decision | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Co-researcher makes reference to previous session(s)       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Co-researching methods chosen by client                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Co-researching methods suggested by ER                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Photographs taken  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Polaroid photographs taken                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| Mini-cam footage shot                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |

**Client:**

**Session:**

**Date:**

| <b>Areas in the room worked in</b> | <b>Comment on use of space</b>   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Co-researcher                      | <input type="checkbox"/> uses available space easily <input type="checkbox"/> confines self to small space |
| Therapist                          | <input type="checkbox"/> uses available space easily <input type="checkbox"/> confines self to small space |

| <b>Themes raised during reflection</b> | Y                        | N                        | Comment |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Aspects of the session                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |

|                         |                          |                          |  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Research/co-researching | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|

|                       |                          |                          |  |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Being in the room     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Peers & relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

**Appendix 11: Practitioner-researcher recording template for co-researching sessions**

page 2 of 3

|                  |                          |                          |  |
|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Home life/family | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Bullying         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Emotions         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Ending           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

|                                     |                          |                          |  |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Transition (year groups or schools) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Other                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

| <b>How do themes and content emerge</b>                | <b>Y</b>                 | <b>N</b>                 | <b>Comment</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Emerge with no researcher intervention                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| With some researcher intervention                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Themes developed are connected to previous DT sessions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Themes highly divergent with little common ground      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |

| <b>Relationship between client and their dramatic expression</b>  | <b>All</b>               | <b>Part</b>              | <b>None</b>              | <b>Comment</b> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Shows concentration   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Shows enjoyment   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Shows motivation  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Shows spontaneity   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Reflection upon own response to methods chosen  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Reflection upon the research/co-research relationship within the methods chosen                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Acknowledges connection between personal material and expression via research methods (co-researcher led) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Acknowledges connection between personal material and expression via research methods (researcher led)    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |

| <b>Expressive means during co-researching</b> | <b>All</b>               | <b>Part</b>              | <b>None</b>              | <b>Comment</b> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Concrete play with objects                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |
| Symbolic play with objects                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                |

**Appendix 11: Practitioner-researcher recording template for co-researching sessions**

page 3 of 3

|   |                          |                          |                          |  |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Acting out imaginary situations                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Character or role for brief period (own)                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Character or role for brief period (with researcher)          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Character or role for brief period (with object i.e., puppet) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |
| Sustained character or role                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

| Relationship with researcher | All                      | Part                     | None                     | Comment |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Open                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Trusting                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Positive projections         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Negative projections         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Permission to self to engage | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Competitive                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Other:                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |

