

Journal of Trainee Teacher Education Research

**Pupil perspectives on classroom spaces:
A proposal for research into how year 3/4 children
interpret the physical environment of their classroom**

Emily Williams

(PGCE General Primary, 2020-2021)

Abstract

The vast majority of research into the physical school environment has focused solely on the perspectives of teachers and researchers, thus overlooking children's embodied experiences in, and perspectives on, the physical environment of their classroom. Accordingly, this research proposal seeks to explore how the physical classroom environment is interpreted through the eyes of year 3/4 children themselves. The proposed study adopts a pragmatic case study methodological design, involving the research methods of a photograph task, semi-structured group interviews and a drawing task, in order to comprehensively investigate children's in-depth and idiosyncratic spatial understandings.

© Emily Williams, 2022

Note

In 2020-2021 the COVID-19 crisis disrupted the second assignment for Primary PGCEs meaning that they were unable to undertake research in classrooms. As a result the assignment was changed to make it a research proposal instead. Therefore, the articles included from the Primary PGCEs do not include results and discussions, but do provide detailed proposals for researching pupil perspectives about different aspects to school and learning.

Pupil perspectives on classroom spaces: A proposal for research into how year 3/4 children interpret the physical environment of their classroom

Emily Williams

Introduction

Reflecting on one's own experiences at primary school can incite particular images and sensations, such as colourful wall displays of children's work and the teacher's desk at the front of the classroom. The physical environments of schools, referring to "material objects as opposed to abstract qualities or actions" (McGregor, 2004, p.348), have long been conceived by architects and planners to achieve desired effects for children's behaviour and engagement (Burke, 2007a; Koralek & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, within individual classrooms, teachers usually have a degree of freedom to exercise judgement about how physical features can be organised to promote effective learning and child development (Kershner, 2000).

Physical classroom environments are not static, however, such that "a classroom is not finished when it is finished; its life is just beginning" (Chiles, 2005, p.109). Accordingly, Prosser and Burke (2008) explain that classroom environments are continuously altered through daily interactions, as teachers and children attach new memories and meanings to these spaces. This occurs through "on-going transaction between individuals and the environment, rather than a one-way deterministic process of environmental effects" (Kershner & Pointon, 2000, p.65). It is therefore problematic that much research into the physical school environment has focused only on the perspectives of researchers and teachers (Kershner, 2000), thus overlooking children's experiences in, and perspectives on, their classroom, which often markedly differ from those of adults (Burke, 2007a).

The intention of my proposed study is to explore how the physical classroom environment is interpreted through the eyes of children themselves. I will present my exact research question at the end of the literature review below. I have chosen to study this topic because I have been struck by the diverse designs of classrooms I have visited, motivating me to consider children's experiences in, and perceptions of, the unique physical environment of their classroom. My research will

employ a pragmatic case study methodology and a sample from a mixed year 3/4 class in a Cambridgeshire school in which I completed a teaching placement. Research into children's perspectives on the physical classroom environment has potential to provide a "rich resource through which collaborative re-design can be realised" (Burke, 2007a, p.361), such that my small-scale study could have implications for my own professional practice and for other stakeholders involved in designing school spaces. Given the scope of this essay, I will focus mainly on theoretical and empirical literature based in the United Kingdom, meaning that my writing may not necessarily apply beyond this context.

Literature Review

Children's perspectives in educational research

Due to the prevailing conception of children as "becomings rather than beings" through the early- and mid-20th century (Clark, 2007, p.2), children's perspectives were neglected in educational research (Ruddock & Flutter, 2000). The New Sociology of Childhood studies, which emerged late in the 20th century, questioned this stance and contributed to the conception of children as social actors who construct, and can articulate, their own perspectives (Prosser & Burke, 2008). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provided further impetus for children's rights to express their views and be heard. As a result, children's perspectives about their school experiences were increasingly explored (Alexander, 2010).

Whilst research into pupil perspectives is not synonymous with pupil voice, which involves teachers consulting pupils to democratise education and transform their practice, both approaches are based on the premise that children can articulate their views. Extensive research has evidenced the benefits of engaging with pupils' perspectives, including that they often enjoy being consulted and subsequently feel respected, valued, and more positive about their learning (MacBeath et al., 2003; Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007). Encouraging children to reflect on their experiences also fosters metacognition, increasing children's critical understanding of themselves as learners (Clark & Moss, 2017). Furthermore, there are several evidenced benefits for teachers of engaging with pupils' perspectives, such as being able to see the familiar from an alternative point of view, greater awareness of children's capabilities to form perceptive understandings, and the possibility of adapting and improving their professional practice (Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007).

In line with the conceptions of childhood discussed above, research into the physical school environment has historically focused on researchers' and teachers' anecdotal observations and perspectives (Burke, 2007b). Whilst the emergence of academic interest into the physical school environment was indeed noteworthy, as the significance of material and spatial conditions in education had long been overlooked (Lawn, 2005; Seaborne, 1971), the omission of children's perspectives in this research domain is clearly problematic. Some of the earliest notable public engagement with children's perspectives about their ideal school, including their views on the physical environment, will be considered in the following section.

