This presentation considers …

How I addressed challenges of securing access to data in the 'real world' (Robson, 2002) for my research degree:

<u>'An attempt to conceptualise ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers'</u>

Firstly, I present some background by addressing three questions:

- What is the nature of the enquiry I have pursued for my RD?

- How did the enquiry develop?

- In this context, what was access? Why was securing it important?

Next, I will share five challenges I encountered while accessing data in the 'real world' for YCaR and how I addressed them

Finally, I will share what I learned about securing access to 'real world' data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry

What is the Nature of the Enquiry?

- Young Children as Researchers (YCaR)

- Epistemological focus

- Located in field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), nested within educational research

- A critical ethnographic study… (Carspecken, 1996)

- …within a constructivist grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006)

How did the enquiry develop?

Grounded in lived experiences

- Personal career change from ECEC teacher to ECEC lecturer

- First international conference - witnessed 'live' the division between educational research and practice (Hargreaves, 1996; Hillage *et al.*, 1998)

Professional Educational Researchers' hegemony:

- Is well documented (Edwards et al., 2005)

- Persists despite significant developments in practitioner research (Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 2007; National College for School Leadership (NCSL), 2007)

- Denies children aged 0-8 years recognition

  as researchers

Dividing | Line

HOW DO I GET TO THE OTHER SIDE?!!

YOU ARE ON THE OTHER SIDE!

WHAMoND 5-4 www.comiczone.com

'Lines' by definition are divisive...
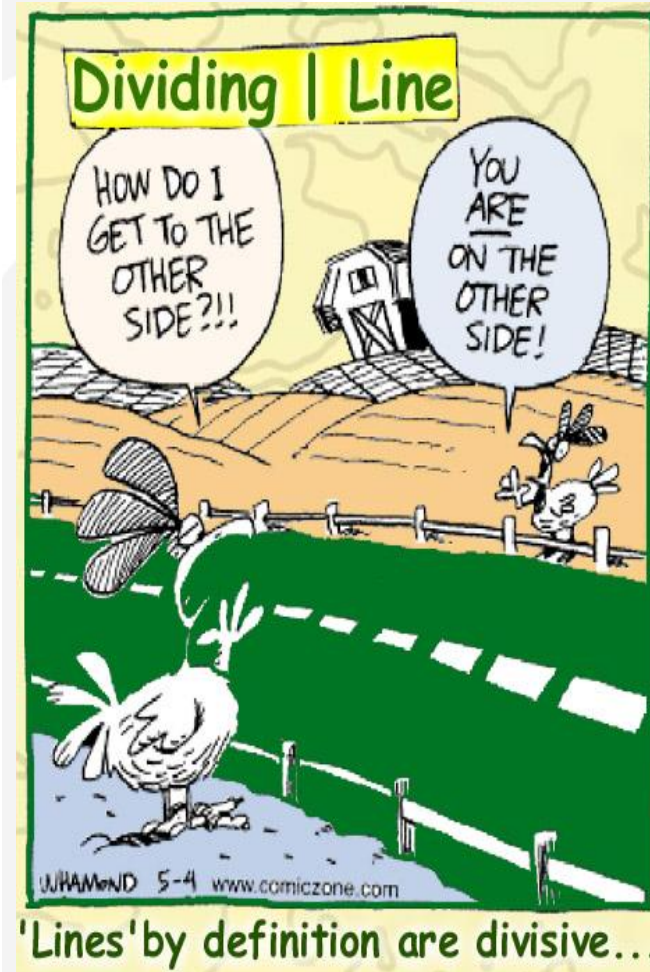
I asked: 'Can children 0-8 years be researchers?'

Psychological Perspective

- Evidence for potentially significant cognitive capabilities of children younger than 8 years (Goswami and Bryant, 2007)

- Very young children are cognitively equipped for aspects of critical thinking (Piaget, 1970; Meltzoff, 1995; 2007; Wellman and Gelman, 1992; Davies and Stone, 1995; Gopnik and Meltzoff, 1998)

- Children as young as 18 months are capable of understanding inference, intentionality, another's goals (Meltzoff, 1977; 1995; 2007): Theory of mind.

