Developing and using an adapted mosaic approach to explore children's foreign language learning experiences in primary school

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A B S T R A C T

This article describes an adapted mosaic approach, developed and used in a longitudinal, ethnographic study that explored children's foreign language learning (FLL) experiences in primary school in England. As a methodological innovation within the field of instructed early foreign language learning, the adapted approach addresses an identified need for a wider range of research methodologies and more inductive approaches. The original mosaic approach was initially considered to help address methodological questions that arose during the ethnography. That approach was subsequently adapted and developed in four main ways: firstly, for use within the longitudinal, ethnographic study; second, for use with its older, primary school-aged children; third, for development and use *together with* children in school rather than a tool designed for use *on* children and finally, where the focus was upon the *process* of completion rather than the end product. The adapted approach met the needs identified within the ethnography by further enhancing children's voices, their agency and perspectives within its data collection and analysis. Recommendations for its use in language learning contexts are made to support further research together with children, to help strengthen what is currently known and understood about children's experiences of instructed foreign language learning. This is based on the premise that knowing and understanding more about these will help inform future practices and initiatives.

Introduction

This article details the emergence and use of an adapted mosaic approach, a methodological innovation developed within a longitudinal, ethnographic study about children's experiences of foreign language learning (FLL) in the primary school (Schulze, 2022). The article draws from the ethnographic study which itself sought deeper insights into children's FLL experiences by engaging as directly as possible *with* children and their experiences of FLL in primary school, rather than doing research *on* children (Dennis & Huf, 2020). Data is used to illuminate ways in which the adapted approach helped address the overarching challenge of exploring *children's* experiences as an *adult* researcher and the following perceived needs that emerged from progressive, inductive analysis and reflection: first, to engage more directly with children to give their voices, their ideas, thoughts, and ways they choose to express these themselves even greater prominence within the ethnography; second, to find, create or develop activities/approaches to help enhance my data analysis and my own interpretations of children's experiences with FLL that had hitherto been garnered; third, to better address the recognised ethical tensions posed by the inherent power differential between me as adult researcher in school and the children as pupils of the school. I argue that the mosaic approach can be suitably adapted for use in language learning contexts together with children and provide an example of how the approach was successfully incorporated within an ethnography to strengthen the integrity

of reported findings. The adapted approach described here has merit for inclusion in further research to strengthen what is currently known and understood about children's experiences of instructed foreign language learning in the primary school, based on the premise that knowing and understanding more about these will help inform future practices and initiatives.

Rationale

With a prevalence of normative research methods within the field, not enough is known about children's instructed language learning experiences. The 'New Paradigm of a Sociology of Childhood' Ba', (2021) advocated the importance of accessing children's views and unique perspectives about different aspects of their lives (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Corsaro, 2023; Mayall, 2015; Qvortrup, 2009). One response to this movement has been the development of participatory research methods, shifting the focus of research *on* and *about* children to research *with* children. The mosaic approach proposed by Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003) and since used widely with pre-school children, is one such approach. Within foreign language education however, this movement has not been fully embraced (Kuchah & Pinter, 2012; Pinter, 2023). Within this field, children's voices and agency have remained largely marginalised, meriting further development (Holmes & Myles, 2019; Ibrahim, 2016; Kirsch, 2012), with need for more inductive, inclusive, creative and participatory methods (Pinter, 2023; Pinter and Kuchah, 2021; Pinter & Zandian, 2015).

National context

My research took place in England, an interesting national context for FLL where languages education in state schools is both pressured and confused, with the uptake of languages in Secondary school (ages 11–16yrs) in sustained decline. FLL remains a relatively new phenomenon and problematic outlier in the statutory primary curriculum prescribed for state schools in England. Despite the September 2014 statutory introduction of foreign languages for all children attending state schools in Key Stage Two (ages 7–11yrs) (DfE, 2013), and the high expectations of what such introduction would achieve (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018), full implementation has still to be achieved (Collen, 2021; Holmes & Myles, 2019). The nature of their introduction was beset by a previous series of stops and starts since the late 1960s (Holmes & Myles, 2019; Schulze, 2022). Whilst afforded the same purpose of study as its long-standing statutory counterpart, modern foreign languages (MFL) in Key Stage Three (ages 11–14yrs), primary foreign languages, including the range of languages from which a state primary school might choose, made it not only a new subject area, but also distinct: foreign languages and modern foreign languages are not the same. Furthermore, these curriculum subject areas in England are distinct from others, being statutory only in Key Stages Two and Three. All other subjects are statutory from Key Stage One (ages 5–7yrs).

Children spend four years of language study at Key Stage 2 and often only two years in Key Stage 3 before preparation for the GCSE examination (taken at age 16) begins in earnest. A successful language learning experience in the primary school therefore matters. Yet questions as to the very validity of teaching languages to children in the primary phase of education in England keep being asked, perhaps most seminally by (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, & Hargreaves, 1974) and thirty years later, in a larger study by Driscoll, Jones, & Macrory, 2004. Most published research about early FLL emanating from England has thus been concerned with whether it is taught, what is taught, and teachers' perspectives. Conflation between Secondary and Primary phases is also apparent where Secondary MFL practices and research findings have increasingly been used to inform and influence what happens with FLL in the Primary phase. Of the research that does exist within this national context, much is now also over ten years old, arising from an initial 'capacity building era' between 2002 and 2011 marked by a period of substantial government funding for modern foreign languages (MFL) in the primary school initiated by the 'Languages for All: Languages for Life' strategy (DfES, 2002). With continued concern expressed about the sustained national decline in uptake and success with GCSE languages examinations and beyond (Collen, 2021; Gibb, 2021; Ofsted, 2021; Tinsley & Doležal, 2018), more understanding is needed about children's FLL experiences if the high expectations of what can be achieved at Key Stage Two (ages 7–11yrs) are to be achieved. It is time to focus the research lens on children's experiences and perspectives. This supports need, especially in England, for research foci and methods that shift away from focussing on the adult to the child to develop greater insight into what (may) work as informed by *children's* experiences and perspectives to inform how such high expectations may not only be better realised but also sustained. With young language learners and the educational environment of the primary school being distinctive from older language learners and the Secondary school environment in England (Schulze, 2022), merely extrapolating content, pedagogies and research findings from Secondary MFL and applying them to the primary phase is ill advised. Primary-based FLL in England, and children's experiences of this, are worthy of their own research, and this field requires further development (Holmes & Myles, 2019).