Public engagement with pupil perspectives on the school environment

Prior to the inclusion of children's perspectives in educational research, *The Observer* newspaper ran a competition in 1967 in which secondary school children were asked to submit essays on "The School That I'd Like". Blishen (1969) published an influential book which discussed the core themes from the 943 entries, including the desire for spaces that afforded opportunities for privacy, comfort and relaxation (Burke & Grosvenor, 2015). Blishen's (1969) conclusions are somewhat biased, as they represent only the voices of children who entered the competition, who may come from similar social backgrounds, and he discussed only the most "intelligent, amusing and well-expressed" entries in his publication (p.15). That being said, it is important to acknowledge that representativeness was not the aim of his writing. Moreover, this publication fulfilled its intentions of sparking a shift towards exploring children's perspectives and promoting the view that children interpret subtle meanings from the built school environment (Nicholson, 2005).

The Guardian newspaper repeated this competition in 2001 and 2011, each of which had thousands of entries from children aged 5-18 years. In both competitions, children submitted entries in a range of forms, including essays, models, plans and PowerPoints. Burke and Grosvenor's (2015) analysis of entries revealed that the built environment remained a major concern for pupils. Despite expectations of great divergence from Blishen's (1969) findings, similar core themes emerged, such as the school environment having "home comforts, a distinct identity and to inspire a sense of belonging" (Burke & Grosvenor, 2015, p.xiv). Alike Blishen (1969), Burke and Grosvenor (2015) note that the identified themes represent only those who entered the competition and entries that did not accord with the most common themes were excluded from their publication. Nonetheless, this early public engagement with children's perceptions of the school environment is particularly

notable in light of the prior omission of children's voices in this research area.

The 2001 competition held by *The Guardian* occurred at a time of national reappraisal of ways in which education could be transformed through physical redesign. This involved the government's "Building Schools for the Future" initiative, which aimed to rebuild and renew all secondary schools in England over a 15-year period (DfES, 2003). This initiative was based on the premise that "school buildings should inspire learning... nurture every pupil and member of staff... and should be a source of pride" (DfES, 2003, p.1), to be achieved through "proper consultation with the staff and pupils" (DfES, 2002, p.63). While some schools in the early years of this initiative did consult students, this was not widespread practice (Mahony & Hextall, 2013). Moreover, the initiative was withdrawn in 2010 and replaced by the "Priority School Building Programme", which intended to make school construction more cost-effective, as opposed to consultative or transformational (Mahony & Hextall, 2013, p.863). This reinforces that the inclusion of children's voices in early public engagement and initiatives regarding school spaces is a complex matter. In the next section, systematic empirical research into the influence of the physical classroom environment on learning, undertaken at a similar time to the public engagement alluded to in this section, will be discussed.

Empirical research into the influence of the physical school environment on learning

Seminal quantitative research into the physical school environment explored how specific physical characteristics may support or hinder children's learning. Higgins et al.'s (2005) review of the literature concluded that there was extensive evidence that extremes of environmental elements, such as poor air quality and low temperature, have negative effects on student learning and concentration, but once the basic standards of these characteristics are attained, additional effects for learning are less clear. This is echoed in the Cambridge Primary Review, as Alexander's (2010) survey of published research stated that "poorly managed and badly maintained settings could have some measurable effects on pupils and teachers" (p.346). Notwithstanding, Higgins et al. (2005) caution about drawing firm causal conclusions from this quantitative evidence base, as factors that are not easily controlled in statistical analyses may confound the findings and the physical characteristics measured likely interact rather than operate in isolation.

To investigate children's own perspectives on how classroom spaces influence their learning, Kershner and Pointon (2000) conducted a mixed-methods study with seventy 7-9-year-olds, using

interviews and rating scale questionnaires. The authors acknowledge that reading accuracy and motivation could have affected questionnaire ratings, perhaps somewhat compromising the validity, however, they also explain that the children seemed to complete the rating scales thoughtfully, not simply ticking the middle box for each question. In addition to identifying classroom features that most children felt strongly about, including noise levels and tidiness, Kershner and Pointon (2000) concluded that individual variations in values about learning spaces were particularly striking. This reinforces the need to challenge the assumption that students interpret and experience the classroom in a homogeneous manner. Such research also emphasises the benefits of exploring children's in-depth perspectives about the physical classroom environment, in order to account for complex interactions between psychological, social and physical characteristics (Loxley et al., 2011; Thyssen & Grosvenor, 2019). This avenue of emerging theoretical interest and empirical research is considered next.

The embodied nature of education and schooling

Burke (2007a) argues that children's in-depth explanations and narratives can help to reveal the "multi-layers of meanings children attach to material things" (p.386), which are unintended by designers and otherwise invisible to adults. This underpins the research domain of embodied education, which is based on the premise that bodies, located in space and time, are "made, re-made, and experienced through and within social relations" (Gleason, 2018, p.8). Embodied education builds upon Foucauldian notions of the body's relation to control, including the view that during the emergence of mass schooling, normalising power operated on and through children via physical and social features of the environment (Burke, 2007b; Foucault, 1977). Thus, theorists interested in embodied education focus on particularities in "choreography in classroom practice... arm movements, eye movements, lining up and groupings", emphasising the value of exploring children's own lived experiences in their surroundings (Burke, 2007a, p.367). Grosvenor (2012), for instance, argues that oppressive school environments subliminally communicate to children that they lack worthiness of respect in that context, so engaging with children's understandings of space can illuminate such internalised perspectives.

