



# Child focused research: Disconnected and disembodied voices

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## Abstract

Voice represents a commitment to child focused studies which provide insights into childhood. This builds upon the assumption that voice equates to authenticity and that children's words can speak for themselves. These claims remain disputed and more could be done to critique how voices are extracted, translated and used in research in ways which disconnect from embodied experiences within material and social contexts. Critical analysis provides an opportunity to consider next steps in voice research, calling for greater dialogue between disciplines and a reconsideration of disciplinary boundaries.

## Keywords

embodiment, materialism, research assemblage, voice, child focused research

## Introduction

A focus on an individualised approach to 'giving voice' to children has resulted in a large body of participatory research (Clark and Moss, 2001; Kellett, 2011; Plowman and Stevenson, 2012; Cooper, 2017) and professional practices which emphasise the importance of listening to and engaging with children (Cooper, 2015; Cooper and Kellett 2017). Underpinned by what Nolas (2015) refers to as a governance approach, children have become routinely involved on councils' and organisations' reference groups as a means of having their views accessed. Children's agency has been foregrounded and their rights facilitated, enabling a focus on their perspectives and recognising them as experts in their own lives (Kellett, 2011), although as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) point out, not the only experts. However, scholars point out that an individualised approach can lack

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close examination of ‘social’ – relational and structural – aspects of experience, which interconnect with and shape children’s agency and participation (Mason and Bessell, 2017; Payler et al., 2020; Spyrou et al., 2018). Voices in dialogue, argues Alcoff (1991) far from being neutral can be seen as a political struggle which is entwined with assumptions about communicative norms and rationality that privilege those from particular classed, gendered and racialised positions and may invalidate the speech of others. An individualised, voice approach therefore can create the illusion of participation without fully challenging social and structural relations (Coppock, 2011).

Discussions also ensue concerning the conceptualisation of voice as predominately verbal, thus discounting different conceptualisations which acknowledge the embodied materiality of voice (Gallagher, 2020). Listening to the views of children includes rich multi-modal experiences (Clark and Moss, 2001) that are embodied, and situated within multi-layered social dynamics (Cooper and Preece, 2023), laced with family histories and shaped by relational activities in which humans and other-than-humans are agentic (Latour, 2005; Mazzei and Jackson, 2017). Authors acknowledge that despite voice emerging from complex interactions between bodies, social, material and cultural histories (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017) these aspects are often overlooked during research (Mayes, 2019) and voices are taken to be authentic in speaking for themselves (Derrida, 1976). Furthermore, it is important to consider how voices are heard within relational research practices where a number of other voices are situated (Tisdall and Punch, 2012) and where adults characteristically wield most power (Chamberlain and Cooper, 2019).

This paper intends firstly, to add to these ongoing discussions that problematise voice research but also to explore these issues through a different and distinct lens of embodiment – thus forging new avenues for debate. I consider how these critiques can be used to navigate a path for methodological discussions in child focused research. I ponder how calls to enhanced interdisciplinarity in Childhood Studies (Smith and Greene, 2015; Tatlow-Golden and Montgomery, 2020) and the cross fertilization of ideas across disciplinary boundaries may provide a key to drawing out some of the key strengths and differences from varied disciplines to develop an approach which recognises children’s voices as they are embodied, shaped and shared within social, cultural, material and relational spheres.

This paper is structured to set out the context of child focused voice research before looking in detail at how children’s voices are accessed and explored in research to share views in ways which typically favour verbal accounts, and which are often *disembodied* from embodied and affective experiences. I then consider how children’s voices often appear *disconnected* by virtue of how they are examined and represented in research, to the social and material contexts in which they develop. I use reflections from both sections to discuss future next steps for childhood research and to critically consider how voices of child participants and researchers are entangled within research assemblages. The critical analysis of voice research is thus presented as an opportunity to consider disciplinary boundaries, call for greater dialogue between disciplines and address the broader implications for research and professional practices with children.

