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An exploration of 'child voice' and its use in care planning: an ethnographic study with a looked after child

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Johanna Bacon

**An exploration of 'child voice' and
its use in care planning: an
ethnographic study with a looked
after child.**

DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION

January 2015

DECLARATION

I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not currently being submitted for any degree other than that of Doctorate in Education being studied at the University of Chester. I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise identified by references and that I have not plagiarised another's work.

Student

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses an ethnographic study to interrogate the policy discourse of capturing 'child voice' specifically in relation to a 'looked after' child. In recent years, attempts have been made to involve children who are 'looked after' in discussions and decisions about their care arrangements to ensure that their voice is heard. To ensure this happens, children 'in care' are asked about their care placement regularly as part of the care planning review process and their views are incorporated into decisions about their care plan.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of a seven-year old female child, who I have referred to as 'Keeva', who is 'in care' under a Kinship Care arrangement. Over a period of a year, I was based in Keeva's home one afternoon a week to gain insights about her lived experience as a 'looked after' child and how she represented herself. I also observed three care planning review meetings to see how her voice was captured by those charged with her care and how she was represented.

I relate Keeva's experience through seven narrative episodes to capture the rich complexity of the social world she inhabits. I explore aspects of her home and family, her interactions with others and her experience of exploring physical spaces both inside and outside the home. I suggest that these experiences underpin her sense of self and how she relates to others. Drawing on the ideas of Bourdieu, I suggest these experiences and her sense of place in the social order write themselves 'onto her' through her habitus and dispositions.

Using a Foucauldian lens, I problematise the notion of voice as I contest that the child I observed engaged fully in the statutory processes that surround her. I suggest Keeva, a child who is 'looked after', will neither have nor feel she has the agentive properties to influence the care planning process. Instead, as her voice is irrevocably bound up in a bureaucratic process that is uncritically accepted as representative of her, she is obscured as a consequence. I also examine the multivocality in representations of Keeva highlighting the competing discourses of safeguarding, child protection and the 'rights-based' agenda.

I conclude that Keeva was not well represented in care planning reviews and had very little influence in decision-making about her care plan. Despite believing the opposite, those charged with her care failed to hear her or take note of what she said. Furthermore, there was an absence of criticality in representations of Keeva allowing Keeva to be constructed by those professionals involved with her care, in an unchallenged way. As a consequence she was silenced and less visible than the process itself.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview

Recent policy initiatives have attempted to involve children who are 'in care' in the decision-making that affects them, their care placement planning and evaluation (Ball, 2014). The notion of capturing 'child voice' has become embedded in policy discourse in England and Wales, relevant to care planning and monitoring, as a way of ensuring that local authorities and other responsible bodies engage with children and take their views into account.

This thesis reviews the political discourse that surrounds 'child voice' and examines the appropriation of attendant 'rights' as an instrument of liberal governmental rationality. I contest the notion of voice by scrutinising the efficacy and presumed benefits of capturing voice by critically examining the practice of representing a child who is 'looked after'. Drawing on the theoretical ideas of Foucault's notions of power, normalisation and surveillance; Bourdieu's notions of habitus and dispositions and Lacan's notions of identity and representation this study highlights the dislocation of policy in practice and the experience of the child in the process of engaging her in decisions made about her.

Using an ethnographic study I examine the lived experience of a seven year-old female child, referred to by the 'pseudonym 'Keeva', who is 'in care'. I wanted to write a thesis that, as closely as possible, represented the child who was 'looked after', to say something that was insightful and relevant from their perspective, to perhaps become their voice. I use these insights to critically reflect on the process and practices followed in care planning reviews to capture her voice and how these are used to both represent her and inform decision-making about her placement. In doing so, I expose the disjunctures and contradictions in these practices.

The child who is 'looked after' or 'cared for' has the experience of all that would normally be private and inconsequential in childhood, being exposed and digested in the public space. I have a strong sense that the individuality of a child 'in care' is lost in broad policy objectives and that they are 'voiceless' in the absence of

consistent advocates e.g. parents. There may be no-one to think and speak alongside the child who is 'looked after', no-one who is known, consistent and familiar. In the place of a stable home life there are a variety of public sector agencies and others who together provide support to and services required for 'looked after' children and represent them when planning and evaluating care placements.

In this chapter, I summarise the political context in which the 'child voice' discourse is situated. I will then explicate the research problem being tackled followed by a justification for the research and methodology adopted. I end with an overview of the thesis structure that gives a sense of the story that will unfold.

2 Political archaeology

I have for a long time felt there was a disjuncture between the UK Government policy and practice with regards to children who are in the care of the state particularly in relation to understanding their lived experience of home, relationships and the social world. This is supported in several recently published reports that highlight significant dissonance in the processes by which children being heard or represented effectively in decisions made about them (Munro, 2011; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [OfSTED], 2010, OfSTED, 2011, Department of Children Schools and Families [DCSF], 2010).

Policy has attempted to ensure local authorities (LAs) and other bodies more effectively engaged with children, to ensure their voices were heard. In the UK, the contemporary concept of 'child voice' has its foundations in the '*Convention on the Rights of the Child*' (United Nation Human Rights, 1989). The UN Convention suggests that the views and opinions of children are respected "in all matters affecting the child" (UNHR, 1989, Article 12(1)). The declaration of this right has been translated into UK policy at both local and national levels and whilst the convention has not been incorporated into law (so there is no statutory requirement

to comply) the UK Government suggests that local authorities and other statutory bodies should pay due regard to it.

The ratification in 1991 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) included two specific rights related to the voice of the child. First, in 'Article 12' the child should have the right to say what he/she thinks should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have his/her opinions taken into account. In 'Article 13' the child should have the right to get, and to share, information, so long as the information is not damaging to him/herself or others. Lundy and McEvoy (2012) says that this requires "a concomitant duty on the adults working with them to ensure that their right to express their views and influence their own lives is respected" (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012, p130). This is a crucial element in capturing voice that entails active participation by adults in hearing and representing children appropriately. Consequently the notion of 'child voice' entered policy discourse in relation to children in the care system. Here, children's views are sought on the arrangements for their care and evaluation of their experience in care. The State then, through its institutions, has foregrounded 'child voice' as a vehicle to engage with 'looked after' children in decision-making about their care.

The UNCRC became enshrined in UK national policy most recently in the 'The Children and Families Act' (2014) and adherence to 'Articles 12' and '13' is stated as a key function of the Children's Commissioner's role. In 2004, in England and Wales the publication of the 'Children's Act' saw the creation of a Children's Commissioner whose role was to provide advocacy for children, particularly those who were vulnerable with a specific duty to protect the rights of children to be listened to in decisions that concerned them. In the 'Children's and Families Act' (2014), the role of the Children's Commissioner shifted from this position of representing the views and interests of children and young people to one that was more distinctly proactive in the promotion of children's rights to express their views:

The Children's Commissioner's primary function is promoting and protecting the rights of children in England...[and] must have particular regard to the rights of children who are within

section 8A (children living away from home or receiving social care)

(2014, p82/3)

The 'particular regard' for 'looked after' children is emphasised several times in the '*Children and Families Act*' and in practice, this 'rights-based' agenda, as it is often referred to, has translated into various mechanisms to 'capture voice' such as advocacy services, questionnaires and children's parliaments.

The child in this thesis is under the jurisdiction of Wales and here LAs have a statutory obligation to "provide an independent professional 'voice' or advocate for every 'looked after' child who wants to take part or comment on decisions about their lives" (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2012, p4). Although there have been several attempts to embed the 'rights-based' agenda in policy relevant to 'looked after' children, it has not been universally accepted as being successfully implemented. For example, in a report commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for Wales [CCW], criticism was levelled at the efficacy of advocacy services, seen as a significant mechanism for capturing voice, for 'looked after' children stating that "'looked after' children... who want the support and advice of an independent professional advocate to help them have their voice heard are being badly let down" (CCW, 2012, p6).

The impetus for improving and extending engagement with vulnerable children has been against a backdrop of a series of damning reports into child abuse and protection (Jones, 1996; Waterhouse, 2000). A more recent parliamentary report was published, following the prosecution of several men in Rochdale for prolific child sexual abuse, that highlighted "children 'in care' were particularly vulnerable ...[to] child sexual exploitation", with up to 35 percent of children identified as being "sexually exploited were in the care system" (Scott, 2012, p6). Implementing 'child voice' practices demonstrates that those charged with the responsibility for 'looked after' children are indeed involving children in decisions made about them. It enables "children and young people to safeguard themselves by exercising their

rights, as outlined in the UNCRC, and specifically in relation to having their voice heard when key decisions are being made” (CCW, 2012, p5).

This emphasis on the importance of listening to children as an essential element of safeguarding and, importantly, enabling children and young people to safeguard themselves, is then perhaps less about the democratic rights of children, or devolved power, and more about the need for government to attempt to provide more protection for children at risk. This is an aspect of the ‘rights’ agenda that is often underplayed as a reason for embedding ‘child voice’ in UK policy and reflects the recommendations of an OfSTED report ‘*The Voice Of The Child: Learning Lessons From Serious Case Reviews*’ (2011). This report examined 67 serious case reviews predominantly related to children who were either ‘in care’ or deemed ‘at risk’. The main emphasis of this report is on the importance of listening to children particularly when they were at risk’ or ‘in care’.

The key findings from the report suggest that professionals working with vulnerable children need to establish processes and practices that allowed them to see and hear the child and take far more account of their feelings and wishes. Instead OfSTED suggested the serious case reviews had shown that professionals too readily listened and responded to the adults who represented the child (parents and guardians) and too little emphasis was on observing the child or seeing them outside of the presence of carers, thus restricting the opportunities to be heard in their own right. The report in many ways is a depressing indictment of how absent children are in assessments about them and it seems to be an endemic issue as previous reports highlighted very similar findings. For example, an earlier OfSTED serious case review stated “too often the focus on the child was lost; adequate steps were not taken to establish the wishes and feelings of children and young people; and their voice was not heard sufficiently” (OfSTED, 2011, p5). This reveals the difficult and complex task of professionals being able to effectively engage with children even when they are directly responsible for their care. It seems pertinent then to question, as this thesis does, the ease with which ‘child voice’ can be captured by professionals who are charged with this responsibility.

The 'looked after' child

Children who are 'looked after' are subject to a care order which occurs when the LA believes that to keep the child safe, he or she will need to be removed from their family. The basis of such an order is that the child is at risk of "suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm if the order is not made" (Ball, 2014, p17). A care order transfers the parental responsibility to the local authority who acts as 'corporate parent' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). This is often without the consent of the parent(s) and may be preceded by an interim care order and the local authority must place the child away from her family. There are other routes into care such as a child being taken into police custody or subject to an emergency protection order but the care order is the category relevant to the study explored in this thesis.

The state of being without parents (and all that is related to this), leads then to a replacement by a corporate parent who is required to "offer everything a good parent would provide and more" (DfES, 2007, in Ball, 2014, p50). In brief, the role of local authorities charged with the role of 'corporate parent' is to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and, in the planning and reviewing of care, should ensure that outcomes for 'looked after' children are improved (Her Majesty's Government, 2010). Care is subject to scrutiny and the LA and other relevant bodies must publicly record and document the minutiae of the life of the children in their care. Munro (2011) argues that "helping children is a human process. When the bureaucratic aspects of work become too dominant, the heart of the work is lost". The implication here is that an administrative process cannot produce an understanding or knowledge of a child's experience (Munro, 2011, p10).

Care planning and review meetings

In the statutory guidance for assessing and reviewing a child's placement, '*Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010*' the need to

engage children in the processes is emphasised (HM Government 2010). It is a legal requirement that these meetings are conducted to ensure the statutory duty of the government is dispensed “(a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children... and (b) to promote the upbringing of such children by their families” (Department of Health, 1989). This duty is transferred to the local authority and in the 1989 Act there is an expectation that the child ‘in care’ will be involved in decisions made about them. In practice, social workers and other agencies are guided by the ‘*Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*’ (Department of Health, 2000) which was incorporated into ‘*Working together to Safeguard Children*’ (HM Government, 2013). It is in this care planning review process where the capturing of ‘child voice’ is formalised. The child is asked about their placement and their feedback is incorporated into the discussion and evaluation of their placement at the care planning reviews. Children are either present at the meetings or an advocate speaks on their behalf. Information on the child is collected through various agencies involved with them such as social services, school, health visitors and this again informs the discussion at the care planning review. Thomas (2011) suggests that, for social work practice, enshrining the rights of children to have their views taken into account, is not solely a moral imperative but leads to good practice and allows for improvements in decision-making.

The whole process is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who has responsibility for monitoring the performance by the local authority in the discharge of their duties in relation to a child’s case and as such has “an effective independent oversight of the child’s case. This independent review ensures that the child’s interests are protected throughout the care planning process (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p7). The creation of an IRO role was against a backdrop of reported difficulties in maintaining good practice in care planning and reviews for ‘looked after’ children (Thomas, 2011; Bijleveld, Dedding, and Bunders-Aelen, 2013) and one of the key challenges cited was ensuring care planning and reviews were centred on what is best for the particular child and not driven by agency policies and budgets (Thomas, 2011). The statutory guidance which frames the discharge of IRO duties stipulates that , “we have aimed to keep the voices of children and young people consistently in mind as we

have drawn up this guidance”, thus embedding capturing voice in the practice of care planning and reviews (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p4).

A recent report evaluated the impact the IRO has had on the care planning process, and suggested the experience is mixed (Jelicic, La Valle and Hart, 2014). Whilst the report cited benefits in terms of timeliness of reports and a move towards more child-centred reviews, there were many constraints in achieving the aspirations for the role. Too little time was available for IROs to conduct their role fully and evidence that best practice was seen when the IRO had a good relationship with the child whose case was under review and this was often not the case. The report suggests that “processes to enable IROs to engage and influence cases require considerable fine-tuning, with a national framework provided to support the development of local protocols” (Jelicic et al., 2014, p9). There was also an underlying theme that highlighted some of the professional tensions that exist between the IRO and social work teams.

However, despite the political rhetoric, the implications of widely-publicised cases of children ‘in care’ being abused, neglected and murdered has led to large-scale reviews of how children’s services are managed (Ball, 2014). Often the agencies seem powerless to act as a corporate parent and I suggest, in the discussion that follows, that ‘child voice’ as presented here can be seen as a way of transferring or delegating some accountability for child protection by deferring rights to the child to become more engaged in the planning and evaluation of care arrangements and thus have some of the responsibility and accountability for it.

‘Child voice’

‘Child voice’ has become synonymous with an authentic reflection of how a child feels or wants to express themselves. This is based on a construct of a child as a social actor who can be viewed as a knowing subject (James, 2007, p261). Since

the mid-1980s, there has been a shift in childhood research that views of children as appropriate and competent commentators who are able to be cognisant in participatory contexts. Jenks observed 'child voice' is based on a concept that "infants are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world ... They have a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that we might "idolize" or even "worship" as the source of all that is best in human nature" (Jenks,1996, p73).

'Child voice' then, is about recognising the child's unique and valuable perspective and finding ways to ensure their voice is captured. It is about providing opportunities for the child to express themselves, using methodological approaches to capture voice that enable a child to engage in discussions, and representing the child meaningfully. Attempts to embed 'child voice' practices with children at risk has led to the development of guidance given to professionals, about the use of increasingly sophisticated approaches to both recognising 'child voice' and making judgements based on them. A local authority gives this guidance on what 'child voice' is:

Non-verbal communication counts too eg facial expressions, demeanour and posture. Some children use signs and symbols as well as speech eg Makaton. Physical appearance can communicate eg an apparently emaciated baby or a suspicious bruise. Behaviour can mean as much as words, including in very verbal children

(Slough Borough Council, 2014).

It adds,

A less obvious but potentially powerful way is to always put yourself in the child's shoes...What verbal children don't say can be important. If a child is known to have the ability to discuss something but won't, this can ... indicate wariness or fear is the reason. Children's writings and drawings count as the 'voice' too. How a child smells can count ...

(Slough Borough Council, 2014).

James (2007) suggests that often researchers and policy-makers tend to assume that by capturing voice they will be able to better understand a child's perspective and in a sense know them better from this 'insider's view', yet she calls for more criticality in these assumptions (James, 2007). There is a danger in voice capturing practices that one all-encompassing construct, described above, of a child holds true. In such constructs the child is represented as the knowing subject and 'child voice' as authentic. The power-relationship between adults and children and the agentive structures which exist are ignored.

For the last two decades 'child voice' has been used to describe how children think, feel or opine about themselves, others or a specified situation (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013). However, this simplistic description does not take account of the politics, positionality or agentive structures relating to voice which would more readily account for the "ambiguous, complex and constructed nature of children's voices" (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013, p2). Hohti and Karlsson's work builds on a position taken earlier by Spyrou (2011) who cited the proliferation of research that foregrounded children's participation in the research but as a discipline had faced very little scrutiny. He argues for more criticality in such research particularly in relation to the "modern, liberal notion of a 'speaking subject' and the acceptance of the individual as unitary subject whose voice is authentic" (Spyrou, 2011, p152). It seems worthwhile then to consider the issue of the power in 'child voice' and here I refer to a growing body of literature that critiques the power hierarchical relationships between (adult)researcher and research subject (child) to explicate the notions of authenticity and representation.

In political terms, 'child voice' is seen as a positive, unproblematic concept that harnesses the ideology of the child as citizen of a modern democratic state (Wall, 2012). The UN Convention suggests that it is an inherently 'good' thing and, in response, a range of organisations have embedded the concept of 'child voice' in their strategies, policies and practices particularly in relation to children 'in care'. There is a danger that 'voice' is inferred by what the child expresses verbally or in

some other concrete way such as written accounts. It carries the assumption that these simple acts will get us closer to an authentic representation of the child. It is also suggested that the act of attempting to capture voice, confers rights to the child, devolving power to them, giving them agency in decision-making.

Providing children with spaces in which to express their views, it is argued, allows decision-makers to more adequately and appropriately ensure these are taken into account. However, research has demonstrated that professionals working with children often find it problematic to communicate effectively with children under eight-years of age and tended to focus on verbal methods (Music, 2010). Additionally, Music suggests that a child with a disrupted childhood has a potentially limited capacity to reflect and, in that sense, may not articulate her thoughts as readily as those from more stable backgrounds. Hohti and Karlsson suggest there is a need for a critical appraisal of the research methodology that seeks to present authentic accounts of children and conclude that there is need for reflexive listening to capture 'child voice' as "voices were discursively, socially and physically constructed" (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013, p8). This places constraints on how well represented the child will be in conclusions reached on this basis. Instead, research in this field indicates that the complex power relations between children and adults limits the potential of the child to be heard or have their wishes reflected in decisions made about them (James, 2007; Gallagher, 2008; Holland, 2010).

More recently the inclusion of children's 'voice' in the decisions that affect them has been subject to some critique and some suggest, this representation is minimal and has limited potency (Wall, 2012). He suggests much of the participation of children in discussion is tokenistic and does not lead to fundamental changes in services or processes significant to them (Wall, 2012). The UN Convention that asks local and national governments to take account of children's views is far less powerful as a form of political representation than the political structures, systems and practices that are devised by adults. Others have argued that the political rhetoric supporting 'child voice' may be naïve and lead to self-serving practices as policy makers are concerned with what Lewis described

this agenda as “not about empowerment but rather as about how to corral those voices” (Lewis, 2010, p16).

Research problem

The central purpose of this thesis is to critically examine how the capturing of voice translates into professional practices and processes. I am interested here in the intentions and appropriation of policy which is often couched in the language of a notional child’s voice agenda (Lewis, 2010) and the efficacy of politically-informed practices.

These aims are framed through the following research questions:

1. What are the professional practices and processes for capturing 'child voice' at Care Planning Reviews?
2. How effective is the policy in practice of capturing voice in relation to stated aims of engaging 'looked after' children in decision-making and representing their views and opinions?
3. Were the processes and practices for capturing voice representative of the child?

In the case of 'looked after' children, the representation of their views is through a complex, state driven process which has the aim of more efficiently capturing the views of children but I question whether it can represent them as children and in particular their needs as children who are 'in care'.

Outline of thesis

I committed early on in my doctoral study to examining the lived experience of a 'looked after' child from their perspective. I wanted to tell the story from 'there' and so the structure of this thesis privileges the child’s perspective in how the research was constructed. I wanted to examine and analyse relevant literature and policy

based on what I observed in the ethnographic study as opposed to determining the

framework for discussion prior to the study. As such the thesis is structured as follows:

In 'Chapter 2: Methodology', I give a detailed explanation of the methodological considerations in conducting a study of this type making clear my epistemological claim for the ethnographic approach. I discuss the process undertaken to identify and engage with a 'looked after' child for the purpose of the study and how I attempted to foreground her.

In 'Chapter 3: Data', data from the ethnographic study is presented using seven narrative episodes which exposes the lived experiences of Keeva, her identity as a 'looked after' child, her engagement in care planning reviews and her interactions in the physical and social world that she inhabits.

In 'Chapter 4: First stage analysis: observations and assertions', I draw out key themes from the ethnographic study data. The themes that are identified are:

- Professional practices and processes
- How Keeva is represented by others and written onto by her environment
- Keeva's voice – how she represents herself

In the discussion I provide illustrative examples from the data to draw out how 'child voice' is captured and represented formally and how Keeva represents herself through her lived experiences.

In 'Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis', I discuss and critically examine the key themes through an extensive literature review. This begins by using a Foucauldian lens to explore how 'child voice' can be understood through the notions of power, regulatory processes and regimes of truth. 'Child voice' has come to represent a foregrounding of the child in the decision-making about their lives in a sense to award them more agency. However, this can be seen as discursive practice that allows the 'views' of children with very difficult, emotional and complex lives to be corralled using processes which are not constructed by them, representative of

them and not necessarily, as seen in this study, engaged in by the children. Further this chapter looks at Keeva's lived experiences through the Bourdieusian notion of habitus and discusses the complexities of expressing and making meaning from 'voice' by using post-Freudian theory including writers such as Lacan (1977), Zizek (2006a), Music (2010) and Kristeva (1982).

Thesis claims

In the ethnographic study, I observed the thoroughness of the regulatory regimes but the absence of any real insight or understanding about Keeva's life. There was superficiality in the applications of 'child voice' in professional practices and also Keeva's engagement with these practices. This is significant because it highlights the gap between the rhetoric of policy and professional discourse and the reality of practice and lived experience.

I argue in this thesis that capturing voice is less about deferring power to 'looked after' children but is better understood as a strategy to address the powerlessness authorities experience in providing protection. The current mechanisms to capture voice are effective in demonstrating that voice has been captured. However, what is absent is either the child's perspective in determining what she wants to be heard or allowing her to influence decisions that are meaningful to her. In consequence the child in this study is disappeared from the minds of the corporate parent as the bureaucratic process has been completed thus closing off any further discussion. I would conclude then that this study has illustrated that, representing a child's voice is highly problematic and questions whether it can be assumed that the child is engaged in or informs decisions made about her. I would further argue that she is rarely seen or heard in the processes that are used to represent her. I cannot emphasise enough my support for any platform, process or practice that allows 'looked after' children the opportunity to articulate their feelings, needs and opinions. However, my fear is that a bureaucratic process is relied on too heavily to tell us all we need to hear.

Delimitations and scope

This thesis focused on one child who was 'looked after' under a 'Kinship Guardian' arrangement whose care was the responsibility of a Welsh County local authority but she was living in the North-West of England. The study focused on the review meetings that related only to this child as well as her lived experience outside of school. There is some difficulty in extrapolating from this study applications to other areas of the country or even other 'looked after' children who reside in the same locality as Keeva and I would resist any temptation to do so. However, it does provide a rich and comprehensive account of one child's experience of being represented in the context outlined and I would argue this is valuable and insightful in its own right.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 Methodology

Overview

This chapter provides an overview and rationale for my choice of an ethnographic methodology to explore the processes and practices of capturing 'child voice' and its use in care planning reviews. The thesis uses the following questions to interrogate the policy, practice and experience to explicate multiple conceptions of 'child voice':

1. What are the professional practices and processes for capturing 'child voice' at Care Planning Reviews?
2. How effective is the policy in practice of capturing voice in relation to stated aims of engaging 'looked after' children in decision-making and representing their views and opinions?
3. Were the processes and practices for capturing voice representative of the child?

In an attempt to make explicit my positionality as a researcher, I adopt a reflexive approach which allows me present my findings as a view from here, "not a view from nowhere" (Pillow, 2003, p178). Reflexive methodology allows insights to be gained and an explanation of how these insights were reached. I tell you what I understand and how I make meanings from what I see and hear. The key thinkers in this field who have been used to frame how the methodology has been adopted include Christenson (2004), Blommaert, (2005), Cameron (2005), Hill (2006), Clough and Nutbrown (2012), Czarniawska (2004) and Pillow (2003). I end the chapter with a discussion on the ethical considerations that were embedded in my research practices throughout this study.

Epistemological claim for an ethnographic methodology

I wanted to write a thesis that as closely as possible represented a child who was 'looked after', referred to by the pseudonym, 'Keeva', to say something that was insightful and relevant from her perspective about her lived experience. To achieve this, I recorded my observations and interactions with Keeva outside of school (usually in her home) over an extended period of time of around thirteen months.

Ethnographic processes are particularly helpful in understanding a child's lived experiences as they allow the complexity and situatedness of a phenomenon and give opportunities for a rapport to be built that creates a dialogical space (Blommaert, 2005; Cameron, 2005). They are ~~is~~ increasingly used in social science research to allow the rich complexity of daily life to be studied in a way that is not framed or manipulated by the research task, "a naturalist approach to social research explores social phenomena as they exist in the world, unaltered. In this paradigm, ethnography has emerged as an increasingly important research method" (Buchbinder, Longhofer, Barrett, Lawson and Floersch, 2006, p48). Ethnography enabled me to gather and present a rich picture relating to Keeva and provided insights that could not be gained using other methods.

There are three drivers for my intention to privilege the perspective of a child: [1] a desire as an ethnographer to get closer to the subject discussed; [2] an acute sense of a power imbalance which can exist in research such as this and a wish to shift the power dynamic from the researcher to the researched; and [3] my belief that there is an imperative for building a strong research base which specifically captures the perspectives of 'looked after' children. There is a body of evidence that suggests that children with disrupted childhoods experience 'gaps' in self-knowledge and reflection is more difficult in children with fragmented and a fractured autobiographical history (Music, 2010). I am most drawn to research which is closer to the subject being investigated, such as ethnographic studies, that present the messy and complex socio-politico-cultural factors that underpin a lived experience. For example the work of Blommaert, (2005), Holland (2010) and

Cameron, (2005) focus not on seeking answers to questions set by the researcher but instead allows the child and her lived experience to lead the exploration.

Whilst this interpretive approach will not lead to generalizable outcomes, it will hopefully reveal a picture of the rich complexity that represents Keeva's experiences.