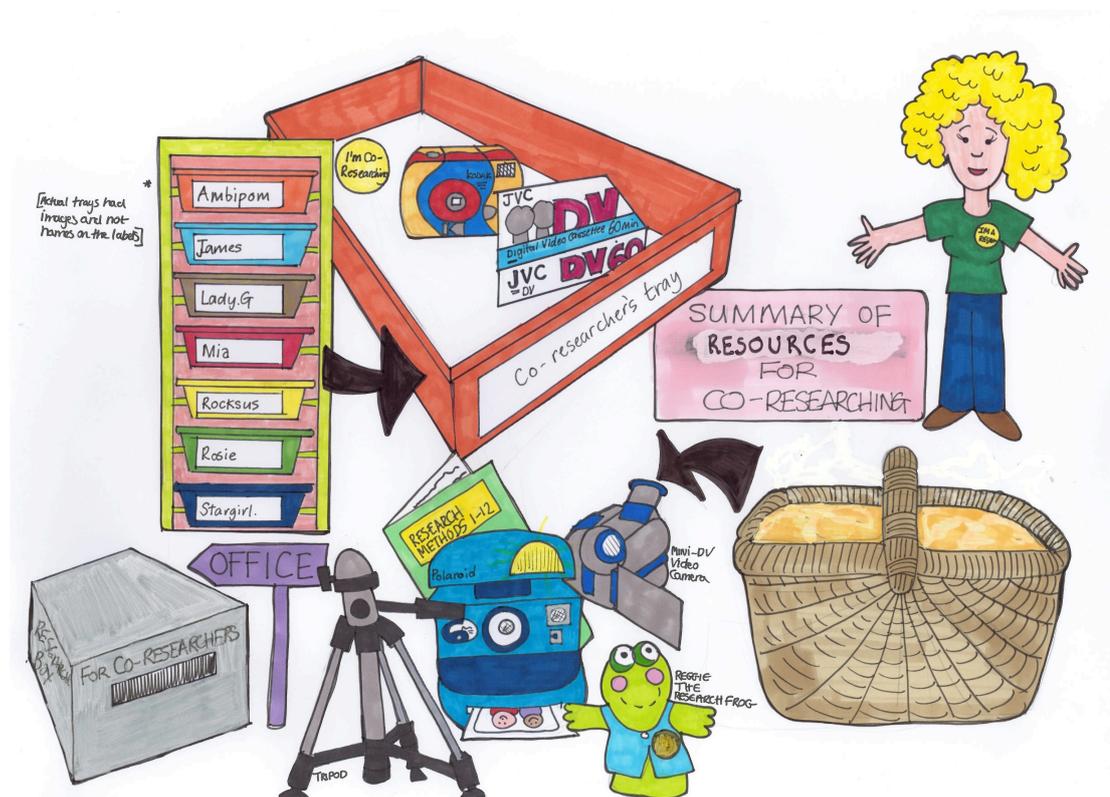
| Interaction   | All                      | Part                     | None                     | Comment |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Eye contact   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Communicative | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Difficult     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Other:        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |

| Ending of co-research session                          | Y                        | N                        | Comment |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Session ended on time                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Co-researcher did not appear to want to leave the room | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |
| Co-researcher spoke of not wanting to leave the room   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |         |

**Comment:**

## Appendix 12: Summary of resources for co-researching

The following cartoon depicts the art and media resources made available to each child during their time as co-researchers. These resources enabled the children to capture and record their self-selected reflections. A description of each item is below the cartoon image.



Listed clockwise from bottom left:

1. Co-researching message box/case, which was kept in the school's office
2. Co-researchers' individual trays containing items 3–5 (below)
3. Disposable camera
4. Mini-DV moving image-recording tape
5. Co-researcher's badge
6. Copy of research methods 1–12 in each co-researcher's individual folder
7. Wicker research basket, which stored the shared items and contained items 8–12 (below)
8. Reggie the Research Frog
9. Mini-DV moving image video camera
10. Polaroid camera
11. Copy of research methods 1–12
12. Tripod for camera mounting

## Appendix 13: Research methods 1 - 12

The 12 reflective research methods were visually described in cartoon format and displayed in the dramatherapy room on a large wall mounted noticeboard. Each method is described and displayed below.

### Method 1

**The imaginary I camera:** The co-researcher in the role of 'photographer' moves the researcher, with eyes closed as the 'camera', into a position in the dramatherapy room, where they can capture an image of the co-researcher's choosing. Once the frame is set, the co-researcher gives the instruction for the image to be taken and for how long. The researcher opens her eyes and looks at the scene for the length of time chosen by the co-researcher.



### Method 2

**Transforming the imagination dough:** Research method two invites the co-researcher to represent and reflect any feelings or experiences from the session using 'imagination dough'. Imagination dough is an imaginary elastic substance, that can be any colour, size or consistency which is then shaped into any object or abstract shape to represent feelings and experiences.



## Appendix 13: Research methods 1 - 12

### Method 3

**Body sculpts:** The co-researcher 'moulds' the therapist as if she were a lump of clay, into a still image (a sculpt) which expresses feelings or experiences which arose during the session. The co-researcher is invited to witness their creation, de-role the researcher from the sculpt, and inhabit it themselves. The sculpt is finally de-rolled and the image reflecting using words or movements.