## Context

Often presented as the gold standard in studies exploring children's lives, providing opportunities for children to share their views challenges a longstanding trajectory where their experiences have been somewhat absent (Cooper et al., 2019). Children's voices, possibly more than any other concept, argues Spyrou (2011) is linked with the Social Studies of Childhood (SoC) and the interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies (CS) where a large body of scholarship has critiqued research *on* and *about* children which does not fully engage *with* children. In psychological studies exploring children's development for example, Mayes (2019) argues that children's voices have been extracted, objectified and then analysed, typically by adult researchers.

The last three decades has also been characterised by a repositioning of the status of those under 18, spearheaded by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN 1989). Articles 12 and 13 of the convention compelled governments to find more effective ways of engaging with children through enhanced listening (Cooper, 2017), further reflected in a rights-based approach to research with children (Graham and Powell, 2015; Cooper and Kellett 2017). As Lundy et al. (2011) argue, working with children to facilitate research and gain understanding of their views and experiences is fundamental to realizing children's rights. By examining the often-neglected voices of children through voice research, researchers seek insights and deeper understandings of children and childhood (James, 2008; Spyrou, 2011; Cooper, 2017). The focus on children's voice is thus a broad concept which intersects ideas about rights and ethics (Alderson, 2015) and research practices (Spyrou, 2011).

In tracing the evolution of CS and what has been described as the 'new paradigm' in the 1990's, Smith and Greene (2015) consider its development against the backdrop of the 1960's civil rights movements which enhanced calls for the voices of marginalised groups, including children to be heard. A central feature of this new paradigm reflected the recognition of childhood as an area worthy of study and children as rights bearing subjects, with a voice. Within this framework, Mayes (2019) contends that the voice of the child becomes aligned with voices of other silenced groups and repositioned as subjects with agency, thus defining their capacity to act autonomously and make their own choices. Connections have been drawn between first wave feminist theories and research in the western world that acknowledge women as agents, critics and creators of knowledge, and set out to reconceptualise children as 'active subjects in naming and creating their worlds' (Cook-Sather, 2007: p. 391).

Despite a host of developments that value children's views (Chamberlain and Cooper, 2019) their contributions to research often fall short of making a difference to deeply entrenched power relations within research practice (Cooper, 2017). While children are regularly consulted and listened to, many report feelings of frustration when they feel that contributing their views ultimately does not make any difference or improve their lives (Bucknall, 2014). As Graham and Powell (2015) argue, it is important to link to the real-world outcomes of studies involving children and question what impact research can have on children's lives and the extent to which children's participation in research generate insights that really make a difference (Vosz et al., 2020). Many children's voices remain

silenced (Cooper, 2017). This is particularly evident amongst those who live with a family member who is seriously ill (Bennett et al., 2017), those with a parent who is in prison (Minson, 2021) as well as those affected by parental drug and alcohol use within the home (Hill, 2015), and those who find expressing their views challenging (Cooper, 2015; Cooper et al., 2019). This adds to ongoing debates within Disabled Children's Childhood Studies (DCCS) which critiques how the core principles of agency and participation - fundamental to CS - are compromised in research exploring the lives of disabled children which are not only dominated by adult views but where disabled children are excluded (Curran et al., 2020; Goodley, 2020). As Spivak (1988) questions, how can an oppressed group possibly speak for themselves, when their voices are garnered and shared within a colonial system with language that shapes their knowledge and speech. This raises questions as to whether a focus on individualised, subjective experiences reflective of voice research fully examines and challenges deep seated and prevailing systemic inequalities (Payler et al., 2020).