Data collected using an ethnographic methodology can expose the cultural underpinnings of a child's daily life (Buchbinder, et al, 2006, p47). I believe that the socio-politico-cultural space outside of school, the community in which Keeva lives, her home and family, her status as a 'looked after' child, act as significant factors which determine how she is perceived and represented in how she perceives and represents herself. Here I have adopted a Bourdieusian notion of "ethnography-as-epistemology", where Bourdieu's central concepts of habitus can be seen as inextricably linked to a situated ethnographic inquiry into the contested notion of 'child voice' (Blommaert, 2005, p219). The methodology explicates the tension between the subjectivity and situatedness of voice and acts as a useful theoretical frame in which to tease out the complex inter-relatedness of habitus and voice by examining habituated conversational practices (Blommaert, 2005).

Through the use of narrative, I construct a representation of Keeva's lived experience by observing the way she represents herself and how she is represented, focusing on the notion of 'voice'. This is reified by examining how her voice is expressed, how it is constructed and what this might tell us about how she is situated within her family, her social space and in society and how she is constructed as a 'looked after' child. I recognise the inner dialogue, about the phenomenon I observe, acts to create insights and generate new knowledge. During the research process from inception to analysis, my position, my experience, my 'insider view', my socio-psycho-emotional self are written into the products of the research in a reflexive way (Pillow, 2003). I am instrumental in creating meanings that shape the findings and it is necessary for me to state my interpretations. This is done later in this chapter in the section titled '*Positionality in the ethnographic study*' where I present a reflexive account that contextualises my own position within the research. This shares similarities with Bourdieu's reflections as an ethnographer and theorizes "how he himself became part of the

object – the objectification of subjectivity” and the reality of ethnographic field work has an emphasis on the “situated, experienced and practised (i.e., ‘ethnographic’) aspects of reality” (Blommaert, 2005, p226).

Rationale for adopting a single study and use of narrative

The proposal to use one child and to privilege her lived experience through a reflexive narrative that presents Keeva’s voice and my voice alongside each other has not been unproblematic and I endeavour to justify its use here.

The study methodology adopted is underpinned by Clough and Nutbrown’s concept of “radical enquiry” (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p26) with an acceptance of my own subjectivity as a researcher. Specifically it involves ‘radical listening’ to and ‘radical looking’ at the perspectives of a cared for child to gain insights to her lived experience (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). This could only be achieved through sustained engagement with Keeva and this required a methodology which allowed me as a researcher to be accepted within the field of study - the child’s home and social environment. Educational research has increasingly recognised the individual as an important site of inquiry (Ransome, 2010) and the research methodology privileges the voice of the research participant, Keeva. I argue that the field of the home or placement is an ideal context to gain insights to Keeva’s experience. This meant the observations in practice were largely unstructured other than occurring on the same day and time each week. This entailed much relationship building with her, her family and her wider social network, which took time and commitment as a researcher. This is an example of research that has a high degree of depth and specification and it is arguably appropriate therefore to use a single research subject (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p176).

Barthes (1977) claimed that narrative inquiry is useful as in research contexts as it encapsulates the social structures that exist in the lived experience

Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there

nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives . . . Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

(Barthes 1977, p79)

Czarniawska (2004) has used and encouraged the use of narrative to capture the lived experience in many fields of study and she explores how narrative is a way for researchers to demonstrate how people make meanings and sense of the world around them. I suggest that as I am using a naturalist, ethnographic approach, that narrative is an ideal genre for me to represent what I see, hear and understand from my interactions with Keeva and others.

The study

The research was undertaken over a period of thirteen months between May 2013 and June 2014 with 'Keeva', who was six-years old at the start of the study.

Finding a child who was 'looked after' to engage in research was fraught with difficulties and led to many frustrating dead-ends as those agencies charged with the responsibility for 'looked after' children could not give me permission to conduct the research. The ethical considerations were equally challenging and I devote a space for discussion of these considerations later on in this chapter. After several months of working with a fostering and adoption networking group at the university where I am employed, an opportunity arose as the network developed closer links with a cluster of local schools.

As school representatives became more cognisant of my research objectives, I was given permission to conduct the research with a family that one school was very familiar with. The school representative, Deputy-Headteacher, felt confident that ethnographic research would be possible as it was a stable care placement

and the children in the placement were well-known to the school and would enjoy being part of the research project. The family consisted of two sisters, 'Keeva' who was then 6 years old and 'Freda' (pseudonym) who was 4 years old, who were in the care of their maternal Uncle 'John' (pseudonym) and his wife, 'Kathy' (pseudonym). I made the decision to focus on the oldest child only as the younger child had an early diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and had limited communication and social abilities. As such, I felt unable to feel secure I had gained or could gain her consent to participate. Keeva did convey more interest and keenness in the research and was enthusiastic about taking part as soon as possible.

Keeva, along with her younger sister, was 'in care' as a consequence of serious parental neglect. She had been placed in residential care for a year before her Uncle and Aunt had become aware she and her sibling had been subject to a care order. Her older sister, 'Lianne' (pseudonym) had already been placed in kinship care a few years earlier with another maternal Uncle 'Peter' (pseudonym).

After an initial meeting at the school with Kathy, Keeva's social worker, 'Julie' (pseudonym) and the Deputy-Headteacher, 'Margaret' (pseudonym) where the research project was outlined and the process for conducting an ethnographic study was agreed. I would meet Keeva initially at school with Kathy and Margaret to explain the research and establish whether Keeva consented to take part. Following this, I would meet Keeva and her sister after school one day a week with Kathy and then go back home with them for 2-3 hours. In 'Chapter 3: Data', I use 'episodes' to represent my observations and interactions with Keeva during the time I spent with her and her family.

Keeva lives in a council house on an estate where there are high levels of social deprivation. John and Kathy are, or have been, employed in low-skill occupations throughout their adult lives after leaving school with few qualifications. They live in the area of their childhoods and other family members live within close radius although there are many frictions within the wider family. The study assesses and integrates this socio-economic context in the representation of Keeva and in the narrative account.

The geographical area in which Keeva lives is economically and socially diverse. Juxtaposed with the large council estate, is an area of high affluence with higher than average house values which includes a well-regarded private school within a few miles. The local shops, schools, houses, amenities are strikingly different. The everyday practices (such as shopping, going to school) are markedly different too and the research reveals how Keeva makes sense of this seemingly incongruent society. Again I am providing an insight on how everyday experiences within the Keeva's life act to construct meanings for her on how she engages in the wider social context. I argue that these socio-politico-cultural structures underpin the 'voice' of Keeva.

I met Keeva, her sister, Freda and her guardian, Kathy once a week at the end of the school day and walked home with them. I then spent approximately 3 hours with the family fitting in with whatever activity was taking place. I attempted to minimise intrusion for Keeva and Freda by chatting with Kathy and let the children approach me or include me in conversations and/or activities as they wanted to. Often I was invited to visit during special occasions such as birthdays and visited the family by agreement during the school holidays on a day that suited them.

During the visits I spent time at the house, going to the shops, visiting the park and accompanying Keeva (who I encouraged to create a photo-diary) on outings to take photos of her local area. I recorded my observations in a journal and these notes were supplemented by recorded episodes when Keeva and her guardian felt it would be appropriate later on in the study. Notes and recordings were transcribed and stored in a secure file. Later these were arranged into themes that structured the narrative data section of this thesis. These were supplemented by my immediate reflections and later reflexive accounts. Additionally I encouraged Keeva to create a scrap-book to illustrate what we discussed or did throughout the project. This included a photo journal, voice recordings, written and illustrated thoughts. As we neared the end of the research period, I provided Keeva with a journal to bring together some of the things she had done and collected and together, we prepared an account of our time together. I included in this journal a letter to Keeva to explain what I had been doing in my research and how she had been involved. I expressed my gratitude to her her and shared some of my

insights of her as a person I had grown to know.

Meetings with representatives who were responsible for ‘looked after’ children

I attended three Care Planning Review meetings over a period of thirteen months and made notes of my observations during the meetings and prepared reflective accounts after each meeting. I was allowed to see paperwork that informed the discussions which I used during the meeting itself but then returned to the social worker at the end of the meeting.

I also met with the team of twelve professionals who have primary responsibility for ‘looked after’ children in the relevant North Wales area. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the process of capturing voice and how it was used to inform care planning. Additionally I wanted to get a sense of how well such mechanisms represent children who are ‘looked after’ and how the professionals involved reflected on their usefulness and efficacy. The meeting took place on 10th March 2014.

Meeting with Keeva’s social workers

I met with Keeva’s social workers separately on three occasions to discuss Keeva’s participation in the research and interrogate emerging themes such as representation, recording of information and practices of capturing voice. During the period of investigation there were three different social workers who were assigned as Keeva’s caseworker.

The notes from these discussions were recorded in my research journal and used to inform the narrative episodes presented in the next chapter, ‘Chapter 3: Data’.

Reflexive presence

However keen I was to represent authentically Keeva, I had to accept the presence of my own 'voice' in determining what I chose to privilege in my exposition of the research findings. By accepting this as being so, allowed me to create a dialogue between the way I represented Keeva and how I influenced, shaped or appear in this representation. Pillow (2003) highlights the role of reflexivity as a way of gaining insight but also shows how this insight is gained. "To be reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced" (Pillow, 2003, p178). This echoes Hertz's (1997) contention that reflexivity is valuable in qualitative research as it reveals not only what we know but how we come to know it (Hertz, 1997). Reflexivity allows me to acknowledge my positionality in the research and to examine not only what I know but how I know it. Adopting a narrative approach, I tell the 'humble story' which is my "view from here" (Czarniawska, 2004).

The reflexive position that I have adopted relates not only to the methodological approach taken but also because I and my siblings have experience of being in the care system and have a background that shares similar characteristics to Keeva. Using Pillow's (2003) characterisations of reflexive approaches, my disclosure of sharing a similar background to Keeva suggests a self-reflexive approach is adopted. This approach seeks to use self-awareness to make sense of the subject and use the narrative to act as a "confessional tale" as, through the process of self-reflexivity, the researcher is able to show a closeness to the research subject" (Pillow, 2003, p182).

I acknowledge some of the difficulties associated with this approach in that it can foreground the researcher in the findings rather than the subject or subjects of the research. Because of this personal closeness to the subject, I decided I needed to position myself reflexively in the case study in a sense to expose the 'me' in the discussion and by doing so allowed Keeva's voice to be privileged. I thought a lot

here about authenticity. The decision to employ a reflexive methodology was to allow Keeva's experience to be as authentically represented as possible and avoiding the trap of navel gazing and presenting the researcher's account rather than the child's account. I was clear I wanted the child's perspective. I wanted to see how a looked after child represented themselves. To do this I felt I had to understand the contextual and the contingent aspects of this self-representation. I do not think self-representation and expressing 'voice' happens in a vacuum and I do not think we can assume what the child sees as their context. I wanted to be alongside with Keeva to see, hear, feel what she did. I could not do this perfectly as I was not 'living' alongside her but 'visiting' her world and not in her situation nor had I experienced her experiences. I thought a lot about not disturbing the natural order of things so I could see what would ordinarily happen and so I could more authentically represent her. Where I felt I had disturbed this, I commented on it. It's important to recognise that the whole purpose of this thesis was to capture a child's perspective and other methods such as surveys, documentary analysis, focus groups, would not have allowed me to record the minutiae that I did, where I recorded the seemingly insignificant, and making the familiar unfamiliar.

It was very difficult for me to not to have a felt experience during the different stages of the research process: anxiety, horror, sadness, anger, panic, hopelessness, that led to physiological occurrences such as shortness of breath, tearfulness, clenched fists, sweaty backs of knees, difficulty in concentrating. One emotionally charged moment happened when I discussed my research with my older brother and he asked to read it. He had been 'in care', left school with no qualifications, ended up in prison but is now a very well-qualified engineer. He read one of the narrative episodes (presented in Chapter 3) and quietly recalled, with few words but no less insightful because of it, his own memory of being taken away for the first time. He recounted the events as a series of facts: he was this age, he travelled by car (it was the first time he had been in one), he had nothing with him on arrival. I asked if he could remember what he thought or felt. He lit another cigarette, thought for a moment, his eyes blinking rapidly – a nervous habit he has – and said "*its fuckin' shit innit? I was only six and knew nowt about what was goin' on. Can't remember even getting' there, was just there and that's it. On me own.*"

My own experience is very limited as I was very young (between the ages of 2 and 4 years) when I went into and came out of short-term care placements. As a family of seven we were chaotic as some of us were full siblings, others half-siblings and over the seventeen years before I moved out of my family home for the last time, had witnessed many different family groupings as my elder siblings were placed in short-term and long-term foster and residential care. My two eldest brothers never lived with us and I only knew them as they reached adulthood and sought the family they had never been part of. When my sisters and brother were put into care, it was never discussed, it was our reality. But the silences around these episodes were deafening, nerve-wracking and isolating. There is a sense of powerlessness I feel about this, as I was not part of the decision-making, do not remember having an explanation and only vague recollections of the reality of the experience (Music, 2010). Even now I am inarticulate about it and recognise the difficulty of expressing my voice in a way that belies a multitude of emotions, questions and anxieties I felt. As I have difficulty at this stage, in hindsight and as an adult, in articulating my voice, I am pessimistic about a child's ability to do so at a point when she is in difficult and confusing circumstances. Additionally, I question the ease with which the listener can establish meaning from captured voice and use this knowledge to represent the child in a way that is authentic. I do not doubt its value as an aspiration but am interested in how the processes work to fulfil the aspiration to engage children in decision-making and evaluating a care placement.

The position I take here is that being 'in care' (regardless of the categorisation) can leave children feeling isolated, powerless and without an effective voice. It is not intended to devalue the work undertaken by all those connected with 'looked after' children nor suggest that these efforts are not worthwhile. Instead I want to foreground the experience of the child by authentically giving voice to them. I did not choose what I reported on but allowed the subject of the research, Keeva, to privilege aspects of her life that she wanted to show. I also want to represent the subjectivity and situatedness of voice to problematise those practices that claim to be representative of the child who is 'looked after'. I am mindful that, whilst I have experience of being 'in care', I now exist as a senior academic in a University, undertaking doctoral studies and am a mother of two children. My daughter Emily, who is now five-years of age, was often in my mind as I spent time with Keeva. All

of these roles and experiences inform and are present in my reflections and in my analysis.

Ethical considerations

I was cognisant of the following debates set out by Denzin (1997), Flewitt (2005), Harcourt, Perry and Waller (2011) and Cameron (2005) regarding ethical considerations of research with young children. In keeping with ethical guidelines of the set out in the Universities UK Concordat (2012) and the University's requirements, I submitted my research proposal to the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education and Children's Services, University of Chester on the 18th February, 2013. Ethically there are many challenges to conducting such research and my key considerations at the beginning were:

- To ensure the child and adults [JB1] involved in the research had given consent
- Consent was continuously established throughout the project
- The research objectives, methods and timeframe were understood by all those who participated in the research
- Ensure anonymity in the recording and reporting of data
- Be sensitive to the child and to avoid discussions and/or acts that may feel intrusive or had the potential to upset her
- To minimise interference in the child's home, school and social environment
- To establish boundaries for me as a researcher and for those involved in the research
- To end the research process in a way that respected the child and supported her in its conclusion

In proposing my research, I prepared an ethics statement that showed how I considered the issues above. Here I provide a commentary on how the ethical considerations were adhered to as the research progressed, reflecting on any issues that arose.

Research access to the child who was part of the study was facilitated by the [North West of England] Primary School, which agreed to host the research

project. All research that occurred was subject to the ethical and child protection policies that the various agencies and institutions involved with the research subjects promulgate and adhere to; and ethical permission was awarded at a Care Planning Review meeting where the research project was proposed and supported by the school and was agreed by the Care Planning Review panel on the 29th May 2013.

Prior to the commencement of the research, I met with the Kathy (guardian) and the two sisters, Keeva and Freda, and discussed the research project and proposal to visit their home once a week. I presented an example of the way I would write up my observations in the form of stories, using an account I had written about my son's experience at high school. During the conversation Keeva was enthusiastic about taking part and suggested things she wanted me to write about. Freda, who was in pre-school, struggled to communicate and showed little awareness or engagement in the discussion. I considered this and reviewed my research plan after the first visit to the family and decided to focus on Keeva only as I felt unable to confirm Freda was giving informed consent. As I was dealing with a vulnerable young child (Keeva), I anonymised her and every other person discussed in the research except for me. I have kept her location anonymous too, thus hopefully minimising the likelihood of her being recognised through the research.

Additionally as I negotiated the research with the school and social services I made clear that I would be observing, recording and writing about Keeva's experiences with other people in her social world. This was affirmed in meetings with her social worker as I came to focus more on the policy and practice of capturing voice.

The research took place in the home where Keeva lived. This was organised so that I routinely met the guardian at the house at around 2.45pm and then accompanied her in the collection of Keeva (and her sister, Freda) from school and then walk back to their home which was approximately ten minutes on foot. There were some issues here regarding my own safety and I took some precautions from the beginning of the research such as letting someone know where I was and when to expect my return. There are a number of reasons for organizing the ethnography in this way. From a safeguarding perspective the arrangement

deliberately conforms to orthodoxies configured around child protection. Keeva only met me with the supervision of her guardian and at school, which helped them to recognise the research routine. If there were changes to the arrangements, I sought permission from the school as well as from Keeva's guardian.

Additionally there are substantial ethical reasons for arranging the research practice in this way: data collected and elicited by me as the researcher were clearly framed, directed and supported by the context of activities within the home; the identity of me as researcher for Keeva was consistent, well-defined and limited to the domestic setting. Additionally these factors utilise and reinforce the child protection practices of the school for the research subjects; minimize any possible issues or complexities that may arise for the research subjects with regard to identity and attachment vis-a-vis the researcher (Flewitt, 2005). However, as I discuss below, the attachment issues remained a consistent concern throughout the research.

Ethnographically, in order to gain as quickly as possible a record of non-intrusive and naturalistic behaviour of Keeva, I had to introduce myself in a way that was understood and acceptable to her. I explained to Keeva that I was interested in what she did outside of school as I was writing a research project. To do this I would visit her at home to see and discuss whatever she wanted to show me or tell me about her daily habits and routines. I did not intend to record data by using film or photographic images, only through written record and where consent was given, by use of a data recorder to aid the writing up of the ethnographic research. However, I did consider it was appropriate to allow Keeva to take photographs in situations that were relevant, e.g. of important spaces to her e.g. school, shops. These photos were not used as data in the research but as a platform to aid discussion about identity and habitus which is from a child's perspective (Einarsdottir, 2005). This meant that would capture incidents that involved other people who were outside of the family and related professional agencies who had given consent. Their representation was anonymized and I did where possible explain my role as an ethnographic researcher. However, I recognize that this does not resolve the issue of consent entirely of those who were included in the data and think it raises an important issue about ethnographic processes and consent.

I am unconvinced though, that Keeva thoroughly understood what was meant by research and the extent of her involvement. My awareness of this brought to the fore issues of informed consent. It was something I tried to address throughout the research and in the scrapbook we produced to conclude the research process.

Research studies with children suggest this is an ethical dilemma as to what constitutes informed consent which “may present some challenges if children do not have the knowledge or experience of what a research study involves” (Dockett, Einarsdottir, and Perry, 2009, p288). Keeva was so eager to be involved, maybe because she felt it made her ‘important’ or ‘special’ and so if she was uncertain, it did not seem to concern her. I, however, was fairly anxious throughout the research that there was a question around the transparency of the research focus. As the data produced some preliminary findings, I shared them with her and her guardian in the hope that she could help Keeva make sense of the aims of the research.

I was also mindful of the possibility that, whilst the research was designed to minimize disruption and to support rather than undermine Keeva’s confidence and participation in the world around her, there may have been instances where the research presence becomes problematic, in which case the needs of Keeva were paramount and research activity would have been re-organized accordingly. In practice, I endeavoured to minimise intrusion by planning and preparing the visits methodically (Cameron, 2005). I visited on the same day each week when I knew there were no activities e.g. after-school clubs and rigidly followed a routine of parking my car at Keeva’s house and walking to school with Kathy, then returning home with them, which normally included a visit to the local shop. I tended to sit in the same place each time on the sofa and was usually offered refreshments from Kathy. After the first two or three visits, Keeva too had a routine when I sat down, which was to ask to use my iPhone and/or iPad that I usually brought with me in my handbag. I rarely brought other items (toys, activities etc) as it would have disturbed the natural occurrences in Keeva’s routine. However, I complied with the requests for equipment as a way of cementing the research process and it seemed to afford me a purpose for being there for Keeva. At the end of each visit I had a routine too of giving notice that I would be leaving soon (usually around 15

minutes) and confirming with both Kathy and Keeva the visit next week. Keeva tended to walk out with me to the front gate, often stopping to request I pushed her on the swing that was in the front garden and we had a countdown from ten at which point I would leave. Kathy usually observed this from the front step as we all said our goodbyes.

Arrangements were made to meet with other professionals to regularly monitor the impact (if any) the research had on Keeva and her family. This included my doctoral supervisors, Keeva's guardian and Keeva's social worker, to whom I was able to turn as appropriate regarding any issues or concerns that arose, and from whom I was guided about possible specific background issues of sensitivity that we need to be mindful of and respect throughout our work with these children. I worked with these colleagues throughout the duration of the research and developed appropriate strategies to conduct and end the research, being mindful of Keeva's feelings about this. One issue that arose was how Keeva and other members of her family seemed to become attached to me personally and the fact that I was there to conduct research was blurred.

This was seen in the enthusiasm of Keeva and her guardian, Kathy, on my visits that gave me a sense that some boundary had been breached between professional and personal identity. They looked forward to me coming round and I seemed to be offering them something unplanned by me. For Kathy, I think it was company of another adult as she talked fairly non-stop often when I was there. It was difficult to maintain a distance from Kathy during my visits and I had to manage this by becoming involved in an activity with Keeva, for example using the iPad together. At the end of the research Kathy suggested I could now come round for a social visit. I am in conflict about perceiving as a problem that boundaries were crossed as without them being compromised I would not have so quickly been accepted in the home by Keeva and because Kathy was so comfortable with me, proffered a huge amount of information in an unguarded way. Smith (2011) highlights the need for researchers to develop close relationships with 'gatekeepers', especially when the research involves vulnerable young children (in Harcourt et al, 2011). My experience was that the relationship I had with Kathy helped Keeva feel able to remove herself from the process during visits more easily.

Where I did, and still do, have a concern is how Keeva made sense of my role and what hope she might have invested in my presence. Again, I was good company for her; available, interested and engaged in whatever she was doing, but I was concerned about a stronger more emotional attachment that both of us were at risk of forming. I knew she had experienced many adults in her life that had left, abandoned or neglected her and it troubled me that I was going to do the same; I was going to leave her too. In my notes, I often reflected feelings of guilt and abandonment that I felt on leaving each week. I also recognised the power imbalance here in that she had no control over my presence or absence but I, as a researcher, had a clearer sense of this. It took me a while to risk conducting this research and, even though I have produced something which is insightful to the life of a 'looked after' child, I feel a sense of exploitation of Keeva to reach those insights.

Throughout the research process I considered consent to be a 'live' and current issue and was prepared to withdraw or cease the research where I felt Keeva or any member of her family were reluctant to continue. Gray and Winter (2011) distinguish between assent and consent, the former seen as less important (Gray and Winter, in Harcourt et al, 2011, p30). They discussed consent as being effectively withdrawn when a child showed any sign of reluctance in the research process and I too responded sensitively to Keeva in this respect (Gray and Winter, in Harcourt et al, 2011). I knew at the beginning of the research that this was potentially confusing to a young child who would not be cognisant of research necessarily and only in practice might she become more aware of my purpose in visiting her. Each time I met Kathy I would confirm it was appropriate and agreeable for me to visit. I did this through contacting her the day before each visit to confirm and then again when we met at the school. As I met Keeva each time, I observed how she seemed in relation to my presence and, on the journey back to her house would listen for anything that would make my visit unwelcome, intrusive or inappropriate. In practice, I found that there were no occasions where a visit needed to be cancelled or rescheduled and conversely found that Keeva and Kathy appeared to want me to visit more.

In itself this was an issue as suggested earlier, there may be attachments forming and I regularly reflected on this with my supervisors and it was agreed at around 10 months into the research that an exit strategy had to be formulated and communicated to Keeva and her family. As a consequence, I gave a period of five weeks' notice of when my research would end coinciding with a half-term break. To make this more concrete as a timeline for Keeva, I agreed a plan of what we could do in each of the remaining weeks and suggested we prepare a scrapbook to capture our time together. On the last visit Keeva and I put the finishing touches to the scrapbook and she kept it as a record of the research. This last visit did present to me the huge emotional investment I had made into the research project. I experienced a sense of grief and sadness as I knew I could not return to visit as this would be too confusing for Keeva and perhaps me.

To summarise then, in practice the ethical considerations were continuously reflected in the way I conducted the study and shaped the outcomes of the research. Like Flewitt "I found little practical support in formal ethical guidelines. My daily ethical practices underpinned the relationships of trust that built up between myself and the participants" (2005, p564).

Summary

This chapter has provided a rationale for the methodology adopted in this thesis and located it within the interpretivist paradigm. It presents the notion of voice as complex and problematises the ease with which it can be captured through a bureaucratic process. Employing ethnographic methods to study a single research subject was proposed as an appropriate approach to gain insights in how one child represents herself, and how she is represented. It outlined the process of the research project and highlighted my positionality as a researcher. Further, it qualified the use of a narrative genre to present the data from the study as it would allow the rich and complex social processes involved to be captured in a meaningful way. The chapter also gave a detailed commentary on the ethical considerations which were underpinned and embedded in the research practices. The next chapter presents the data from the ethnographic study.

Chapter 3
Data from the ethnographic study

Chapter 3 Data from the ethnographic study

Overview

This chapter presents seven narrative 'episodes' that relate to Keeva's lived experiences outside of school. They include depictions of her home and family, her habits, customs and practices and her interactions in her social world.

Through these accounts, I tell the story of how Keeva is represented by others and how she represents herself, concluding with a final episode which recounts how her voice is captured and how she is represented at a Care Planning Review meeting.

The narrative episodes

Each of the following episodes are structured to report on my ethnographic observations in the first section and then offer a reflective commentary on my observations. There are themes explored that relate to titles of each episode but those themes are not exclusively dealt with in each episode. The episodes are:

1. Meeting Keeva and beginning an ethnographic journey
2. Home and family
3. Inside and outside spaces
4. Being a 'looked after' child
5. Social interactions
6. Tastes and dispositions
7. Representing Keeva

Meeting Keeva and beginning an ethnographic journey

Observation

Phase one: Introductions

I felt uncomfortable, as Keeva danced and I, with four other adults, watched this impromptu performance in the school staffroom. The Care Planning Review meeting had finished a quarter of an hour ago and I had finally, thankfully, been given permission to go ahead with my ethnographic study. Keeva and her carers had discussed it and social services and the rest of the care planning team were happy for the research to start. We were discussing setting up the first meeting with Keeva when Margaret (the deputy-head) on hearing the school bell ring, said “*hang on, I will see if I can get hold of Keeva now-they’re on a break*” and with this opened the door to the playground, after a couple of scans of the large concrete square playground spotted Keeva and shouted to her “*Keeva would you come here for in a moment please?*”.