### Method 4

**Pass the facial expression:** Using facial expressions initiated by the co-researcher, feelings and experiences from the session are embodied and re-experienced by being passed to and fro, between the co-researcher and researcher.



## Appendix 13: Research methods 1 - 12

### Method 5

**Statements in the box:** The co-researcher is invited to make statements about experiences in the session which are stored in a 'reflection box'. Statements are made either using speech and/or movement, or recorded on paper with drawing and/or text.



### Method 6

**Reflecting with sentence prompt cards:** The co-researcher chooses to finish one or more of four incomplete sentences that have been written on large cue cards. They can do this by speaking, moving drawing or writing. The cue cards are:

'Today I have...'

'What I would like to say is...'

'I enjoyed...'

'I did not like...'



## Appendix 13: Research methods 1 - 12

### Method 7

**Saying anything you want to:** The co-researcher is invited to sit and talk about their experiences of the session.



### Method 8

**Choosing objects that represents your session today:** The co-researcher gathers together, or identifies objects that have been meaningful during the session and reflects on their choices using movement, speech, drawing or writing.



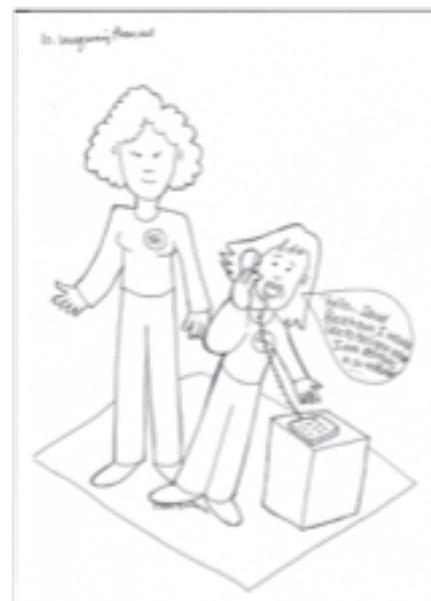
**Method 9**

**Expressing and reflecting with puppets:** The co-researcher is invited to reflect on their session using puppets. This can include re-creating moments from the session, or having a conversation with the puppets about the session and their experiences.



**Method 10**

**Make an imaginary phone call to someone of your choosing:** The co-researcher makes a pretend phone call to someone either real or imaginary, to chat about the session. The call is witnessed by the researcher.



## Appendix 13: Research methods 1 – 12

### Method 11

**Re-tracing your steps:** The co-researcher leads and revisits the physical journey taken in the room during the session as the means of reflection. The researcher mirrors the process as instructed by the co-researcher.



### Method 12

**Reflecting with pictures and images:** The co-researcher chooses wet or/and dry art materials to create an image representing aspects and experiences of their session or chooses from the storage bank of found images (postcards and magazine cut outs) in the 'images box'.



## Appendix 14: Phase Three: review methods 1–3

Each of the three reviewing sessions that made up Phase Three incorporated a different multi-modal reviewing research method. These methods had been identified from the analysis of existing dramatherapy practice which I conducted when developing methods 1 - 12. The three multi-modal reviewing research methods captured some of the co-researchers' experiences as they reflected on the co-researching role. Completed examples of each method are shown below, and accompanied by a description of the method.