Debates also contest the dominant, minority western voice which takes precedence at the expense of other voices particularly those from the global south (Serpell and Marfo, 2015) and particularly those where participants are mainly WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) (Nielson et al., 2017). Not only are voices shaped by social contexts in which they have evolved but adult-child power relations render some voices more listened to and powerful than others. The terms 'student voice' and 'pupil voice' for example, reflect a hierarchy where children are often 'othered' as less powerful than teachers (Cruddas, 2007). Such positioning feels at odds with claims that voice research recognises and meets children's interests. Moreover, the concept of 'children's voice' is apt to homogenise and run the risk of assuming that when referring to children - that this relates to many if not all children where they share the same views and experiences (Bakhtin 1963). These debates are also infused with critical discussions concerning anthropocentric voiced experiences which often overlook non-human and particularly materialistic encounters (Cooper, 2017; Gallagher, 2020) which shape experiences as well as unvoiced experiences and silence (Mazzei, 2007). In my own work (Cooper et al., 2019) I have made calls to go beyond talk and consider what isn't said as much as what is and join discussions on the importance silence as an aspect of voice. Listening includes 'hearing silence' and recognising that 'silence is not neutral or empty' (Lewis (2010, p. 20) but can be powerful in conveying resistance and compliance thus revealing power relations and inequalities (Hanna, 2021). Researchers are thus urged to be vigilant about how voices are heard and develop ways for studying the nuances of voice beyond utterances (Spyrou, 2016). Indeed, Mazzei (2007) questions whether to move away from what is audibly voiced, we might discover the split between what is spoken with words, between words and without words.

## Disembodied voices

Children's experience of the world can be substantially affected by their bodies. As Overton (2018, p. 2) argues the development of the person emerges 'from the fully embodied person actively engaged in a sociocultural and physical world'. Everything

children know, feel and experience is to some extent mediated by the body. The body carries a person's deepest thoughts and mediates interactions with others. Through comparing their bodies to others, children develop a sense of self as well as a growing appreciation of the identity of others. Bodies are also a means through which children make judgements about self and others and where bodies are labelled as different, less than or broken and used as a way of 'othering' children (Cooper and Preece, 2023). Consideration of how bodies shape voiced experiences thus provide opportunities to consider children's understanding of self and their embodied experiences.

Mazzei and Jackson (2017, p. 1090–1092) describe how voice is produced in the 'intra-action of things – bodies, words, histories ... as an assemblage'. During research however, and as Mayes (2019) argues, voice moves from being embodied - as utterances from the body – to become something of a 'research object' to be observed and studied by the 'objective' researcher. It is important therefore to reflect on how researchers can fully understand the experiences of children without being cognisant of how children feel and experience life within and with their bodies. In my own research (Cooper, 2015, 2017) I consider the limitations of child-focused research which frequently favour verbal accounts of experience and do not fully acknowledge how many experiences are not easily verbalised but are affective and embodied experiences which often sit outside the study focus and are often simply 'beyond words' (Cooper et al., 2019). It is valuable to also question how voice might betray feelings held within the body again adding to ongoing debates within DCCS which problematises notions of agency (Curran et al., 2020; Goodley, 2020).

Derrida's deconstruction critiqued the transcendental meaning implied when researchers present voices as speaking for themselves (Derrida, 1976). In many respects voice is taken to represent reality - as an authentic expression of how children think and feel. The assumption that voice depicts something which is 'rational' and 'self-aware' (Coole and Frost, 2010: p. 8) fails to discern how children - much like adults - are often poor biographers. Mayes (2019) draws upon post-structural critiques of the speaking subject, and the assumption that there is a singular, stable core self who possesses knowledge that may be known and expressed through language. Building upon Freudian critiques of the limitations of rational self-awareness, Thrift (2008, p. 7) describes his deep suspicion to ideas of 'oneness' and claims that lives can ever be fully 'known and understood' and more importantly how they can be articulated by those living it.