I felt like I was about to be interviewed, judged and was worried that I may be rejected. I was nervous and hoped she liked me and I hoped the adults in the room felt I was a safe pair of hands. She might not like the fact she was losing playtime though, so I was hoping this didn’t get things off on the wrong foot. After a quick introduction from Margaret, “*This is Jo, she’s coming to your house to see what children do after school*”, she then prompted Keeva to show us what she had learnt at Morris Dancing classes, of which she had attended two. As requested, Keeva performed a dance routine. I felt bewildered – why had she been asked to do this in front of a complete stranger and what was my role here – to clap? As an introduction, it was memorable!

My first impressions of her were quite strong. Keeva had a vivacious personality and a wide smile with her two top front teeth missing (I find out later her milk teeth were eroded as she had eaten non-food items firstly through starvation when she was a baby and later, as a habit. Behind her wire-framed spectacles she had large brown eyes that were very expressive and her small elfin face was framed by long, straight dark hair tied back in a ponytail. She was unsure how to behave as she was standing with a group of adults who did not have a natural grouping: her carer (Aunty Kathy), her deputy-Headteacher, a stranger (me) and her social worker. She stood still quietly regarding me as she answered some questions from Margaret politely but with little embellishment. Keeva didn’t speak to

me and seemed relieved to be allowed back outside to play. “*Well there you go, that’s Keeva – good luck!*” laughed Margaret, with Kathy nodding in agreement.

Observation

Phase two: Picking up Keeva from school.

“*Well when’s she’s gone, can I have one?*” Keeva said huffily as she half-skipped through the playground and persisted in pushing Kathy for an after-school ‘Slushi’ drink. Freda indicated her desire for a drink too by emitting whining noises and tugging at Kathy’s hand. Kathy had refused the request as I was coming round. I did not want to interfere with the girls’ routine and said as much to Kathy. “*No, I don’t want to stand in the queue -it’ll be really busy now*” she said quietly to me.

These were early days as an ethnographer and I did not want to be alienated by Keeva and used as an excuse by Kathy. This was a ‘no-win’ situation so I kept out of the discussion and continued to stroll alongside the family group out of the playground, which was a mass exodus of children on their last day of school. It was a sunny day and this was the beginning of the summer holidays. Already uniform items had been discarded by the children and already parents were lamenting the beginning of the summer holidays. The exit from school through to the housing estate was chaotic. Prams, scooters, roller skates spilled out of the school gates, off the pavements and onto the roads where cars were coming from all directions. Children were oblivious to the dangers until alerted to it by a physical or vocal chastisement by a parent.

As we neared the local shop Kathy decided that they could have iced drinks after all as the queue was quite small. Keeva used the physical space, freezer cabinets, door steps and shelves, in the shop to perform acrobatics whilst Freda waited silently with Kathy in the queue. The shop felt claustrophobic to be in without a purpose; it was a small space that offered a multitude of items for sale. Fresh cream cakes were sold alongside dog food and brooms. It was on a crossroads at the centre of a housing estate and so was busy with the ‘walking traffic’ that passed by. I felt conspicuous in the space where my presence could not be explained. I chatted with Keeva who flitted in and out of the shop, apologised several times for being in the way and finally decided to stand outside to wait. It is a complex state of being as an ethnographer, trying to be unobtrusive yet sticking out like a sore thumb. I was also concerned that I’d look like a social worker, or some other professional, and that would raise questions for Kathy and the two girls. Outside was a

hive of activity too, children on bikes, a rather haggard couple who seemed to be confused, annoyed parents who were castigating children for a multitude of misdemeanours. Armed with two neon-blue slush drinks, that Kathy reported was a rip off as they'd doubled in price as soon as the holidays started, we continued on back to their home.

Keeva gave me her school things to hold and I was instructed not to lose them. I put them safely in my bag and, as we got near the house the girls asked if they could go to the park which was opposite their house. Kathy said she had to get home to let the dog out so I offered to supervise. As Keeva and her sister played on the swings another girl of about the same age came across to join them. She was quite a large girl and commanded attention, she looked like she 'owned' the swing. She was very interested in me and asked who I was, why I was there, could I push her on the swings, could I hold her cardigan? So it went on until Kathy arrived a few minutes later. The girl clearly knew Kathy and started chatting about the Morris dancing classes she and Keeva attend.

Again I was given a demonstration of Morris dancing as the girl and Keeva each appeared to try to impress me by their skills. Keeva began to exclude the girl from conversations and tried to separate me from her by going to another part of the park. However, the girl appeared not take the hint and followed us continuing to engage in conversations. Finally, Keeva had had enough and said "*you can't talk to Jo 'cos she's with me*" and with that tossed her ponytail over her shoulder and said over her shoulder "*I want to be pushed on the swings!*" indicating I should follow. I have clearly made some progress in the last hour – now I'm in!

As I drove away, I noticed again the social deprivation and how it reveals itself in behaviour and appearance of individuals. A young man who could have been aged anything between 16 -25 years walked quickly by, eyes averted, hood up and carrying a plastic bag. His emaciated, pallid complexion seemed to illustrate ill health and poor nutrition. His eyes were barely open and he seemed utterly grey and lifeless. He is not significant here yet seemed to characterise an absence of hope and wealth. I could not imagine him being engaged in any economic or educational activity or embracing life in any regard. These are my perceptions and I wonder how I arrived here in my sense of him. However, my gut reaction is that I was responding in kind to the despair he emanated.

Another story unfolded as I continued out of the estate. A family of three, Mum, a boy of about 7 years of age and a girl aged around 2 years in a pram, were walking on and off the pavement as a dog jumped and barked around them. At first I thought the dog was theirs and they were playing. However, as I got closer I saw the young boy's face was screwed up and he shouted "*fuck off*" repeatedly and alternately tried to chase the dog away and then running behind the pram. The young Mum looked on sheepishly, with a nervous smile and seemed to be avoiding the eyes of someone who had parked strangely nearby and had the passenger door open. The boy was in effect trying to protect his little sister from the dog, who appeared not to be in the control of the owners (the people in the car) and he was doing it without the help or support of his mum, who in turn seemed intimidated by the people in the car. I could imagine how poorly judged the young boy might be, using the language and behaviour he was, to try and resolve a stressful situation. This was his strategy and it represented a surprising amount of care and responsibility for his family. I felt sad that he was exposed to the immediate danger and in the longer term the approaches he used, which for him have already formed, will separate him from others in society.

Reflection

In both of these episodes I thought more about me, my experience and my feelings as an ethnographic researcher than I thought I would. I 'felt' my own presence in Keeva's environment and was more self-conscious than I expected. It was not the unfamiliarity of the 'field'; I am not unused to the sights and sounds of this type of family or this type of social space; I grew up in a similar place. However, the difficulty was mediating and negotiating my role as an ethnographer - should I be another 'adult' carer, or completely independent of the family dynamic?

For me, the most natural act was to be the guiding, caring, responsible and interested adult to Keeva. Here again I faced a boundary issue and I let the 'real' me supersede the 'researcher' me. It was of no consequence to me to look after the children for a few minutes whilst Kathy dropped off stuff at home and yet I had perhaps invalidated the naturalistic methodology by interrupting what would have occurred. But perhaps a more important question is, if I was finding my presence difficult and uncomfortable, how on earth was Keeva experiencing it?

I found that Keeva had little obvious reaction to my presence in her world. She had me accompany her from her classroom, to the shop where she buys her after-school snack and to the place where she played. For the most part she seemed oblivious to my presence and this may be because this is how she deals with adults or it might be how she deals with adult 'strangers'. I didn't know that at this stage.

I was also mindful of the space they occupy, the sights and sounds of the estate. I think they're important, because this is what Keeva hears and sees too. She exists in this social space and to make sense of the world she has to make meaning here first. I tried to capture some of these sights and sounds to reveal Keeva's experience of the world. I could not see how to extract her experience from this yet.

Keeva's home and family

Observation

Kathy was very talkative as I arrived at her home and made me feel welcome, “*come and have a seat Jo, hang on let me clear this stuff out of your way*”. I was worried about intruding and making people feel uncomfortable or watched but Kathy seemed happy that I was there. She is a few years older than me and has bright eyes buried within a weary face. She looks older than her years and wears no make-up and there's a degree of masculinity about her. She is heavysset and wears casual clothes that are shapeless but comfortable. There's little display of adherence to current fashion and she wears her hair short but with no discernible style. She comes across as 'matey' and can be summed up as, you would not mess with her! We have an easy rapport, I know this woman, she is like the adult females I grew up with.

Keeva's home was a terraced house on a council estate with a decent sized front and back-garden with a full 5-feet high perimeter fence at the back and, in the front, there was a wooden fence of around 3-feet high. There were no plants in the garden and what was not concrete was laid to lawn, well more like unkempt grass really. We all sat in the one space, the living room, which looked out onto the park across the road. The front door was left open and from where I sit I can see the boys playing in the next garden. They look in as I looked out, it felt very exposed and I shifted in my position so I was outside of their line of view. The house next door is a larger house that had metal caging on the windows and an outside utility meter with its casing stripped off and lay abandoned in the garden. It looks derelict but apparently a single parent lives there with “*anything up to 8 kids, all of 'em bleedin' nutters*” said Kathy.

Every bit of perimeter floor space is taken up and it took me a while to establish the functionality of the furniture as it had multiple uses. The coffee-table, for example housed a gerbil in a large cage and in the space between the cage and the wall, some school bags and books were stored. A large desk in the corner acted as a laundry store and a place for a hi-fi but piled on top of this was discarded post and other documents. There was a big box next to the fireplace, filled with toys I think, with a sturdy lid and things again are piled on top such as catalogues, newspapers which made accessing the box difficult. There were children's DVDs near the television which sits in the corner of the room near the window. The rest of the floor space was taken up by two large sofas, one of which is a

corner unit style where the edge ended within a few centimetres of the TV. The décor was dated, lacking colour and there are no wall decorations (although the fireplace did have family photos, mainly of children) creating a stark relief to the busyness of the floor space. The strongest sense I had was that this was a 'lived in' space, a space where people sit, eat, read and come together. In a way it was inclusive, it was not preserved for anyone or anything.

There are signs that the household was run on a tight budget. For example, the television was attached to a meter and Kathy said she had other items on a meter such as the washing machine and the electric cooker. It struck me that there must be times when these are unavailable or choices have to be made. Today, Keeva and her cousin Natalie are being picked up from school by their Aunty and as Keeva and her cousin Natalie come in they take a look at me and then ignore me. They dropped their school stuff on the floor and engaged in boisterous play jumping on and off the sofa. Freda gets annoyed with them as it disturbs her as she watched the 'Disney' channel on TV from the edge of the corner sofa. This seemed to be her spot. I felt that I was intruding and not particularly welcomed by Keeva, this was the first time she had experienced me in her home and I felt conspicuous. I questioned how I could conduct observations whilst not making Keeva feel 'watched', which I imagine would feel a bit creepy! I was also mindful of other adults that Keeva would have to contend with, social workers, for example, who would be there to observe her and her setting. She might be used to this level of intrusion but she may have expectations from it. The fortunate thing was Kathy liked to talk and so from Keeva's perspective she would have witnessed me as an adult 'friend' perhaps.

Kathy and I sat on the sofa and she gave me a quick biography and described the family network. She indicated that living in a nearby area was where John's brother, Mike lived with Keeva and Sadie's elder sibling, Lianne, who they took responsibility for five years ago. They are no longer on speaking terms with Mike and his partner and, as a result, the three siblings do not get to see each other. Kathy explained that there was a rift when she and John took in the two girls and Mike and his partner had been planning to do this at some point. "*It's all about the money Jo, especially with what's going on wiv 'er [pointing at Freda who would receive extra financial support as she has a diagnosis of ASD]... but when we found out about these [Keeva and Freda] they'd been stuck in a home for ages and no-one 'ad told us. I mean we would've 'ad 'em from the beginnin' when it went wrong with their mum*". She continued to tell me about Keeva's and Freda's mum and the support they had given her in the past and I was surprised at how candid she was without any prompting. Whilst I had a real interest in the background, I was uncomfortable as the

girls played a few feet away and so must be able to hear this conversation. By my presence in their home, I was exposing them to what may be an upsetting recap of a difficult period in their lives.

Reflection

Keeva's unique past and present experiences as a child are exposed and exploited to allow those around her to represent her. As a vulnerable child, who had a history of neglect she was accordingly placed in the care of social services. This then led to a family dispute over what should happen to Keeva and her sister Freda and they were left in a residential home and a foster placement whilst it was being sorted out. The family who have the care of the older sister apparently did not even alert Kathy and John to the situation of Keeva and Freda being taken into care as they were trying to decide whether they wanted the children to be placed with themselves. This left Keeva and Freda left 'in care' with no family intervention for over a year. Apparently Keeva did express agreement to the existing care plan of 'kinship guardianship' and was reportedly overjoyed to be allowed to stay with Kathy and John instead of being in foster care. However, with this placement came some significant restrictions on the children's lives.

Due to the family 'rift', Keeva is unable to see her sister Lianne who has experienced similar early childhood neglect and familial disruption. Again, the adults around her are defining Keeva by creating this family divide, the separation of siblings which is not necessary on the grounds of child protection or safeguarding. It could be beneficial for Keeva to widen her family network and develop a relationship with her sibling in order for her to develop a fuller sense of her identity. There may be shared narratives here that could be helpful for the children to discuss and try to make sense of their situation. I feel very strongly about this as I had a similar 'divorce' from my siblings sometimes for weeks, sometimes months, and often longer. We entered adulthood not knowing each other as children and I experience this as a 'living loss' as we sometimes try to forge a relationship now we are older. It leads to black holes in my own history and my understanding of theirs. I wonder how this 'separation' is not immediately rectified for Keeva through an intervention by social services. Her younger sister has fewer experiences to share as she was under one year when she went into care. Keeva had developed a much stronger relationship with her parents, particularly her father and could perhaps ask questions and make meaning by reflecting on this with an older sibling. Her present situation too shares such a striking resemblance with that of her sister that there is a chance that if they were

closer they could feel less marginalised as they co-exist in a society that would see their childhoods as 'untypical' and 'outside' of the normal family unit.

Kathy has explained that the reason Keeva and Freda are 'in care' is that there were often violent arguments between their parents and sometimes these were caused by Keeva *"playing one parent off against the other. If she din't get what she wanted from one, she'd go to the other"*. *"I've told them [social services] she won't get away with that 'ere. That's why John shouts at her 'cos she tries to play us"*. Keeva's perseverance, however, is remarkable and when using loud but monotone demands is unsuccessful, a waiting game ensues until she can secure the thing she wants, particularly if it is something that is in the possession of her younger (yet bigger) sister. Failing that, she will try to 'neutralise' the thing she desires by damaging it, ridiculing it or hiding it. I had given her sister a birthday present, a *'Peppa Pig'* book. The next time I visited Keeva informed me the book was broken insinuating that Freda had not properly taken care of it. Later Kathy had told me the book had one missing and then they found it with pages torn out under Keeva's bed.

Keeva's experience of family and as a 'looked after' child may affect the way she perceives the social world. Her parents are seen as 'bad' adults, her sister is living with adults who are in conflict with her carers, she is at risk when she is unsupervised even when very close to home, friendships will have to be mediated through her carers and also have to be negotiated by Keeva herself on how she represents herself in them. This will be undoubtedly difficult for Keeva to navigate her way through as these tensions exist. How does a seven-year old give voice to these concerns which will present in ways that are complex, highly emotive and will perhaps feel risky given the fragility of her 'family' as it exists?

The family tensions were evident in another visit to Keeva's house early in the new year. Keeva's mum and dad had gone to social services before Christmas to request a visit but that was declined as they hadn't requested one until now. Kathy said they would not be allowed at her house *"they're not coming to mine, no way"*. I asked if Keeva had asked about them and Kathy responded, *"sometimes but not for a while. She wants her mam to come to my house but I said "no"*. Keeva had asked why she was not living with her parents and Kathy said she had replied that *"some mummies and daddys are not able to look after kids properly"*. Keeva had apparently agreed with her and that she knew her life would not be as organised as it was. Keeva misses her dad more, Kathy said, as she was a *"bit of a Daddy's girl, bit spoilt, getting' her own way"*. That was until the domestic

violence had started against Keeva's mum. I asked if she had seen any of the arguments and fighting and was that the reason the children had been placed 'in care'? "Yeah [vigorous nodding and worried mouth/eyes] she did. She was often the cause as she would ask her dad for something and then when she got a 'no' would ask her mum and it would cause a row".

Christmas Day was spent with just the four of them as Kathy and Johnny's adult children had Christmas with their own families "it was quiet, no drama, so it was aw'right" said Kathy "I was glad when it was over". I had assumed that there would have been a large family event as many relatives live very close by but I sense there are many tensions. The tree and decorations had been taken down on Boxing Day as "we'd 'ad enough of the mess". It also transpired that both girls had opened most of their presents on Christmas Eve. Kathy had told me Christmas ended abruptly on Boxing Day because Kathy and John wanted to restore the living room's function. How would Keeva feel about this? It perhaps would have seemed at odds with other houses she would see where the festive period extends beyond Christmas Day. May be it was a relief if it brought up reminders of her own family and their absence on a day that is fervently and constantly presented culturally as a 'family' event. However, the sensitivity towards her is not obvious or made explicit at least not in my presence. I felt sadness on hearing about the Christmas tree coming down as I imagine it would make Keeva feel the occasions she is given space to celebrate are fleeting and perhaps unfulfilling. It seemed to me that these festivities were enjoyed only very briefly, with little extension or embellishment. These occasions were 'consumed', almost as a custom, rather than something the family fully immersed in and as soon as the habits and customs were played out the celebration ended. My sense of this was how contained these occasions were temporally, physically and socially.

I recognised my growing emotional attachment to Keeva, I wanted her to be happy, fulfilled and safe. I became angry, frustrated and concerned at some of the things I saw and heard and questioned how well those around her thought about her, empathised with her, prioritised her and privileged her perspective. She clearly has questions around her biological parents and her elder sister and these seemed more evident around Christmas, yet these did not seem to be prioritised. This is stark difference to how Kathy talks about her children and grandchildren whom she exhibits a great deal of concern for even when it is in relation to something that is long in the past. Yet here in the present, she did not seem to bear witness to Keeva's expressed unhappiness with the situation. It felt there were two very distinct family groupings here and unwittingly Kathy and John were exposing Keeva and Freda to a sense they were not the favoured family group.

Keeva's concern was not accommodated in the planning of her care by the care planning team either. I attended three care planning meetings during my ethnographic study and there was no foregrounding of Keeva's desire to see her sister nor her questions about her parents. How did she feel about her parents making requests to see her? The only time this was highlighted was when Keeva had expressed a desire to see her elder sister to her social worker who then fed this back through the '*Have your say*' pamphlet that is used to capture the voice of children 'in care' within this locality. There was no plan made for this or acknowledging Keeva's feelings about this. I did not see how, then, she could be helped to express her feelings and have a space to respond to decisions/non-decisions about her on matters she saw as significant. Would she bother to express these wishes again, fruitless as the outcome was? What else has she given up saying and what then can we say about these silences?

Inside and outside spaces

Observation

I parked my car outside Keeva's house and walked to the school to meet Kathy and the girls. I met Freda and Keeva outside the gates and Freda hugged me, Keeva acknowledged me and immediately asked me about availability of 'iPads'. It was a sunny day so no-one was wearing coats. We walked to the local general store and girls had 'iced-slush' drinks. Freda's hug was a bit of a surprise, she must have been pleased to see me. We went to the store and Keeva sat on the chest freezers and jumped on and off shelves. "*Stop it you're only doing that 'cos Jo's here*" said Kathy. I wonder how much behaviour changes because of my presence and how much I observe is authentic. Freda stays close to Kathy and presses her nose to bakery cabinet near the till. I stood alone and looked and felt like an interloper. I stepped out of the way several times, apologising. I saw people looking at Kathy and the girls and me and trying to work out why I was there. There were a few brief conversations that Kathy had with people but these were short and perfunctory.

We continued our walk home and Kathy spoke to the woman who lives next door to her. The woman is aged beyond her years – she is around 35 years old but is haggard, grey and skinny. She smoked with a passion and I watched as a cigarette lasted seconds before being finished. Her home looked less maintained than Kathy's and had debris in her garden with a perimeter fence that looks like it has been vandalised. I knew from previous conversations that there were several children who either lived with the woman or spent time at the house and often caused problems for Kathy. She once had a paddling pool and came home one day to find that the children from next door had climbed over her fence to use it. Kathy had since got rid of the paddling pool as a result.

The public-private space was ambiguous on the estate. People leave open their front doors and in doing so reveal the interior of living rooms, hallways and kitchens. Several people stand at their fences and look out over the estate often shouting out greetings or having loud conversations with passer-bys they are familiar with. To me it felt exposed, people watching each other, making the act of closing a front door seem rude or suspicious. Yet amidst this the 'public spaces' were largely empty and uninhabited. The central green space with a children's park was quiet and empty except for people passing through. Few people walked around. I asked Kathy about the park and asked if they used

it much. They didn't and she told me about some children who had been causing problems and setting fire to the swings. She pointed the children out and they looked about 11 years old but possibly could be as young as 8 or 9 years old. One of the boys held a plastic gun to the head of a girl. I could see it would feel threatening to both adults and children. There was a tension even as we walked past the park, being eerily quiet then very noisy, it was surrounded by houses where there was a smattering of people sat in their gardens and the many windows and open doors indicate you could be observed but you cannot see the observer.

As we went in the house I sat on the sofa and realised I chose the same spot each time. Freda turned on the television and used the remote control to access the 'Disney' channel. Keeva stood in the middle of the room and asked if I had brought the 'iPad' and the 'iPhone' so she could use them. She also really wanted to go in the car and drive around but Kathy and I agreed that this was not going to happen today. For me it was because I felt this interfered with the natural flow of events that would ordinarily happen. I was interested though, why she wanted to do this and I got the impression it is about claiming space. She had been in my car before (with Kathy) and wanted to reclaim it - almost fighting to retain or at least not lose some territory.

Keeva played with my 'iPhone' and wanted to download 'Apple Apps'. I was interested to see what she was interested in. She seemed enthusiastic by very feminine applications where you could choose accessories, make up or hairstyles for different female characters. She liked the 'Hello Kitty' genre of 'Apps'. Keeva and Freda both argued over the use of my 'iPhone' and I intervened to give them a slot each. Freda backed down from Keeva as she does quite often. This is where Keeva felt most powerful, I think as she was able to use more effective strategies than Freda to compete and win. She was more extrovertly persevering whereas Freda, on losing a battle, returns when no-one is looking to retrieve the prize.

Freda went outside in the front garden to play. There is a chain on the gate that can easily be removed but Freda and Keeva don't touch it. Freda played outside for a couple of minutes and then resumed her space in front of the television, directly in front of it. Keeva rarely seems to watch TV and this might be because it is usually switched onto to channels for younger children (for Freda) or occasionally on a channel which Johnny wants. I have not seen Keeva request a channel or watch a programme yet she seemed tuned in to popular culture such as boy bands ['One Direction']. The living-room is starting to feel slightly oppressive. It does not get a lot of light and the presence of so

much furniture with things stacked up on top made it feel cluttered without being interesting. The vacuum cleaner was stored in here too filled as it was with dust and debris. There was little for Keeva to easily access such as toys, paper and so I am unsurprised that she wanted to know what I have brought with me. All activity though seemed to take place in this room and the only other space on the ground floor is the kitchen, which was seemingly out of bounds as it had its entry restricted with a child-gate, perhaps to keep the dog in. Or it might be to keep the children out of the kitchen?

I noticed that Keeva rarely gets herself something from the kitchen. She was presented with food and drinks by request and seems uninvited into that space. I compared this to my own children who are often in the kitchen to see what's available, to self-select and there's more of a sense of egalitarianism. For those cupboards they cannot reach there is a footstool. It is not unusual for them to use worktops to gain further access if they need it. It is a space as visited as often as the living-room containing as it does food, drinks, and utensils that might be incorporated in some activity they are doing. My own children wander from room to room, floor to floor and co-own the home. I did not feel the same agency was afforded to Keeva, she was given a restricted set of options and it is supervised, monitored and on Kathy's (or Johnny's) terms

I am not sure of the relationship Keeva had to the dog and whether he was enjoyed as a pet. Or was it a guard-dog and so functional? The girls did not greet the dog as a pet and paid little attention to the pet gerbil in the cage in the living room. When we went to the park the dog was not included and I did not see a routine of taking him for a walk. This is strange as Keeva was keen usually to go outside of the house whenever I am there and so walking the dog would be a good excuse to do this. I know she liked dogs as I have seen her rush to them in the park and pet them. I did not hear Kathy refer to this as an appeasement even, when Keeva requests to play outside. Again it was another contradiction, having pets but not having a fulfilling, effective relationship with them, not engaged. A desire to let the 'outdoors' in through the open door but not being allowed outside at the same time.

On another occasion, Keeva and I went to the park as I had agreed to do this at the last visit (although I had forgotten) but Kathy said "*just for five minutes*". I didn't want to go particularly as I had a long cashmere coat on and heels and it was slightly damp outside after a recent rainfall. Keeva wanted to use the camera to take pictures of the park. We were still there 15 minutes later and as we were going back to the house, Keeva saw a school friend walking with her dad. She ran over and she wanted to take a photo which they agreed to. The

ground of the park was slushy, muddy, wet and my feet sank as I followed Keeva to the swings. I was a bit whiny about it as I didn't want my shoes to get muddy and wet and Keeva wanted to go on the swings where there was less grass and so more slippery brown mud. She was insistent I push her. I finally agreed to it as I felt guilty about being so miserable when she obviously just wanted to play and have fun.

She wanted to go further afield to where there was equipment for older children. We had not agreed this with Kathy and I worried about this so Keeva shouted very loudly to Kathy who was observing us from her front door for permission. Not sure either of them really heard each other (I could not hear) but Kathy seemed to understand the question. We set off across the wet muddy field. My shoes were ruined and I resigned myself to that. Whilst Keeva played on this equipment (a bit unsuccessfully as she was too small) I sat on the bench. She wanted me to video her so she could watch it back. She saw a friend from school and shouted out her name. The child looked but ignored her and didn't come to play. I was unsure if mum was not letting her respond as she chatted to another adult for about 10 minutes. I thought it was sad the friend was not allowed to come over as Keeva seemed keen to have company and she seeks it out. Whilst we were there a young woman shouted "*Keeva, you alright?*" as it must have appeared she was on her own and was not usually seen in this park. "*Yeah with Jo*" and the woman went back to her house. There was a negotiation to get Keeva back to the house even though it was cold and raining. I think Kathy thinks I'm mad to do this kind of thing. There is possibly a truth there.