Exploring children's instructed FLL experiences in England through a longitudinal ethnographic approach provided one such way of addressing these calls. Whilst the ethnography enabled the study's overarching research questions to be answered, need to further enhance children's voices and perspectives within the study was identified, together with a desire to strengthen the validation of its inductive analysis directly with children. In responding to these needs, I drew upon my own professional experiences developed during 26 years in Primary and Initial Teacher Education and the original mosaic approach, considering both whether and how this approach could be used. This article focuses specifically upon how the original approach was subsequently developed and incorporated within the ethnography. The steps taken in its development and use are shared drawing on data to illuminate how this approach met the needs identified within the ethnography.

Structure of the article

The original mosaic approach is next outlined before I show how children's voices have hitherto been marginalised within FLL

research. I then consider use of the mosaic approach in studies with children and within the field of FLL. The educational context in which this approach was developed and implemented then follows. The methodology describes the steps taken to develop and implement the adapted approach before its outcomes are shared and discussed. Recommendations for the considered use of the adapted mosaic approach in language learning contexts with children conclude the article.

The mosaic approach

The original mosaic approach was developed in 2003 by Clark et al., in a research study that was to include the voice of the child. It was an approach developed directly within the context of, and for, research with young (pre-school) children. It was intended for exploring and evaluating tangible aspects of children's lived experiences, such as playparks and buildings, providing a framework for listening to pre-school children (Clark, 2005). Since that time, the mosaic approach has been widely used by both researchers and teachers engaged with pre-school children. The approach is framed within a positivist methodology of observation and interviewing whilst introducing some participatory tools for use with pre-school children. Each tool provides one piece of the overall 'mosaic' which is produced. The approach consists of three main stages:

- Stage 1: gathering data from all participants, including children and adults.
- Stage 2: piecing together information for discussion and reflection.
- Stage 3: interpreting the data and using it to make decisions.

This approach brings together different perspectives to create an image of children's worlds with the resulting mosaic being rich with layers of data, providing a form of documentation co-constructed by the children and adults (Pinter, 2023). Whilst many of the mosaic tools and techniques, such as photo elicitation or drawing, could be used independently, its main appeal is the combination of several tools and how they draw together the different sources of data (Pinter, 2023). With the use of different participatory tools, variations of the mosaic approach are possible but the following elements, as drawn from Clark et al. (2011, p.13) remain integral to it:

- Multi-method – recognising the different 'voices' of children.
- Participatory – treating children as experts and agents in their own lives.
- Reflexive – includes children and practitioners in reflecting on meanings and addresses the question of interpretation.
- Adaptable – can be applied in a variety of contexts.
- Focused on children's lived experiences - can be used for a variety of purposes including looking at lives lived, rather than knowledge gained or care received.
- Embedded into practice – a framework for listening that has the potential both to be used as an evaluative tool and to be embedded within classroom practice.

Literature review

In the following review, I show how issues in research processes can marginalise children's voices, drawing on four FLL studies that purportedly involved children. I then draw on three studies that exemplify the potential for the mosaic approach in contexts beyond those associated with pre-school children. This review shows the widespread use of the approach with pre-school children is not replicated in language learning research contexts with older children.

The marginalisation of children's voices in FLL research

Addressing the need to engage with children's voices in FLL research has proven problematic. Whilst many countries have already embraced early FLL within their prescribed curricula, calls for more FLL research that engages with children's voices and perspectives have repeatedly been made (Holmes & Mitchell, 2019; Pinter, 2018). A legacy of normative methods and adult-centric concerns otherwise remains, marginalising children's voices and perspectives. A review of the field highlights methodological tensions and ethical challenge in seeking to engage with children's experiences and perspectives of FLL in primary school, shedding light on potential reasons behind the scarcity of published research. Finding a way as an *adult* researcher to engage with *children's* FLL experiences in primary school is one such challenge, with need to navigate and manage the dominant power, position and perspectives of the adults.

The dominance of adult-centric perspectives is illuminated in Wawrzyniak-Sliwska's (2007) study. The study sought to address whether autonomy was an issue for young language learners in their (Polish) classrooms, including how teachers understood it. This research was however ultimately based upon adult perceptions, not whether autonomy was a relevant issue for children themselves. Factors reportedly studied were the extent to which *teachers* allowed their learners to take responsibility for their own learning, the extent to which *teachers* believed young learners were capable of doing so and the strategies employed allowing learners to develop their autonomy. The study was based on interviews with 32 trainee teachers, 18 teachers and observations of 87 lessons given by pre- and in-service teachers. As a result, whilst purportedly focussing upon the young learners, its ultimate research questions, data collection and analysis led it to predominantly focus upon teachers' perceptions of whether autonomy was an issue for children. It did not include those of, and from the children themselves.

A further example of adult-centric dominance is illuminated in the study by Costley, Gkonou, Myles, Roehr-Brackin and Tellier

(2018). Their study focussed upon how children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and monolingual children perceived and related to FLL in England. It comprised observations of two French lessons, interviews with children which included questions about what languages they liked, and with teachers, including questions about current and past experiences with languages, questionnaires about background and attitude and tests of French proficiency, metalinguistic awareness and associative memory. The methods used to ascertain children's attitudes and perceptions relied upon Year 4 children (aged 8–9yrs) self-reporting through questionnaires and interviews and upon *teacher's* perceptions of children's language learning and any differences *they* perceived between children with EAL and monolingual children. The lesson observations reportedly also focussed upon other aspects related to the teaching, such as which language(s) were used by the teachers and the children (French, English, other languages); the focus was not directly upon the children's own perspectives.