Similarly interested in human experiences in particular physical environments, cultural and environmental geographers, sociologists and psychologists have reasoned that "space becomes a place when it is invested with meaning by those who spend time in it" (Ellis, 2005, p.58). In this

way, educational spaces are a dynamic and intersubjective creation in which children develop understandings of themselves through shared experiences and meaningful interactions. This means that classroom spaces have potential to be interpreted by children as a “source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity” (Ellis, 2005, p.57), depending upon the nature of the unconscious cognitive and affective internal working models that children develop through experiences in these spaces over time (Briggs et al., 2014, p.156). Such theorisations, which are grounded by empirical research, highlight the importance of shifting away from the focus on adults’ conceived understandings of physical classroom environments to studying children’s own perceptions of, and lived experiences in, these spaces (Kellock & Sexton, 2018). In the subsequent section, examples of such small-scale, in-depth empirical studies will be discussed.

Empirical research into children’s perspectives on the physical classroom environment

One such study, undertaken by Kellock and Sexton (2018), presented three children’s rich narratives about their school spaces, rather than identifying themes across the data of participating children. This decision was based on the authors’ aim of highlighting the idiosyncratic embodied nature of school spaces. Kellock and Sexton (2018) conducted a “small yet rich qualitative case study” over a three-month period (p.125), involving a gender-balanced group of eight 8-10-year-olds from a semi-rural school in the North of England. The children took photographs of spaces that were meaningful to them and selected 3-4 images that they perceived to be most significant to talk about in a group discussion. A year-6 child, deemed to be gifted and talented by the school, photographed her year 1 classroom. She explained that this room brought back happier memories and less stressful experiences than her current classroom in year 6, which she perceived to be characterised by “enormous pressure to perform and work hard” (p.127). Moreover, a year-4 child chose to picture her seat in her classroom and described how being moved for recent SATs practice papers was a distressing experience because “her own seat made her feel safe” (p.128). Thus, Kellock and Sexton’s (2018) study exemplifies how investigating children’s in-depth narratives about physical school surroundings can reveal otherwise unacknowledged cognitive and affective understandings.

A larger multi-method case-study, conducted by Fleetwood (2010), involved 42 children aged 10-11 years from one Cambridgeshire school. Fleetwood (2010) presented individual narratives alongside common themes identified across the data, thus revealing both group and individual

understandings of classroom spaces. All of the children were asked to take one photograph of “the thing they like best about their classroom” (Fleetwood, 2010, p.9), and one child to represent each theme from the photograph task was randomly selected to participate in a group interview and drawing task. The most common theme derived from the photograph task was entitled “home” (p.14), referring to objects in the classroom that are similar to things at home. One explanation for why many children ascribed meaning to such spaces may be that “school is the first environment after home with which children identify, have a sense of belonging and are familiar” (Burke & Grosvenor, 2015, p.6). The validity of Fleetwood’s (2010) “home” code was strengthened by the related theme of “comfort” identified in the interview and design task analysis (p.20), characterised by soft objects that afforded security and warmth. This accords with the findings from Koralek and Mitchell’s (2005) consultation project, as the participating primary aged children described the desire for spaces to relax and escape the busyness of school.

Another core theme identified in Fleetwood’s (2010) study was “wall displays” (p.17), encompassing those that related to learning outcomes, behaviour management and expressions of the children’s identity. Value placed on learning outcome displays corresponds with the questionnaire responses from Kershner and Pointon’s (2000) study, as most of the participating children felt that classroom displays supported their learning, though a few children contrastingly questioned the purpose of such displays. With regards to wall displays reflecting children’s identity, Clark (2010) suggests that these might function as “personal markers” (p.83), stimulating feelings of pride, ownership and belonging in the class. Interestingly, few children in Fleetwood’s (2010) study made reference to markers of group identity, contrary to findings of related research (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Clark, 2010; Pointon & Kershner, 2000). Hence, this could be an interesting avenue to explore in future research. Taken together, in-depth empirical studies have shown that classroom spaces are imbued with intersubjective meanings and can shape how children understand themselves. This provides the grounding for the design of my research proposal.

Framing my research proposal

The aforementioned literature illuminates that much can be learnt from engaging with children’s reflections on their experiences in, and perspectives on, classroom spaces, shifting away from focusing solely on adults’ conceived meanings of these spaces. In line with the research brief to investigate a ‘generic aspect of teaching or learning’, my project is designed to develop insights into

children's implicit learning about how the classroom environment shapes understandings of themselves. Such learning takes place over time through interactions with and in their classroom. As discussed in the literature, through experiences in the physical classroom environment, children implicitly develop perceptions about themselves which often relate to their socio-emotional needs, such as sense of belonging and safety (Fleetwood, 2010; Kellock & Sexton, 2018). Sense of belonging encompasses children's feelings of connectedness to their school and class (Korpershoek et al., 2020), whilst psychological safety describes perceived protection from envisaged risks (Wanless, 2016).

