AGENCY IN DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION

RESEARCHING YOUNG CHILDREN'S VOICE AND METACOGNITION IN THEIR ONLINE LEARNING JOURNALS

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WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

Documenting children's play is essential for early years educators to make sense of children's interests and interactions and to inform their planning and pedagogy.

In this project, we're exploring how digital documentation can be integrated into early years pedagogy in ways that promote child agency and inclusion in child-centred practice.

Our objectives are to:

- Identify the potentials and challenges of digital documentation in early years education
- Investigate how adult scaffolding of Tapestry's Child Login feature can support young children's voice, agency and metacognition
- Explore how digital documentation can be integrated into early years pedagogy in ways that promote inclusive and child-centred practice.

HOW ARE WE DOING THIS NEW STUDY?

We are working with the online learning journal company Tapestry and nursery staff in a maintained and fully inclusive Research School and Early Years Hub in East London. This involves ethnographic case studies with children aged 3–4 years who represent a highly diverse local population. Practitioners are supporting children to view and add to their own digital documentation using Tapestry's new Child Login feature, and these interactions are being video-recorded so we can take a close look at what is going on.
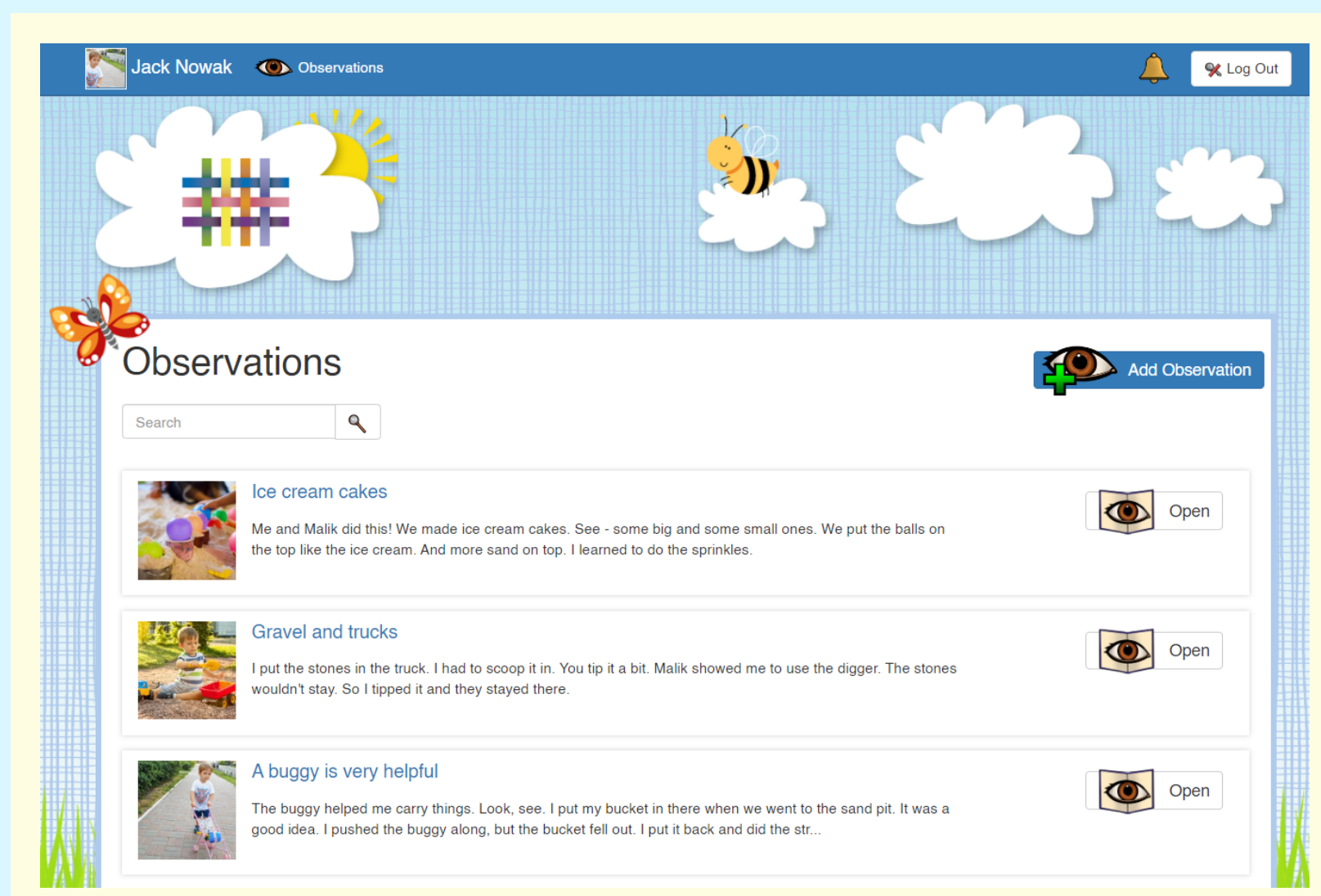
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Traditionally, paper-based formats such as 'special books' have been used to record children's learning, where educators collate observations and children may add their own drawings, early writing, photos and small, glue-able artefacts.

Nowadays, early educators can opt for digital documentation systems, such as 'e-portfolios' and 'online learning journals'. Designed to enable educators and families to share information about a child's development, these tools are often used to monitor children's progress and contribute towards early years assessment. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many early years settings found that digital documentation systems offered a way to stay connected with families.

With digital documentation, educators can use tablets and smartphones to combine photographs, video clips, audio recordings and written records of their classroom observations. These multimodal texts offer the advantage of capturing moving images and sound, which children enjoy watching and are easy to share remotely with parents and carers.