Issues relating specifically to data collection tool design are illuminated in the extensive meta-analysis of the cognitive benefits of language learning commissioned by the British Academy and completed by Woll and Wei (2019). The questionnaire design and use arguably side-lined children's voices, despite their apparent inclusion. The research included a set of online questionnaires, developed to explore stakeholder attitudes to language learning and perceived cognitive benefits: adults, youths, and children. One questionnaire was developed for adults and the other for youths and children, with a combined average age of 14 years: clearly older than the primary phase (5–11yrs). Woll and Wei (2019) report receiving over 740 responses to the adult questionnaire but only 40 usable responses from the combined child and youth questionnaire. This afforded children's perspectives much less voice and a possible issue with the design of the questionnaire, given so many were deemed unusable. Such issues limit the validity of reported findings, and this provides an example of how children's voices within research that apparently includes them can instead become side-lined by decisions even experienced researchers can make throughout the research process.

Engaging with children's experiences through inductive approaches such as ethnography also needs time, which can be challenging to source and manage (Schulze, 2022). This was also recognised by Kirsch (2012) whose study explored the language learning strategies of Year 5 children (ages 9–10yrs) learning French in England. She made a clear distinction that whilst drawing on sociocultural theory and ethnographic methods her study was not an ethnography. Such methodological challenges may also help explain the prevalence of normative approaches and the use of tools such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews, pedagogical interventions and tests to yield data and research outcomes at pace; tools that distance the learner. The prevalence of such studies means that our understanding of children's FLL experience is currently based upon constructions of learning more distant from the actual children themselves, with concern about learners being distanced by pre-constructed theoretical frameworks and research instruments largely focused on measurement according to an already existing scale (Barcelos, 2003; Lamb, 2005). A general impression of learner experiences has instead been gleaned at the expense of adding definition and nuance. The continued use of similar research methods arguably also leads to similar findings, such as the continued reporting of the same generally positive attitudes (e.g., Graham, Courtney, Marinis & Tonkyn, 2014; Martin, 2012; Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2019; Tinsley & Doležal, 2018).

Engaging with alternative methods is challenged not least by the ages of children involved, the wider logistical constraints concerning methodological approaches, the needs of adults and decisions made by adults in the research process together with a continued, underlying counter-narrative serving to diminish the extent to which children's perspectives have been embraced. This signifies a gap in current research. As summarised by Pinter (2018), children have largely remained passive objects of adult interest in most research and even where children have been studied as unique subjects with their own characteristics and trajectories, all aspects of such studies have also been fully controlled by adults.

Use of the original mosaic approach with older children

The mosaic approach provided one way in which researchers – and teachers- could listen more closely to young children, their thoughts, ideas and perspectives. Clark et al. (2011) suggested the approach could easily be adapted to use with adolescents and adults. One example is provided by Rogers et al. (2020) who added the voices of parents and carers alongside those of pre-school children (ages 2–5yrs) in an Australian study focussing on children's experiences of living with a parent working away for periods of time. A further example is provided by Jara-Osorio (2024) who reports a case-study reflection on the use of the mosaic approach in participatory research in Chile with adolescents, exploring their experience of participatory policymaking. The study by Mearns-Macdonald (2021) in Ireland also used the mosaic approach with seven children aged between 6 and 10yrs to help construct their understanding of safe spaces in school. Her study included child-led tours, photography and the use of puppets. It evidenced some of the challenges involved in incorporating children's perspectives into adult practice, including the time investment needed from adults to enable the slow knowledge (Clark, 2019) to emerge from children.

Use of the original mosaic approach within the field of FLL

Within the field of teaching English to young learners (TEYL), a range of studies now exist that have begun using more inductive methods to incorporate children's voices (e.g., Besser & Chik, 2014; Kuchah & Pinter, 2012; Schwartz, Oranim & Hijazy, 2020). Some TEYL studies have also employed the mosaic approach as a research method. Ibrahim has published quite extensively from her doctoral study which utilised the mosaic approach (Ibrahim, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2021). Her 2016 paper for example reports its use with nine multilingual children (ages 5–12yrs) in France, where she sought to elicit children's attitudes, perceptions and interpretations of their trilingual/tri-literate identity. Described as a multimodal methodology, she argued the approach gave children a voice to explore, apprehend and express their unfolding multilingual identity, beyond the constraints of the national school system. Her data collection and triangulated analysis comprised group interviews with children, group interviews with teachers and individual interviews with

parents, children's written and pictorial representations and the use of physical artefacts selected by children to represent their three languages.

Within the English national context, Pakkar-Hull's (2014) study examined 'mosaic'- a piece of multilingual theatre-in-education designed to promote linguistically diverse practices in primary schools in Birmingham. Whilst it did not involve Clark et al. (2003) mosaic approach, the study provides an example of a participatory approach linked to the field of FLL. It recorded the interactions of six participating children (ages 5–7yrs) with the theatre piece, enabling the children to negotiate and perform new social identities in relation to their multilingual resources. This review did not otherwise identify any FLL studies in England that used or adapted the original mosaic approach.

Summary

This review has demonstrated ways in which children's voices and perspectives have been neglected by traditional methods and approaches that can be found in FLL studies purporting to include children. It has also demonstrated that whilst the original mosaic approach has been used extensively in case-studies involving pre-school children, and has been used in some research with older children and even adults, only a few published studies using the original mosaic approach with the teaching of English to young pre-school children (TEYL) are apparent and none that have specifically used the mosaic approach with FLL research in an English context. This signifies a further gap in research concerning early FLL, upon which my own adaption of the mosaic approach builds.