The situated, partial and particular nature of voices has been recognised (Cooper, 2017; Mayes, 2019) and the assumption that voice presents an unwavering truth, or the assumption that 'giving voice' is the pathway to an authentic core being has been critiqued (see Komulainen, 2007). These critiques challenge the idea of voice reflecting a self-knowing, authentic subject, instead unveiling fluid, changeable and multiple voices, including the research participants(s) and the researcher. Claims to an authentic speaking voice argues Canosa and Graham (2019) are problematic and the idea that voice aligns to reality is somewhat precarious. Many authors address this issue and call for a much broader analysis of meaning within social life (Latour 2005; Cooper, 2017; Braidotti, 2019). This raises questions as to whether voices are always verbal or that they connect to other ways of communicating.

The textual dominance of voice and the exclusion of other facets of communication (Horton and Kraftl, 2006; Tisdall and Punch, 2012) including emotion, and embodied experiences overlooks what Gallagher (2020, p. 452) describes as the ‘embodied materiality of voice’; the accents, half-sentences and huffs and puffs of real voices which are characteristically edited out of transcribed accounts. Calls for childhood research to go beyond the written and verbal to include visual forms of communication, for example picture making, visual arts (Plowman and Stevenson 2012; Caton and Hackett, 2019) and voice audio methods (Gallagher, 2020) evidenced in an expansion in multi modal research methods appreciate that voice is more than semantics and syntax (Gallagher, 2020). Photographs, pictures and map making as methods provide opportunities for children to collaborate and also lead within research (Clark and Moss 2001; Cooper, 2015) and concede that there is no one way to convey meaning but a number of expressive modes (Cooper, 2017). By exploring the inadequacies of voice research, qualitative researchers can continue to examine the affective entanglements that exceed, escape and appear disembodied and disconnected to children’s lives.

## Disconnected voices

In the past decade debates have been characterised by the recognition that to understand another - their identity, feelings and experiences - can no longer be understood in isolation from the social, cultural, embodied, material and relational features in which they evolve (Vachelli, 2018). Voice emerges from relations among objects, spaces, bodies and discourses in shifting arrangements and re-arrangements and cannot easily be disentangled from their histories and social contexts (Mayes, 2019). In research however, children’s voices are often listened to, written down and presented as not only speaking for themselves, but in forms which are disconnected from broader social contexts. In my research (Cooper 2017; Cooper et al., 2019; Payler et al., 2020) I discuss the value of exploring young people’s experiences of the trauma of living with a loved one who is seriously ill within the social and relational contexts in which they have evolved. Young people living in these contexts describe how their behaviour and words are often perceived by adults as ‘unacceptable’ and ‘disruptive’ when closer analysis reveals emotional upset, longstanding trauma and a need for support. Taken out of social, relational context, both words and behaviours can be misunderstood or overlook important aspects. Understanding is thus rendered partial at best. This has implications not only for research which seeks to understand children but also professional contexts where engaging with and supporting children is fundamental to ethical practice (Lundy et al., 2011; Graham and Powell, 2015).

Calls for researchers to develop holistic approaches which recognise lived experiences within social and cultural contexts seek to address these apparent gaps. Prout (2011) argues that researchers need to pay attention to ‘including the excluded middle’. As such, drawing on work by Latour, and Deleuze and Guattari, he proposes to pay greater attention to the ‘interdisciplinarity and hybridity of childhood; being asymmetrical about how childhoods are constructed; attending to the networks, flows and mediations of its production, and the co-construction of generational relations’ (Prout, 2011: p. 4). The call

is to move away from the largely human, anthropocentric focus to consider human voices as they evolve within social systems, relationally with people, places and materials. As the philosopher, J. Baird Callicott, in an address to the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(2012\)](#) conference in Paris suggests,

We humans are intimately connected—with every breath we take, every sip of liquid we drink, and every morsel of food we eat—to the surrounding biochemical-physical world. We are as vortices in a flux of energy and materials, distinguishable only as ephemeral structures in that flux. (para. 3)

