

**Dr. Margaret Simms' response to Rory McDowall-Clark's reflections on:
Is there space for the child in partnership with families?**

In her Reflections Article, Rory McDowall-Clark thoughtfully poses the question, 'Is there space for the child in partnership with families?' The practice of 'working in partnership' in early years increased with the requirements of the National Childcare Strategy (1998). Local Authority Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) were charged with the responsibility of working together in partnership with parents, providers and professionals. Fraught with challenges, I relished the task of building professional working relationships with nurseries, schools, childminders, Children Centres and voluntary and community organisations to enhance early years provision and practice for children, parents and practitioners. Partnership working is without doubt, embedded in early years. It is – for its intended purposes – ethically legitimate. However, by posing her question McDowall-Clark is moving forward the notion of partnership working to include the voice of the child.

Does partnership working currently consider the child's perspective? I suspect not. Should it consider the child's perspective? Yes, of course it should. Far too often adults talk over the heads of children, giving no thought to what is being heard, understood or assimilated by them. If children were the same height as adults we might think twice about talking about them in this manner. Does being smaller than us make their perspective less significant? I think not.

Some would argue that as children change their minds like the weather and are happy to tell you what they think you want to hear, there is little in point in seeking their perspectives. However, this applies also to adults, and we do ask them! Not only is it polite to consult the person (in this case the child) about whom we are making decisions but as McDowall-Clark points out, it is a statutory right for children under-five to be consulted on decisions affecting their lives. I hear someone say, "How can you consult with a baby?" Babies are amongst the most vocal of our under-fives. We only have to put them in the arms of an adult they do not take to and they let us know in no uncertain terms what they think. Readers interested in behaviour know that human beings respond better to doing something they like to do and are interested in so there is every point in seeking the perspectives of under-fives *and* over-fives. There must be room at the table for children. Working in partnership opens many channels of communication. We must tune into the child's channel to gain insight into the child's perspective. Adult discussion of such perspectives then informs decision making and has a positive impact on children and families.