Research context

This research took place within the final phase of my ethnography, during the summer term (2019), within a junior school (ages 7–11yrs) in South-East England rated as 'Outstanding' by the national inspectorate, Ofsted (see Table 1). The school was situated in a semi-urban location, taking children from a mixed catchment area and had been proactively engaged with teaching French and promoting 'Intercultural Understanding' within its curriculum for a number of years. This was supported by a long-standing Head-teacher and the promotion of French as the target language by previous local government policy. Individual class teachers were responsible for implementing French, guided by the school policy of timetabling French with the adopted published resource, *Tout le Monde.*

Ethical considerations

In addition to the ethical considerations made in the ethnography, new and specific ethical approval was sought and received for the adapted mosaic activities. In line with BERA Guidelines and GDPR, gate-keeper consent and proactive parental/carer consent was obtained for all participating children. Children's verbal assent was obtained where their right not to participate and their right to withdraw at any time they wished was explained. As the research activities progressed, reminders of these rights were made whilst I also remained alert to children's verbal and non-verbal responses, checking directly with individuals as relevant. Whilst ethical gate-keeper approval was received by the Headteacher, additional proactive consent from some parents/carers was less forthcoming, notably from those for children of designated lower ability and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (as defined by teachers). This provided a further ethical dilemma which ultimately reduced the range of children with whom I directly engaged in the focus group activities (see Table 2). Mindful that not all children were able to be included in the focus groups, I spent additional time in an informal capacity with children at play and lunch breaks, through which to also make myself accessible and approachable within the normal course of their school day.

Whilst the activities were conducted in an agreed space conducive to discussion and sharing ideas and thoughts, finding a suitable space for some of the activities was at times problematic. The weather was however clement, and several tasks were completed on the playground, on the field, and in the school's inner quadrant. On two occasions, such group work was disrupted and cut short as a result, with priority given to children's wellbeing and respect for their time: once by a drumming workshop which led to difficulties in being able to converse and another when we were memorably disrupted by a swathe of flying ants. Having embedded the activities into my ongoing dialogue and time with children through the wider ethnography, the impatience and temptation to retreat to the security of question-and-answer routines highlighted by Blaisdell, Arnott, Wall and Robinson (2019) as a particular challenge of implementing creative or participatory methods was not something I experienced. I remained mindful that my approach needed to avoid advancing my own agenda as a researcher over children and the research community such as can happen in the process of conducting interviews and/or focus groups (Gibson, 2012). To help ensure my approach continued in an inductive and reflexive manner, I sought to afford

Table 1
School setting.

Setting and location	Semi-urban state junior school in SE England
Number on roll	210, 7–11 yrs (Y3–6), average class size of x26 children.
Ofsted/Inspection grade	Outstanding (2016)
Target Language(s) in curriculum	French
	30 mins weekly (timetabled, but not always happening)
FLL teacher	'Generalist' classroom teachers.
FLL resources	Heineman *Tout Le Monde.*

Table 2

Participants from the Year 5 class of 28 children.

Group	Number of children /28	Overall academic ability (teacher designated)	General socio-economic background (teacher designated)	Gender
1	6	Higher: 4	Higher: 4	Male: 3
		Middle: 2	Middle: 2	Female: 3
		Lower: 0	Lower: 0	Other: 0
2	6*	Higher: 2 **	Higher: 1 **	Male: 4*
		Middle: 2	Middle: 3	Female: 2 **
		Lower: 2*	Lower: 2*	Other: 0
3	4	Higher: 2	Higher: 0	Male: 2
		Middle: 2	Middle: 4	Female: 2
		Lower: 0	Lower: 0	Other: 0
4	4	Higher: 3	Higher: 3	Male: 2
		Middle: 1	Middle: 1	Female: 2
		Lower: 0	Lower: 0	Other: 0
Totals	**20**	**Higher: 11**	**Higher: 8**	**Male: 11**
		Middle: 7	**Middle: 10**	**Female:9**
		Lower: 2	**Lower: 2**	**Other: 0**

* x2 children were subsequently unable to fully participate, with need to attend a maths booster for some of the time.

** includes a bilingual Swedish child.

children choice and input in the design and implementation of the activities. I also paid attention to recording and documenting how they preferred to express and articulate their experiences. Whilst I sought to position myself as a facilitator, trying to capture children's voices and listen carefully to them, I recognise that the power imbalance between the children and me may only have been slightly altered (Graham, Powell & Truscott, 2016). I sought to mediate this by a process of constant negotiation, but ultimately recognise that not only was I still caught up in a complex web of power relations (Gallagher, 2008), but the children and teachers too.

Research participants

Twenty children from the Year 5 class agreed and were able to engage with adapted mosaic activity in the ethnography's final phase. All were aged 9–10 years and had been learning French for three years. All but one child's first language was English (see note in Table 2). The children were mostly all those with whom I had previously been involved since the beginning of their time at the school in Year 3 (ages 7–8yrs). Four new children had otherwise since joined the class, and three had left. Children were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and academic abilities, as defined by their teacher. In line with ethical considerations, this was further dependent upon receiving proactive parental/carer consent and which children were also deemed by the teacher to be 'free' to participate at agreed times in the school day. This approach ultimately led towards a mix of 'higher' and 'middle' children in each group, with 'lower ability' children and those from designated lower socio-economic backgrounds being underrepresented (see Table 2).

Methodology

This section details the four ways in which the original mosaic approach was developed for use:

1) within a longitudinal, ethnographic study
2) for older, primary school-aged children
3) *together with* children
4) with focus upon the *process* of completion rather than the end product.

I then summarise how the approach was implemented through a series of six stages.

Adapting and developing the mosaic approach within an ethnography

The adapted approach was developed within the final phase of an ethnographic study following a research paradigm associated with naturalistic enquiry. It was something that emerged from inductive analysis, reflection and development with children during the ethnography. Not being something that was intended from its outset, careful consideration was required to retain the ethnography's overall integrity where some aspects of the original approach were more favourable than others. For example, the original approach offered a practical framework against which to involve child participants much more directly to explore their FLL experiences in primary school, complementing my own observations and field notes drawn from the ethnographic tradition. Having been designed and implemented with young children, it also offered a supportive context for developing conversations with children which provided a good fit with the child-focussed and reflexive ethnographic approaches that formed the study's backbone. By adding new tools and methods, it afforded greater scope for adding depth and richness to my research and the eventual image of children's FLL experiences revealed. It could also be used in support of evaluating interpretations attached to observations and draw from participants in the co-

construction of meaning, strengthening the triangulation of my data.