Reflection

In the account above, I speak about the claustrophobic feeling I experience as we seem confined into a small space. I get the impression that Keeva and Freda do not have a sense of ownership or entitlement outside of the living-room. They are accommodated but not integral in the home. I also suspect my presence dictates where they are in the house and maybe they are told to remain in the living room whilst I am there? But equally I also felt Keeva and her sister were settled; as there was a clear routine of walking from school, going to the shop, walking back to their home, turning on television, drinking 'Iced-slush drinks, sitting on sofa. It is the ordinariness that brings a sense of calm, an absence of drama and knowledge of what to expect in the next hour. I try not to underestimate the value in such routines as it is here that I can see how Keeva experiences the notion of 'home' and 'family'.

However, after leaving I tried to identify how the girls might have been feeling and I surmised it was 'frustrated' and 'contained'. They wanted to be outside, yet they could not use the interesting outside spaces. The park was deemed too 'risky' because of the other children, the back garden was inaccessible because of the child gate to the kitchen and the dog seemed to dominate that space. Yet the door was open revealing their neighbours and social space outside, they were both part of and yet outside of this community. One family seems to 'live' outside as they had stools, a coffee table, baby paraphernalia and were eating, smiling having conversations whilst in full view of everyone else.

I was struck by the manifestations of poverty on the estate. There is a lack of glamour or beauty. Many of the people I see have poor dental care, obesity or unhealthy skinniness. The spaces that allow opportunities for attractiveness such as the park, gardens, houses are instead barren, unkempt and a bit miserable. The play area in the park is littered with shards of glass and plastic bottles. There is one garden that stands out like an oasis because it has got some plants in and someone has obviously created a space which has colour and purpose. Mostly the other gardens were extensions to the buildings, not really defined as spaces in their own right. This makes the private-public space indistinguishable. The wide open green space a matter of feet from the girls' home feels oppressive and under the public gaze. Nothing could be private here, surrounded as it is on all four sides by houses where the doors are left open and people stand watchful in their gardens. This was exposed when Keeva and I spent a few minutes in the park and someone familiar to Keeva was watchful of her, assertive in intervening, yet completely ignoring me as an adult. Typically adults in one way or another acknowledge each other but here I was an 'outsider' viewed with suspicion, and I felt uncomfortable. Whilst I felt claustrophobic inside the living-room, I felt under surveillance outside in the park. I have a balanced perspective of this and am relieved that children are being protected from what the adults see as a potential threat. It feels like a double-edged sword though as it may make people reluctant to socialise, be welcoming, engage with those people who are seen as a threat simply because they are unfamiliar. How does this 'write' itself on how Keeva sees the social world? Her responses were appropriate in a sense to the frame I have laid out here, she relayed to the adult I was not a threat or a stranger and she was 'safe'. Are these useful or valid parameters for her to view herself and others?

There are contradictions too in the way people behave with their children. Walking back from school, I witness chaotic scenes as a large crowd of parents, guardians, schoolchildren, babies in prams, teenagers on bikes make a mass exodus through the

school gates and spill out in various directions. I see several chastisements of young children coming out of school for the mildest of misdemeanours; one child tripped coming off a pavement and dropped to his knee. His Mum pulled him up sharply and told him off for being “*an idiot*” yet at the same time children seem to have huge freedoms and are able to wander away from parents crossing from one side of the road to another without any comment. It is difficult to work out the boundaries of behaviour and the ‘norms’.

As I drive away from the estate within a few minutes I am in an area of affluence. Here there are large, well-maintained detached and semi-detached houses with landscaped gardens. The roads are busier here, more residential cars perhaps. How does Keeva make sense of this wealthy environment within minutes of her home? As a comparative there is a park in the more affluent area but this one is busy, well-maintained (or less vandalised), houses tennis courts and an outdoor ‘adult exercise’ area, a clubhouse and a café. Another example is a wine shop in the affluent area and an off-licence on the estate. The off-licence displays its products behind Perspex screens and pay through a partial grill whereas the wine shop encourages customers to browse and make choices. Same function but very different in its use highlighting the contradictions in the everyday practices in the social, political and physical world Keeva inhabits.

Being a 'looked after' child

Observation

I visited Keeva's house at 10.00 am on a weekday during the school holidays. As I approached I noticed the front door was open, but the gate looked locked as it had a chain wrapped around the post, but it was not. There was a bike in the garden, abandoned at some point alongside the green and black wheelie bins. It was a sunny day but there was little sign of life outside except for one child in the park. I noticed several front doors were open of the houses which surround the park but very little activity. I arrived at the open door, slightly knocking, "Hi" I called to announce my presence and as I stand on the front step I can see the whole of the ground floor. Keeva and Freda were in the living room as they often are and Kathy was sat on the sofa. There's a visitor, Natalie, who is the eldest grandchild and Keeva's cousin and she had stayed overnight.

Kathy told me they were going on holiday and she was waiting on a telephone call. The plan was to stay in a static caravan in North Wales which was owned by a family friend and so she was hoping to rent it quite cheaply. The children have been before and loved it apparently. I asked Keeva about it and what she would do there but she was non-committal and did not seem excited or very engaged with the plans. They will go with Natalie and her parents. Natalie seemed more excited by it and talked about the swimming pool on the campsite.

I sat on the sofa and Keeva chatted with me and Natalie but it was difficult to concentrate as Kathy tends to be talking to me at the same time from the other side of the living room. It feels overwhelming, I felt I had to try to absorb it all. There was a sense of anticipation about my arrival and people being on best behaviour. Keeva was dressed, her hair brushed and in a simple pony tail, and the children were drinking iced-slush drinks from the local shop so they have neon-blue mouths. They must have been out early to get them.

Kathy talked about getting a bargain on holiday and she "got her 'pay'" and so had decided they were going away (this 'pay' was a social services payment which they received as 'guardians'). She laughed at the suggestion (from her sister-in-law) that it would be relaxing (as she has the two girls) but said she would not do what was suggested that social service could provide respite care whilst they went away, "*rather have the worst*

holiday than leave 'em". I looked out of the window and observed the park was empty; she said how she had played at the 'Rec' (a local recreational area) and was able to go further afield as a child but "*couldn't let these go now cos of fears of yer know – dangers, paedos* [she said as an aside]. "*Lots of drugs around...*" she continued and she went on to specify.

All three girls seemed very comfortable sharing the same space, no competitiveness, moderately affectionate. The older girls went out of the room and Freda went too as Kathy went to the kitchen. Then the older girls came back and sat on other sofa talking together (I think they had been told to go back in the room with me), ignoring me. I said I was going to have a look where they were going on holiday and pulled out my 'iPad'. All three girls immediately surrounded me and sat very close, each wanting to make use of it. They knew what to do and what to look for and navigated around the tablet with ease. The screensaver was on which was a picture of my daughter and Keeva asked who that was and I told her. She lingered over the photograph for a few moments more but then asked "*what games have you got?*". Keeva took the lead (chose a make-up game, a lollipop game and a dentist game). I took out my 'iPhone' to check for a signal and Keeva was keen on using that instead.

Shortly after I arrived, Natalie had to go home as she was having a sleepover with friends. I felt sad for Keeva as I remembered what Kathy had said about other families never inviting Keeva over. I wondered why as Keeva has been at the local school for some time and in a large class I expect there would be opportunities to make friends. However, what became clearer was that even if she was invited to a friend's house the guardians would be reluctant to allow sleepovers. Keeva's biological parents have family members who live locally and the concern of social services was that the relatives of Keeva's parents would facilitate a visit between Keeva and her Mum and Dad. This means that a lot of the outdoor spaces were restricted, even the back garden, as there are neighbouring gardens which overlook Kathy's back garden, that are the homes of friends of Keeva's parents. Kathy related an event recently where Keeva's mum was spotted in an adjoining back garden and Kathy and the children had to go back inside, lock the door and rang social services. All access for the parents has been denied but they have made several attempts to appeal. Regardless of the process for appeal, Kathy has refused any contact "*at my 'ouse! I tell you what if she or 'im stepped one foot in my garden I'd set the dog on 'em and ring the police*". Kathy tells me these things almost as a theatrical aside, with some arm gestures and even if Keeva cannot hear or understand any of this, which is highly unlikely, she is reminded of their situation through episodes such as this. I wonder how they feel

about this and she says that “*she’d like to see ‘em but knows they can’t look after them properly*”.

There is little planned over half term and I felt claustrophobic in the living room. Again the girls don’t seem to go beyond this space, not into the hall or the front garden or upstairs. I am not clear if they are not permitted to yet I have not seen them push at the boundary of the living room. Keeva was eating a bag of crisps, quite noisily whilst chatting to me and then deposited the bag on my lap. She then asked Kathy quietly whilst still being close to me, “*can I show her my dress?*” Kathy agreed and Keeva quickly ran out to the hall to retrieve a new outfit that has been bought for a special event. The event was an awards evening for children who are ‘looked after’, who are nominated for awards for different aspects of success. Kathy was unsure what Keeva had been nominated for but was obviously keen to participate in the event and told me in detail the plans for the evening. Keeva wanted me to go with her and I felt again that she attached some importance to me, she wanted me to be part of things which were going on in her life. Apparently the children were invited to do a performance during the evening and Keeva had an idea of a song she planned to sing. However, she does get stage-fright (it came up in the dance group she used to be part of) and Kathy was not convinced she would do it. Why would you ask children who are ‘looked after’ to do a cabaret just because they are a ‘looked after’ child?

The dress was black and red tartan that was to be worn with black biker-type boots. It was a rather severe outfit for a young girl and I wondered how the choices had been made ... Keeva likes pinks and purples and is petite. Kathy is more masculine and so it perhaps reflected her own style. This was obviously a good thing and Keeva was clearly excited and maybe proud of being selected yet I felt very sad about it and could not feel celebratory about such an event. If it was a way of creating a nurturing community, it did not seem to work as Kathy said Keeva would not know anyone there and there would be little ‘networking’. It just sounded like it reinforced difference and isolation. There were only two tickets so Freda wasn’t going and that meant Johnny was babysitting whilst Kathy took Keeva with her sister. Again it seemed sad that the one person who Keeva is most closely related to was not going with her to ‘celebrate’.

I have noticed that Keeva takes opportunities to be given something and was assertive about this. She continued to press, to negotiate, to pester. For example, she asked if we could drive around the park in front of the house. Whilst we drove she wanted to download games on my phone but I refused as I needed to see what she was downloading. After a

few seconds she asked for my password, which I refused to give but said I would look with her later and input it then. She began negotiating with me and emphasised that she could do it herself although she said “*but I’m not good with letters*” and as she continued to try to guess my password she asked – “*is it Jo-lovely?*”. Then she wanted to download an ‘iTune’ and we repeated the conversation. We pulled up outside of Keeva’s home although Keeva was keen to continue. I said “*Why don’t you make a video to say where we have been so we remember?*”. She did (but did not press record) and it went something like “*Hello I’m Keeva and I have been with Jo my social worker to Asda that’s all*”. I was 8 minutes later than I had said and I think Kathy was a little worried, not sure if it was about me or Keeva. “*How did you put up with her?*” she asked.

As I prepared to leave, Keeva was keen for me (and/or my ‘iPad’) to stay, “*stay longer please! five more minutes, no ten*”. Kathy and I discussed when I would next come and deliberated either Tuesday or Wednesday. Keeva shouted “*Tuesday cos its sooner and then Wednesday*”. Keeva followed me out to the garden gate, she really wanted to come with me or me to stay, whilst Kathy and I made arrangements. Keeva hugged the bottom half of my body.

Reflection

I was interested in the way a ‘looked after’ child such as Keeva represents herself, how she speaks to this categorisation and how it speaks to her. I found myself studiously avoiding using any reference to the fact she was ‘looked after’, painfully aware that this could feel too intrusive for her, her personal life exposed and interrogated. I reflected on this a lot over the months I had spent with Keeva and wondered if my discomfort was becoming paralysing as a researcher. I was so mindful of the ethical considerations and sensitivity towards her that I perhaps began to obfuscate the research aim. Instead our discussions and activities focused on what she typically did after school, what she liked to eat, drink, play, watch on television. I observed behaviours, interactions and preferences in a sense to see if patterns emerged or not. I noticed Keeva rarely referred to herself or her carers in relation to being ‘looked after’. This starkly contrasted to how her Auntie Kathy regularly included it in conversations in Keeva’s presence.

One such example was during a conversation about the caravan holiday they were planning. Kathy said “*my sister said they could go on a soash [social services] break, yer know , where they’ll be with other kids ‘in care’ like. I could do with the break but there’s no*

way, it's like I said to 'er [sister], I'd rather 'ave no holiday than leave 'em". Kathy's communicating to me that she thinks to have Keeva and her sister 'looked after' by social services would be wrong, for the children and for them as a family. She was uncomfortable that they would feel left out of what is essentially a family treat and also that being on a trip with social services would be a bit of stigma for the children. This conversation took place in the same room as Keeva and her sister and, whilst I nodded in agreement, I felt this only served to remind the children that they were 'looked after'. Such conversations were typical and it would reinforce Keeva's status as being 'in care' and I wondered whether this would then remind her of her biological parents, their absence, the circumstances that led to her being placed 'in care', and perhaps the fragility of the family structure she was in. Even though Kathy was saying that she would not use social services for a respite 'holiday', she alluded that going on holiday together, which would be entirely normal in other families, was an option not a certainty.

Being 'looked after' is replayed in Keeva's perceptions of the social world and how she makes meaning. She wanted to say who I was when she thought she was making a recorded video and without hesitation referred to me as a social worker. There has not been any reference to me as a social worker and I have explained I am a University researcher but her default for a stranger who was given access to her, her home, her family was understood from her frame of reference as a child who has been 'in care'. Can I qualify this? My own children would struggle to describe professional roles within social services. They would try to make sense of 'a researcher' by relating to what they know about adults they have relationships with: family, friends, teachers or by the adult's function: postman, cleaner. They would not have the frame of reference to identify a social worker and probably would query the intrusion of a researcher in their space. Keeva seems to have less sensitivity to her space being invaded by me, perhaps because she is used to adult strangers making appearances and her sense of this is an ordinary state of affairs.

The private and public spaces that Keeva occupies must be confusing as there are all kinds of contradictions. Due to the proximity of family and friends of Keeva's biological parents, they are unable to play unsupervised outside of their home including the back garden. For example, the way the families live on the estate with doors left open, large open green play areas accessible within a few feet of their home, and the reality for Keeva is that these are in a sense mirages, closed to her, yet open to others. Culturally, she will be at odds with other children who will have more freedoms to make use of the spaces

outside of their homes and develop relationships with those in their immediate vicinity. This may impact on and restrict her friendship networks both at home and at school.

Social interactions

Observation

'Glee' after-school club

During the warm-up exercises Keeva engaged enthusiastically with the activities and discussion. She smiled when I came in to the hall and seemed excited that I was there. There was a democratic process going on about which play they were going to do. Keeva didn't get her choice and was disappointed and showed that by doing a quick physical flounce and crossed her arms. Keeva fitted in well with the group in terms of outfit (there was a sort of uniform of black leggings, school PE top, trainers, hair tied back). Some kids stood out as being really unprepared for the club – in outdoor clothes or full school uniform. I was introduced as “*Jo, who will also be keeping an eye on you*” to the Glee club group kids. Why does anyone have to keep an eye on anyone? I felt a bit awkward on Keeva's behalf with this comment as I was unsure how she was explaining me to her friends.

Keeva did not remember the song words that they were practising and seemed to hold back a bit in her performance, I worried it might be because she had an audience. I tried not to overtly observe her but instead watch the whole class. The scene they kept practising ended with the main character (Victoria) being surrounded by the whole class doing 'jazz' hands. With 30 or so children this led to a semi-circle around 'Victoria' and Keeva somehow always managed to be in the front of this semi-circle. This was juxtaposed with Keeva's decision not to volunteer for the role when the group leader asked. Almost every other child did volunteer with arms up high, rigid hoping to be picked. Conversely, Keeva stood motionless, looking down.

After the 'Glee Club', as we walked out of school, Keeva wanted to use my phone to look at game 'apps' that are on there and immediately asked “*can I get more?*” I asked if she could get games on her tablet and she could not (I got the sense it was not encouraged because of cost). Freda asked for 'Slushies' and Kathy said the machine was still broken. Keeva saw a friend who invited her to play and Kathy said she couldn't because of me. I intervened and said it was no problem but Kathy shook her head. Again am I being used or being accommodated? The girl said she would call round for Keeva on Friday. Not sure how Keeva felt about it... didn't protest at nor going and didn't seem happy or unhappy

about Friday. I saw no response from Kathy to this and I anticipated the friend would not be welcomed in.

The shop did not have its usual big queue and in fact the shop was busier outside than inside - it is a magnet for children, adolescent boys (many sat on unmoving bikes) and teenage mums. I commented on the business of the shop at school times and Kathy said come back in 5 minutes and there's no-one there. What is this phenomenon? We walked round the store this time (one central aisle) and then queued up ~~for to~~ buying sweets. I have noticed a quietness, a wariness of Kathy and the girls in the shop whilst other people are louder, more engaged in the social activity. Kathy comes across as reticent and purposeful

- buy this and get out. Not anxious, but not hanging around. I get the impression when I visit that she loves company and so this doesn't tally. The girls too, are quieter than usual and seem to stay close to Kathy. This may have been to do with another woman who was in the shop too.

This woman was at the counter, at the front of the queue and her behaviour was really irritating as a shopper, although to me she was fascinating. She kept putting things on the counter and then going off to get another thing of the shelves, one at a time, whilst others waited for this transaction to conclude. As she disappeared again she talked loudly to everyone and no-one about her absentmindedness. As she plonked 3 onions on the counter, she spoke loudly to the shopkeeper that she needed to get her mum "*some fags with this*", holding up a tenner that she pulled out of her back pocket. She was a skinny, unkempt, scruffy woman with broken and missing teeth wearing her hair in a tight ponytail. As she disappeared for a couple of minutes, the shopkeeper said under her breath but so we (the queue) could hear "*come on Sharon*" but in a careful way so that if Sharon did hear it wouldn't seem critical but more humorous. Sharon had control of this situation and I was unclear why there were no challenges. People stood quietly, barely lifting their eyes as she returned with yet another random item. She finally finished but didn't leave the shop, instead chatted to friends or family (wasn't sure which) about some issue that was bothering them to do with benefits. It was all played out loudly in public. They did not care who heard and yet this created a complete barrier that excluded everyone else.

Keeva finally got her turn and chose popping candy after Kathy checked how much. As we walked out of the shop, I chanced a look at the skinny woman and she stuck two fingers up at me. I kept walking.

We walked back to Keeva's house and she asked if she could have the iPad or the iPhone and I said she could use it in the house. On the way back to the house we met John's nephew, who had the day before a huge row with his ex-girlfriend that led to a van being stolen. Kathy was clearly trying to stop him going into details as I was there. He did not speak to the girls or me. Apparently the ex-girlfriend had stolen some things from the van he uses for work and so he had stolen the car she uses to drive to work. He reckoned his ex-girlfriend's brother and uncle had threatened to come round to "*trash his van 'n fuck me over*". Trouble was, the car he had taken was uninsured and now he was "*stuck with it*" outside of his house and could "*get done by those shits [police] for nickin' it 'n drivin' with no fuckin' insurance – I could kill 'er*".

As I was leaving, I agreed with Keeva and Kathy that we would visit Chancellor Green Park (pseudonym) on my next visit. Keeva had been keen for me to take her there as it was much better than the park opposite her house.

Chancellor Green Park

As planned I took the girls to the park which is in the adjoining residential area which is markedly more upmarket. The park was rarely visited by Keeva even though it was bigger and better equipped than the one across the road from where they lived. It was a grey day, rain (and more) was threatened but felt I had to go as planned. It had been a very busy week for me and I had allowed this visit to be pushed to today, Friday, which was the last day of half term. Keeva was happy to see me and immediately included me in a game of 'fart tag' where the person who was 'it' was the fart. She was excited and jumping on beds and Kathy had to tell her to come off. Her sister copied everything she did. More evident today were the children's toys, which were on top of the bunk beds in Keeva's room and also Kathy showed me to the toys (including the bike that Freda got for her birthday) that was now in the spare bedroom recently vacated by Kathy's youngest son.

I questioned my earlier observation of the absence of toys in the house, other than the big plastic crate that was never opened had disappeared when the Christmas Tree took its place, and which never reappeared. I had queried this in passing with Kathy and I got the impression that she was pointing out these toys for a reason, maybe I had a critical edge in my conversations with her. I didn't think so but again I resumed my need to guard against accepting Kathy's responses as the whole truth but rather a prepared story that presented her role as a guardian in a positive light. This need to manipulate reality for the consumption of others is something that I query could impact on how advocacy works in

meetings with others. I suspect that she knows what social services, school and health services need to hear and will foreground this.

My role as researcher is less and less obvious and instead I am seen by Keeva and perhaps the rest of her family as another social worker or a similar role. Keeva's interactions are not to let me see anything about her but to get me to do things for her. In a sense this is her expressing her 'voice'. She is keen to go to the park as planned but in the five minute journey to the park she has asked to sit in front passenger seat, use my phone, have the window down, have the window up, and asked could she have a small toy handbag that has fallen under a car seat. This last request was declined as the handbag belonged to my daughter but Keeva suggested "*why don't you ask her if she wants it and if she doesn't then I can have it?*". The requests are expressed forcefully but not unabashed and I feel there is an ambivalence here, a tension, she has to ask and demand as much out of a situation, be foregrounded, with an infinite number of demands. She does not expect to be denied but does not cry or get upset at any refusals, although she often tries an alternative argument or strategy to achieve intended outcome.

I remind myself that this is not unusual; my four-year old daughter is at least as demanding and as determined as Keeva. I am not convinced, though, that these things are really desired by Keeva or that there is a pleasure in receiving them. It is more that there is an immediacy in opportunity that has to be grasped and her approach is so that this opportunity is not missed. That seems to be the overall desire and it feels desperate. In this sense the demands appear to underscore the sense she has a vision of the future where these 'good' things may not be available and so she has to take advantage of them now. As we arrived at the park, Keeva raced from the car to the playground with a football that was in my car and she asked could she play with it. I was reluctant (I knew I would end up carrying it) and again did not think she wanted it but wanted to know she could play with it. As we arrived at the playground, she handed the ball back "*can you hold this?*", I put it back in the car and she did not notice for the whole time we were there that it had gone. It was a meaningless acquisition.

Keeva raced around going on every piece of equipment. I was involved throughout "*can you push me?*", "*can you help me climb this?*", "*can I go on those?*". She was surprised when I wanted to have a turn too on the zip wire, was a bit put out, and she said I should not go on it again. I asked why and she answered "*cos you're here with me*". As the rain started Kathy wanted to go home and I let her have my car keys so she and Freda could stay dry. Keeva would not come until she had been on everything at least once. She

raced around having a few seconds on each apparatus. The park was empty now, the rain had turned to hailstones, I was grateful for my waterproof. Keeva was seemingly immune to the weather, she needed to stay here as long as she could. The weather became even more challenging as the wind and hailstones gathered apace, and I eventually managed to get a sodden, cold Keeva to head back to the car. “*This is the best day ever*” she shrieked as she raced ahead. I was left confused.

Reflection

The social interactions I brought together in this episode reveal several things about Keeva, Keeva’s world and the Keeva’s world as represented through ethnographic research. Through observations in these different situations, I reveal how she represents herself when she has to deal with uncertainty, navigate the unfamiliar and the normalising of strangeness.

In the shop Keeva is presented with a ‘same but different’ experience when she visits to buy her sweets after school. Typically she does this each day, and enters the store with her sister and guardian. She waits in the queue, chooses her sweets or drink, leaves the shop and walks home. All of this is the same in the episode above but it felt very different as the lady depicted in the above story displayed chaotic, passive-aggressive behaviour and made a mundane task of buying goods a worrying and stressful affair for many others. Shoppers, children and staff keen to make their transactions watched and waited until the female shopper concluded her business. All were powerless to intercede; there was a tacit understanding that tackling this behaviour would be risky. It was possibly an event witnessed before and so regulars knew the routine but it was I felt extraordinary. There were few oral or facial expressions of any kind: mirth, annoyance, surprise. I would describe it as stoicism but could be perceived as meekness. There was even a quietness in the queue that was rare. Keeva too stood silently and unusually stayed close to Kathy. As we left I puffed out a held breath and said to Kathy “*what was going on there?*”. She shrugged her shoulders, raised her eyes and said nothing. I wanted her to ask Keeva and Freda if they were alright, something that acknowledged the strangeness, to let them share their sense of what we witnessed. I realised quickly, it was my need not theirs. However, this tells me something about how they perhaps deal with frightening and unusual aspects in their lives, they do not speak of them.

The interaction with Johnny's nephew was interesting too. The girls were completely ignored by their cousin, who was in his early twenties. The incident that was being discussed with Kathy was littered with expletives and delivered in a way that felt aggressive and contained depictions of violence (I can hear the judgemental tone in my voice here). Kathy's response was interesting as it revealed there were parts of her life or the way she lived she did not want me to witness, "*careful what you say – Jo's here*", not sure if he knew who I was or what I was doing but it did reveal that she may control aspects of the environment when I am visiting. This placed me in a difficult position ethnographically as I want to witness naturally occurring phenomena and also not appear too intrusive in my questioning.

I witness many conversations that take place in front of Keeva that would perhaps cause anxiety, fear and paranoia. She is reminded of the need to be safe, but she is also exposed to events and conversations that she may not feel readily able to contain or understand. I noticed that Keeva's interest in the nephew's story was markedly absent. Is she tuning out that which she is uncomfortable with or does not understand? Or does she understand situations such as these all too well and is distancing herself from something which she realises could be frightening to her? I wanted her to hear something that nullified the conversation with the nephew, something that distanced it from Keeva and realised I was responding as a concerned adult with Keeva but could not recognise that response in the other adults. Keeva was not considered in this interaction and so anything she might want to 'voice' was not given a space.

I noticed that Keeva seemed a bit uneasy about me recording – she asked why the recorder was on - and I wondered if I was as clear with her as I should have been about the use of the recording. She usually wants to record, video or photograph herself but recording her perhaps feels a little less in her control than she would like. As we played in the park, for example, Keeva wants to take photos continuously and usually of very ordinary things such as a slide or park fence and created a video 'selfie' to narrate what she was doing. I allowed her to turn off the recorder when she asked about it and made a mental note "*this is her voice, it is just not her recorded voice!*"

Keeva's social interactions are constrained in a sense by herself and by her circumstances. Friendships outside of the school are not effectively managed by her guardians and this means she has limited interactions with her peers and my feeling is that will make her feel uncertain about how to navigate in her own world. I sense loneliness on her part and a very strong desire to play and engage with others. Yet if

these opportunities are rare or sporadic then she cannot rely on them happening. A brief conversation with a school-friend who had asked her to play after school left her I believe with no faith that she would be able to play with her. So she did not respond positively and so may have consequences for her being asked to play in the future. Her status as a 'looked after' child could already make her feeling 'outside' of 'normal' family and social networks and this will only be worsened through minimal contact with her peers outside of school. I theorise that her demanding nature is in a way a reflection of her knowledge that such interactions are few and far between so she has to maximise her opportunities when they are presented to her. She is telling us, with her pushy nature, that she wants to be included, thought about and involved but the absence of social interactions allows her little space to rehearse the nuances of social behaviour so that she is more successful in having her needs met. So, instead, she uses extrovert and assertive behaviours as witnessed at the 'Glee Club', where I am unconvinced she wants what she strives to achieve, to be the centre of attention.