Whilst sense of belonging and psychological safety are of course important ends in themselves, academic learning is ultimately a central focus for schools. Thus, it is important to recognise that such socio-emotional needs, as well as physiological needs, can be prerequisites for academic learning, as described in Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Notwithstanding the flaws of Maslow's (1943) work, including the biased sample of educated white males and that children may engage with academic learning without obtaining all of the needs lower in the hierarchy (King-Hill, 2015; Mittelman, 1991), the theory is still referenced widely in education today, given that it sheds light on the importance of long-underacknowledged psychological needs. Moreover, based on advances in neuroscientific research, Lieberman (2013) suggests that a human's socio-emotional needs may in fact be even more fundamental than physiological needs, as the instinct to connect with others and make sense of social situations allows for the attainment of the physiological needs themselves. Although evidence of the relationship between academic learning and socio-emotional needs is correlational, meaning that longitudinal studies are required to gain insights into directionality and causal pathways, it is noteworthy that small-to-moderate correlations have been evidenced between academic learning and sense of belonging (Korpershoek et al., 2020) and psychological safety (Wanless, 2014).

In light of the literature discussed throughout this section, my proposed research question for this study, involving a class of mixed year 3/4 children, is:

How do year 3/4 children interpret the physical environment of their classroom?

Methodology

The methodological approach I intend to adopt in my research is inspired by Fleetwood's (2010) study into the values that children attribute to their classroom learning spaces, as my own research aims and underlying values align with those expressed by Fleetwood (2010).

Research methodology

My research would involve a pragmatic approach, meaning that decisions will be informed by my understanding of the nature of what I am researching and how I could learn more (Taber, 2013). I will adopt a case study methodology, involving "investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.150). Hence, the children in the year 3/4 class will be the cases in my research, given that I seek to gain insights into their idiosyncratic perspectives on the physical classroom environment. I will not aim for the positivist concept of reliability, referring to the extent to which a "procedure produces similar results under constant conditions across occasions" (Bell, 2010, p.117), but rather I am interested in eliciting in-depth insights into the children's perspectives, situated in the time and place of my study (Taber, 2013).

The specific methodological approach I will adopt is Clark and Moss' (2017) Mosaic Approach, using multiple methods for "ongoing exploration into everyday lives, opening up new questions to be considered and challenging preconceived ideas" (p.138). The assumptions and intentions underpinning this approach accord with my own, including that children should be viewed as experts in their lives, research should be conducted with, rather than on, children, and methods should play to participants' strengths (Clark, 2010). Employing multiple methods would strengthen the internal validity of my findings, as I can engage in "methodological triangulation" by comparing the data yielded from each research method (Evans, 2017, p.209), thus overcoming any biases of each individual data source. I will employ three research methods to construct my mosaic. I acknowledge that using a greater diversity of methods could allow for the construction of an even more comprehensive mosaic of the perceptions of the children participating in my study, but this would be beyond the scope of my teacher-researcher project.

Research participants

My research participants will be the children in the year 3/4 class in a school in Cambridgeshire in which I completed a teaching placement. This age group is appropriate, as Kellock and Sexton's (2018) study illuminates that children of this age can reflect thoughtfully on their experiences in, and perceptions on, the physical school environment. I would not conduct the research until I have spent at least one week in the classroom, allowing for a rapport to develop with the children prior to my research, so that they will feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me. I intend for all 31 of the children to take part in the photograph task and for 8-12 of these children to participate in the subsequent group interviews and drawing task.

The group of 8-12 children will be obtained using purposive sampling, as I plan to select 1-2 children to represent each of the codes generated from the photograph activity. I would aim for this sample to have an equal gender-balance and range of attainment levels, increasing the likelihood of diversity in their spatial interpretations. Although I would ideally involve all 31 children in every stage of my research, this would not be practical given time and resource constraints. Moreover, Fleetwood's (2010) and Kellock and Sexton's (2018) studies highlight the value of taking time to engage in-depth with a small group of children's spatial narratives. Whilst it would also be interesting to compare the perspectives of children from both of the year 3/4 classes in the school, to potentially give rise to group variations based on physical differences between the classrooms (Kershner & Pointon, 2000), the existing pandemic restrictions hinder the possibility of this.

Research methods

Photograph task

I have chosen to use a photograph task in light of Prosser and Burke's (2008) assertion that "seeing the world through the eyes of a child means literally getting down to their eye level" (p.410). Additionally, Clark and Moss (2017) suggest that children often feel more comfortable engaging in creative tasks than tasks relying on words, so I hope that the children will enjoy being co-researchers through taking a photograph of their classroom (Clark, 2010). I will conduct the photograph task when the classroom is empty, for instance during part of a PE lesson, and will involve children in groups of 6-8 at a time. It would be desirable to engage in conversations about how and why the children are selecting their images during the task, to clarify their intentions and

thus inform my subsequent analysis (Clark & Moss, 2017), however, the possibility of this will depend upon having another adult in the room to supervise and support the other children.

Before giving children the school iPads to take photographs, I will ensure that each child is aware that they can take only one photograph of the ‘space they like most in their classroom’. I will limit the children to one photograph each, as I expect this may encourage them to consider the task more carefully and thoughtfully. I will also answer any questions and give the children time to think about what they want to photograph. This photograph task would allow the children to engage with their personal interpretations of the classroom rather than eliciting preformed ideas (Clark, 2010). I will purposively select 1-2 children from each of the codes generated from this task to take part in the group interviews and drawing task. If a selected child expresses that they do not want to take part in the subsequent tasks, I will select another child to represent that particular theme, if possible.