Conversely, some aspects of the mosaic approach were less conducive, leading towards subsequent adaption and development. For example, the mosaic approach was expressly intended to be used to explore and evaluate tangible aspects of children's lived experiences, such as with playparks, buildings; with concrete environments as opposed to children's lived experiences with abstract concepts. My own study focused on exploring the more abstract concept of children's FLL experiences. The original approach was also developed for use with pre-school aged children and has so far had more limited application with older children/adolescents and even less within the field of FLL. Care was therefore needed to ensure the practical tasks devised to create the 'mosaic' of children's FLL experiences were both age-appropriate and fit for purpose. The ethnographic approach required the use of a range of data to triangulate data and help with its interpretation. However, that approach largely argued for naturally occurring data, grounded in the setting and with the participants themselves. The adoption of more prescribed tasks for use with children, as advocated by the mosaic approach, could prove unhelpful to my inductive approach. More fitting would be for such tasks to evolve more naturally in an inductive way through the course of my fieldwork. Ethical approval was however required, and therein lay a further tension as to obtain ethical approval, a full outline of focus group mosaic tasks was required. A middle-way was required; one which assured the ethics whilst appeasing the inductive nature of my ethnography.

I initially drew on my own professional experiences to consider possible ways of further prioritising children's voices and perspectives and checking my own interpretations and analysis in the latter stages of my research. An initial brainstorm of activities yielded ideas such as the use of video/filming and revisiting recordings with children; FLL climate-walks led by children; short, practical tasks such as picture sorting or using lesson artefacts as prompts; collaging. It did not however provide a methodologically coherent way forward, such as that suggested by the mosaic approach. In the final phase of research, a set of activities was therefore devised and included within my study in a mosaic-type way. In contrast to the original approach, these not only drew on my professional experience, but also the themes and questions already emerging from inductive analysis, reflection and my implicit knowledge and understanding of the research setting and participants.

Adapting the mosaic approach for use with older, primary school-aged children

In liaison with the teacher, a series of focus groups with a range of children from the class was decided upon. To meet and satisfy ethical approval, a set of six, practical focus group activity outlines were outlined. Nuancing Clark's (2011) original approach, each of these were intended to help elicit group co-operation, collaboration and communication, focussing on exploring children's perspectives about emerging themes and findings:

- Notions of 'challenge' and 'persistence' rather than 'fun'
- The extent to which children's experiences and responses to them resonate with each other's

Fig. 1. Simile/Metaphor prompt pictures.

- The extent to which there were any noticeable differences between the experiences and responses of children from different socio-economic backgrounds and designated academic ability

Each activity was also intended to last no longer than 20 min, mindful of children's – and the teacher's- curriculum time.

Adapting the mosaic approach for development and use together with children rather than a tool designed for use on children

My role as researcher was intended as facilitator/prompt, observer, and 'recorder'. I first introduced a set of six activity ideas to participating children as a 'menu' upon which to comment, add to and from which to choose up to three activities. Presenting the activities as options and prompts from which to select, decline or suggest their own ways of adapting and adding to them to help me understand their experiences provided opportunity for children's own input to help shape what happened, recognised as good research practice (Pinter, 2023). Children's choices were noted together with their verbal and written commentary about which activities they wished to engage with, and any other suggestions for inclusion.

Each group interestingly selected the same three activities: picture sorting; Blob diagram discussion and emoji prompts. In the first of these activities, the picture sorting activity, children engaged with pictorial metaphors of younger and older children's language learning inspired by Wray (2008): a bull in a china shop; a game of football; building a Lego wall; an uphill struggle (see Fig. 1).

These examples served as discussion prompts, where children considered whether they agreed with any of them and why, making and discussing other suggestions. The second, Blob diagram activity involved children identifying themselves with one (or more) selected figures to represent which they most related to with FLL in school and why (see Fig. 2). Notably, children unanimously chose to use the 'bridge' Blob diagram as opposed to the others on offer. This was itself supported by their explanation that they could best identify with its representation about FLL being like crossing a bridge from one side (English) to the other (French) together with others. The other discarded diagrams on offer were the Blobs climbing a tree ('no, not that'), and interestingly, the Blobs in a classroom ('definitely not that').

The third activity, emoji prompts, involved children sorting, selecting and adding to emojis representing their emotions and feelings about FLL (see Fig. 3). As transpired during the activity itself, children were also keen to compare their feelings and thoughts about FLL with other curriculum areas in school.

Each of the selected activities were conducted with focus groups over a series of three weeks, at times and in conducive spaces in the school as agreed with the headteacher, teacher and children themselves, and in line with all due safeguarding practices.

Implementation with a focus on the <u>process</u> of completion rather than the end product

Unlike the original approach, it was not intended that all tasks would necessarily be completed. It was not the finished mosaic that was of most interest; rather the conversations, responses and reactions elicited during the *process* of completion: what was said, what
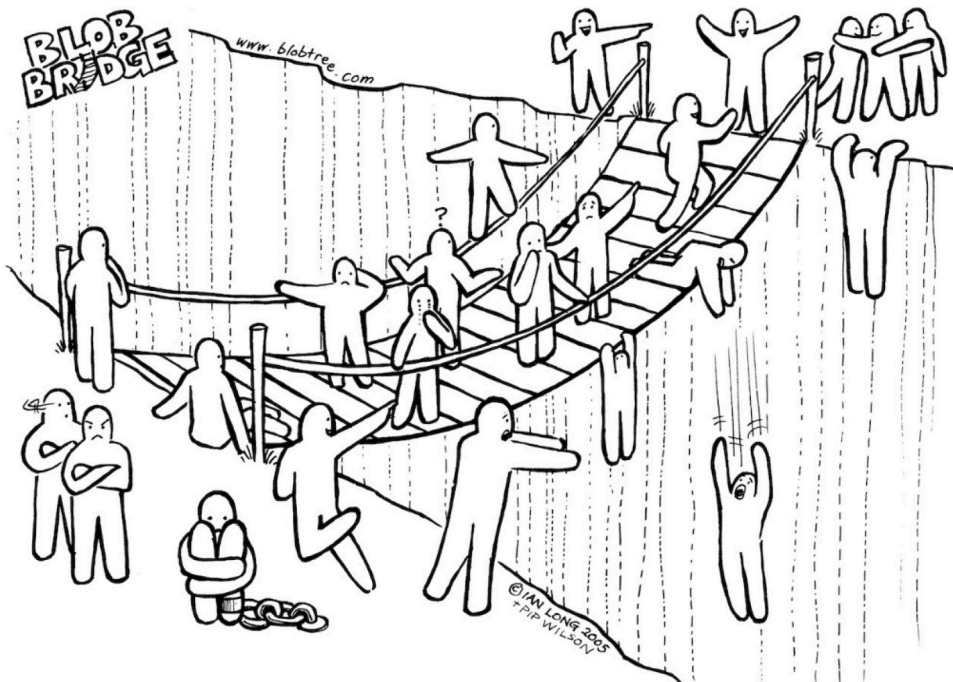

Fig. 2. Blob Bridge.