I felt sad and powerless at Chancellor Green Park and a premature exit. We had to leave and I could not give Keeva a guarantee we could return. My time with the family was ending and Keeva knew this. I had a week earlier explained that I would visit four more times and so we had planned what those four visits would be like. She knew I had fulfilled my promise to bring her to the park and yet it was not satisfying. I recognised the surging sense of helplessness of this that I felt, I could offer her nothing but why do I feel I should offer anything? Am I abandoning her, I wondered and if so is this because I had stepped outside of the role as researcher and had become of use, important even, to Keeva? Is Keeva thinking about any of this? Keeva had some agency when we spent time together as my approach to this research was to let her set the pace, but it was weak and it was temporary.

Tastes and dispositions

Observation

Kathy was welcoming and immediately offered me a coffee as I arrived at Keeva's house. I do not know why my visits did not irritate her more. I had the impression she enjoyed the company although I find that this affected my ability to focus on the conversations and activities of Keeva. It is on the other hand helpful as she does not appear worried by my presence either and this is largely due to me appearing to be there to chat with Kathy.

Keeva and Freda were playing with a 'Play Do' sweet making set and, after the usual enquiry, "have I got the iPad?", went back to the game. It was laid out on the living room floor spread between three dinner trays. It was a play set that had been bought for Freda on her birthday although Keeva was dominating the activity and trying to prevent Freda from using the more interesting implements. Freda tolerated the 'pecking order' that exists but when Keeva moves onto another activity, she quickly took her opportunity to play with the set. The 'Play Dough' turned into one mass of blue-green dough instead of four different colours. Kathy said that they had played with little else for the last two days. I realised this was the only toy or game I had ever seen being played with in the home. Without prompting, Keeva tells me that the book I bought for Freda's birthday was torn by Freda. Kathy tells me that a tug of war broke out after I left with Keeva and it got torn. On reflection I should have brought something for Keeva too on Freda's birthday as she would have found it difficult not being foregrounded. From her perspective I am here to see her not Freda and she has started to jealously guard this relationship. I am left with the impression Keeva was compelled to eke out extras, treats, activities etc.

Kathy has said often on my previous visits how Keeva generally manages to acquire Freda's things, especially if it is something new or different. Kathy implied she was manipulative about doing this. I felt this was overly critical and less than empathetic towards Keeva and her reasons for doing this. Over the last few months though I have seen that this was characteristic of her interactions with people, she was very watchful of what her sister received for example. She also needed to take ownership of anything new - magpie like? This occurred when I provided the two sisters with a camera each to photograph or video things. I tended to provide Freda with the same things as Keeva as I thought she would have felt left out or ignored if I didn't. I also felt it would take the pressure off Keeva as I got the impression she was uncomfortable with being centre of

attention sometimes. Each time I asked her about herself, her thoughts, her experiences, she was monosyllabic, shy, or uninterested. This was incongruous to the way she reacted to situations where she placed herself 'front and centre' of what was going on and yet when she was given the opportunity to speak or be focused on, she appears reticent and 'disappears' herself. I had written on 'Post-its', three questions/points to think about when taking photos: "*What things do you see every day?*", "*What do you like?*" and "*What don't you like?*" Keeva was very enthused and immediately started to take photos.

I talked to Kathy about the purpose of the cameras and that the girls did not need to do or find something special to photograph but instead focus on the ordinary, everyday things in their lives. Kathy replied, "*well this is it – they come and sit in front of that*", pointing to the television. We talked about some of things that may be interesting to capture. What I had brought for them to use were in little plastic boxes with a kit (pc leads, batteries) and one camera had a case and the other did not. I had given Keeva hers and it was the one without a case. Later as I was showing Freda how to use the camera, Keeva spotted Freda's had a case. A little time later I noticed Keeva's camera now had a case, she had taken it quietly, without explanation or permission and, although Kathy mentioned it, she did not acknowledge that she had removed it from Freda's box. Freda was quite powerless in this respect - she had few words and so tends to react by shouting or screaming incoherently but then gives up. She tried to grab the case back but Keeva retained it easily. Keeva showed no remorse or embarrassment about being found out and challenged.

After half an hour there was visit from a heating engineer from a company, who had been contracted by the housing association from whom they rent their house, to replace the central heating systems and fires on the estate. Kathy argued at the door that he should have been there yesterday and he was equally insistent that the appointment was for today. He was allowed entry anyway and I got the impression Kathy didn't feel she had a choice. He was brusque and overly familiar, there was little in the way of customer service. I was interested in the conversation about a new fire to be fitted. Kathy was to choose her style from a selection presented in a brochure. She took a couple of seconds and pointed at one (almost at random) and said "*that'll do, what does it matter to me?*" she asked flippantly. "*Well you've got to live with it!*" he replied. The fireplace would be the centre of the room where the family spent most of their waking hours – why so little interest?

Keeva took more of an interest in the pictures and asked questions “*you’re a right old woman you aren’t yer?*” the engineer quipped. Mostly her inquisitiveness was demonstrated physically – she got close to where the information was on the man’s lap and on the sofa and slowly sequestered the folder and started leafing through the pages. Again, she is collecting the ‘new thing’ and engaging with a new person that had been introduced into her world. It strikes me as unusual for a young child to be so assertive and engage so readily with a stranger, particularly as Keeva’s lack of freedom to go outside unsupervised is because of a perceived threat posed by those familiar and unfamiliar to her.

Kathy talked about the accommodation she lives in and it appears that, whilst this is her home she is not attached to it - it has no special meaning. She has always been a tenant living in socially rented accommodation and the discussion tends to be around what has not been done right by the housing association, such as the bathroom is in the wrong place, improvements not thought through, points not being awarded so that she can get a bigger house now that she has two children, “*especially with her* [pointing to Freda] *havin a disability*”. Freda has been identified as having ASD. Again, the conversations we have are held in front of the children.

I observe again the absence of pictures or any wall hangings and how there seems to be little interest in the interior space. Items are not particularly well matched and there’s an absence of anything that conveys an interest in colour, design, fashion. It is comfortable but eclectic. I have noticed in my notes that I tend to call this Keeva’s ‘house’ not ‘home’ and there feels something quite significant about that. I may have picked up unconscious cues from Kathy and her ambivalence towards her home, Keeva’s lack of freedom to move both inside and outside of the ‘home’ and perhaps my own sense of a care placement as an unstable and temporary place of residence. My observations in Keeva’s and her neighbours’ homes suggest there was also the lack of an obvious investment of time, effort and creativity in creating a home that reflects the individuals who inhabit them.

Whilst John is the blood relation to Keeva and Freda, I rarely speak to him and it is noteworthy that all arrangements for the girls seem to come through Kathy. I am often impressed by her as without this knowledge, I would have assumed she was the relative and for her part she acts as main guardian. Freda was blowing raspberries by pushing out her tongue and blowing hard so spittle came out. She did it to Keeva and it made her giggle and then did to Kathy a few times and Kathy made it into a game. I would have been really irritated by it but I get the strong impression that Kathy feels very protective

about the children in her care. On a few occasions I have heard her relay stories about her own sons that showed she was fiercely protective of them and will assert her authority as a carer if she feels there is an issue for the children I observe as she did her own sons.

Kathy tells me a story about her youngest son, who is now in his mid-twenties and his need to wear callipers as a child. The monologue was around 35 minutes long and in it Kathy recounted a story of medical neglect that has had lifelong consequences for her son who still struggles to walk. I am struck by Kathy's desire to tell me about these things. It is the first time I have used a voice recorder whilst there and was surprised to see how long she had spent on this story. I also heard the silences of the girls during this, the conversations are between me and Kathy. They don't interject or ask questions about people they know (love?).

Keeva's use of physical space is interesting and she rarely sits down in a relaxed way. Instead she stand in the middle of the room, moves about this space, finds something to focus on (for example looking at a photo on the fireplace) then moves on. She tends to face the people in the room, observes much of what is going on and rarely watches the television which is always on.

Keeva wanted to watch '*Horrid Henry*' on her new tablet but Freda doesn't like it because of the noises and monsters. She asked if I could come upstairs to her bedroom with her and Kathy said it was fine so I sat with Keeva as she crunched sherbert lemons and watch '*Horrid Henry*'. We watched around 8 episodes whilst Keeva lay on her bed and I sat on the bed. In the bedroom which she shared with Freda were two sets of bunk beds(four single beds) plus a cupboard with a portable television on top. It was tidy with a few personal items on wall. There were no dolls or blankets or soft toys that I could see. I know that, when I looked, I was holding an image of my own children's bedrooms that have over the years had a large number of soft toys, blankets, dolls or action figures that were kept close.

I felt aware of the intimacy of being in a bedroom with Keeva and as I reflect upon this recognise the level of trust she must have had in me. I also felt very aware of the need to be visible from the open bedroom door and sitting on bed (not slouching, lying etc) with a clear space between me and Keeva. As I went to leave, Keeva wanted to watch one more episode. It's a strange request as we are not communicating except for me asking questions about '*Horrid Henry*' (as I have not watched it before) and Keeva is self-sufficient really as she has a big bag of sherbert lemons (I was not offered one) and

entertainment. It is difficult to identify what her thoughts about me are (welcome? friend? invisible?). I think it is because she knows she is foregrounded when I am there, my whole purpose for being there is for her and for some reason this is better having than not. Yet she rarely uses me to talk to even when we are on the subject of something she enjoys such as the TV programme.

Reflection

Being 'looked after' means that Keeva has a discontinuity in learning habits, customs and dispositions and has to mediate her early experiences with her present and make sense of this. Her own tastes in clothes, for example, are different from what she seems to be presented with. She had little influence or impact on the clothes chosen for an important event, although she was happy that she had something new. I do not know this is the case because I do not have full access to her wardrobe or her carers' shopping habits. I do know that Keeva was not present in the purchase of the clothing and so did not participate in decisions about them even though this event was seemingly all about foregrounding her. This may not seem significant but my experience of children from as young as three, is that they have preferences and with freedom will express these preferences often in conflict with parents. It is a way of defining own identity and developing independent decision-making on how a child sees herself and how she wants to look.

Haircuts and hairstyles too are restricted by social services and permission has to be sought by the guardians before any changes are made. This takes away some of the spontaneity that children who are not 'in care' would enjoy in determining how they treat their own bodies. This means then that her carers have a strong influence on how Keeva represents herself aesthetically. This felt significant as Kathy seemed to have little regard or interest in matters of taste and creating a home that spoke to her own preferences. This may mean she will have little empathy or understanding of Keeva's needs and preferences and how this can help her to create a more secure sense of herself. Keeva, in this sense, will not be heard when she tries to express herself and her self-development and self-awareness will not be nurtured.

This insecurity or uncertainty may manifest in behaviours and I wondered if this is what is happening with her need to take possession of new things, be foregrounded and yet be ambivalent about the things that are hers. The cameras and journals I provided have been interesting for example, as Keeva was very enthusiastic to 'own' them, to use them and

engage in activities to produce something from them. However any products from such activities are relatively unimportant to her, she does not connect with them, she dismisses them. She went through 50 prints of the photos she took within seconds and only engaged with them as Kathy felt it was polite to take an interest. They were left scattered on the floor even though at the time she took great pleasure in capturing shots of Kathy, the bedroom and the television, which was showing Freda's favourite advert. There were no pictures, images or texts produced in the drawing pad given although at the outset she was keen to tell a story about a Princess called Keeva. When asked about any photo, she rarely offered a comment and seemed to change the subject or physically move away.

I am suggesting then that Keeva's voice in representing herself is not obvious in the way she acts, talks or dresses. For me, it is the silences in how she responds to questions about herself and the absence of decisions she makes for herself that speak the loudest.

Representing Keeva

Observation

Care Planning Review meeting

“*How are things going?*”, asked Ian, the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Nods all round, shuffling of paper, a sense of a commonly understood purpose for the meeting. There were no refreshments. We were sat in the school staffroom reviewing the placement of Keeva and her sister Freda. There were thirteen people in the room including me and her guardian Kathy. Present were professional representatives from health, school, social services and the education department. Keeva and Freda were absent. This was the third Care Planning Review meeting I had attended and it is of note that I had observed two different IROs chairing the meeting, three different social workers responsible for Keeva’s case, and two different specialist support workers responsible for Freda’s in-class support.

Everyone in the room had a look of ‘being at work’ the way they dressed, how they sat, the manner of their interactions with others and their presence was in a sense functional - this was one of their duties. Kathy was clearly not part of the professional group, dressed as she was for school drop-off, no work-wear or work-related accessories, passively waiting to be brought in to the discussion. Ian, as IRO was the Chair of the meeting and appeared to be in a buoyant mood and seemed optimistic. “*I’m sure we won’t have to make recommendations as everything is going well*” he said smiling widely at Kathy, who acknowledged his smile tentatively.

I was nervous and uncertain, anxiously trying to make notes as these meetings were so instrumental to my research. I was keen to capture as much as possible, which meant I had to listen as closely as I could and take in the information that was being presented, names, roles, what was tacit knowledge and what was made explicit in the information sharing. Children are sometimes present at these meetings and I can imagine this feels overwhelming socially, emotionally and cognitively. Everyone was amiable and Ian, Margaret (the deputy-headteacher) and Julie (the social worker) made an effort to include Kathy in conversation and encouraged her to participate in discussions and gave her affirmation when she did.

“Everyone had social worker reports and notes from the last meeting?”, more shuffling of paper, nods of assent. The last meeting had been chaired by Rob, who had chaired the meeting as Ian was unable to do so. There had been no explanation of this given at the previous meeting which proceeded much the same as this one. Kathy had no papers and I wondered if she was included in the circulation of documents. *“Let’s start with Keeva then, have we spelt her name right at last?”*, more nods and a couple of smiles. I wondered about the spelling I had made and made a mental note to check this. The notes included Keeva’s identity number and full case profile. The file Ian and other professionals had on Keeva was about 3-inches thick in a buff-coloured folder secured with a file band to keep papers enclosed. The case profile contained information on Keeva’s birth date, location and family. It also documented the timeline and accompanying details of her timeline as a child ‘in care’, including the social workers involved in her case, of which there were several. Her medical data and dental records were referred to as was her school performance. I was torn by conflicting desires to pore over every detail of the paperwork and conversely to not read anything as the information was personal, private and exposed to scrutiny a child’s life recorded because that life had been traumatic.

Kathy was asked how the placement was going. *“it’s ok, they seem happy, not sure what else I can say”*, she replied with a slightly nervous laugh. Questions followed to elicit more feedback and Kathy got more verbose adding in anecdotes and examples to furnish her replies. It felt like she had to prove herself as worthy of guardianship, whereas I believed the review team was already satisfied with the placement and this review was perfunctory. It was a way of documenting processes had been followed, ensuring there was collective agreement in relation to the placement. Julie, the social worker gave some feedback too, saying that Keeva was always excited when she went around and enjoyed the art and craft activities they did. The children were happy, Julie reported and said ~~they~~ were *“settled at home”*. Kathy reported that Keeva still refers to her by name whereas Freda called her ‘Mum’.

There was clearly a process as discussion focused on health checks with reports from the school nurse and health visitor, regarding dental visits, optical and immunisation records. Keeva was reported as healthy with weight and height in proportion. There was little discussion about therapeutic services, (Keeva has one hour a week music therapy) but her psycho-emotional state was not foregrounded. There were checks from the previous review on whether eye appointment and dental appointment had been kept and this was ticked off as Kathy had attended with Keeva as requested. I started to question whether

my own children's health checks were up-to-date and reflected how little was monitored in their lives. The checks for Keeva would occur every three months and the outcomes recorded and added to the information in the buff file.

School reports were next and through Margaret the Deputy-Head, I felt Keeva was more thought about and reflected on, as a complex case. Behaviourally she caused concern Margaret said, as she "*needs to be in charge*", "*is Miss Bossy*" and her class teacher calls her "*me, me, me*", indicating that Keeva is perceived as an attention-seeker who monopolised the teacher's time. It is clear, Margaret said that "*she has a need for constant reassurance and praise*" and she "*reckons she can get away with anything, well 'cos you know, her situation, and then she starts to cry*". She is often unfocused but her need for attention meant she interfered in the work of other children and it upsets other children "*a lot*". She will have a "*rude awakening*" as she moves through school because "*she will fall behind and the other children will lose patience*". However, she is making progress Margaret said, and at her 'target level'. Kathy nods along with some of this and is often brought into the narrative and she gives her own anecdotes "*She gets sent upstairs when she pushes me to me limits and she stops 'cos she ain't getting the attention*" she laughs and ends saying "*well you'll never change 'er, she's 'ard-faced like her Mum.*" I thought the feedback was a rather harsh summary and there seemed little empathy towards Keeva. My gut response at the meeting was I would have been upset by these comments if they were made against my own children. I would have challenged some of the comments, defended their behaviour, offered different perspectives and would be assertive in my role as their advocate even if there was some truth in the comments. However, the school's feedback was received with no challenge and I wondered if this was a reflection of respect for another professional's judgement in the inter-professional setting of the meeting, so there was more distance from Keeva and little emotional investment.

The discussion moved onto financial matters as the group identified that Keeva and her sister attracted the 'pupil premium' and the teacher commented this was partly being used to fund one-to-one music therapy sessions. There was discussion about possible sources of funding for the school to support the two girls such as the 'School Effectiveness Grant' and the 'Pupil Deprivation Grant'. The conversation continued as comparisons were made between North Wales financial arrangements for social services' support for Keeva even though the school is in the North-West of England. There was recognition that if the girls had been under the jurisdiction of the North-West local authority, the financial support would be greater. "*Gosh ours is quite paltry isn't it?*" said Ian apologetically, as there was recognition the school received less than it would have done and so "*was only able to do*

so much". Quite how this would reflect on Keeva and her sister was not made clear but it was hard not to feel dismayed that there could be a discrepancy such as this.

After about 90 minutes, Julie was asked if she had any comments from the '*Having your say at your review: Young Person's Report*' booklet that gives Keeva an opportunity to say how she feels about her care arrangements. Julie feedback that Kathy had completed the booklet with Keeva and highlighted that Keeva would like to see more of her sister, Lianne, who lived on the same estate with her Mum's other brother. There were some nods of acceptance but no plan was made to ensure this was followed up. Julie also discussed the request by Keeva's parents to have some access and there had been sightings of Mum on the estate where Keeva lives. Kathy disapproved of any such contact "*I'm not against them havin' contact, it's the girls that are my priority*" she said. There is a question in the booklet that asks "*Do you know why you are 'in care'?*" and Keeva's response was recorded as "*'cos my mum didn't look after me*". When asked if there was anything else she needed, she answered "*£1000*". This got a laugh around the room. The representation of Keeva here was duly recorded in the buff-coloured file and the leaflet was secured with the meeting notes.

We reached the final stage of the meeting where Ian raised the topic of guardianship and the status of this. It was recommended that this be put on a more secure footing and Kathy and Johnny instead have a Residence Order. This allows the placement to be more long-term, with legal protection regarding guardianship of Keeva and her sister. "*It's about putting the legal side in your hands*" he said to Kathy. Social Services would support this move, said Julie, and there were mumbles and nods around the room indicating assent. Kathy shakes her head, laughing nervously and said no. "*It's a bit too much to deal with*" and Ian registers his disappointment and attempts to continue with the discussion but Kathy is resolute, for her and Johnny their preference is to keep things as they are. No-one asks, what would Keeva and her sister prefer? There would be no point, they are powerless in determining the terms of their care placement, so why bother?

The meeting ends with the next date agreed for three months hence.

Reflection

The above account reflects an efficient process, if superficial, to bring together a multi-professional group to ensure the holistic planning and evaluation of a care placement.

The amount of information collected on Keeva, was vast. It was shared and understood by all those charged with her care. There was an egalitarian approach where each professional was given a space to share their professional perspective and this was duly recorded, available for review at a later date.

Keeva was represented in part by each of these professionals who without exception, seemed well-organised and used evidence from their practice to form an opinion and each was limited to the dimensions of their professional context. Kathy too represented her own evaluation of the care plan that was in place for Keeva although this was less thoroughly documented or evidenced and I want to problematise this. Kathy represents the most significant part of Keeva's care plan and how she experiences her home, her daily life, her family, her social network and how Keeva makes sense of her status as a 'looked after' child. Yet there was such paucity in the discussion round this, I am unclear how anyone in the room knew what Keeva's experience was. In reality, the only sense of Keeva being represented was through the mosaic of professional practice. She was a healthy weight, she attended and was making progress at school, she had prescription spectacles, she received the pupil premium, she had her required immunisations, she had her 'voice' captured as required. I include this last element in the same context as the other 'checks', as this is how it translated in practice. It was checked off, not embedded, not leading the care plan, just recorded as having been done.

I had the benefit of seeing the process from another perspective as I was based in Keeva's house and I had discussed the '*Having your say...*' booklet with Kathy and she had told me that Keeva "*doesn't fill it in, I do, she's not really interested*". I spoke with Keeva and she had only the vaguest memory of completing the booklet and initially said she did not know what I was talking about. I think this is significant as it means there is no clear line of communication from Keeva to the review meeting but is instead shaped through the process that decides what questions are important to ask (and how these are phrased) and filtered through Kathy who then shares this with Julie, the social worker. For example, Kathy did represent Keeva's desire to see her sister but what she excluded was the reason why this was not possible. Kathy and Johnny do not speak to Lianne's guardians (Johnny's brother Steve and his wife Ann) because there is a family rift regarding Keeva and Freda being placed with Johnny rather than with Steve, who wanted to take guardianship of the two girls as they already 'looked after' their sister Lianne. This has led to tensions so bad that even though both families live a few minutes away from each other, they do not speak and will not allow visits. So how is Keeva being represented here? How is her voice captured here? In short, I would argue it is not and, as the

process has been completed, it has almost silenced her voice as a result. The process has served only to distance her from being heard and has ratified the representation of Keeva rather than actioned or responded to her expressed desire.

Kathy is not alone in representing yet absenting Keeva from the meeting, the protocols, processes and functioning of the meeting make it difficult for a child's perspective to be foregrounded. What would Keeva say in this meeting given the chance? Probably that the meeting makes no sense to her as it does not privilege her perspective and does not prioritise those things that are important to her. Keeva would appear in the spaces between the commentary, the reasons why she acts as she does at school, for example, requires her socio-pycho-emotional state to be considered alongside the problematic classroom dynamic she creates. When I think about how Keeva could be better represented I have to conclude that this is too much of a responsibility to place on her shoulders. She needs the adults around her to find a way to hear her, understand her and then both speak for her and guide her in expressing her feelings, views, and concerns. In a sense, the professionals around her need to collectively act as a parent and this is perhaps impossible.

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Chapter 4
FIRST STAGE ANALYSIS:
OBSERVATIONS AND ASSERTIONS

Chapter 4 First Stage Analysis: Observations and Assertions

Overview

This chapter examines the narrative episodes presented in the previous chapter. I begin to evaluate the extent to which the intentions of policy on 'child voice' are put into effect examining the rhetoric and reality dichotomy. Keeva's voice, as observed through ethnography, is crucially significant here as it exposes the disjuncture between the outcomes of bureaucratic processes and her lived experience.

In a first-stage analysis three themes emerged from the data presented in the previous chapter and these are:

- Professional practices and processes
- How Keeva is represented by others and written onto by her environment
- Keeva's voice – how she represents herself

These themes will be used to discuss the findings in this chapter.

Professional practices and processes

My assertion is that the formal processes of care planning and review, are an efficient method of representing multi-professional perspectives on the health and well-being of a child who is 'looked after' and allows for a vast amount of information to be presented, shared and recorded (HM Government, 2010). The process of capturing voice and representing the child's well-being is undertaken by several professionals including dentists, general practitioners, school nurses, opticians, school-teachers and deputy head-teacher, social workers, and the guardians.

To prepare for the tri-annual care planning reviews, appointments are made for the child with several of these agencies and, where appropriate, any services for which a referral has been made and so the child is continually and regularly seen, observed and information about them, is recorded. In a sense, the capturing of voice then is not solely done through the care planning review meetings but through all the interactions that lead to the meeting too. However, there are limitations on how the child is represented through these interactions, as the professionals' perspective of the child is privileged in the care planning meetings as they report from their professional context. They use information from their interactions with the child and/or her guardian to represent the child with little or no mention of the child's perspective.

Also the key professionals involved in the care planning review were not consistent:

This was the third Care Planning Review meeting I had attended and it is of note that I had observed two different IROs chairing the meeting, three different social workers responsible for Keeva's case, and two different specialist support workers responsible for Freda's in-class support.

(Data, 'Representing Keeva')

Recent evaluations of the role of IRO suggest that in the care planning reviews that led to the most positive outcomes for a child, the IRO and social worker had developed a good relationship with the child. It was notable that Keeva had three social workers in the twelve months I had contact with the family. As the care planning reviews were completed three times a year, it was questionable whether she was able to form a relationship with her social worker each time the paperwork for the care planning review was needed. From the professional's perspective i.e. the incoming social worker, completing the process of capturing voice would be a useful platform to develop an understanding of Keeva but it would in all likelihood require Keeva to go over her life history again and there would be little consistency

in how she was represented. As suggested in the care planning review, sometimes even recording a child's name accurately was problematic,

“Let's start with Keeva then, have we spelt her name right at last?”

(Data, 'Representing Keeva').

I felt the culminating process of representing yet absenting Keeva from the meeting, the protocols, processes and functioning of the meeting make it difficult for a child's perspective to be foregrounded. Professionals have a certain language and remit in these meetings, there are requirements for recording certain things have been fulfilled from a legislative perspective, there are time and resource constraints to consider, thus dealing with this as a messy, complex, emotionally traumatic experience that is probably irresolvable would be inefficient, problematic and bureaucratically pointless.

Professional practices and language were evident as discourses about resources and localised policies came to the fore in the meeting. An example here is when budgetary considerations were discussed in the planning of care for Keeva particularly in respect of music therapy provided by the school:

There was discussion about possible sources of funding for the school to support the two girls such as the 'School Effectiveness Grant' and the 'Pupil Deprivation Grant'... The conversation continued as comparisons were made between North Wales ...*“Gosh ours is quite paltry isn't it?”* said Ian apologetically as there was recognition the school received less than it would have done and so “was only able to do so much”.

(Data, 'Representing Keeva')

Again in the guidelines for IROs, there is a concern that budgetary considerations should not be a constraint to challenging a care plan and yet the above illustrates

the shared professional acknowledgment that limited resources might have

consequences for the quality of services provided. There was little evaluation of the therapy offered (mentioned above) which represented the limits of the interprofessional dialogue I witnessed.

The outcomes of these activities are presented in the care planning review meetings. This includes information from the child although this is not presented in person which is dissimilar to all other representations in the meeting. Instead the child has prior to the meeting completed a questionnaire usually with her carer or social worker to establish her views and opinions on her placement, her situation, her schooling, her concerns and her hopes. This is summarised (not read out) by the social worker who identifies any key points and/or issues that arose during the completion of the form.