### JAMES

#### Review 1: five things about me

This method was adapted from an unpublished dramatherapy evaluation tool (Hasnip and Coleman for Roundabout Dramatherapy, 2006). A person stick figure with a thought bubble, a speech bubble and a big red heart stands next to a suitcase, an unopened present and a rubbish bin. The co-researcher is invited to think of: a thought; a feeling about the research; a present they would give themselves; an experience they would take away in their memory; something to leave behind or throw away.



| Questions   | Answers  |
|---|--|
| 1) A feelings you've had whilst being a co-researcher   | <b>"Puppets. It's hard to explain [what about them]."</b> <b>"Drawing pictures"</b>            |
| 2) A thought you've had about being a co-researcher   | <b>"Sometimes when I draw pictures I draw better than I think I was going to draw anyway."</b> |
| 3) A present you would give yourself if you could that would help you to be a co-researcher in the future | (had a look around the room first)<br><b>"Binoculars."</b>                                     |
| 4) Something to take away from the experience of taking part in the research                              | Badge: <b>"Would help me remember."</b>  |
| 5) Something to throw away or leave behind about it   | <b>"The picture I have on my tray I'm not quite used to it anymore."</b>                       |

## Appendix 14: Phase Three: review methods 1–3

### STARGIRL

#### Review 2: where am I on the blob tree?

This reviewing method draws on the blob tree people resource (Wilson, 1988) which depicts a series of blob figures with different facial expressions positioned at different points on and around a large tree.

The co-researcher is invited, at the start, middle and end of the 10 sessions in Phase Two, to document where they would place themselves by colouring-in the corresponding blobs and writing or saying a sentence to accompany each position.



| Questions   | Answers                   |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) Where you were as you became a the co-researching. | <b>"Free."</b>            |
| 2) Where you were half way through the ten sessions.  | <b>"Confident boost."</b> |
| 3) Where you were at the end of the ten sessions.     | <b>"Upset."</b>           |

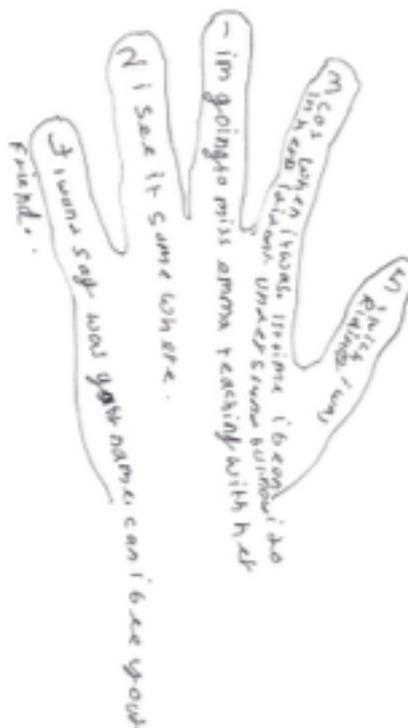
## Appendix 14: Phase Three: review methods 1–3

### AMBIPOM

#### Review 3: self portrait of a co-researcher

First drawing around the outline of their own hand with a pencil, felt tip, pastel or crayon, the co-researcher is invited to record five statements that they would like to share about their experiences of being a co-researcher:

- 1) Something to remember about co-researching
- 2) What your voice is in dramatherapy
- 3) How being a co-researcher enabled you to be heard
- 4) Something to say about co-researching
- 5) A hope for the future



| Statements to complete                               | Answers  |
|--|--|
| 1) something to remember about researching           | <i>"I'm going to miss emma teaching with her"</i>  |
| 2) What your voice is in dramatherapy                | <i>"I see it somewhere."</i>   |
| 3) How being a co-researcher enabled you to be heard | <i>"Cos when it was 1<sup>st</sup> time I been in here I didn't understand but now I do"</i> |
| 4) something to say about researching                | <i>"I want to say what's your name can I be your friend."</i>                                |
| 5) a hope for the future                             | <i>"I wish I was rich inof"</i><br>[rich enough]   |