Group interviews

“Photographs obscure as much as they reveal” (Gleason, 2018, p.7), such that a researcher can easily misinterpret the meanings of photographs (Briggs et al., 2014). It is therefore valuable to seek accompanying narratives and in-depth explanations from participants. I intend to use group interviews, each involving 4-5 children, for this purpose, as children might be less inhibited than in individual interviews and “the comments of one child can act as a stimulus for another” (Taber, 2013, p.277). I will guide the children’s conversations using a semi-structured interview schedule, developed from the related literature base, and will ask follow-up questions to capture their views as fully as possible (Appendix I). I will begin by asking simple questions about the children’s photographs and progress to more abstract open questions, in line with Kvale’s (2007) suggestion that such progression allows for a power transfer to the participants, prior to exploring their personal perspectives in greater depth. All of my questions will be pitched at an appropriate level for each group of children.

The group interviews will involve “prompted consultation” rather than “direct consultation” (MacBeath et al., 2003, p.10), using children’s photographs as a stimulus for discussion. I intend to talk about the children’s photographs at the beginning of the interview in light of Prosser and Burke’s (2008) comment that sharing photographs can “help to break down the power differential in interviews” (p.410), as they signal that eye-to-eye contact need not be maintained and that the images children have taken are of value. During conversations about the photographs, I would ask

the children about other spaces that they might have photographed if time permitted, thus gaining greater understanding of their views about the broader physical classroom environment.

I aim to minimise the likelihood of children losing interest and becoming distracted, but also intend for sufficient time to engage with their perceptions. I will therefore limit the group interviews to 20-30 minutes each. To navigate difficulties surrounding my role as a teacher-researcher, I will explain how this research is separate to my teaching role before beginning my research. Given the nature of group interviews, it is probable that some children will be more dominant in discussion whilst others are more withdrawn and influenced by other children's perspectives (Drever, 2003). Such social dynamics cannot be avoided; however, I will attempt to reduce these by establishing ground rules at the beginning of the interviews and questioning each child directly (Appendix I), alongside reinforcing that the children are welcome not to answer each question.

Another consideration for group interviews is potential impacts of the power differential between myself and the children. To reduce this, and in accordance with Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) claim that situational contexts mediate interviewer-interviewee dynamics, I will conduct the interviews in the children's classroom. Their familiarity with this setting may reduce any anxiety and they will also be able to make reference to the surrounding spaces during the discussions (Clark & Moss, 2017). Additionally, I will emphasise that my aim is to gain insights into the children's own perspectives, hence minimising the likelihood of "expectancy effects" which could otherwise compromise the validity of my findings (Cohen et al., 2007, p.411). I will retain a reflexive mindset throughout the design and conduct of my research, avoiding the use of leading questions, double-barrelled questions, and ensuring questions are as neutral and open-ended as possible (Roulston, 2010).

Drawing task

The drawing task will combine "mediated consultation" and "prompted consultation" (MacBeath et al., 2003, p.10), as I intend to engage in discussions about the children's drawings whilst they create them. At the beginning of the task, I will give each child one piece of A4 paper and ask them to draw 'what would you change about your year 3/4 classroom?'. Throughout the task, I will use prompts such as 'what would you keep the same, and why?' and 'what would you take away/ add, and why?' to guide the children's thinking. I intend to audio-record the interviews and drawing task discussions, with the children's permission. Although I will likely develop a feel for possible

themes whilst collecting the data, my process of data analysis, discussed next, will give rise to the formally identified themes.

Analytic methods

My process of data analysis will combine deductive techniques, using themes identified in existing literature to inform my analysis, and inductive techniques, identifying patterns in my data that relate to my research question but not necessarily other literature. To ensure that my analysis is not solely influenced by my prior knowledge about the topic, which could otherwise result in overlooking unique patterns in my data, I plan to engage in a systematic and cyclical process. I will also retain a reflexive mindset, reminding myself of my intention to illuminate the children's own perceptions (Berger, 2013; Roulston, 2010).

To analyse the children's photographs, I will look at the physical features captured in each image and develop preliminary themes based on apparent similarities and differences across the photographs. Photographs that do not fit the emerging categories will form their own code. This process of theme generation will be cyclical, as I will return to the raw data several times to consider the fit of the themes and will alter the themes accordingly. The themes generated from my analysis of the photograph task will form my first coding framework.

In line with Drever's (2003) statement that there are "strong arguments for using transcription selectively" given the time-consuming nature of interview transcription (p.61), I will transcribe only passages of 'rich' material from my interview and drawing task recordings. In this context, 'rich' material refers to segments of discussion that inform my research question. Whilst some may consider this approach to potentially give rise to themes that do not represent the entirety of the raw data, this method is appropriate for my research due to time constraints of a teacher-researcher project. Moreover, I will listen to each recording twice through to check that the transcribed material includes all of the material that is relevant to my research question and reflects the variety in the children's perspectives. I also intend to annotate the physical features in the children's pictures created during the drawing task.

