**BERA 2016 abstract innovation session**

**Rob Abbott, Nikki Fairchild, Eva Mikuska and Sandra Lyndon**

**Problematising the concept of ‘voice’ in Early Childhood research**

**Abstract**

Voice is an umbrella term to consider speech acts of participants (Herman, et al., 2005). Regardless of theoretical positioning voice is a primary consideration, as one debates whose voice is heard and how it might impact the subjectivity or objectivity of the research (Lincoln, et al., 2011). Critical researchers consider the relationship between voice and power and how this might be lived and problematised (Jackson and Mazzei, 2009). More recent debates focus on whether voice is a purely human attribute and whether researchers privilege the voice of the rational thinking, speaking subject (St. Pierre, 2009).

The research area of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is relatively new in the UK, and could itself be conceived as an emerging voice within Social and Educational research (Osgood, 2012). This innovation session presents a multidisciplinary research approach to build on existing theorisations of voice. It will explore different ways of thinking and conceptualising voice drawing upon a range of qualitative research methodologies within the ECEC field of inquiry.

We are a group of researchers at the University of Chichester working in the Early Childhood department, all of whom have been exploring different concepts of voice within our individual research. Here, collectively, we draw together voices of students and professionals who are negotiating a changing and challenging ECEC landscape that includes professional recognition and ‘becoming’.

Nikki Fairchild is applying Posthumanist theorising to consider the voice of material participants within her work with Early Years Teachers. Sandra Lyndon is exploring the co-construction of voice and the connection between early year practitioners’ personal and collective narratives of child poverty. Rob Abbott applied action research aims to investigate how the voice of the learner (future professionals) in Early Childhood Studies can be heard in learning environments. Eva Mikuska is seeking to reach an understanding the construction of ‘good’ through deconstructing the ‘voice’ of a range of actors working in the field of ECEC.

The content of the session is significant for education policy, practice and theory as it engages with a range of contemporary professional and student debates. We will invite the audience to work collaboratively and participate in unearthing whether voice can ever be seen as an unproblematic concept within qualitative study. The outcomes of the session will contribute to developing a deeper understanding of voice in ECEC research and practice.

**Innovation**

This session is innovative in as much as it will be a participatory event with the audience. The audience will be invited to explore voice within Early Childhood in creative ways using a range of visual, audio and kinaesthic methods. For example digital recordings, voice recordings, written accounts and drawings and models.

The session will begin with short film of a focus group of the presenters each discussing how they have used and problematised voice within their different research studies. The audience will be posed a number of questions to discuss and provide their own interpretation and problematisation of voice and will be encouraged to use the materials/resources provided. The presenters will facilitate these discussions and at the end of the session there will be an opportunity to reflect and discuss voice as a wider group. Participants will be encouraged to consider how they might reconceptualise the use of voice within their own research and practice.

The presenters will consider how they can capture the outcomes and impact of the session in the following ways:-

1. share with the session audience after the conference and;
2. contribute to the development of a paper detailing potential new knowledge.

This session falls within the boundary of an innovation session and not a symposium as it is a non-traditional participatory event aimed at giving voice to the audience as well as the researchers.