Fig. 3. Emoji samples and choices.

was not, with the silences being of equal interest as well as any contradictions (Pinter, 2023). The devised menu of activities therefore comprised activities through which children's talk and responses about their FLL experiences were encouraged, recorded and then transcribed. Anonymised notes about what children did, their responses and reactions were also made during each task through which to enrich transcribed recordings, e.g. Child 2.2(Focus Group 2, Child 2). Transcribed conversations and notes made during the activities provided an additional way in which children's voices, in their own words and phrases, were tangibly captured for inclusion and triangulation with other data from the ethnography's corpus.

The different stages of implementing the focus group activities are summarised in the following table (see Table 3):

Stage 1 drew upon my own inductive analysis, professional experience and implicit knowledge of the research setting and participants through which to consider and compile an initial menu of activities to present to children, and through which to obtain ethical approval. In line with continued ethical considerations, children's views and input about these were sought in Stage 2 before their preferences and suggestions were used to refine selected activities in Stage 3. Stage 4 comprised children engaging with their selected activities in focus groups. Analysed outcomes from Stage 5 were shared with each focus group in Stage 6, to check, confirm and rectify these as relevant. Stages 2, 4 and 6 specifically sought to ensure that children had tangible opportunity to engage *with* and contribute *to* the research process itself as respected participants.

Outcomes: learning from and with children

Triangulated data from children's engagement with each focus group activity is now drawn upon to illuminate how children's engagement with the activities and their responses to these helped endorse some of the ethnography's findings, whilst adding new insights to others and at times offering something entirely new.

Endorsing and strengthening emergent findings

Inductive analysis had indicated more diversity than homogeneity amongst children's FLL experiences and children's responses endorsed this. For example, whilst most children were reasonably happy to humour the suggested metaphors likening FLL in school to being a bit like a 'bull in a china shop' or 'playing a game of football', they were quick to suggest their own, varied alternatives such as: 'It's like 'working with pieces of a jigsaw puzzle…without the picture' (Child (1.2); 'Running a hurdle race' (Child 3.4); 'Skipping' (Child 4.3); 'Walking a tight rope' (Child 1.3); 'Climbing over a brick wall' (Child 4.4); 'Being in a ballpark – with too many balls'

Table 3
Six stages of implementation.

Stage 1	Initial drafting of focus group activities, aligned with identified needs (themes and questions for exploration with children initially identified from inductive analysis in the ethnography, along with creating opportunities for further data), liaison with class teacher.
Stage 2	Introducing the proposed activities with children in each focus group as a menu, seeking their input, preferences and further ideas about these.
Stage 3	Refining and preparing to conduct the activities with children, mindful of their responses in Stage 2.
Stage 4	Implementing the selected activities with focus groups; recording group conversations and chatter, making researcher notes during the activities about children's responses, silences, body language, expressions and interactions.
Stage 5	Analysing notes and transcripts: what more have I learned and understood? (Confirming and reappraising emergent themes and findings; new insights).
Stage 6	Revisiting focus groups to share and check considered findings and themes with children.

(Child 2.1).

Emergent findings about children's concerns were also not only endorsed but strengthened. During discussions children articulated worry about getting something wrong, and their awareness of how 'some people are OK with that and some people aren't' (Child 1.1). Recognising that not all children's voices were represented in the focus groups, it was of further interest that such worries and concerns were expressed by children from the middle-high ability and socio-economic ranges (see Table 2). Children also instigated comparisons of their FLL experiences with other subjects. It was a development that provided further insight, whilst recognising children may have been attempting to please me by possibly referring more often to their FLL (French) than if completing the activity with someone else and caution was applied to the data. Somewhat concerningly, children's responses otherwise implied they experienced a greater range of negatively associated feelings regarding their learning in general. For example, ten negatively associated emojis were chosen/added by children in comparison with only four positively associated emojis, highlighting children's conscious awareness that their learning experiences were not wholly positive and not shared between children as has often otherwise been depicted.

Children's responses also illuminated that the fragmented way in which I had found children encountering FLL in primary school was something they were consciously aware of too. For example: 'We're only learning pieces by pieces by pieces' (Child 3.1); 'Yeah… it's like a jigsaw puzzle…with no picture…you have a bit …but don't know where it fits…' (Child 1.4). Their reactions reiterated notions about FLL being distant to them, and how the infrequency of their learning made FLL harder. For example:

(Child 3.3): 'We ran out of time a bit.'
(Child 1.5): 'It's hard going into it (French) when your brain has been kind of relaxing from it – and we've got to kind of like…. get to work…'
(Child 4.2): 'You've got to kind of like …click back into it' (agreement of others: yeah…yeah).
Child 2.3): 'In Y3 we used to have it more… In year 4 we hardly had any …. and this year… it's only been the last couple of weeks… we hadn't had French in like ages…it makes it harder'.
(Child 1.1): 'It just makes it annoying that it only happens sometimes'..
(Child 2.1): 'When we have French….?'
(Child 3.3): 'Well…when we *do* do French…'
(Child 2.6). 'We don't always do French…But I don't think I'd like it if we had it more…'

Data indicated the sporadic nature of their lessons made for a largely time pressed FLL experience for the majority children. Children regularly used the phrase 'pop-up French', describing how French 'popped up' during their time in school. This contributed towards a reported ad-hoc experience of FLL but one in which the occurrence and use of French was endorsed as becoming an established and normalised part of their wider school experience.