Materials matter to children ([Cooper and Holford, 2021](#)). Not simply ‘the stuff of the world’ ([Law and Hetherington, 2000](#): p. 52), materials are imbued with memory, imagination, language and culture ([Dale and Burrell, 2008](#)). Yet the materiality of voice has so often been overlooked. [Law and Hetherington \(2000\)](#) describe how materials have typically been thought of as meaningless inert stuff, taken for granted and regarded as somewhat incidental to what is really going on in one’s social life. [Dale and Burrell \(2008\)](#) note how this is further reflected across academic disciplines where the study of materiality has traditionally been positioned within the natural and physical sciences, leaving the study of social life within the realms of social science and most notably psychology, sociology and social anthropology. In part, they suggest that this is due to the tendency across these academic disciplines to separate the materiality of the social world from the thinking, human mind.

Over the past 30 years, there has been an increasing focus on materiality in social sciences and its significance in understanding childhood not only mirrors developments within the field of CS, particularly Children’s Geographies, but is also marked by a much broader awareness of everyday experience and mirrors debates on what is termed the material turn in social science ([Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012](#); [Urry, 2000](#)). This approach recognises how materials can carry part of a person with them ([Law and Hetherington, 2000](#)) as much as they link up to events and contexts and can also retrieve something that may have been lost or forgotten ([Harper, 2002](#)). More recently, Posthumanist and New Materialist Studies pay close attention to the way people, objects and places interact in relationships of affect. A focus on materiality considers how objects are enmeshed with meanings that cross boundaries and carry with them the ordinary qualities of life; as such, materiality can provide a different approach through which to examine the nuances of childhood ([Jones, 2008](#)). As [Fox and Alldred \(2021, p. 124\)](#) suggest, bodies, thoughts, social interactions, objects and materiality’s are not to be defined by their form, fixed attributes or substance, but simply by their capacity to shape and influence others and situations. [Deleuze and Guattari \(1988, p. 22\)](#) define these affective arrangements as assemblages. This describes the distinct ways in which people, things and places interact in moments to produce affective experiences. The range of interactions and experiences or as [Clough \(2008, p. 15\)](#) defines them ‘affect economies’ within an assemblage shape what a body can or cannot do and how an object is used or discarded – thus shaping a social encounter ([Fox and Alldred \(2021\)](#)). With this framework in mind [Deleuze \(1988\)](#)

recommends a reorientation in research and a shift in attention from the individual or the body - to the assemblage.

Interacting with young children, glitter, and squashed blueberries in a community setting, argue [Hackett et al. \(2017\)](#) afford opportunities to explore embodied, relational, and affective experiences and creates new ways to understand children. The interest in relationality and a focus on more-than-human interactions typifies the Posthumanist and New Materialist Studies' stance. [Braidotti \(2019\)](#) indicates that what is emerging now is a second generation of new studies committed to critical dialogue while addressing more directly the issue of anthropocentrism. Significant examples described by Braidotti includes posthuman/inhuman/non-human studies; posthuman disability, fat, sleep, fashion, celebrity, success and diet studies; critical plants studies, etc. The generation of these new studies are both responsive to real world experiences – what's topical and of interest to individuals and societies – as well as challenging the conventions of strict disciplinary boundaries. So rather than 'trying to capture the voice of the child in isolation', [Mayes \(2019, p. 14\)](#) suggests that researchers might consider how they can more effectively examine 'the assemblages of the research encounter'. This approach challenges adult/child power relations as it repositions children in an assemblage – as agentic key actors within the encounter.

## **The voice of the researcher within a research assemblage**

The inadequacies of voice extend beyond the research participants and focus also on the researcher and their voices- as they too are situated within complex social histories. It is necessary therefore to think carefully about how the voice of researcher is relational to that of the participant and how researchers often seek to represent children's voices using processes which are vulnerable to interpretation and translation.