My second coding framework would be more detailed than the photograph coding, as it will be comprised of analysis from the interview transcripts, design task transcripts and drawing annotations. I plan to adopt Braun and Clarke's (2012) method of thematic analysis, characterised

by an iterative, rigorous and cyclical process. I will begin by reading each transcript multiple times, to increase my familiarity with, and immersion in, the data. During re-reading, I intend to note preliminary thoughts about patterns and dissimilarities across the data sources. From these notes, I will create a list of potential themes based on their meaning in relation to my research question. I will then write notes on the transcripts and highlight extracts of the text according to their relation to each code, along with combining, expanding and collapsing codes if necessary to better represent the data. When satisfied with the codes I have generated, I will finally define the themes in relation to how they inform my research question.

To present my findings section in my final research report, I intend to use the themes I have generated during data analysis to structure my writing. In the first section of the findings, I would present the themes identified in the photograph task coding framework, along with examples of children's photographs that reflect the themes. Hence, this section will include a quantitative group-level overview of the frequency of each code and also qualitative interpretations of the findings. The second section of my findings will be qualitative in nature, structured using the themes that emerged from the group interviews and design task, along with interview excerpts and examples of the children's annotated drawings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations should be “an actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation” to best protect the individuals involved in the research (BERA, 2018, p.2). Therefore, to reach any decisions throughout my project, I have and will continuously reflect upon the British Educational Research Association's guidelines (BERA, 2018) and the ‘Ethics Checklist for PGCE Placements’.

Prior to the time when I intended to begin my research, I completed a research proposal form and this was subsequently approved by my personal tutor and class teacher. I discussed my proposal with the class teacher, sharing my aims, proposed methods and ways to minimise disruption to teaching. In obtaining informed consent, the Headteacher of the school confirmed that their permission would be sufficient for my research design, so it would not be necessary to seek consent from the children's guardians. My consent form for the Headteacher was transparent and open,

detailing the methods involved, how the information collected would be used, how the data would be kept secure and when it would be destroyed.

When conducting my research, it will be imperative to seek assent from the children involved in my research, in addition to informing them of the purpose and design of my project. According with Prosser and Burke's (2008) statement about the importance of informing children of their right "to opt in or out at different phases of the research" (p.417), I will explain this right to the children at each stage in my research. I will also remain sensitive to the possibility that any child might wish, for any reason and at any point, to withdraw their assent and I will be alert to subtle non-verbal indications that they might rather be elsewhere (Clark & Moss, 2017). Throughout my project, I intend to act to minimise concerns that children might have by reassuring them that there are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions or in the drawing task, as well as establishing ground rules for respectful behaviour at the beginning of the group interviews.

To respect the participants' privacy, I will pseudonymise the names of the children and the school throughout my transcription and final report, and children will not be permitted to take photographs with people in them or where the school logo could be identified. If any of the children's photographs contain children's names, I will edit the images to hide this information. To reduce any risks of distress, I will conduct the interview in the children's classroom with the door open, allowing for the children to look out and for staff to look in. Some children will likely feel less comfortable than other more dominant children in the interview (Drever, 2003), so I will respect their right not to respond and will give each child a choice of whether or not they want to expand on their responses. Whilst the nature of my project means that sensitive topics are unlikely to be raised by the children, I will re-read the school's safeguarding policy prior to my research and will remind myself who the Designated Safeguarding Lead is. After conducting each research method, I plan to check that all children involved are feeling content and ready to return to their lesson.

Implications for my Professional Development

Exploring the aforementioned research and methodological literature has reinforced that critically engaging with educational literature can allow for me to become a more reflective practitioner. This is because it will continue to enable me to challenge unquestioned assumptions of everyday school life (Wilson, 2017), as well as to reach professional judgements by connecting my experience and

empirical findings (Pollard et al., 2019). Learning about the Mosaic Approach has revealed how I could undertake more informal research in my future classrooms, adopting diverse means for children to express themselves, underpinned by positive relations rooted in mutual respect. The Mosaic Approach provides an accessible methodology in which children can be active participants, aligning with my aim to empower children in my classroom.

Reading for this proposal has also exemplified the value of consulting children about their lived experiences. The literature has demonstrated the importance of providing opportunities for children to have their voices heard, as an end in itself and also fundamental to the longer-term aim of supporting children to become active participants in a democratic society (DfE, 2014). I have come to realise the range of positive effects of consulting children, such that engaging with children's perspectives in my future classroom may help them to feel valued, motivated and more positive about their learning. While my proposal concerns only a small-scale project into pupil perspectives, my reading has also highlighted the value of larger-scale pupil consultation, providing opportunities for all students to participate in decision-making and recognising the multiple voices to be listened to in order to improve educational experiences (MacBeath et al., 2003; Robinson & Fielding, 2007). Burke and Grosvenor (2015) state that "it is still adults who dominate debates, make decisions and implement change. Children may be listened to more, but the evidence suggests they are rarely heard" (p.xxvi). Thus, when I research pupil perspectives and pursue pupil voice in the future, the central aim of altering my practice in light of children's perspectives will clearly guide my actions.