**Appendix 15: Journeys in the gramophone speaker with Ambipom and Rocksus**

**Ambipom**



**Rocksus**

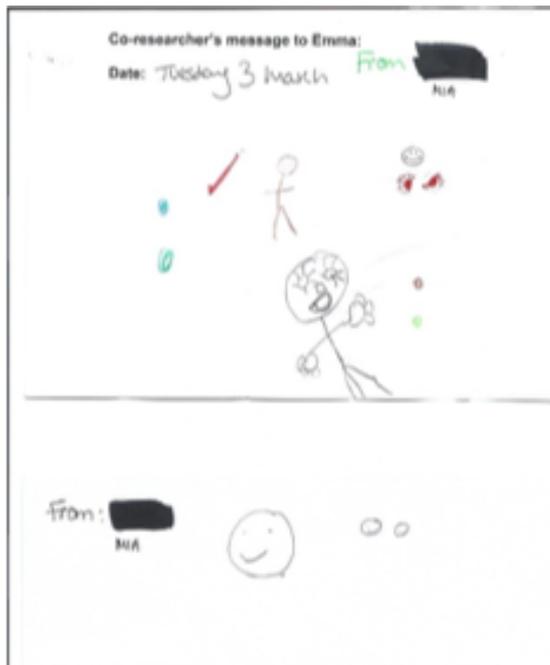


## **DEAR CO-RESEARCHER:**

- 1 Leave your message for me in this box. It can be words, a drawing or both.
- 2 Use the paper, colouring pens and crayons to draw or write your message and place in an envelope.
- 3 Please write your name on the message.
- 4 Please write the date on the message.
- 5 Place in the box and close it.
- 6 I will pick up your message before our next session together.

## Appendix 16: Mia and Stargirl's research box messages (B)

During Phases Two and Three, a silver coloured 'research box' was kept in the main school reception/administrative area, containing dry art materials, paper and envelopes. Co-researchers could write and draw reflective messages in-between sessions if they chose to do so. Below are examples of message posted by Mia and Stargirl which are in addition to those presented in chapter six.



Mia's messages



Stargirl's messages

## Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts

The following images were referred to in chapter four, section 4.15:

I was keen to document my experiences as an emerging researcher, and capture them in a visual format. I commissioned monthly cartoons to be drawn for the duration of the study by an artist, who is also an art therapist and who works with children elsewhere in the United Kingdom... These cartoons followed the research journey and were realised from the reflexive descriptions I scribed and relayed to her on a monthly basis. Many of these images are based on the format of the 'six piece story approach' dramatherapy technique, in which six panels follow a narrative with key foci in each panel (Gersie & King, 1990; Lahad, 1992).

These images represent a selection from the 75 images that were commissioned throughout the term of the scholarship. The themes for each commission came from my practitioner-researcher's journals, in which I documented the overall research process.

Image 1: June 2007, thinking about doctoral level research



**Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts**

Image 2: September 2007, starting out.

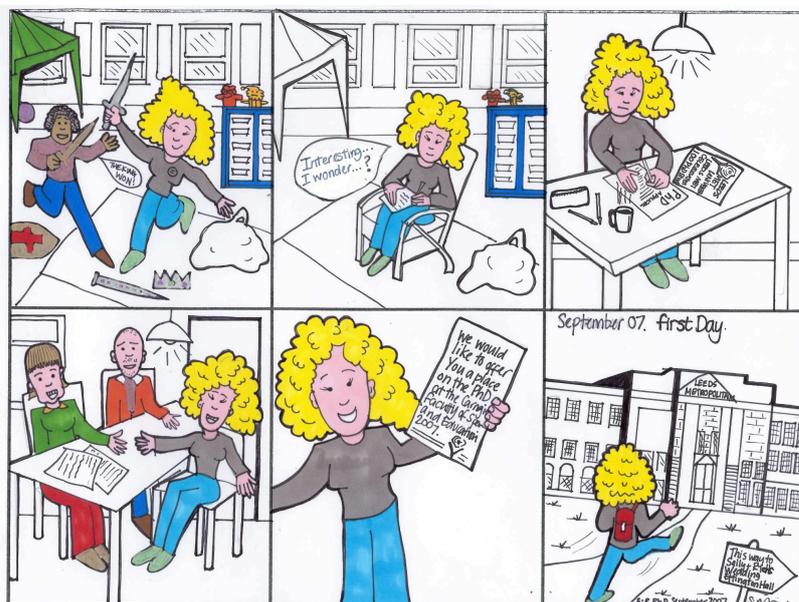


Image 3: Developing a research focus. The voice of the child.



**Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts**

Images 4 and 5: Developing methods from existing practice.



Image 6: Data collection.



Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts

Image 7: Cataloguing data.

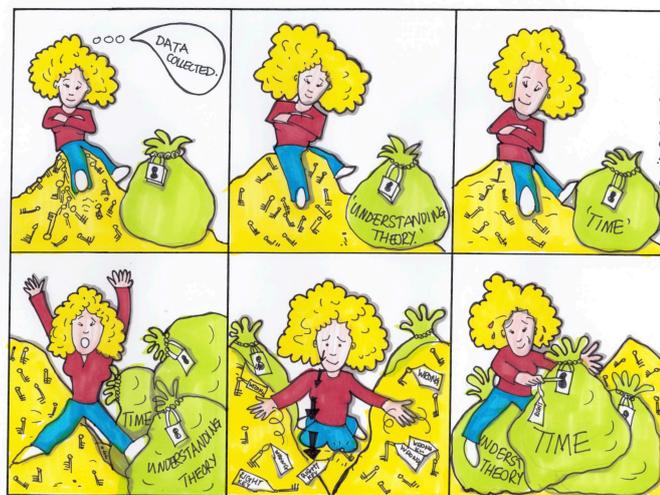


Image 8: Analysing data.



**Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts**

Image 9: Immersion in the findings.