At the end of the meeting the IRO then establishes if the placement is satisfactory and concludes whether this arrangement will continue or not. Action points are set for the next meeting and all information presented is used to update the child's file. The whole process is completed within two to three hours and, as a way of sharing experiences in a multi-professional context so that all professionals have heard from each other, it was efficient.

Whilst the above commentary examined capturing voice as a bureaucratic process, it is now worth considering the aims of the policy which proffers Keeva some power or rights in being heard and taken account of in the process. The process that is in place to capture what she wanted to say was a template based around questions the local authority had determined should be raised. It would be difficult to use this form in a way that originated from Keeva's perspective and there is little room for discussion outside of the set questions. As Keeva did not attend the review, there was not a space for her to present her thoughts in a way that may have made more sense to her or for her to reiterate an important point, for example the request to see her elder sister. This process then does not represent her views or opinions but instead seeks answers to evaluate her placement. It is helpful for the provider of care to know how they are doing but does not allow Keeva to set the agenda or frame the discussion.

I do not think Keeva was adequately represented in the care planning reviews as I could not hear her voice. I believe that this indicates the meeting makes no sense to her as it does not privilege her perspective and does not prioritise those things that are important to her. For example, Keeva made one consistent request in each of the three care planning reviews I attended:

Keeva would like to see more of her sister, Lianne, who lived on the same estate with her Mum's other brother. There were some nods of acceptance but no plan was made to ensure this was followed up.

This was responded to by Kathy:

“I'm not against them havin' contact, it's the girls that are my priority”

(Data, 'Representing Keeva')

There was knowledge in the professional grouping that family tensions led to Keeva being unable to see her sister. However, there was a real dichotomy for the social work team to keep Keeva in a stable placement and at the same time insist that Keeva's voice was heard in this respect. In the absence of Keeva at the meeting, those representing her (Kathy and Julie) were complicit in not pursuing this matter. A further tension regarding the status of the placement was made clear in the discussion later on in the Care Planning Review meeting:

It was recommended that this be put on a more secure footing and Kathy and Johnny instead have a Residence Order...Kathy shakes her head, laughing nervously and said no. “It's a bit too much to deal with” and Ian registers his disappointment

(Data, 'Representing Keeva')

Keeva's voice would appear in the spaces between the commentaries, the reasons why she acts as she does at school for example requires her socio-psychological state to be considered alongside the problematic classroom dynamic she creates:

It is clear, Margaret [Deputy-Head] said that "*she has a need for constant reassurance and praise*" and she "*reckons she can get with anything well 'cos you know, her situation, and then she starts to cry*".

(Data, 'Representing Keeva')

Again the response to this was to affirm Margaret's observation and so the process did not invoke interrogation of the opinion stated or require the professionals in the room to think about these issues from Keeva's perspective. She was the problem in this scenario and the flow of the discussion was how this created an issue for the school. The paucity of professional criticality in the discussions or representations of Keeva seemed to be the norm. No-one challenged another professional's summary in the meeting or asked searching questions to better understand the representations of Keeva. The group was quick to reach assent, it was collegial and little was picked up on or challenged. The guardian said very little and seemed phased by the professional grouping leading to little insight on the actual lived experiences of Keeva. It did not feel unreasonable to expect the professionals in the room to identify potential issues with the way Keeva was understood or pose alternative viewpoints. There was too little expectation of the guardian too in providing a more fully prepared summary of Keeva's placement. I felt the absence of any dissent, questioning, challenges led to Keeva receiving only the most superficial of representation at the meeting.

I sat through three care planning review meetings and noticed how much information was collected and kept about Keeva and shared in the meeting. It may all have been necessary but it did feel Keeva was violated in some respects and as she was not present made it seem secretive from the person it concerned. I did wonder how much Keeva would want shared with all the people in the room

(including me) if she was given a choice or right on how she was represented. In the ethnographic study, I found that Keeva rarely wanted to be the focal point of a discussion and she showed a high degree of ambivalence to being foregrounded.

There was scant evidence that Keeva heard back from the care planning reviews and so, in this way she had fewer rights on knowing about the 'herself' that was presented as the totality of her. Thus I would have to conclude that she was not conferred the right to receive information about herself as stated in the UNCHR articles referred to earlier in this thesis. The unfulfilled right to having access to her own information was exacerbated by the lack of direction given to or management of the guardian or social worker in completing the 'life-story'. This was highlighted in the first care planning review I attended and one year on the process still had not been started. When this was initially raised, it was suggested that it needed someone who specialised or was qualified in supporting a child through this process who would work alongside Kathy and Keeva. The social worker at the time was qualified but soon after left and so this did not seem to have been followed up.

It seemed like a lost opportunity to find a way for Keeva to talk about her natural family and explore her family history with guidance. From this, she could examine and reflect on her feelings, anxieties, hopes, understanding about her situation but the opportunity was not offered to her. Then she may be able to more readily engage in decisions being made about her at the care planning review meetings. The 'life story' book was available in her house and this was shown to me in front of Keeva so she was aware of it too, and it is difficult to know what meaning she would make of this resource being ignored and not used. The guardian was kind, concerned for Keeva's welfare and had clearly had an impact on Keeva's well-being, development and educational progress. This was noted in the care planning meetings, by the school and from observing the family interactions. However, the guardian was uncomfortable about revisiting Keeva's history with her as she felt it was too upsetting and Keeva's best interests would be served by not dwelling on the past. Additionally there were many family disputes, particularly with the carer of Keeva's older sister and the completion of the 'life story' would raise questions relating to this too.

~~When I think about how Keeva could be better represented, I have to conclude that this is too much of a responsibility to place on Keeva's shoulders. She needs the adults around her to find a way to hear her, understand her and then both speak for her and guide her in expressing her feelings, views, and concerns. Policy mechanisms intended to facilitate the expression of 'child voice' make Keeva accountable for a situation that is beyond her control. In a sense, the professionals around her need to collectively act as a parent and this is perhaps impossible.~~

-How Kee va 's voic e is represented by others and written onto by her environment

I saw the way Keeva was represented by others in her home, in her school, by her social workers and in the Care Planning Review meetings. I present here some highlights from the data to say something about how she was represented by others. Later in this section, I examine her lived experiences in the environment she lives, exploring the spaces and social space she inhabits.

I begin with the most significant way in which Keeva is continually defined as a 'looked after' child in the way she is represented. Keeva rarely spoke of her situation as a 'looked after' child yet this was used to speak for her in how she was identified and how she was understood. I rarely saw her being able to drop this identifier. At school, at home, in the social space she lived she was accorded a 'looked after' status in the language used about her and seemed to define her for all she came into contact with. This is significant as she is constantly being reminded of a traumatic childhood, an awareness of risk, a knowledge of the fragility of home and family. This status was used to identify her in conversations around her for example I was given a biography of Keeva whilst she was present.

"When we found out about these [Keeva and Freda] they'd been stuck in a home for ages and no-one 'ad told us. I mean we would've 'ad 'em from the beginnin' when it went wrong with

their mum". ... I was uncomfortable as I watched the girls play a few feet away who must be able to hear this conversation.

(Data 'Home and family')

Another conversation alluded to Keeva's role in the domestic violence that she had witnessed before being placed 'in care' and indicated how she may be perceived by her guardians:

"She was often the cause as she would ask her dad for something and then when she got a 'no' would ask her mum and it would cause a row. I said to him [Johnny] we won't be played off... that's why Johnny shouts at her cos she tries the same thing but she aint getting her way."

(Data, 'Being a 'looked after' child')

In the same observation, I noted a conversation with Keeva early on in the study and she referred to me as a social worker even though this had never been suggested. She knew I worked at the local university and yet she had framed her understanding of me from her knowledge of the social world and her place in it.

I believe this would instil a sense of how she was represented in the minds of those around her and possibly how she used it to define herself and her identity. Her perception of herself could be influenced by this and shaped how secure or fragile her immediate and longer term future felt. I noted how Kathy would refer to Keeva in her presence about her status as a 'looked after' child and that had potential consequences for the immediate future for example in planning a holiday:

Social services could provide respite care whilst they went away,
"My sister said they could go on a soash break, yer know , where they'll be with other kids 'in care' like. I could do with the break but there's no way"

(Data, 'Being a 'looked after' child')

The weight of the 'looked after' status and the experience of being taken into care seemed incredibly difficult for a child to bear, yet was so casually referred to in her presence. For example, Kathy asked if I was attending the next care planning review meeting and we had the following conversation:

Kathy: But we've got another review coming up February haven't we so...

Jo: Oh yeah. Will the social worker be at that?

Kathy: Should be, yeah.

Jo: What's her name, I've forgotten?

Kathy: Melanie

...

Kathy: 'ad a few

Jo: What about five or...?

Kathy: We had Kelly, Kelly was the first one. Um, Emma. Who else have you had?

Keeva: Catherine.

...

Kathy: Who else have we had?

Keeva: Emma.

Kathy: Emma. Who else?

(Transcript, 2201143)

Another example of how Keeva was defined by her 'looked after' status was through a celebration event organised by the local authority social services department for children 'in care', where children are given awards for making progress in personal and educational contexts.

This was obviously a good thing and Keeva was clearly excited ... There were only two tickets so Freda wasn't going ... it

seemed sad –the one person who Keeva is most closely related to was not going with her to ‘celebrate’.

(Data, ‘Being a ‘looked after’ child’)

As a researcher, I was sensitive to this being used to define a child, but I was struck by Keeva’s apparent indifference and so this perhaps permitted those around her to ignore the ‘child’ in the ‘looked after’ child and exposed her to conversations that were inappropriate. I did not believe she was indifferent and think instead it served to remind me that capturing voice is more complex than taking a literal translation of what is or is not expressed.

The inside and outside spaces in the world Keeva inhabits featured heavily in the data collection and have a significant impact on how she experiences the social world and how this perhaps writes itself onto her. This focus here is on agency and inside-outside spaces, surveillance, and socio-economic factors.

The limited degree of agency in her house that Keeva had is revealed in the ‘*Inside and outside spaces*’ episode. Whilst I undertook the study she appeared to have little access to spaces inside the house except for the use of the living-room and on one occasion the bedroom she shared with her younger sister:

All activity though seemed to take place in this room and the only other space on the ground floor is the kitchen which was seemingly out of bounds as it had its entry restricted with a child-gate, perhaps to keep the dog in. Or it might be to keep the children out of the kitchen? I noticed that Keeva rarely gets herself something from the kitchen. She was presented with food and drinks by request and seems uninvited into that space.

(Data ‘Inside and outside spaces’)

Within the living-room, access to what appeared to be a toy-box was restricted as it was buried under piles of clothes, magazines and other items, the television

viewing seems to be based on other family members' preferences, and there was little introduced to occupy her. She stood a lot of the time in the small bit of floor area that was unoccupied and was enthusiastic about making use of anything I brought.

Keeva's use of physical space is interesting: she rarely sits down in a relaxed way. Instead she stands in the middle of the room, moves about this space, finds something to focus ... She tends to face the people in the room, observes much of what is going on, and rarely watches the television which is always on.

(Data 'Tastes and dispositions')

I felt as a consequence of the ambiguity of inside-outside spaces and the limited use Keeva had of them, led to her feeling possessive of the small spaces she was allowed to occupy. I was part of that space and she would often sit right alongside me and use anything I had within the confines of this space. She would guard against her sister gaining access too. This could also be a projected occupation of a space such as journeys in my car which she would ask to go in routinely at almost every visit. When we did leave the house to visit a park, for example, she would explore as much as she could quickly moving from one play area or piece of equipment to another. I noted how I felt Keeva and her sister would experience this

The park was deemed to 'risky' because of the other children, the back garden was inaccessible because of the child gate to the kitchen and the dog seemed to dominate that space. Yet the door was open revealing their neighbours and community outside ... they were both part of and yet outside of this community

(Data 'Inside and outside spaces')

Such limited scope for movement around and between inside spaces, there were examples where there seemed few if any boundaries.

Kathy...once had a paddling pool and came home one day to find that the children from next door had climbed over her fence to use it.

(Data 'Inside and outside spaces')

Keeva was unable to go outside of the house either without someone supervising her as there was a concern her parents would gain access either directly or through friends who lived locally. This included the back garden as it backed onto other houses where Keeva's parents' friends lived. Connected to this limited agency, another key finding is the level of surveillance both inside the house and outside. Inside the house, the front door is open and so people outside have clear views straight into the house. I commented on how this felt in an early observation record:

We all sat in the one space, the living room, which looked out onto the park across the road. The front door was left open and from where I sit I can see the boys playing in the next garden. They look in as I looked out – it felt very exposed and I shifted in my position so I was outside of their line of view

(Data, 'Meeting Keeva and beginning an ethnographic journey')

And later,

Mostly the other gardens were extensions to the buildings ... not really defined as a space in their own right. This makes the private –public space indistinguishable. The wide open green space a matter of feet from the girls' home feels oppressive and under the public gaze. Nothing could be private here, surrounded as it is on all four sides by houses where the doors are left open and people stand watchful in their gardens.

(Data, 'Inside and outside spaces')

On a visit to the park, Keeva and I had clearly been observed from one of the houses facing the park as the neighbour had to come out to enquire if Keeva was okay and whilst outside, Kathy observed us from her front door.

Such were the restrictions and constant surveillance because Keeva was 'in care', that any natural occurrence of meeting friends was limited and making arrangements for 'playdates' seemed absent mainly as the guardians could not guarantee Keeva's safety nor be assured Keeva's parents would not be able to contact her. ~~(in 'Going on holiday' and 'Celebrations')~~ For example, I rarely saw Keeva interact with friends after school at home or when playing outside, even when there seemed to be opportunities.

The episode, '*Being a 'looked after' child*' illustrated that Keeva was often presented with the dangers in the world 'out there' such as people who supplied and used drugs, violent arguments between her relatives, people who harmed children, her parents who may try to see her. Kathy often expressed her fears about Keeva's Mum and Dad making contact:

... Keeva's mum was spotted in an adjoining back garden and Kathy and the children had to go back inside, lock the door and rang social services... Kathy has refused any contact "*at my 'ouse! I tell you what, if she or 'im stepped one foot in my garden I'd set the dog on 'em and ring the police*".

(Data, 'Being a 'looked after' child')

The narrative accounts also revealed Keeva's ambivalence towards relationships and again I felt this could be explained by the world being presented as a dangerous place. Yet the study showed how many times Keeva was exposed at home or in her social space to conversations or behaviours that may have been frightening, stressful or worrying.

The only friendship I witnessed was with her second cousin, Natalie, but even this was fragile as Natalie's Mum was estranged from Natalie's father (Kathy's son) and they were in a bitter dispute over access. Yet my observations illustrated Keeva was often keen to go outside, talk to people (including those who she was unfamiliar with) and explore beyond the space she was allowed. This created for her a confusing social world and this served to constrain her ability to form and enjoy friendships in her local community. She lived alongside other children who enjoyed full freedom to explore and enjoy the social world, such as her cousin Natalie. This presents her as being different, 'othered' in her everyday experiences with those she interacts with. I observed:

Her status as a 'looked after' child could already make her feel 'outside' of 'normal' family and social networks and this will only be worsened through minimal contact with her peers outside of school... She is telling us ... that she wants to be included, thought about, involved but the absence of social interactions allows her little space to rehearse the nuances of social behaviour so that she is more successful in having her needs met.

(Data, 'Social interactions')

I showed she engaged readily with strangers even though she had a narrative of the social world presented to her that people are or can be dangerous and she needs protection. The heating engineer's visit, (in 'Data, 'Tastes and Dispositions') for example gave Keeva an opportunity to have an event that was outside of the normal routine and allowed her to have a conversation about something that clearly excited her, a new electric fire. She was physically interacting with him too, leaning across him, sitting next to him, looking at materials that were on his lap. Kathy presented confusing and contradictory responses to this. She did not suggest to Keeva to move away or allow the engineer some space even though she has talked about some fairly radical interventions in relation to Keeva's freedom to explore outside.

Finally the study revealed Keeva's exposure to social deprivation but in a way that was more evident because of the stark contrast to an area where there were indicators of wealth and economic prosperity. I noted

The spaces that allow opportunities for attractiveness such as the park, gardens, homes are instead barren, unkempt and a bit miserable...there is one garden that stands out like an oasis because it has got some plants in and someone has obviously created a space which has colour and purpose

(Data, 'Inside and outside spaces')

Against this backdrop was an area of affluence that housed a well-equipped park that had clearly had a great deal of investment. The children here were accompanied by parents and there was evidence it was popular place for the community. People stood in groups, chatting and the children enjoyed a space that was welcoming where they could interact with their peers. Contrasted with this is description of the park that is across the road from Keeva's house:

The play area in the park is littered with shards of glass and plastic bottles... some children ... had been causing problems and setting fire to the swings...one of the boys held a plastic gun to the head of a girl. I could see it would feel threatening to both adults and children. There was a tension even as we walked past the park

(Data, 'Inside and outside spaces')

Another observation:

I see several chastisements of young children coming out of school for the mildest of misdemeanours ... yet at the same time children seem to have huge freedoms and are able to wander

away from parents crossing from one side of the road to another without any comment.

(Data, 'Inside and outside spaces')

Keeva lives in a house where many appliances are connected to a meter, presumably as a way of allowing her guardians to manage a tight budget (Transcript 150114). It also meant these items were rented. It is not a particularly insightful finding but it does tell us how Keeva might make sense of the world. Sometimes the use of an appliance will presumably be restricted and so there is not the certainty that they will be available at point of need. Given this applied to the cooker, the television and the washing machine, these restrictions might be quite difficult to live with and constrain the choices Keeva has in her lived experience.

The narrative accounts contain several observations of social phenomena such as those elucidated here and I suggest such daily experiences cannot help but infiltrate Keeva's sense of the world and how she applies this in her voice. It will write itself onto her however she makes meaning of it.

To summarise, Keeva is left to navigate the world with confusing and conflicting messages. She lives in a social space where most of school-friends live locally yet she has few opportunities to interact with them, she has a back garden that she is discouraged from using, and she is unable to use a park that is literally on her doorstep unless accompanied by an adult. All of these restrictions are imposed due to her status as a 'looked after' child who needs to be safeguarded.

Her

agency within her home is ambiguous; there are clearly resources for her to use as a child yet they are either inaccessible or not assertively encouraged. This concerns toys, pc-tablets, television, and seemingly the use of any space other than the living-room. It is hard to imagine these aspects would not influence how she thought about herself and how she was represented in the social world. She has no way of having her views on such matters represented to those agencies accountable to her and might well be reluctant to express them to her guardian.

Again, how she might become cognisant of this and able to articulate it is hard to

imagine and could not bring any of this to bear on the decision-making about her care.

Kee va 's voic e – how she represents herself

One of the most significant findings of this study is the complexity of the task when trying to capture voice and then represent what is heard, seen or felt. There are so many social, psychological, cognitive aspects to how thoughts, ideas and opinions are formed that then change in different contexts and so it must be accepted as being so complex that any representation made must be seen as interpretive and contingent.

During many observations and interactions, Keeva used behaviours to express what she needed or what she wanted to be understood but these were often only recognisable by me during reflexive periods and after observing patterns of behaviour. One behaviour that was consistent throughout the study was Keeva's relentless requests for things which seem to bring little satisfaction even when she secures them. When playing a game of marbles and we were choosing our sets, the following conversation took place:

Jo: Ten, that's it. Oh I like my collection ...

Keeva: Can I have yours?

...

Jo: Oh, are you sure? I like mine.

Keeva: Please.

...

Jo: I'm going to go for this type, these are beautiful.

...

Keeva: Aw, can I have yours and you have mine?

(Transcript 260314)

In '*Tastes and dispositions*' I discussed the incident with the camera and how Keeva sequestered Freda's case , the case illustrating again that there was little joy in her acquisitions and she did not attach any real value to them. For example

the excitement around using the camera did not extend to the pictures she took - they meant little to her. The pictures themselves or the subject of the photos did not seem to have meaning to her.

Keeva showed no remorse or embarrassment about being found out and challenged. Yet the photos she took were not important to her and she gave these away easily

(Data, 'Tastes and dispositions')

The following conversation took place when we were discussing completing a scrap book I had prepared for the two sisters and I asked about availability of this and the photos Keeva had taken:

Keeva: Oh right. I think I've lost it. And Freda.

Jo: Well where might they be?

Keeva: Bin. They're even in the bin.

(Transcript 220143)

The things that she then possesses become unimportant even though she fought hard to secure them and this was true of the attention that she received from me, she wanted it but was unwilling or unable to sustain engagement when she is the subject of discussion. When she had my complete attention, she usually disengaged quickly from conversations and rarely elaborated on topics that were clearly interesting to her, as on the day we sat together watching several episodes of her favourite programme '*Horrid Henry*':

I think it is because she knows she is foregrounded when I am there... my whole purpose for being there is for her and for some reason this is better having than not. Yet she rarely uses me to talk to even when we are on the subject of something she enjoys such as the TV programme.

(Data 'Tastes and Dispositions')

I also observed the same incessant demands on a trip to the park, in '*Social interactions*'. I am suggesting here is that Keeva finds it difficult to feel contented and her demands are illustrating her uncertainty of what would be fulfilling. She is expressing this in her demands and this I believe represents her voice.

I also thought her limited opportunities to play with peers meant she was unrehearsed in social situations and would perhaps not mature in these relationships at a pace with other children. I believe this had an impact on how she represented herself when she interacted with others. This could be seen in her competitiveness with other children, her demands for attention at school to the annoyance of her peers and her dismissal of another child or children if it seemed she would lose out. This was evident too in the way the school spoke about Keeva in relation to her performance at school, her improper modes of communicating with staff and pupils:

Behaviourally she caused concern Margaret (Deputy Head) said as she "*needs to be in charge*", "*is Miss Bossy*" and her class teacher calls her "*me, me, me*"

(Data 'Representing Keeva')

She desperately tried to monopolise people, often employing unsuccessful social strategies that led to her being refused or being chastised or separated her from others and amplified her isolation as illustrated here:

Keeva began to exclude the girl from conversations and tried to separate me from her by going on another part of the park. But the girl would not take the hint ... finally, Keeva had had enough and said "*you can't talk to Jo 'cos she's with me*"

(Data, 'Meeting Keeva and beginning an ethnographic journey')

|

She was also uncertain it seemed in the family context and this showed in how she referred to her guardians, Kathy and Johnny. She usually called them by name in conversations yet when she referred to them in her journal that she prepared with me she wrote “my parent Angela” next to a photo. On a visit where we were compiling a book that summarised my time with the family the following conversation took place:

Keeva: This is Kathy, shall I cut these out?

Jo: So do you want me to put a picture of Kathy?

Keeva: No, this is my parents, Kathy.

(Transcript 190314)

When annotating a photo she had stuck in the book she wrote “*Hear [sic] is my family, my family*” which was a photo of Kathy, Johnny and Freda. On other occasions she used Mum to converse with Kathy.

During my visits with Keeva, we talked about things she liked to do, and she in turn asked me what I did and, slowly over a period of about eight months, I felt able to represent her voice in a way that was meaningful. I observed that there were differences in Keeva’s tastes and dispositions to the adults around her including how she dressed (in ‘*Tastes and Dispositions*’). She had no interest in the main activity in the living-room which is watch the TV preferring outdoor activities and engaging with other children (in ‘*Social Interactions*’). Also Keeva was clearly keen to make choices over the style of the fire and its surround which was in stark contrast to Kathy’s disinterest:

Kathy was to choose her style. She took a couple of seconds and pointed at one (almost at random) and said that would do ... “what does it matter to me?” she asked flippantly. “well you’ve got to live with it!” he replied. The fireplace that would be fitted

would be the centre of the room where the family spent most of their waking hours – why so little interest?

(Data, 'Tastes and dispositions')

However, what Keeva is presented with is not necessarily in accordance with her tastes, for example, the new outfit that had been purchased for the event organised through social services:

The dress was black and red tartan that was to be worn with black biker type boots. It was a rather severe outfit for a young girl and I wondered how the choices had been made ... Keeva likes pinks and purples and is petite. Kathy is more masculine and so it perhaps reflected her own style

(Data, 'Tastes and dispositions')

She likes boy-bands, princesses, playing with glitter, using feminine-type 'Apps' on the PC-tablet and none of these are evident in the physical spaces she lives in. They are hidden in a way and she uses any opportunity to seek them out. I note this as a finding as what I think my study reveals is the complexity of how voice can be understood and represented and how others might misrepresent Keeva. The social worker discussed with me Keeva's enthusiasm for creative play and she did feed this back at a review meeting. We knew this about her, therefore, and through these interactions it could have been interpreted that this was how Keeva enjoyed interacting with people and showing or saying something about herself. The Care Planning Review meetings would have benefitted from using this knowledge to get to know and understand Keeva as a 'child' as opposed to being a 'looked after' child' and affording such self-representations some value.

Also noted in the narrative accounts is the unwillingness of Keeva to actually choose to express her voice. We presume as we have gifted children with this right to voice their thoughts that they are willing to do so and have the same understanding as the adults around them about what they are being asked. Keeva

often avoided conversations or redirected them. For example, when discussing an after-school drama club that Keeva attended and was enjoying the following conversation took place:

Kathy: Yeah. Yeah, we're trying to get Keeva to go to stage school, aren't we babe? We're going to get you on the stage, aren't we?
Jo: How's Glee Club going, is that...?
Keeva: It's on Thursday. Thursday.
Jo: Do you like it?
Keeva: How do you spell Samsung?

(Transcript 220143)

What I observed more often was Keeva's reluctance to talk about herself and the silences, I felt, spoke volumes. In the study, for example, I gave numerous examples where Keeva wanted to explore spaces beyond those she was allowed in – mainly the living room – yet she rarely voiced this to Kathy nor did she push at the boundaries set or get upset. But this cannot be taken to mean she is accepting or in agreement with the boundaries, it only means she is not voicing a complaint. But how to make sense of this would require a more sophisticated communication method than a pre-prepared questionnaire which is used for Keeva to summarise and opine on her placement.

Concluding remarks

There was clear evidence in the study that Keeva was afforded an opportunity to feedback on her experience and this was used to represent her in care planning reviews. From the findings, however, it is clear how minimally Keeva was engaged in the processes and practices of capturing voice and how unproblematic this was for those engaged in her care. The outcome was that she was not adequately represented and there was little input from Keeva into the decision-making about her care placement.

In summary, the findings showed the process for care planning reviews was very efficient and indeed included a space for Keeva to be represented by an advocate who fed-back the responses provided in a hard-copy document allowing Keeva to comment on her placement. A key issue that emerged was Keeva's lack of agency and how this was not discussed by those charged with the role of 'corporate parent'. I also highlighted how Keeva was identified as a 'looked after' child constantly in many different contexts by those around her in conversations, in decision-making, and in imposed constraints.

The information gathered including the child's voice, was accepted unquestionably as facts or truths rather than recognising the uncertainty and ambiguity that existed. Nor was there recognition or problematising of the perspectives of those presenting information and how that might lead to certain positions being taken to represent Keeva. The assumption that there was a shared desire to capture Keeva's voice and best represent her wishes in decision-making seemed unlikely to be privileged by the professionals in the room. Instead, it appeared to be used to show that she had been afforded the right to contribute and also that those who represented her through their professional knowledge had made unquestionable judgements and reached reasonable conclusions that had no need for critique.