The literature into children's perspectives on the physical classroom environment, with which I have critically engaged, has reinforced that assuming homogenous interpretations of classroom spaces must be avoided, as multiple and potentially contradictory needs should be considered in classroom design (Kershner & Pointon, 2000). I hope that encouraging children to engage with their interpretations of, and experiences in, my classroom may foster the development of "environmental literacy" (Nicholson, 2005, p.64), as children will become more critical of their surroundings and possible relations to how they feel about themselves in this space. Thus, in my future classroom, I am motivated to engage with each child's values regarding the physical environment, with the intention of making alterations which could enhance their sense of security, belonging and self-esteem (Clark, 2010). This will undoubtedly involve reaching compromises, due to financial and resource constraints, as well as differences between my own and the pupils' spatial understandings.

Taken together, although this proposal did not involve conducting the empirical research itself, I have learnt much about the benefits of researching pupil perspectives, effective ways in which this can be undertaken, and the importance of investigating children's idiosyncratic, rich and in-depth experiences in, and perspectives on, physical classroom spaces. This will greatly inform my development as a reflective practitioner who aims to empower children, encouraging them to express their opinions and experiences and to know that they will be heard.

References

- Alexander, R. (2010). *Children, their world, their education: Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. London: Routledge.
- Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1–16. doi: 10.1177/1468794112468475
- Blishen, E. (1969). *The School That I'd Like*. London: Penguin Books.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *The handbook of research methods in psychology* (pp. 57-71). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Briggs, L., Stedman, R., & Krasny, M. (2014). Photo-Elicitation Methods in Studies of Children's Sense of Place. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 24(3), 153–172. doi: 10.7721/chilyoutenvi.24.3.0153
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles: SAGE publications.
- British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>
- Burke, C. (2007a). The View of the Child: Releasing 'visual voices' in the Design of Learning Environments. *Discourse*, 28(3), 359-372. doi: 10.1080/01596300701458947
- Burke, C. (2007b). Editorial. *History of Education*, 36(2), 165-171. doi: 10.1080/00467600601171237

Williams, E.

Burke, C., & Grosvenor, I. (2003). *The School I'd Like: Revisited* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.

Burke, C., & Grosvenor, I. (2015). *The School I'd Like: Revisited* (2nd ed.). Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Chiles, P. (2005). The classroom as an evolving landscape. In M. Dudek (Ed.), *Children's spaces* (pp. 101-113). Oxford: Architectural Press.

Clark, A. (2007). *Early Childhood Spaces: Involving young children and practitioners in the design process*. Working paper 45. The Netherlands: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Clark, A. (2010). *Transforming Children's Spaces*. London: Routledge.

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2017). *Listening to young children: A guide to understanding and using the Mosaic approach* (3rd edition). London: National Children's Bureau.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th edition). London: Routledge.

Department for Education [DfE]. (2014). *The National Curriculum in England, Framework Document*. London: The Stationery Office.

Department for Education and Skills [DfES]. (2002). *Schools for the future: Designs for learning communities*. Building Bulletin 95. London: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills [DfES]. (2003). *Building Schools for the Future: Consultation on a new approach to capital investment*. London: DfES.

Drever, E. (2003). *Using semi-structured interviews in small-scale research: A teacher's guide*. Glasgow: SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow.

Ellis, J. (2005). Place and identity for children in classrooms and schools. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 3(2), 55-73.

Evans, M. (2017). Reliability and validity in qualitative research by teacher researchers. In E, Wilson (Ed.), *School-based research: A guide for education students* (3rd ed) (pp. 202-216). London: SAGE Publications.

Fleetwood, E. (2010). *Pupil perspectives on spaces of learning: how year six children perceive the physical environment of the classroom*. Unpublished PGCE assignment. Cambridge: Faculty of Education.

- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Allen Lane.
- Gleason, M. (2018). Metaphor, Materiality, and Method: The Central Role of Embodiment in the History of Education. *Paedagogica Historica*, 54(1-2), 4–19. doi: 10.1080/00309230.2017.1355328
- Grosvenor, I. (2012). Back to the future or toward a sensory history of schooling. *History of education*, 41(5), 675–687. doi: 10.1080/0046760X.2012.696149
- Higgins, S., Hall, E., Wall, K., Woolner, P., & McCaughey, C. (2005). *The impact of school environments: A literature review*. The Centre for Learning and Teaching, School of Education, Communication and Language Science, University of Newcastle. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Impact-of-School-Environments-%3A-A-literature-Higgins-Hall/406361a3ba67b971c6402295f107c0ddbbe95ae1>
- Kellock, A., & Sexton, J. (2018). Whose Space is it Anyway? Learning About Space to Make Space to Learn. *Children's Geographies*, 16(2), 115–127. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1334112
- Kershner, R. (2000). Organising the physical environment of the classroom to support children's learning. In D. Whitebread (Ed.), *The Psychology of Teaching and Learning in the Primary School* (pp.17-40). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Kershner, R., & Pointon, P. (2000). Children's views of the primary classroom as an environment for working and learning. *Research in Education*, 64(1), 64–77. <https://doi.org/10.7227%2FRIE.64.7>
- King-Hill, S. (2015). Critical analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of need. *The STeP Journal (Student Teacher Perspectives)*, 2(4), 54-57.
- Koralek, B., & Mitchell, M. (2005). The schools we'd like: Young people's participation in architecture. In M. Dudek (Ed.), *Children's spaces* (pp.114-153). Oxford: Architectural Press.
- Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & de Boer, H. (2020). The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: A meta-analytic review. *Research papers in education*, 35(6), 641-680. doi: 10.1080/02671522.2019.1615116 1–40

- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Lawn, M. (2005). A pedagogy for the public: The place of objects, observation, mechanical production and cupboards. In M, Lawn. & I, Grosvenor (Eds.), *Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology, Objects, Routines* (pp. 145–162). Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Lieberman, M. (2013). *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. New York: Crown.
- Loxley, A., O’Leary, B., & Minton, S. (2011). Space makers or space cadets? Exploring children’s perceptions of space and place in the context of a Dublin primary school. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 28(1), 46–63. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/15038>
- MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J., & Myers, K. (2003). *Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers*. Cambridge: Pearson.
- Mahony, P., & Hextall, I. (2013). ‘Building Schools for the Future’: ‘Transformation’ for social justice or expensive blunder? *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(5), 853-871. doi: 10.1002/berj.3001
- Maslow, A. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- McGregor, J. (2004). Spatiality and the place of the material in schools. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 12, 347–372. doi: 10.1080/14681360400200207
- Mittelman, W. (1991). Maslow's study of self-actualization: A reinterpretation. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 31(1), 114–135. doi: 10.1177%2F0022167891311010
- Nicholson, E. (2005). The school building as third teacher. In M. Dudek (Ed.), *Children’s spaces* (pp. 44-65). Oxford: Architectural Press.
- Pollard, A., Black-Hawkins, K., Hodges, G., Dudley, P., Higgins, S., James, M., Linklater, H., Swaffield, S., Swann, M., Winterbottom, M., & Wolpert, M. (2019). *Reflective Teaching in Schools* (5th ed). London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Prosser, J., & Burke, C. (2008). Image-based educational research: Childlike perspectives. In J. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 407-419). London: SAGE Publications.

- Robinson, C., & Fielding, M. (2007). *Children and their primary schools: Pupils' voices*. Cambridge: The University of Cambridge.
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings (4th edition)*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Rudduck, J., & Flutter, J. (2000). Pupil Participation and Pupil Perspective: Carving a New Order of Experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(1), 75–89. doi: 10.1080/03057640050005780
- Rudduck, J., & McIntyre, D. (2007). *Improving learning through consulting students*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Seaborne, M. (1971). *Primary School Design*. London: Routledge.
- Taber, K. (2013). *Classroom-based research and evidence-based practice (2nd ed)*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Thyssen, G. & Grosvenor, I. (2019). Learning to make sense: Interdisciplinary perspectives on sensory education and embodied enculturation. *The Senses and Society*, 14(2), 119–130. doi: 10.1080/17458927.2019.1621487
- Wanless, S. (2016). The role of psychological safety in human development. *Research in Human Development*, 13(1), 6-14. doi: 10.1080/15427609.2016. 1141283
- Wilson, E. (2017). Becoming a reflective teacher. In E. Wilson (Ed.), *School-based research: A guide for education students* (pp. 13-22). London: SAGE Publications.

Appendix 1

Group interview schedule (page 1 of 2)

Semi-Structured Group Interview Schedule

Prompts: Anything else you would like to add? Can you tell me more about that?

Probes: Permit silences for children to reflect, don't jump in too quickly, adapt responses

➔ **Ask them for permission- only I will know responses. Reinforce that they can withdraw at any point for any reason. Ask about the audio recording.**

Introduction: I am trying to find out what year 3/4 children think about their classrooms. I want to know what they like about them and what they might change to make them better. No right or wrong answers, just learning about your own opinions and experiences.

Ground rules: I am very interested in what you have to say, so I need to make sure I can hear what each of you think. So, it's very important that if someone is speaking, you listen to what they have to say and don't talk over them. You can build on what others have said once they have finished speaking. You don't need to agree with what anyone else in the group says and we have to respect that everyone has different experiences and thoughts.

Photo stimuli:

Why is this the classroom space/ feature that you like most?

How does this space make you feel/ think? (possible prompts- safe, happy, belong, comfy)

What do you think about the other photos that people took?

Possible prompts: How important are these features in a classroom to you?

Is there anything else you might have photographed if you had time? Why?

How does this space make you feel/ think? (possible prompts- safe, happy, belong, comfy)

Is there a classroom space that you don't like? Which one and why?

General feelings about the classroom environment:

Can you describe how you feel about the overall classroom environment?

What makes you feel like this?

Group interview schedule (page 2 of 2)

How is it similar or different to other classrooms you have been in?

Which did you prefer? Possible prompts= display, layout, areas, resources, wet play

If you were describing your classroom to children who had never visited year 3/4, how would you describe it to them?

Are there any differences in how you feel about with classroom due to COVID?

Possible prompts- Moving around? Using only few spaces in the classroom? Warmth?

Prompt- Have these changes impacted your experience/ feelings in the classroom?

Do you think the physical classroom design is important to your school experiences?

In what ways?

Perspectives about change: (bring out drawing task)- 15 minutes maximum

How would you improve and change the year 3/4 classroom so you liked it even more?

➔ Is there anything you think is missing from your classroom?

➔ Is there anything you would take away?

How would these changes make you feel in the classroom?

Is there anything else you would like to say about this topic that you haven't already told me?

Thank you very much, I've learnt lots about the classroom from you all!