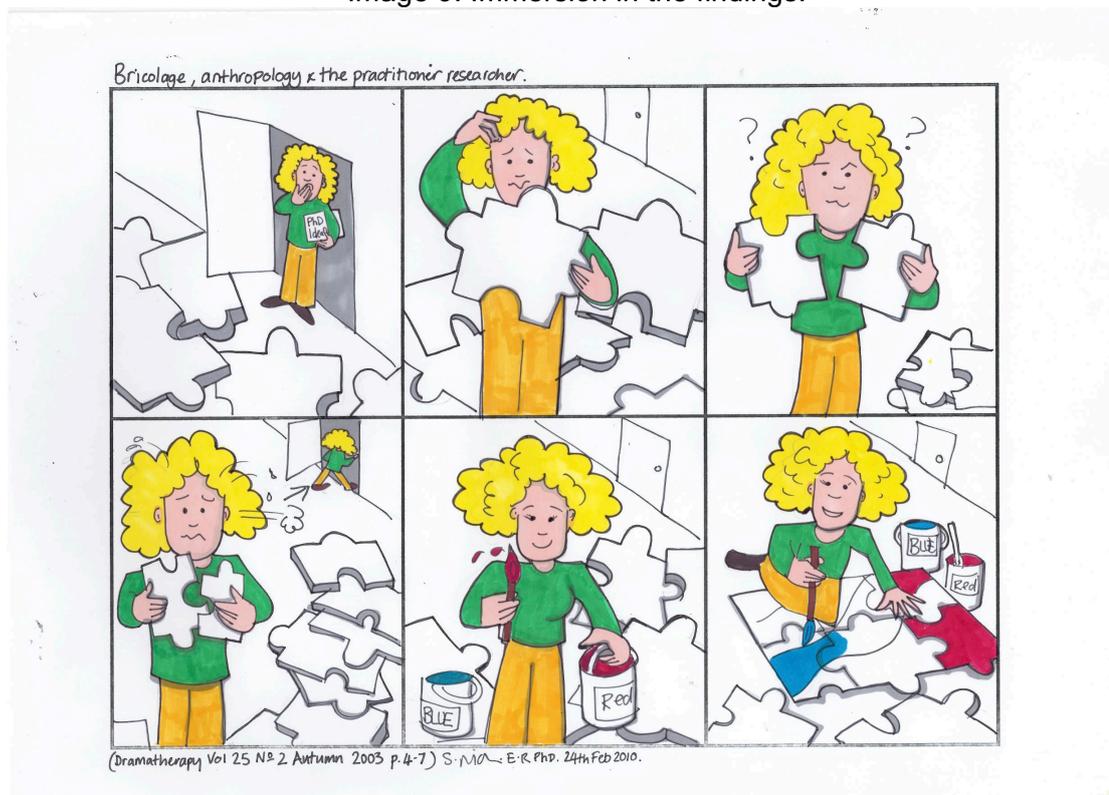
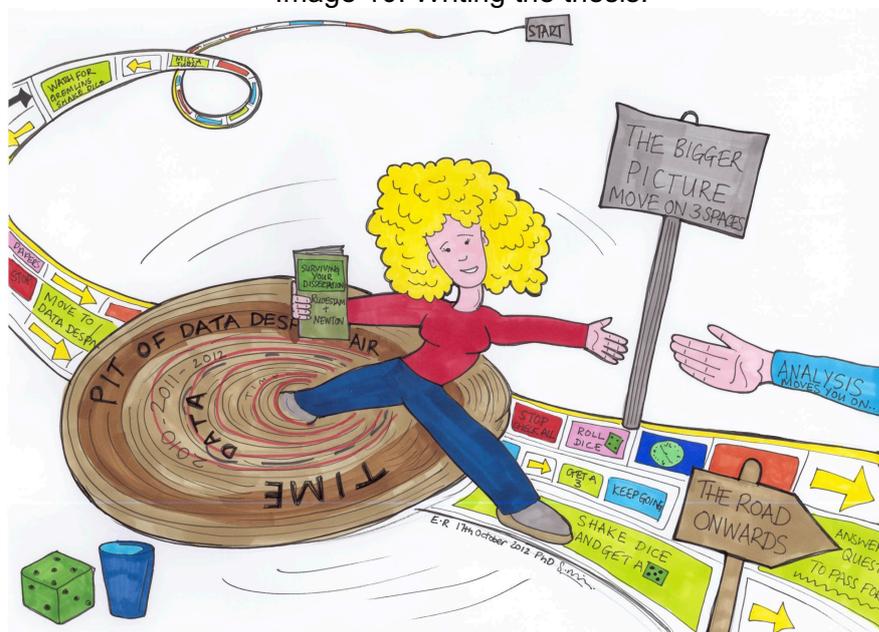


Image 10: Writing the thesis.



Appendix 17: Practitioner researcher's reflexive journey in cartoons – drawn from journal extracts

Image11: Submission.



Image 12: Acknowledging the support and consolidating the learning.



*'Why' said the Dodo, 'the best way to explain it is to do it.'*

(Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 1986.

In: McFall, 2013, p.6)

## Appendix 18: Images related to UNCRC Rights No. 6 and 13

These images depicted relate to the quotations on the first page of chapter 1 (page 14) and on the final page of chapter 7 (page 244). They are taken from the book **'For Every Child – the rights of the child in words and pictures'** which was commissioned by UNICEF, and sees leading contemporary artists interpret some of the UNCRC's rights in images. I chose the quotations relating to Rights number 6 and 13 as they articulated part of the philosophy of this study in terms of listening to children and hearing what they say.



**'For Every Child – the rights of the child in words and pictures'** (2002) Red Fox Books



*"Allow us to tell you what we are thinking or feeling. Whether our voices are big or small; whether we whisper or shout it, or paint, draw, mime or sign it – listen to us and hear what we say."*

Based on UNCRC Right No. 13 (illustrated by John Burningham)



*"All children should be allowed to live and to grow...and grow...and grow...."*

Based on UNCRC Right No. 6 (illustrated by Babette Cole)