During time in the field, I had found a surprising emphasis on writing in the FLL, endorsed by teachers as being special. Triangulated data however suggested that rather than be enthused about the opportunity to write in full sentences, it was instead interpreted more negatively. For example, 'I get confused and embarrassed' (Child 4.1); 'Not everyone reacts the same' (Child 1.1); 'Some people feel it's useless' (Child 3.4); 'People can be intimidated by writing and reading a lot'(Child 1.2); 'You look around and can see it on everyone's faces…'(Child 4.2).

Challenging emergent findings and adding new insights

Counter to my own reflections about a few aspects of FLL linking to children's other learning, such as 'time' in mathematics, their responses indicated a lack of recognition about *any* links with other aspects of their learning. Conversations revealed children's perceptions of the difficulty of making any other connections with or links from their FLL (French) *because* French was an entirely different language to English, the language of all other aspects of their learning. For example:

Child 1.5: 'It doesn't really link…with anything else… because… it's… a different language!'
Me: 'So …are you saying the language itself stops you linking it with other things?'
Children in focus group 1 (in unison): 'Yeah!'
Me: 'Although you've just done 'time' in maths and you've done some of the 'time' in French too? So…that's a link?'
Children (in unison):' No! (Uttered emphatically as if that were obvious).
Me: 'So… the language itself still stops there being a link?'
Children (in unison): 'Yes!' (As if I'm silly not to have known that).

The very fact that FL was different to English was agreed by children as being obvious that it could have no other connection with other learning, other than perhaps Religious Education. This was suggested by Child 2.5, 'because when we're learning about other religions…and… sometimes they speak differently'. This provided new insight about the fragmented, dislocated manner of children's FLL encounters previously indicated.

Children's responses also made me question another of my own adult-interpretations: that of thinking some were unusually shy in their FL lessons in contrast to other lessons. Instead, they talked about fear, worry and anxiety with FLL and surprisingly dismissing the 'shy' emoji (see Table 4). Responses during this activity also revealed most cared little for fuss and disruption that might upset their teachers: 'It's not that nice when they (teachers) get cross…' (Child 2.2, others nod in agreement); 'We look out for others' (Child 4.4); 'We just want to get it done. Not make teachers angry' (Child 1.6); 'Not everyone likes it (French). You can see it on their faces' (Child

1.3).

Children demonstrated how attuned they were to the responses and reactions of their teachers during their FLL and potentially affected by them too. For example: 'I think the bull picture could also related to Ms xxx when she can't quite find the video clip' (Child 1.2); 'Sometimes the teachers get things wrong that can make us kind of nervous. But it is quite funny though' (Child 3.2).

Children were furthermore revealed as empathetic to the strains that could be experienced by their teachers e.g. getting the whiteboard links to work, finding the requisite place in the published scheme, getting through the lesson as quickly as possible to resume what teachers referred to as 'main work'.

The activities provided children with opportunity to add their own agendas. One example was their discussion of personal FLL goals. This indicated how their own ambitions with FLL were at times counter to those found to be on offer:

Child 4.4: 'My end goal is to like talk to people…and go to friends and I would be able to talk to them…'
Child 4.1: 'My goal is to just get French right whenever I say it'.
Child 4.2: 'I've…. never been…. a fan of French though…. it's …. not…. my…strong
point… I want to learn Spanish'.
Child 4.3: '… I've always like wanted to learn Japanese because…I like… um…
Japanese culture and things …'

Data also reiterated the importance of the supportive and social aspect of FLL to children. For example: 'You don't have to exactly love it…to be… get on with it… because I don't love football either… But it's just the sense of trying…' (Chid 3.5); 'It's why I like French because you know there's always someone there right by your side to give you a hand' (Child 1.3).

Whilst the end product had not been the intended focus of data gathering, the completed Blob bridge activity endorsed the supportive and social aspect of children's FLL experiences, subsequently reported as a major finding in the ethnography. For most of these children, helping each-other out in their FLL lessons appeared central to their FLL experiences. Out of 22 possible Blob characters to choose from (see Fig. 4 & Table 5), 8 characters in total were selected, depicted by letters A-H.

The most frequently selected character was that identified by the letter G, viewed as supportive, standing securely and squarely on the bridge just a little further than half -way, helping another less-sure character across the bridge with a comforting arm, stopping together to pause a while before continuing. The choices provided deeper insight into the levels of responsibility and collegiate learning these children appeared to experience, with conceptions of their role in supporting the FLL of others, and valuing the time spent with others whilst learning. The extent to which children sought to explain their experiences of FLL in tune with their peers in class and/or their own degree of confidence became striking. FLL for these children seemed a very social experience disguised under the wraps of compliance: helping each other 'get through the writing' (children's phrasing) and make sense of the content of the lesson without drawing their teacher's attention. Children's chatter and responses indicated they were much more consciously aware of others in class than even I had noticed from my time in the field. Their own developing self-concept and identity as learners also had a role in helping and supporting others in class, emphasising the value placed on talk with each other in the classroom.

Summary

My analysis makes an important contribution to the way researchers consider the voice of the child in FLL research. To date, no other studies have considered involving and engaging with the voice of the child in the ways developed by this study. Data elicited by the adapted mosaic-type approach facilitated new, nuanced and deeper knowledge and understanding of the range of children's FLL experiences. As a result of incorporating this approach in the final phase of my ethnography, I was able to explore and reflect directly with children about what I had come to know and understand from my time spent in the field. In so doing, some clear resonances between what I had observed, seen, and experienced in the field and children's responses with the activities became apparent. Thereafter I afforded greater centrality to those findings in my study, whilst being able to add finer nuance, detail and insight to others. The approach also allowed me to give children's own voices and agency greater centrality in the research process, not only in deciding which activities to use, but also making their own suggestions to better fit what they wanted to share with me. Data yielded from this approach strengthened my triangulation and afforded me greater confidence and conviction about what was ultimately reported.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article has explained the use of a research approach developed within a longitudinal, ethnographic study about children's FLL experiences in primary school. This approach was inspired by Clark et al. (2003) mosaic approach which was subsequently developed in four ways to address the study's context and needs arising from inductive analysis. This adapted approach involved children not only

Table 4
Emojis chosen by children to represent their FLL experiences.