However, in a previous study that was funded by the Froebel Trust (Cowan & Flewitt 2021), we found that digital documentation systems weren't easy for children to use, so it was difficult for them to contribute to their own digital documentation. We suggested that all documentation, including digital systems, worked most effectively and democratically when the voices of children are included as well as teachers and families.

Child

Democratic Documentation
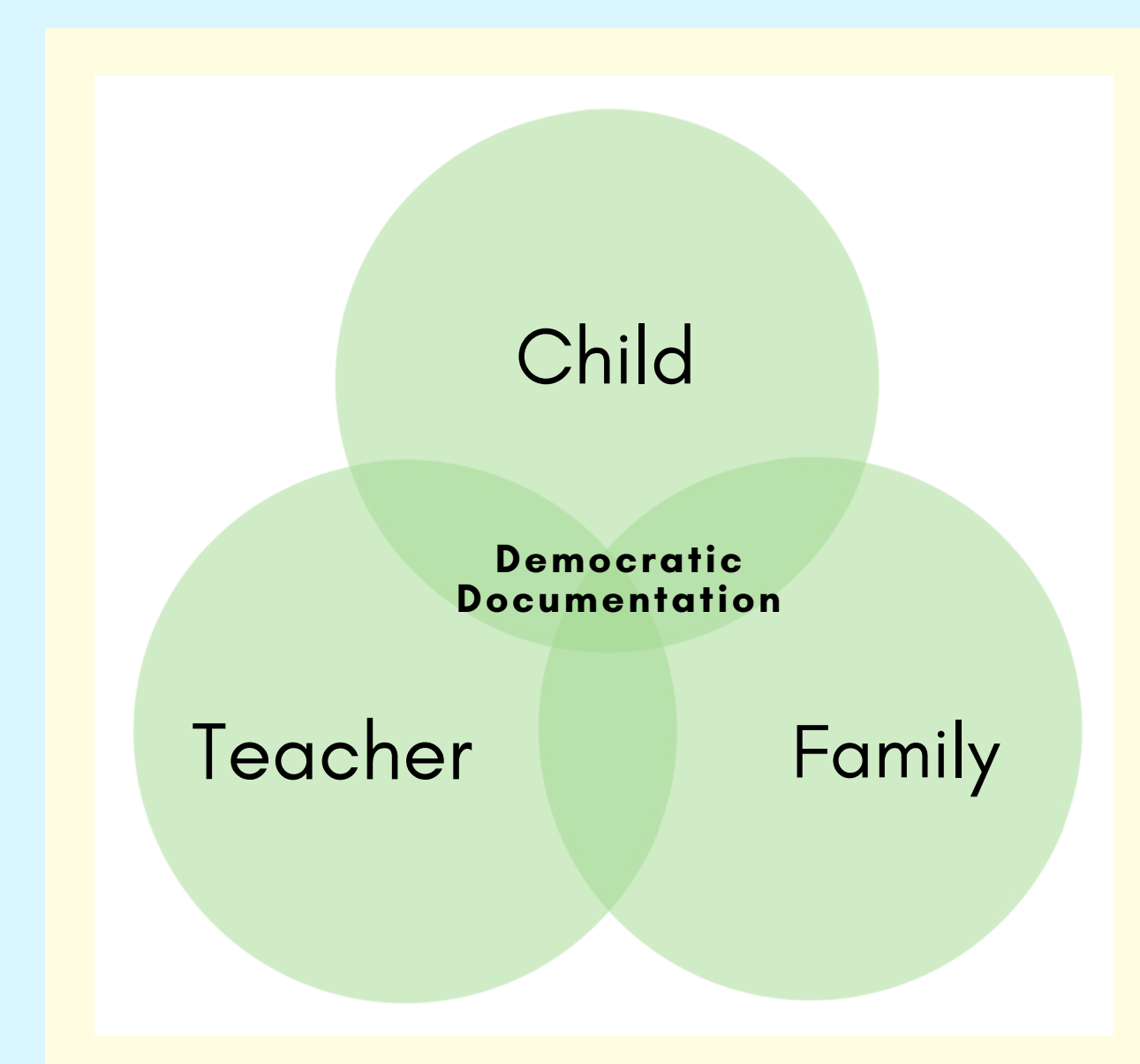
Teacher   Family

Since we did that study, Tapestry has developed a Child Login feature to help make their system more accessible for children to use, so children's voices are included in their documentation as well as teachers and families. Our main aim in this study is to explore how this feature, combined with child-centred pedagogy, can support young children's agency, voice and metacognition.

WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THE FINDINGS?

We will develop our findings as we work with the researcher-practitioners involved in this project, with a view to developing guidance materials for educators that will be used to support best practice in digital documentation. We will also share what we find with Tapestry to help shape future system design and development. The findings will be relevant to researchers who are interested in early childhood education, multimodality, digital technologies and children's rights.

"Documentation is most powerful when the voices of educators, parents/carers and children are all included, offering a variety of perspectives on children's worlds and experiences. Digital documentation invites new potentials for supporting reflection and communication, informing teaching, and ensuring that learning is deeply meaningful for children."

Cowan, K. & Flewitt, R.S. (2021). Moving from paper-based to digital documentation in Early Childhood Education: Democratic potentials and challenges.

International Journal of Early Years Education.

OnlineFirst: https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.2013171

READ THE FULL STUDY HERE

The University Of Sheffield.

Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre

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TAPESTRY ONLINE LEARNING JOURNAL