The aim seemed to be to reach an agreement that the arrangements for her care were satisfactory and to question or challenge any aspect of this arrangement would raise, perhaps, irresolvable issues such as Keeva's compromised freedom of movement. Being 'at risk' of being seen or contacted by her parents and living so close to her wider family, including her sister, and yet not being able to see them, placed unreasonable restrictions on a seven-year old child. In this sense, her rights have been obscured by the need to 'safeguard' her.

The study demonstrated the complexity of capturing voice in relation to the approved interventions and accepted professional practices for doing so, engaging the child in the process, understanding how a child might express their thoughts in ways other than verbalising or writing them down and then understanding what has been voiced. To represent her voice it is argued in these findings that we need to-

account for how her voice is constructed through her environment, and her

navigation and agency in that environment. How she is represented by others will be heard by her and give her a sense of self that may well be reproduced in her own representations. Making meaning from such expressions requires time, patience and periods of reflective analysis with those who know the child well and those who have the professional expertise to critically examine 'voice'.

Chapter 5
DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 5 Discussion and Analysis

Overview

To review, the thesis employed an ethnographic methodology to address the following questions:

1. What are the professional processes and practices for capturing 'child voice' at Care Planning Reviews?
2. How effective is the policy in practice of capturing voice in relation to stated aims of engaging 'looked after' children in decision-making and representing their views and opinions?
3. Were the processes and practices for capturing voice representative of the child?

In order to consider the research questions set and the findings from Chapter 4, I locate them within three theoretical meta-discourses:

- Foucault's notions of power, normalisation and surveillance
- Bourdieu's notions of habitus and dispositions
- Lacan's notions of identity and representation

The data indicates that Keeva was not represented or engaged in decision-making and the theorists I use here are valuable in helping to understand why this might be so. Each of them discuss how the social world writes itself onto individuals and determines how they enter and relate to the symbolic order and the consequential power-relations this order gives rise to. Whilst there are differences in the way each of these theorists approach the subject of power, I wanted to select those elements of their theoretical positions that enabled me to understand some of the issues I highlighted in the previous chapter. They each present highly regarded arguments on how the individual does not create the social world in which they exist but the social reality is written onto them and defines their place in it. But they do so using different perspectives.

Foucault tells us that power-sharing i.e. democratic rights cannot be viewed from the narrative of policy but in the effects it produces. The mechanisms are operated by the social entourage around the individual (basic family unit, doctors, teachers). He provides insights on how political meta-discourses create a net-like environment enabling the instruments and technologies of power. Here I examine voice as way of providing surveillance and monitoring for those responsible for Keeva's care and explain the findings from the study using this perspective.

Bourdieu highlights that habitus and dispositions will determine how we perceive of our 'social capital' and our place and relationship to the social order. Unlike Foucault Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure. The main way this happens is through what he calls 'habitus' or socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Foucault instead sees power as 'ubiquitous' and beyond agency or structure, A looked after child in many senses has a very fragile and insecure place in this order, dependent as she is on those around her to provide care and protection – parenting – whilst living with the knowledge gained through traumatic experience that this could be an ill-advised dependency. The benefits promised in 'child voice' may not be realised because of her place in this social world. She may not feel she has the cultural capital, shared habitus, dispositions or agency that would allow her to recognise or secure power in this sense and engage in decisions such as her care arrangements. Another reason why she might not be able to fully participate in these decisions is an inability to form a secure and positive self-identity. Little has been consistent for her in the social world. Even her habitus, her place in the social space is the same but different. She is 'othered'. How then can she articulate her authentic sense given this frame. Bourdieu too recognises the importance of language but discusses notions of habitus (customs, culture, aesthetics, economic status) that leads to social reproduction. Here the symbolic order acts to write onto a child that her identity is contingent and tied up in the social relations she finds herself in.

Lacanian influenced philosophy suggest the linguistic structure (the rules, signifiers,

chains of signifiers, symbols) allow and require the individual to enter into the symbolic order and abandon that part of them that is in the 'Real' state. These linguistic structures precede them and they create the laws, the social order, the customs, (in the name of the Father) that will shape how they experience the social world and understand or at least recognise themselves in their relationship to this social world. Finally her imaginary sense and place in the social order is fragile and punctuated by the 'real' exposing her to reflect on that which is most traumatic and perhaps hateful about herself – not wanted, neglected, isolated, subject to the proclivities of social care, existing in deprived economic circumstances. Her experience of the social world has been chaotic.

Whilst I was selective in the instruments I chose to explore from each of the key thinkers highlighted here, I feel that taking all of these theoretic positions into account it perhaps becomes clearer why capturing child voice with a looked after child is problematic.

Foucault's notions of power, normalisation and surveillance

Policies and practices intended to capture 'child voice' have the expressed intention of allowing a child democratic rights and hence affording them more power in decision-making about them (Lewis, 2010; Lundy and McEvoy, 2009). Foucault avoided defining power as a capacity but instead he used the French verb 'pouvoir' to identify the notion of power as something that is contextual that can only be seen in its use. He was interested in power as:

A mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions, "an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future...it incites, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely.

(Foucault, 1983, p220)

In this sense, the enactment of power does not exist in the abstract. This contrasts

with the generalised use of 'child voice' as a mode of increasing children's democratic rights to invest them with the capacity to exert power in decision-making about them as power "is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth" (Foucault, 1976 in C. Gordon (Ed.), 1980, p98). Relevant to this is the system or chain of relationships in which 'child voice' exists as we cannot separate out the policy and practice from the socio-economic and political context within which the child exists. The 'looked after' child is subject to the care of the state and so exists within this context of being 'looked after' meaning there's an absence of his/her parents, a fragile social network and thus the child is subject to the proclivities of social care.

The narrative of policy in this area is that children's opinions are sought in order to situate the child at the centre of practice. The problem it intentionally or unintentionally tries to address is the isolation and vulnerability of children who are 'in care' or 'at risk'. Therefore the foregrounding of 'child's voice' processes can be seen as a form of governmentality, often described as the conduct of conduct, to ensure the state and its practices in relation to children 'in care' are subject to scrutinityscrutiny. This scrutiny or self-governance may replace responses to the main danger of those children being isolated, vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion and it may be because these are issues where there is no solution (Foucault, 1991). Not only is there no solution, the vulnerability of children exposes the powerlessness and the impotency of both the state and the children who are 'at risk'. I contend that in the place of protection are objectifying processes that expose the 'looked after' child to a high level of surveillance of body (how well is she?), mind (what is she thinking?) and soul (how does she feel?) which render children's voices less audible than presumed.

The practice of capturing voice is presented as inherently valuable and the assumption is that, through this process, the 'looked after' child will be more adequately represented. By reviewing the processes of capturing voice, I am examining the discourse or "the domain of subconscious knowledge" which make it difficult to think beyond or outside of the "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1974, in Ball,

2013, p25). These “regimes of truth” include, for example, defining the child by her parents’ absence, by articulating ‘child voice’ as a democratic right and by instilling the imperative of those who are engaged with children and the children themselves to capture voice. It is suggested that these discursive practices are linked to “the exercise of power” and are integrated into the prevailing “episteme”, defined as “a unitary practico-cognitive structure, a regime of truth or general politics of truth, which provides the unconscious codes and rules or holistic conceptual frameworks” (Ball, 2013, p21). What this implies is that capturing ‘child voice’ is based on a temporal notion of democracy and a particular construct of childhood of which more will be discussed later. Relating this to the policy objective of capturing ‘child voice’, it is necessary to examine the discourse of power and the effects of power “where it installs itself and produces real effects” (Foucault, 1980, p97).

The Foucauldian notion of power suggests that individuals and groups are subjugated and compelled to behave in certain ways through ‘bio-power’. Disciplinary and bio-power act to produce a ‘discursive practice’ or a body of knowledge and behaviour that defines what is and what is not normal, acceptable and deviant. Accepting that power is a discursive practice implies, therefore, that power relations are in constant flux (Foucault, 1991). Surveillance and normalisation are the mechanisms through which disciplinary power achieves its hold, suggests Foucault, through hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and the examination. One perspective on capturing voice and enacting it in practice, is to view this as a mode of surveillance and normalisation.

Surveillance in this context views the human subject as a body of knowledge that can then be used as a way of managing and governing individuals and groups. Often associated with the idea of the ‘gaze’ in which “each individual ... will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be minimal cost” (Foucault, in C. Gordon (Ed.), 1980, p155). This concept of ‘gaze’ is central to power systems and notions of knowledge and the power/knowledge relationship within a system. These concepts create and explain self-regulation under systems of surveillance.

For Foucault, 'normalization' concerned the construction of an idealised norm of conduct, for example, the way schoolchildren should dress, line up, put up hands to answer a question and subsequently rewarding or punishing individuals for conforming to or deviating from this ideal (Foucault, 1990). Normalization he suggested was a tactic for exerting the maximum social control with the minimum expenditure of force, which Foucault refers to as disciplinary power (Foucault, 1991).

Disciplinary power acts on people in that it "breaks them down into components such that they can be seen, on the one hand, and modified on the other" (Foucault, 2009, p56). In '*The Birth of the Clinic*' (1963) Foucault argued that for the first time the human subject became both the object and subject of knowledge and I believe we can see the way a 'looked after' child is scrutinised, the way their care is planned and evaluated can be seen in the mode of a positivist epistemology where there is a search for a 'truth'. In this sense, the 'looked after' child is objectified through the introspective practices including those employed under the banner of 'child voice'. This was seen in the data where the codification of professional practice was observed. Foucault was interested in those conditions in which a subject (e.g. the 'looked after' child) is constituted as an object of knowledge. I suggest that capturing 'child voice' with 'looked after' children can be viewed as a means to achieve the unspecified intentions of surveillance and normalisation of the 'looked after' child.

The state of being without parents and all that is related to this, leads then, to a replacement by a corporate parent who are required to "offer everything a good parent would provide and more" (DfES, 2007, in Ball, 2014, p50). Note the normalising language in this aim. The provision of care services to 'looked after' children is subject to scrutiny and this leads to the local authority and other relevant bodies to record and document the minutiae of the life of the children in their care (HM Government, 2014). This exposure relates to their home life, their schooling, their history and even their physical being. This 'hierarchical observation' acts as more than a monitoring device but acts to construct the life she leads and that 'life' is objectively judged through a multitude of agencies who attempt to provide a support network that monitors the physical and emotional

wellbeing of the child using complex data collection processes including capturing 'child voice'.

In the data presented in the previous chapter, I highlighted that this leads to a construction of that life and the child's experience is scrutinised and judged by others who represent them. I contend that, in this space, it is paradoxical that the child is less visible or heard as a result. I argue this because the bureaucracy that surrounds them does not include them; the data collection and information sharing is predetermined and often expressed in a way that is irrelevant to them; and the lived experiences of the child are barely noted. The findings from this study illustrated that knowledge was held by the authorities who were responsible for Keeva. This knowledge base was constructed, compiled and used in a way that represented what was seen as a well-parented child and so acted as a normalising mechanism. This worked for those charged with her care to define a process that was manageable and allowed them to demonstrate the efficient discharge of their responsibilities.

The location of the 'looked after' child as an object and as a body of knowledge can be seen from a Foucauldian analysis as situated politically outside of normalised structures. The 'looked after' child falls outside of the 'norm' in that they are without a desired family structure and the practices of the corporate parent is to try and replicate this model and replace the undesirable model of the displaced child. Chase, Simon, and Jackson, (2006) highlighted a tension which runs throughout the history of policy around 'looked after' children between "the aim of protecting children and young people from ill treatment and undesirable influences and the ideal of family preservation and reunification" (Chase et al, 2006, p 16). They argue that policy has followed a pattern of shifting the balance between these two competing aims.

Holland (2013) conducted research with care-leavers and found that these 'looked after' children had competing models of what family is and often held strongly held perceptions of an idealised family that other children experienced. She suggests that, in a post-modern society, two models of family exist in our minds simultaneously: the families we 'live with', which is our lived experience and the

families we 'live by' which is our imagined, idealised version of the family that forms the 'norm' (Holland, 2013, p59). She found that those care-leavers involved in the research "often powerfully envisioned families they lived by, sometimes in the form of their birth families and the imagined alternative lives they might have lived with them, a longed for, stable substitute home or an imagined future family of their own" (Holland, 2013, p59).

Thus, at the Care Planning Review meetings, discussion was framed by professionals within their parameters of what compliance with norm looked like and expressed concern where it did not occur, issuing warnings of 'punishments' that may occur as a consequence of non-conformity. Consider, for example, the response of the school representative regarding Keeva's attention-seeking behaviour. The school representative was critical of Keeva, used language that would be upsetting for Keeva to hear, and in a sense it humiliated her. Foucault described how non-conformist behaviours were perceived in various contexts and how disciplinary power seeks to correct, to 'normalize' such manifestations.

The school [was] subject to a whole micro-penalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency).

(Foucault, 1977, p78)

We can perhaps understand the need for viewing the 'looked after' child in an objectified way and seeking to normalize, through Kristeva's notion of the abject (1982). In the 'looked after' child, there are representations of ourselves as children, as parents, as members of a community, but it is ourselves being vulnerable, abandoned, unworthy, unwanted, rejected and experiencing inconsolable misery. This is a perspective of ourselves we would see as abject. Kristeva (1982) who in defining the abject says "the abject has only one quality of

the object – that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva, 1982, p1) suggesting that the abjected is never really absent as it is always, irrevocably connected to that or those who abject. To subject ourselves to hearing and seeing the child who is abandoned or neglected would mean we could not content ourselves with the current bureaucratic mechanisms that exist for caring and protecting the ‘looked after’ child. Instead, we would have to intervene directly, never leaving untouched an aspect of the child’s life that was hurtful, damaging and frightening. We could not ignore it because we would feel the pain ourselves and we would want to feel better about it if not selflessly, then selfishly. If there was a desire to hear this narrative then the mechanism would not be through an impersonal, irregular communication methods such as those employed. It might be more effective to use long-term, resource-intensive strategies such as therapeutic services, family mediation, enhanced, high quality educational services but these things require financial investment that at present is not committed. In the absence of resources to resolve for the child those things which are most pressing, the focus is instead on performativity, that measures what is done, which is probably less than or different to what is needed.

The notion of the abject and abjection is important in developing a recognition that when we refer to a state or at an individual level, self and self-identity that we are in effect drawing a boundary between what it is and what it is not. The argument put forward by Kristeva is that these are not distant relatives as such but represents a chasm in our understanding and our sense of being which represents everything that goes into creating that sense , “the abject has to do with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p4). In other words so close am I to what I am not, that I can barely remove myself from the abjected regardless of my revulsion towards it. What we can do though, through the objectifying processes highlighted in the Care Planning Review meetings and in capturing voice is reify Keeva as conforming to normalised notions of a sufficiently well parented child. At the very least we are objectifying her, or the abject, in order to feel less burdened with the responsibility of considering her fully.

This is evidenced through a range of objective medical and educational

instruments and through the mediating practices of participation. These meetings are a useful and effective way of bringing together those professionals who could help present an assessment of Keeva with regards to her educational progress, her health and well-being, and her relationships with her guardians. It is here where we can see the power-knowledge relationship at work and I would suggest the objective is not to hear more from the child to understand her better or as a corporate 'parent' to hold her, nurture her and protect her but is instead a method of data collection and checking mechanisms to uphold the 'symbolic order' (Zizec, 2006c, p141). Kristeva used the idea of abjection to help illuminate how we assimilate in the symbolic order and, in this way, we can be effectively subjected to Foucault's notion of disciplinary power. By understanding what we are not – which is subjective and ever-changing – we can understand how and where we belong. It may help explain why Keeva engages, even in a limited way, to the processes that are required for her assessment to be completed for the Transition Review meetings. Indeed, my introduction to Keeva illustrated the very powerful symbolic order at work when Keeva danced in a school staff-room full of adults, some of whom she had never met, yet she was compliant (Chapter 4, Data, 'Representing Keeva').

The participatory processes used in care planning give the research subject, Keeva a voice, but it is arguable that this allows her to influence proceedings or be represented. To understand the findings from this study, the emphasis should not be on the locus of power or what that power is but instead how power functions in the specific circumstances under investigation. Gallagher (2008) suggested that, to understand children's participation using a Foucauldian perspective, we must look at the ways in which "power is exercised through networks of relations" (Gallagher, 2008, p399) suggesting that to understand how 'child voice' imbues the child with a degree of agency it is more productive to examine how power is exercised, in the specific contexts they operate. That means it cannot be assumed participative practices such as including the child's perspective on their care, will ensure power is transferred to children but will reveal the localised relational exercise of power.

This does not suggest these practices are conducted by people who are consciously trying to exert or use power relations in their favour but instead creates

a discourse that makes it difficult to perceive of the practices followed as a form of subjugation. I would suggest that the findings in this study indicate they do subjugate Keeva. The discourse of surveillance masked as democracy creates the opportunity to expose Keeva to introspection, to give her a space to comment on her guardians, to ensure the interdependence of Keeva and her guardians with the social worker. The role of Keeva in this is to subject herself to the process not help shape it. She finds out little from the knowledge exchange, so it cannot be seen as a two-way exchange. Even the booklet that was completed on her behalf was not returned to her but stored in her ever-expanding file (Chapter 4: Data, 'Representing Keeva'). At this point, there is no immediacy, imperative or purpose to find out more through dialogue to deepen the relationship between her and her 'parent' to aid capturing her 'voice' – the process has been completed. It is unlikely that the process has achieved the aim of engaging in the decision-making about her or that she has articulated her thoughts, feelings or desires to inform decision making. It has been suggested that those "investigating children's participation could gain important insights by looking at the effects of participatory initiatives, rather than at the professed intentions of the people involved in designing and implementing those initiatives (Gallagher, 2008, p5).

Keeva, through the mediation of her guardians and her key social worker, did express her voice in ways premeditated by her supervising local authority and given her expectations might be low of the impact this would have, this is perhaps surprising. I would suggest again that this illustrates power in the form of a process of subjectification. She had accepted consciously her status as a 'looked after' child and this legitimated the process of being asked about that status and her experience of it.

Her conformity with the process can also be viewed as a consequence of effective governance from a Foucauldian perspective where, "government in general is understood as a way of acting to affect the way in which individuals *conduct themselves*" (Burchell, 1996, p20, emphasis in original). Butler argued that this subjectification relies on the subject – in this case, Keeva – being dependent on these formulations of self to exist "we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire,

then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are” (Butler, 1997, p2). This process involves “a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (Foucault 1980, in Gallagher, 2008, p12). However, her lived experience is outside of this defined status and whilst it will write itself onto her through processes, practices, memories and experiences, she is something beyond this. In a sense I think she subjugated that part of herself to the role in which she was defined and that became a way in which she engaged but did not become overwhelmed by the practices it entailed.

This level of monitoring is to be expected and there is good reason for ensuring that children who have become subject to a care order are closely monitored to ensure they are safe, nurtured and developing as normal. But from the child’s perspective I had the distinct impression that Keeva did not view these processes positively and in a sense disregarded them all together. Keeva’s only discernible interest in the exercise of capturing voice in preparation for the Transition Review Meetings was to interact with her social worker who routinely used creative play during her visits and Keeva really enjoyed the arts and crafts. The discussions rarely went beyond the minimum information required to complete the form’s pre-set questions and the guardian admitted she usually filled it in on her behalf. Yet this carried weight in the care monitoring meetings that went beyond what was reasonable given the level of interaction. Neither the social worker nor the guardian identified Keeva’s limited input, and nor was Keeva’s input to the process interrogated by the IRO.

It is suggested in the rhetoric that by allowing children space to express their views enables decision-makers to more adequately and appropriately ensure these are taken into account (Lewis, 2010). The interplay between the discursive and non-discursive practices is interesting as it reveals the neoliberal ideology presence in the idea of the unitary subject promoted through the practices or technologies of capturing voice. Here we see the child being viewed as a democratic citizen as part of the ‘personalisation’ agenda which has its foundations in neoliberalist

notions of consumerism. Following this line of argument, Keeva is allowed a voice not as part of a moral imperative to empower her but rather she is being used to give opinions on services used.

More recently, the inclusion of children's 'voices' in the decisions that affect them has been subject to some critique and some suggest this representation is minimal and has limited potency (Wall, 2012). He suggests much of the participation of children in discussion is tokenistic and does not lead to fundamental changes in services or processes significant to them (Wall, 2012). The UNCHR asks local and national governments to take account of children's views is a far less powerful as a form of political representation as the political structures, systems and practices are devised by adults. In the case of 'looked after' children, the representation of their views is through a complex, state driven process which has the aim of more efficiently capturing the views of children but whether it represents them as children and in particular their needs as children who are 'in care' is doubtful from the data provided in the previous chapter. It was difficult to see the mechanisms of capturing 'child voice' or the representations of Keeva affording her more agency in the power-knowledge relationship. Instead her agency was situated and irrevocably tied up within the guardianship of her placement and it was within this contested place that the discursive elements were most prevalent.

Applied post-Foucauldian perspectives on participatory methods with children

For the last two decades 'child voice' has been used to describe how children think, feel or opine about themselves, others or a specified situation (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013). However, this simplistic description does not take account of the politics, power relationships or agentive structures relating to voice which would more readily account for the "ambiguous, complex and constructed nature of children's voices" (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013, p2). Hohti and Karlsson's work builds on a position taken earlier by Spyrou (2011) who cited the proliferation of research that foregrounded children's participation in the research but as a discipline had faced very little scrutiny. ~~Others have argued that the political~~

~~rhetoric supporting 'child voice' may be naïve and lead to self-serving practices as policy makers are concerned with an agenda that is "not about empowerment but rather as about how to corral those voices" (Lewis, 2010, p16). Capturing voice then can be seen as less about conferring rights for Keeva and more about deferring accountability.~~

Holland (2010) has written prolifically on the experience of 'looked after' children and how they participate in decision making and in research and suggests "an analysis of participation can potentially examine micro-exchanges between adults and children, between children and between adults, all of which foreground issues of power relations." (Holland et al 2010, p361). The family particularly used the power-knowledge relation to ensure their agenda was met. Keeva's voice was mediated through them and further filtered through the social worker so that when her 'voice' was heard it was sometimes quietened and sometimes ignored. The language that she would use naturally, the items she would prioritise were rarely given space in the adults' determination of her care plan and on one occasion was met with amusement, and dismissed. This was seen in the data ('Chapter 3: Data 'Representing Keeva'). The comment about money could easily be misrepresented as childish, naïve or greedy but I would argue it was a wholly rational response and a rare authentic response. What she meant by it is uncertain but it reveals that paradoxically Keeva as a unitary subject is expected to participate fully in this neoliberal environment, yet her request was not considered rational or worthy of consideration.

One of the key tenets of 'child voice' is that it allows us to hear the authentic voice of the child and this will, it seems to be presumed, will ensure those charged with the responsibility for 'looked after' children will get a more accurate, authentic account of the child's experience, which in a sense is closer to the truth (Lewis, 2010; Spyrou, 2011). In a way the capturing of voice is a way of uncovering the truth by allowing Keeva an opportunity to report on the reality of her experience, thoughts, feelings and hopes. It is her perspective that is being privileged but this is not without constraints in terms of how she participates, what she can discuss and what the impact of her involvement will be.

~~Jenks observed the perception that 'child voice' is authentic is based on a concept that "infants are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world ... They have a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that we might "idolize" or even "worship" as the source of all that is best in human nature" (Jenks, 1996, p73). Hohti and Karlsson suggest there is a need for a critical appraisal of research methodology that seeks to present authentic accounts of children and conclude that there is need for reflexive listening to capture 'child voice' as "voices were discursively, socially and physically constructed" (Hohti and Karlsson, 2013, p8). Additionally, Music (2010) suggests that a child with a disrupted childhood has a potentially limited capacity to reflect and in that sense may not articulate her thoughts as readily as those from more stable backgrounds.~~

This suggests that capturing and making meaning from 'child voice' is complex and the processes that exist do not reflect this. Also the model of 'child voice' practices discussed in the study is based on some assumptions that she has full awareness of the questions being asked or the points she is considering and that she can respond without any perceived risk. These risks are that she may offend another person, it may lead to a [deteriorating] change in her circumstances, or have unintended consequences for another. Also the recipient of truth it is assumed will hear, understand and accept what they are told. Foucault (1984) introduced an interesting notion of 'truth-telling' and the practice of 'parrhêsia' which is the act of telling the truth in spite of the risks.

You can see then that the parrhêsias is the opposite of the prophet in that the prophet does not speak for himself, but in the name of someone else, and he articulates a voice which is not his own. In contrast, the parrhêsias, by definition, speaks in his own name. It is essential that he expresses his own opinion, thought, and conviction.

(Foucault, 1984)

I suggest here the representations of Keeva are more akin to Foucault's prophet

who filter what they understand to be the truth of another. This will not reveal authentically the real story and nor does it adhere to the rules of the 'parrhêsiasic game' where the role of the parrhêsiasic is telling him the truth, and the 'intercolutor'(the person to whom the truth is told) "must accept the truth, however much it may hurt generally accepted opinion in the Assembly,... or interests, or the individual's ignorance or blindness" (Foucault,1984). It is not obvious from this investigation that the assumptions set out above are sound. Instead we see Keeva demonstrating little awareness of the purpose of the 'voice' capturing practices, and nor does she exhibit the confidence or trust in them to reveal fully the 'truth'. What is also absent is the direct transfer of the 'parrhêsiasic's' story but instead the filtering and reification of this anodyne version of Keeva's voice through advocates or 'prophets' which is then codified and stored for monitoring purposes only.

The notion of polyvocality suggests that there exists "multiple, legitimate versions of reality or truths as seen from different perspectives" (Trigger, 2006, p446). It can be seen as the self-reflexive regard for the ways in which social knowledge is produced, as well as a general skepticism regarding the objectivity and authority of scientific knowledge. 'Child voice' is promoted as a way of allowing the child's perspective to be considered in informing and shaping social knowledge so that decisions about young people are on a more informed basis. Spyrou (2011) provides a critique of the preoccupation with children's voices in child-centred research by exploring their limits and problematizing their use particularly in research. The argument here is that critical, reflexive researchers need to reflect on the processes which produce children's voices in research, the power imbalances that shape them and the ideological contexts which inform their production and reception, or, in other words, issues of representation. At the same time, critical, reflective researchers need to move beyond claims of authenticity and account for the complexity behind children's voices by exploring their messy, multi-layered and non-normative character. I believe the same concerns should be expressed about the use of 'child voice' in the context considered in this study.