Scholars appreciate that researchers are very much driven by their research objectives ([Mazzei and Jackson, 2017](#)) where they are embedded within disciplinary debates and packaged for dissemination attuned to particular research agendas. Indeed, I have reflected on my own research on how the voices of children are often subject to adult censorship and translation during the research process ([Cooper, 2017](#)). This aligns with ongoing debates concerning the positioning of children within research practice ([Chamberlain and Cooper, 2019](#)) and how children's voices are 'used' in research to convey, tell stories and depict everyday life using words often suspended in time and place. Whilst reflection has been recognised as a crucial process in helping researchers to critically consider the ethics of their research ([Lundy et al., 2011](#)), how data is collected and analysed and how knowledge is produced, the process also runs the risk of searching for 'authentic' and 'really real' data that can reflect reality ([Haraway 1991, p.16](#)).

Debates continue to examine the capacity of 'reflection' and 'reflexivity' to fulfil specific research objectives. The extent to which social science can generate insights which accurately reflect 'real' life and how reflexivity can be employed by researchers to intuit from data the meaning of social life is questioned. [Haraway \(1997\)](#) draws upon the metaphor of 'diffraction' to consider how social research can examine the 'interferences' between that being studied and the social researcher. As such, the aim of diffraction is not



to represent the object of research in a different form elsewhere, or as a representation, but instead to pay attention to what Barad (2007, p. 73) describes as the socially contingent nature of the world, which encompasses the 'ontology of knowing'. How researchers make sense of the world impacts the world being studied. Barad (2007) builds upon the work of physicist Niels Bohr and most notably the 'Copenhagen Interpretation' which explains how quantum level materials behave in inconsistent and contradictory ways across different experiments. For Bohr these inconsistencies can only be explained by the impact of observing or measuring quantum material and so recognises the entanglement of the researched and the researcher. As Barad (2007, p. 185) argues, 'the very act of observation diffracts what is observed' such that how research is designed, and the very questions asked, establish a particular point of view which he defines as an 'agential cut'. The process of doing research, and of making 'cuts', exploring different aspects of a phenomenon, will always be partial and will always bear the traces of the research process. These cuts reflect the overlap between the research process and object of study. It is important therefore to acknowledge how researchers make choices or agential cuts (Fox and Alldred, 2021) which Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013, p. 684) suggest, may well be informed by their own experiences as 'as white, middle-class, female academics' for instance.

So, if we suspend the idea that there is one voice – but many – and no such thing as authenticity but relational exchanges, feelings and beliefs interacting as assemblages within complex social systems – what then is the future of child focused research? Feminist post-structuralists have highlighted the apparent contradictions in how an understanding of experience is situated, evolving and inconsistent and as Haraway describes 'stitched together imperfectly' (1991, p. 193). This begs questions as to whether disembodied and disconnected voices can be re-connected in ways which appreciate the complex connectivity across people, places and spaces.

## Where and what next?

Childhood is multifaceted reflecting embodied, social, cultural, material and relational experiences. One might question how researchers can develop methods that embrace such complexity and perhaps interdisciplinarity provides scope for development. As Moody and Darbellay (2019, p. 3) argue, when discussing childhood research, children 'can be regarded as a natural condition, a social construction, and a structural space. It is the interplay of these various components—more or less identical or different depending on the viewpoint—that provides a complex understanding of childhood'.

The work of Bronfenbrenner illustrates the intricacy of children's lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2009), highlighting the need for childhood research to appreciate how experiences are formed and performed within sociocultural worlds (Miller et al., 2012). Yet as Alderson (2015) explains – the balance between a macro analysis of systemic issues shaping childhood and the impact of micro, subjective children's experiences is not straightforward, and researchers often orientate to one or other approach often reflecting disciplinary orientations.