Rank order	Positive	Neutral	Negative
1	Happy	Confused	
2	Excited, Surprised		Embarrassed
3			Angry, Tired, Frustrated Scared/Worried.
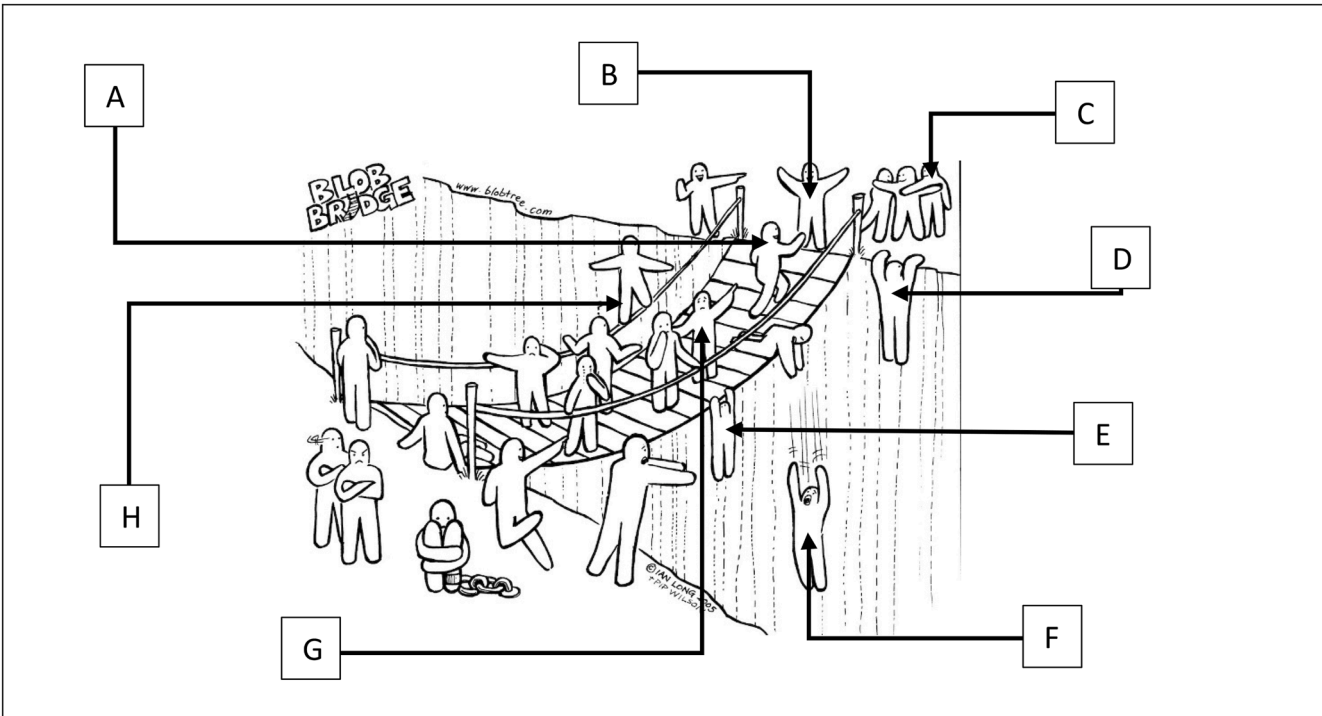
Fig. 4. Blob character choices.

Table 5
Blob choices and reasons.

Blob choice	Number of times selected	Reasons
A	3	'I struggle a bit but I'm ready to make mistakes.'
		'There's a handle nearby if you need it to help you'.
B	2	'Excited and confident with my French – but confused at the same time.'
		'Amazing!'
C	2	'It's about being with people together'.
		'We're in it together with friends.'
		'Everything I've been taught I know, but I don't feel confident on the whole language'.
		'I'm prepared to help others.'
D	3	'Sort of keen'.
		'It's kind of ok'.
		'I'm sort of there but prepared I've got mistakes.'
E	1	'I want to know more but not sure how. It's hard'.
F	1	'I'm happy!' (Child interpreted the character looking really happy)
G	7	'I'm ok'.
		'We help others'.
		'Not everyone likes it, so I try and help'.
		'Some people just don't get it. You can see it on their faces'.
		'I would choose this one because I would if someone was stuck. I wouldn't just carry on and think 'who cares' …I'd be helping them…'
		'This person looks a bit worried. I would go and help them…Let them reach the end of the bridge'.
H	1	'Like walking a tight rope. It's exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time. It's easy to fall off'.

proactively inputting into activity design, but also during implementation and analysis (see Stages 2,4,6 outlined in Table 3).

The adapted approach met the needs identified in the ethnography and is also recommended for use in other language learning research contexts together with children. It not only facilitated more direct engagement with children's thoughts and ideas about FLL but also strengthened the triangulation of themes emerging from the ethnography's inductive analysis. It enabled more intent listening to what children had to say and reveal through their responses, where the collected data proved relevant and valuable for both confirming and challenging emergent findings. This approach also helped mitigate some of the power imbalances between me as an adult researcher and the children, where children's own voices and input allowed me to explore, question and deepen my own coming to know and understand. This facilitated the deconstruction, reconstruction and representation of knowledge and understanding about the under-researched phenomena of children's FLL experiences in primary school. The four ways in which the original mosaic approach was developed can help expand research about what is known and understood about children's FLL experiences in primary school, with the six stages of implementation (Table 3) providing a framework to support inductive research together with children. This approach provides a tangible way in which recognised methodological issues in engaging with children's FLL experiences can be addressed, helping researchers tackle the pernicious issue of adult-centric power and perspective that currently remain prevalent, especially in the field of FLL in England. Whilst I was relieved to have developed a way to successfully address such arising issues and needs within my own research, this approach now stands ready to support the field of FLL research in moving on from its more well-trodden paths with scope to expand what is yet known and understood about the fascinating phenomenon of children's FLL experiences.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Victoria Schulze: Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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