In much of the data, I illustrate how there are different representations of Keeva. It was also evident that within the same meeting that concerned the same child, Keeva, there were several different discourses operating and the discourse of

'child voice' masked the prominent priorities of the representatives in the room. Foucault viewed micro-physics as a domain of multivocality, a conflict with "innumerable points of confrontation" (Foucault, 1977, p27). The school representative, for example, used an educational discourse to frame Keeva in a way that ensured it was documented, that progress against educational targets were being successfully pursued. I spoke with the team of social workers who supported the 'looked after' children in the local authority area that was the subject of the study and there was much dissent about the use of such constrained mechanisms to capture voice and used as representative of the children in their care. They felt the relationships built with children with the key support worker and/or mentors were far more valuable in allowing the complexity of the child's needs to be represented. The social workers I spoke with were particularly upset about child representation in legal cases, as the social worker who had built a relationship with the child was often bypassed by courts who made judgements on care orders. This aspect of representation is worth further research and was beyond the scope of this study but there was a strong feeling of resentment expressed by the social workers I met regarding the way children were 'represented' by such voice capturing exercises.

Self-representation and voice

In this section, I explore and, in a sense, think alongside Keeva to try to understand her voice from her perspective. I do this by discussing themes that were noted during the observations presented in the previous chapter 'Chapter 4: Findings' and explore possible interpretations of these. The themes I focus on are habitus and dispositions, identity as a 'looked after' child, and understanding voice and silences. These are framed to explain firstly the space Keeva occupies and the place she is coming from or to put more simply her perspective. The discussion highlights how her status as a 'looked after' child defines her for others and perhaps for herself. Finally, I discuss where and how she chooses to express herself and how this might be understood. The purpose of formulating a discussion this way hopefully creates a view from her and captures her voice. To develop an analysis, I use the ideas of Bleiberg (2004) who uses psychoanalytic

thinking to focus on how 'deviant' behaviours can reveal vulnerability in children with traumatic childhoods; Music (2010) who uses a Freudian perspective to explore development of identity, and then employ a Lacanian perspective drawing on the work of Zizek (2006) and Kristeva (1982) who are prominent linguistic philosophers who help to illuminate the complexity of articulating and capturing voice. I begin, though, with the Bourdieusian notion of habitus to briefly examine the social world she inhabits and how this might write onto her, and lead to the way she represents herself.

Bourdieu's notions of Habitus and Dispositions

Capturing voice, it is suggested, allows the child agency in decision-making and confers some powers to the 'looked after' child. In this section I argue that the social hierarchy that Keeva resides in and the reasons she is there make it unlikely she will either perceive she has agency or hold any particular power. If, as has been argued in this analysis, Keeva's voice is underwritten by the discourse from which it emerges then it is worth considering customs, habits and dispositions that will help shape this representation of Keeva through voice. Relevant here are her 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' which gives the "sense of the position one occupies in the social space" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p235). As adults Keeva's guardians can find common purpose with the other adults who planned Keeva's care plan and determine 'child voice' praxis but Keeva is not part of this adult or social world. These are in a sense practices that are taken for granted, everyday experiences of life or as Bourdieu referred to them as "*doxa*" and those engaged in them rarely have to think about the meanings or contextualised nature of such practices (Bourdieu, 1990, p20).

This is something that is contradictory about the 'rights' agenda as it assumes homogenised cultures and presents the child with adult formations of engagement practices and democratic structures. Bourdieu discussed how such competing discourses can make invisible the social relations that bring it about:

Interactions, which bring immediate gratification to those with

empiricist dispositions they can be observed, recorded, filmed, in sum, they are tangible, one can "reach out and touch them"- mask the structures that are realized in them. This is one of those cases where the visible, that which is immediately given, hides the invisible which determines it.

(Bourdieu, 1989, p16)

However, these discursive practices are learned and constructed in a particular space and time and the research highlighted contradictions and ambiguities relating to her habitus – those embodied dispositions that are developed through socialisation and learning – and the field she inhabits. I am using a Bourdieusian understanding of a field which is defined as “a network...of objective relations between objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p39). The social space in which Keeva lives is relevant here as it allows us to interrogate these dispositions and the field she occupies.

Keeva and her guardians live in a council house on an estate where there are high levels of social deprivation. The guardians are best described as ‘working class’ and whose background is typical of people who live within this community. The husband and wife are, or have been, employed in low-skill occupations throughout their adult lives after leaving school with few qualifications. They live in the area of their childhoods and other family members live within close radius although there are many frictions within the wider family. During the process of ethnographic research, I observed the social space that Keeva exists in and how she co-exists with the wider society and the data from the observations suggests the impact of this socio-economic context acts to secure social reproduction even in the processes and practices which explicitly exist to safeguard and improve a child’s life chances. The geographical area in which they live is economically and socially diverse.

Juxtaposed with the large council estate is an area of high affluence with higher

than average house values which includes a well-regarded private school within a few miles. The shops, schools, houses, amenities are strikingly different. The everyday practices (such as shopping, going to school, playing) are markedly different too and the research revealed these everyday experiences within Keeva's life act to construct meanings for her on how she engages in the wider social context and I suggest here that these socio-political and economic structures underpin the 'voice' of the research subject.

In the study I showed several examples where Keeva is presented with several competing social structures in her school, her social space and in her family where she is rarely positively positioned. Her guardians are not wealthy and showed clear evidence of tightly managed budgets yet there were neighbours who presented even more challenging social circumstances. Access to wealth was limited and yet she was presented with a competing model of affluence at very close proximity. At school she was progressing well educationally but this was presented using her 'looked after' status as a frame of reference. She was part of the school which is in the social space she lives but she was 'othered' through her status and the requirements of it. It was not surprising perhaps to see that the difficulties Keeva navigated in the complex social world she inhabited. It is also difficult to conceive that this environment would write onto Keeva a sense of power in the social hierarchy since "points of view depend on the point from which they are taken, since the vision that every agent has of the space depends on his or her position in that space" (Bourdieu, 1989, p18).

I felt for Keeva her physical spaces were filled with ambiguity. Keeva's immediate physical space in her home belongs to someone else, her stay there is puncturing the 'norm', she has few 'natural' rights to command the spaces. The spaces immediately outside too, are to be feared or at least to be concerned about, as they may lead to interactions with her parents or their friends and the consequences might be negative. The outside space for example, contained a park that could be viewed from her open door but she could not go and play there or at least not without supervision. The back garden was used by the adults and the dog but neither she nor her sister was able to freely enter this space. I noted the feelings I had during the observation where the front door was often left open

and I felt privacy was compromised. The 'outside' was 'inside' yet Keeva was unable to move from 'inside' to 'outside'.

During every visit Keeva was keen to use the outside spaces including going to the park, driving in my car, visiting other places and yet even then she was subject to immediate surveillance, a reminder of the unsafe nature of outside. She would have this experience whilst viewing freedoms enjoyed by other children who were allowed to play together, visit friends' houses and so on. How was it safe for them and yet unsafe for her? Her everyday practices were the same as these children in that she lived in a similar house, walked into school with them, shared the same educational input including attire and yet her circumstances necessitated different dispositions and offered a different perspective of indoor and outdoor spaces in her social world. Bourdieu argued that the social world was a construct that was created from a lived experience:

Legitimation of the social world is not, as some believe, the product of a deliberate and purposive action of propaganda or symbolic imposition; it results, rather, from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident.

(Bourdieu 1989, p21)

However Keeva's lived experience exemplified discontinuity of the practice, habitus and field and it is difficult to extrapolate what sense she would make of this and her own role within the symbolic world as she seemed to experience it in silence. She very clearly expressed her desire to be outside of the home she lived in, she often stood in the middle of the living room slightly agitated which for me suggested she did not want to accept that she was going to stay inside for long (Chapter 4 Findings, 'Inside and outside spaces'). She did not verbally revolt against Kathy when she was not allowed to go outside but she used her physical actions to reveal her refusal to accept. I suggest here that this is a form of self-representation for Keeva and this reveals a very difficult and complex inner

dialogue that feel unlikely to be articulated in a way that will be heard.

Lacanian notions of identity and representation

I found that Keeva was often identified as 'looked after' and whilst I did not interrogate her feelings about this, I thought it was notable that she did not become upset, anxious or confused during conversations that labelled her in this way. For her, normalisation was evident, as she had no visible reaction, asked no questions and none were raised by those around her. It was her everyday experience of who she was and how others identified her. The examples in the study highlighted a 'looked after' child event organised by social services, a need to gain permission to change her hairstyle, the visits by the social worker who three times a year asked her about her placement.

More subtly, her 'looked after' status was reaffirmed in her everyday experiences; where she could play and who she could play with, her agency within the home, her limited access to relatives which included being banned from playing in the back garden as she needed to be protected from her parents. Even a family holiday contained references to her being 'looked after' as it was a possibility that she would go on a break under the supervision of social services rather than going with her guardians. Whilst the data in the previous chapter identified that this was discussed because it was not going to happen, it was a conversation that took place in Keeva's presence and would make her aware there was always that possibility.

A Lacanian perspective suggests that the central property of a linguistic system is discontinuity (Leader and Groves, 1995) which is a description of the gaps or spaces between elements that creates a structure that is based on differences. Words and phrases have meaning because they say what they are not as much as they reveal signifiers to the referent points. This has significant implications for how individuals reveal their unconscious perceptions of self and their relationship to the world (Zizek, 2006b). This perspective replaced the epistemological belief of the world being 'out there' separate and independent of human existence with one that

was created and contingent on the meanings expressed through language.

This “confronts individuals with the most radical dimension of human existence” as “it does not show an individual the way to accommodate him/herself to the demands of social reality; it explains how something like “reality” constitutes itself in the first place” (Zizek, 2006a, p3). This is relevant as it helps to draw the relationship between the unconscious mind, the individual as (s)he chooses to express herself and the shared or collective understanding in the social environment in which (s)he exists.

The identification of Keeva as a ‘looked after’ child was replayed and underlined in the language used to describe her and her status for example she is ‘in care’, ‘looked after’, ‘at risk’ and these work as signifiers to convey to her who she is and how she will perceive her world. The language objectified her yet was instrumental to how she might identify herself. Her absence from her parents is explained as a consequence of ‘neglect’ and the parents are unable to ‘look after her properly’ (Chapter 4 Data ‘Keeva’s Home and Family’). These phrases are contextual and Keeva will feel the weight of the meanings and yet they are used without empathy for how children who are ‘looked after’ routinely and emphasised in identifying them. I found this a particularly difficult issue in the research process as I did not want Keeva to feel ‘othered’ in this way and so I never spoke about her status as a ‘looked after’ child; for me it was unnecessary.

In terms of how language and narrative can shape and inform self-representation, it is worth considering how children develop self-knowledge and identity. At around four-years of age, children develop a sense of themselves that is more organised and a coherent sense of themselves and in the world they live (Music, 2010). Music is a psychoanalyst at the Tavistock Institute who works through a Freudian framework adapted later by Bion (1962). For Bion (1962) in order for a baby to thrive emotionally, a mother must hold it in mind by actively participating in its projected emotions of pain, fear, hunger, discomfort. The idea of being held in mind, (originally Bion, 1962) is that as children, we develop a sense too of how other people view us and our internal narrative account is based on this experience – and our memory of it. From this we interpret the perceptions of ourselves that is

held by others and the accumulation of our memories “gives us a sense of who we are and what is possible and likely” (Music, 2010, p114).

This organised ‘autobiographical self’ is more organised in that the child can situate themselves in a network of family and social situations as well as understanding who they are in time. This episodic memory (Damasio, 1999, p72) characterises the child’s sense of identity as a ‘felt’ response or how the memory was experienced and so creates not only a ‘story’ of themselves but as a system of organising likes and dislikes, pain and pleasure, safety and threat. Significantly, the development of autobiographical memory depends on how they exist in the minds of others such as parents and this feeds the stories stored as memories. Children who have disrupted family backgrounds such as Keeva, may not perceive being held in someone else’s mind – ‘mind-minded’ - and will have a less secure awareness of their own story of who they are, “the importance of being in another’s mind is obvious to those who know the effect on some unfortunate children of having never really been in anyone’s minds, nor having a clear story told about themselves, such as many children in the care system” (Music, 2010, p117).

In Chapter 4, I noted that there was a recommendation for the use of a ‘*life-story*’ resource with Keeva so that she could explore her autobiographical history. It is seen as a valuable resource in helping children to make sense of their experience with the support and guidance of a key worker or carer (Shotton, 2011).

Autobiographical memories, which are expressed verbally, suggests Welch-Ross, are enhanced by articulate care givers who can help the child to develop a sense of themselves. It is a process of expressing their identity and also building complex narratives which are more secure in those children who experience secure attachment (Welch-Ross, in Music, 2010, p117). However, research with children who have disrupted early childhoods suggests that reflection and reflexivity is more difficult in children with gaps in autobiographical history. For this reason the use of language and co-creating constructs of Keeva’s childhood will impact on her self-identity and how she narrates her life-story:

If we have been thought about, and our lives spoken about a

lot by carers with sophisticated narrative capacities, then we will probably develop complex autobiographical memories...Such children feel 'held in mind' by othersOthers are less lucky such as children who have not adults around them who tell stories about their history, including many children in the care system

Music, 2010, p121

Whiting and Lee (2003) also highlighted that children's voices are often lost in the transition to foster care and their experiences 'in care' are not revealed by the mechanisms employed by foster agencies and many researchers in this area. They suggest story telling can be a therapeutic method of allowing a child to retell and examine their experiences in a way that is meaningful to them. However, the guardian had not made an attempt to use this as it would, she felt, raise some unpleasant memories for Keeva. I had some sympathy for this position but wondered where the discomfort was most felt. It also demonstrated the power in action and the agencies around Keeva seemed either ineffectual or unable to ensure this was completed. I felt this amplified again Keeva's voice being quietened as, through this process, she could have an opportunity to express her feelings about her experiences. Lundy (2007) wrote of the need to create an appropriate audience for children and highlighted that "even where there is no doubt about the child's view on an issue, there is no guarantee that their views will be communicated to or taken on board by those adults who are in a position to give them effect" (Lundy, 2007, p937).

Earlier in this chapter, I pointed to the research of Holland (2013) with 'looked after' children and their perceptions of family who argues that children "are active participants in the making and doing of family relationships and, as these findings reveal, even when children are removed from home at a very young age, birth families will often continue to be have a powerful co-presence in a child's emotional world" (Holland, 2013, p62). It is not a new idea to suggest we can transplant a child from one family to another as 'tabula rasa' or 'blank slates' (Prout 2005) and assume their family history will travel with them along with the strong

cultural ties to the background they left behind.

For Keeva to make sense of her experiences, it seems this needs to be acknowledged particularly as she is within the family network as she is cared for by her maternal Uncle and yet family members being absent such as her sister, are inadequately explained or examined from a child's perspective. Recent studies found that little attention has been paid to sibling relationships and that potential for positive family relationships is underplayed (Edwards, Hadfield & Mauthner, 2005). Instead the focus for local authorities in particular is on structural issues such as finding placements that accommodate multiple family members and often siblings lose contact (Holland, 2013). However, where children's perspectives have been explored, research studies highlight the feelings of "profound loss" at this lost contact with siblings (Holland, 2013, p62).

A recent report by 'Action for Children' stated that a significant proportion of children 'in care' were separated from their sibling(s) and in some areas this figure rose to 45% in the year leading up to April 2014 (Action for Children, 2014). For these children, the separation "can ignite feelings of loss and abandonment which can affect emotional and mental health. They increase the risk of unstable foster placements and poor performance at school, as well as further problems in adulthood, such as difficulty finding a job, drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness or criminal activity" (AFC, 2014). Keeva's voice was most authentic in her request to see her sister. It was authentic in that she genuinely wanted this request to be heard and she took a risk in expressing this as her guardians were in conflict with her sister's family and she was aware of this. Yet the power-relations were such that this was barely acknowledged through the year I spent observing her and the care review processes.

The observations in the previous chapter reveal that Keeva's voice was consistently represented in the study as a demand or desire to own and monopolise things and people. I highlighted in 'Chapter 4 Data 'Home and Family' that her demanding behaviour was seen as a factor that created stress in Keeva's biological family. She seemed compelled to ask for more than that which was being offered almost to the point of her being rejected. This was invariably the case

in my interactions where there was always at least one point where I had to deny Keeva a request or multiple requests. I noted that Keeva did this in a way that was assertive yet underplayed with nervousness and uncertainty. The acquisition of time, attention or things brought only momentary pleasure for Keeva and usually led to a further, different demand. At the point where she was denied, there was little reaction either – I never saw her visibly upset. Rather it brought about an end to the frenetic energy she poured into making such requests and for me highlighted her inability to express her needs and have them met in a way that was satisfactory. It was akin to the self-destructive behaviour displayed in a ‘fixed fantasy’ which is described as “a rigid, nonreflective scenario of self-induced pain” (Bleiberg, 2004, p144).

Bleiberg studied early manifestations of personality disorders in children and adolescents and suggests typical behaviour of such children can be strikingly arrogant, defiant, and manipulative, yet their demeanour typically masks devastating experiences of vulnerability and pain (Bleiberg, 2004). Here a strategy that Keeva employs, (that of relentlessly demanding and procuring things) could be viewed as a self-defence mechanism to replay an irresolvable earlier trauma where she did not receive or doubted she received something she needed “the omnipotence betrayed by the ‘fixed fantasy’ underlying self-victimization or other forms of self-defeating behaviour...creates the illusory sense that they are actively producing the abandonment [&] pain” (Bleiberg, 2004, p145). He cites Green (1967) who commented that this behaviour is a way of “arranging deceits... arranging for blows to fall” (Green, 1967, p65 and p38 in Bleiburg, 2004).

Keeva’s compulsion to receive attention in one form or another to the point of being denied or rejected could also be understood through the Lacanian notion of ‘*jouissance*’, which is a presence or absence (or inert) of anything which is impossible for a human being to bear yet the unconscious may desire (Lacan, 1977). It is connected to the ‘real’ in a Lacanian sense in that it is inexplicable as it is “something outside symbolisation and meaning” (Leader and Groves, 1995, p141). At once Keeva was connected to a desire for a presence or an absence and a consequential need to repeat thoughts or actions to return the ‘it’ which creates such suffering , “a return of the repressed”, and the compulsion for

individuals to repeat these actions (Hill, 1997, p41). Individuals will endeavour to control or regulate jouissance as they become more consciously and actively embedded as a social being. They do so by abiding by written and unwritten laws, by curbing desires and behaviours, by adhering to the processes as defined by the state.

What they fear is not the 'other' out there but the 'other' in themselves. In a sense, they are rejecting or 'abjecting' that part of themselves they cannot abide, in fact they find it abhorrent. Kristeva argues that it is the individual who creates that which is to be abjected and as such is intimate with all that she rejects. The border that separates that which is abjected is then fragile, and subject to change as individuals redefines who we are. These shifts represent the "eruption of the Real into our lives" (Felluga, 2003) and here the individual has reached new understandings or clarity into that which is before undefined and without meaning. But Keeva is not able to control these urges and instead allows them to define her for others. She is perhaps not voicing her desire for the objects or attention but is instead telling us where she has become stuck with a strategy that is often unsuccessful and leads to the rejection she perhaps fears. It seems highly unlikely that Keeva could either gain such an insight or articulate her fears through the mechanisms which exist to capture her 'voice' and so would in all likelihood be unheard.

Keeva often expressed herself by using silence. She did this by not responding to questions, changing the direction of the conversation, or simply by not engaging at all in social interactions. Lewis (2010) felt that the current climate of asking children to participate in research, decision-making and through local politics often ignored a child's right to silence. I saw Keeva's silences as a natural form of behaviour for a child of her age who needs space for thinking, conceptualising, and to tune out. I saw it as an agentive action, one that was in a Foucauldian sense exerting power through "actions upon actions" (Foucault, 1983). I also saw it as a way of letting me and others know she did not want to participate in discussions or conversations at that point.

At other times the silences seemed to show Keeva's ambivalence towards being

privileged or core when engaging with others. She often initiated conversations but would then stifle any further discussion through changing topics, moving away or simply not participating. I noticed that conversations between Kathy and myself and other adults usually continued in the presence of Keeva that were either about her or not. During these conversations there were only fleeting attempts to include her and sometimes included topics that I felt were inappropriate or adult-orientated. Her other significant relationship that formed the majority of her interactions outside of school was her sister, Freda who had a diagnosis of Autism and used speech intermittingly and constrained to a specific topic. It seems inevitable then that when Keeva was given an opportunity to talk that she would perhaps be unrehearsed in continuing a discussion from her perspective even when she initiated it. I also wondered if she felt constrained in how much she could and should reveal in conversations and instead opted out of them to avoid the risk of saying something that had adverse consequences later. She had a lot of experience of meeting adults who usually wanted to discuss aspects of her life in the context of being 'looked after' and I felt she would be suspicious of conversations and discussion as she would not see them as value-free.

What I hope to convey here is not a psycho-analytic understanding of Keeva based on my limited observations, as I neither have the skills nor the expertise to conduct such an assessment, but instead the complexities of representing a child through 'child voice' practices. Keeva's expressions, made verbally or through her behaviour, has become a way of defining her for others and is shaping her sense of self, how she feels compelled to think and act and be. As such her expressive self needs to be recognised as complex and perhaps problematised rather than to monitor or judge her. The problem then is not how Keeva represents herself but how she is understood.

Concluding remarks

This analysis problematises the policy in practice of capturing 'child voice'. It has been suggested in this chapter that the policy and practice of involving 'looked after' children in decision-making about their care plan can be seen as a neoliberal construct of a child as unitary subject with rights and responsibilities. This

suggests that it confers to them a share of power in decision-making about them. However, I would argue that these agentive properties are unlikely to be enjoyed by the 'looked after' child as the structures and practices by which voice is captured is process-led and have the effect of subjugating the child and, instead of her being heard, she is obscured in the process. Furthermore, the absence of professional criticality in discussions about Keeva and her care plan further privileged the professional voice and as a consequence undermined or at least underplayed the child's voice.

The contextualisation of policy in this area highlighted the intention to not just 'hear' from the child but instil practices to safeguard them. These safeguards, however, serve to expose the child in the study to a high level of surveillance and in return she has restricted freedoms. Also, as capturing voice was in a sense a one-way process, it allowed the LA to benefit from information gathered, as a way of checking their own processes and Keeva was built into this as a mode of their own self-governance. I showed that Keeva was subjected to intense scrutiny to collect information about her and instead of being foregrounded in discussions become objectified and in a sense 'othered' as a 'looked after' child. Less scrutinised was Keeva's lived experience and how the care plan propagated a series of constraints and restrictions, particularly her freedom within the physical and social world. This was justified on the grounds of safeguarding but the rationalisation of the risks was less clear.

In this study, voice has been presented as an illusive and problematic notion in relation to how it is expressed, captured, understood and used. The discussion illustrated how identity, self-representation and voice are written onto by the environment and through the symbolic order. Voice cannot be seen as absent from the social structures and hierarchies which determine how Keeva perceives her social and physical world. Neither can we absent how Keeva's experiences have shaped her sense of self and again how this determines what she does or does not say but also what meaning we can confer from this.

I argue then, that capturing voice is less about deferring power to 'looked after' children but is better understood as a strategy to address the powerlessness

authorities experience in providing protection. The current mechanisms to capture voice are effective in demonstrating voice has been captured: it is seen to be done. However, what is absent is either the child's perspective in determining what she wants to be heard or allowing her to her ability to influence decisions made in her Care Plan~~about her care plan that are meaningful to her~~. In consequence, the child in this study is disappeared from the minds of the corporate parent as the bureaucratic process has been completed, thus closing off any further discussion. I would conclude, then, that this study illustrates that representing a child's voice is highly problematic and

questions whether it can be assumed that the child is engaged in or informs decisions made about her. I would further surmise she cannot be seen nor heard in the processes that are then used to represent her.

Chapter 6

Thesis Claims

Chapter 6 Thesis Claims

This study has offered some new insights to the lived experience of a 'looked after' child and how difficult it is to represent this experience meaningfully in a bureaucratic process to capture voice. I suggest these are 'new' insights as they are undeniably unique relating as they do to Keeva's circumstances only and explicated the multivocality in the notion of voice which is irrevocably tied up with a range of conflicting discourses on safeguarding, child-protection, as well as the 'rights-based' agenda.

In this thesis, I have problematised the notion of voice as a democratic right, often presented as a moral imperative or 'regime of truth' to ensure children give their views and opinions. I have shown in the preceding discussion that this can be seen not as a way of empowering children 'in care', but as a way of ensuring those charged with their care have a process of surveillance of both the child and the care plans devised. I provided a Foucauldian analysis of this practice as a form of governmentality that uses disciplinary power to ensure all those engaged in the care planning, including Keeva, are self-monitoring and thus accountable.

Those charged with her care failed to hear or take note of all that she said or expressed. As professionals they were seen instead to unquestioningly serve bureaucratic and statutory processes. In so doing they were accountable to each other and an unseen audience and made themselves visible through succumbing to the processes and practices discussed. As a consequence, this self-serving practice rendered the child invisible and silent. For Foucault, power is neither here nor there and cannot be given to another. For a child who is 'looked after', the power rarely resides with them regardless of a political discourse that seeks to demonstrate it is so.

In a sense, the corporate parent is narcissistic asking questions and monitoring only that which it has predetermined to privilege. The child in this process reveals little to, and gains little from, the 'rights' they have been awarded. Her voice is

barely heard in the professional dialogue around them. This was seen in the study where the child shows limited engagement in completing the form designed to capture her voice, she is absent from the meeting where her minimal input is fed back and even here it is filtered through another person. To hear Keeva would require more critical examination of what is being said by those around her who are in a position to comment on Keeva's needs, views, desires, fears and hopes. However, as noted the interprofessional dialogue was confined to the professional capacity of individuals with no perceptible challenge or examination of opinions and comments received. In this case, the sum of the parts was not greater than the whole.

The analysis also highlighted the complexity in self-representation and how Keeva's socio-psycho-emotional state, and the social structures in which she resides, predicated what she feels about herself and how she develops a sense of identity. Keeva's background has presented her with confusing and frightening notions of the social world and her place in it. She is living alongside these notions as they are presented to her in her daily life and impact on her agency in the home, her freedoms to explore the social world, her reified status as being 'looked after' and her unsated desire to develop closer familial links. She needs guidance in giving voice that allows her to be able to say what she needs to be heard. Instead, she has developed and uses habits, behaviours and thinking patterns that reveal her ambivalence in social interactions and dialogue, which she may not be cognisant of. Thus to consider only the literal or superficial aspects of 'voice' will only partially represent her, if at all.

In summary, I contest the presumed benefits of capturing voice of a 'looked after' child. The study revealed it is difficult for a child to express their voice to best represent themselves; the process to capture it is not close enough to the child to understand what is being said and thus the culminating processes that use this process to represent her are based on too little.

From this conclusion, it would seem as though I am arguing against involving children 'in care' in decisions made about them. This would be a fallacious conclusion to draw. Instead, I am suggesting that, given the findings from this

study, a corporate parent needs to instil far more rigour and integrity in voice capturing processes and recognise and respond to the limitations current professional processes and practices offer in terms of representing the child. This, however, would require the state to recognise its impotency in relation to knowing what a child who is 'looked after', feels and experiences whilst in its care that might only be improved through consistent and thorough engagement with the child.

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