Moody and Darbellay (2019) ponder the value of combining disciplinary methods to provide a fuller account of children's lives. Uprichard and Dawney (2019) recognise that although drawing different approaches together—often termed a mixed methods approach—to integrate data is a sensible aim, it does not necessarily have optimal outcomes. They contemplate how distinct parts of an experience or phenomenon can fit together to assume a whole or a singular reality. They contend that at the heart of mixed method research lies the assumption that it is possible to integrate data in ways which join up explanations and generate clear descriptions of lived experiences. Yet, as they argue, how is it possible to develop coherent descriptions of lived experiences when social life is messy. One might question if it is possible to examine parts of social life using particular methods and then stick them back together in ways which represent holistic pictures. Indeed critical, post-structuralist and materialist sociologists (Latour, 2005; Thrift, 2008) have critiqued the capacity of social science research to fully represent the social world it studies.

The manner in which researchers make choices informed by the academic discipline within which they work is also an area worth consideration. Historically there are borders and perceived boundaries between disciplines and as Reynaert et al. (2015) describes, it is important to be mindful of the orientations of disciplines like psychology for example aligned to the individual, in contrast to those, like sociology, anthropology and law, which are more affiliated to the study of social, cultural and policy focused contexts. Perhaps the future lies in forging communication between disciplines and as Moody and Darbellay (2019) suggest, in identifying modes of debate on how disciplines relate to and interact with each other as they critically dis-engage from the rules and conventions of the academic disciplines. Furthermore, this aligns with calls for researchers to be collaborative in ethical decision making and be open to cross-disciplinary discussions which can enrich ethical practices (Graham and Powell, 2015). Described as a 'nomadic exodus from disciplinary homes' Braidotti (2019, p. 38–39) suggests a shift from the conventions of academic disciplines and a move towards cross breeding and new discursive practices. The quest for knowledge production is therefore not disciplinary purity, but the opening up of dialogue.

Rather than attempting to examine the holistic complexity of lives or trying to reduce childhood to a number of constituent parts, Moody and Darbellay (2019) argue that it is necessary to commit to the recognition of childhood as the interaction of its parts, through a co-constructive process which requires a significant dialogue between disciplines. The implications for child focused research and for ethical practices supporting children's rights (Lundy et al., 2011) call for a much broader awareness of how research practices can connect to the social – relational, embodied, material and structural aspects of children's lives and how lives of children can be understood in ways which recognise these connections. This approach orientates more towards the interactive, relational nature of circumstances and encounters and how these can be examined within relational research assemblages. This stance can appear quite daunting as it calls into question who steers the research process and adds to ongoing debates on issues of child led research and child participation (Cooper, 2017). Without disciplinary boundaries might we – as researchers – lose our footing and get lost or perhaps this affords opportunities to question power relations and children's rights within research encounters (Lundy et al., 2011).

These questions are not intended to undermine the expertise of researchers. Its more about recognising the shifting landscape where the cross fertilization of ideas can both destabilize and enrich and where the messiness of life is reflected back in the messiness of research practice. Finally, these questions might spur research communities to question the practicalities of working ‘with’ children. Such as how children are positioned and ethically protected within research encounters, how their voices are conveyed, heard and recorded and ultimately how these voices are shared in ways which make a difference to their lives.

## **Conclusion**

Research makes many claims to authenticity enshrined in the rhetoric of voice. It promises a great deal and has indeed come a long way in recognising the value of children’s position in research. Yet voice research in many respects appears stuck. Stuck in its claims to authenticity and stuck within disciplinary boundaries which potentially limit free flowing ideas. Rather than focusing on the researcher and how they gather data about people, places and things and how voices relay experiences, its more about considering the research encounter as an affective, embodied, material, relational process. Looking forward might then envision new connections and opening out of avenues for dialogue and exchange. Instead of working within well-established academic disciplines a form of cross breeding affords opportunities to think outside disciplinary boundaries and to add to the ongoing development of minor sciences steered by issues of everyday concern. A focus on real-world issues invites critical analysis of how ethical research can impact children lives. The idea of nomadic inquiry thus reconceptualises the researcher from - an expert within an academic tradition who carries out research to represent real life - to embrace a degree of expertise in reflecting on how little we know and the fluidity and relational dynamics of research as an encounter, where researchers are part of a research assemblage ‘with’ children.

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