Sociological Perspective

- Children as young as 12 months are capable of being social actors (Markström and Halldén, 2009)

- Children's rights agenda suggests possibilities for children to be researchers (United Nations (UN), 1989; Laming, 2003; Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), 2009)

Barriers to young children being researchers or being recognised as researchers

Cognitive Barriers	Socio-cultural Barriers
We don't yet know the precise mix of genetic and environmental factors that underpin developing cognitive capabilities in children 0-8 years (Rutter, 2002)	• Educational research hegemony in England (Hargreaves, 1996; Hillage *et al.,* 1998) • In England we are slow to empower children as social actors (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2008; DCSF, 2009) • For example, we cleave to school readiness as a key rationale for ECEC (OECD, 2006).

Preliminary enquiry (Murray, 2006)

- Mixed methods design (Creswell, 2008)

- Focused on two groups' views about young children as researchers: Professional Educational Researchers (PERs) and ECEC Setting Leaders (SLs)
- Why? As gatekeepers, both PERS + SLs are powerful
- PERs and SLs can facilitate opportunities for young children to be recognised or denied as researchers.

- **Findings included:**
- Both PERs and SLs believe children aged 8 and younger do not have as much agency as they should
- Both PERs and SLs doubt the capability of children aged 8 and younger to research.

Young Children as Researchers…YCaR

Questions emerging from the preliminary study for Young Children as Researchers (YCaR)

- What are the nature and definitions of research in the field of early childhood education and care?

- What enquiries might be important to young children and how might they engage in them?

- What support structures and barriers might affect young children's participation in research in matters affecting them?

- How might a project develop to explore ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers? *As part of this question, issues relating to access emerged during the study.*

In *Young Children as Researchers*, what is access? Why was securing access important?

For ethnographic educational researchers…

- Access is more than walking through a door

- Access is important (Hood *et al.,* 1996; Robson, 2003; Cutler, 2004; Cohen *et al*. (2007)…

- Access leads to the data which provides enhanced understanding of people and their ideas, behaviours and cultures (Cutler, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Schostak, 2002)

- Access involves both ethical and practical issues, often predicated on each other.

- This is particularly highlighted in research involving children…
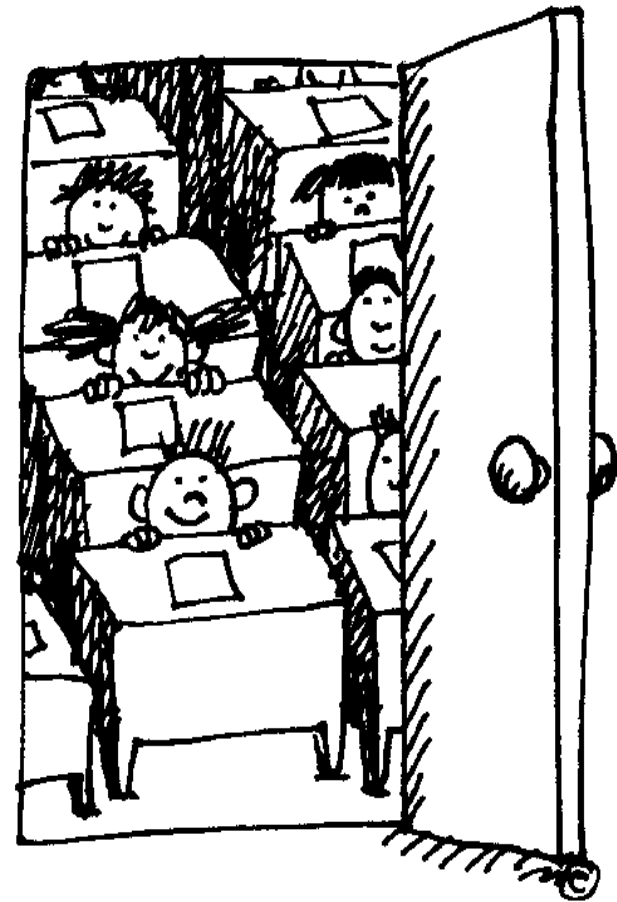
Some Ethical Issues	Some Practical Issues
Institutions have increasingly tight control on researchers through ethical codes (Morrow, 2008), tracing back to the Nuremberg Code (United States Government, 1949) Ethical codes are framed within a context of concern for litigation, safeguarding and rights issues (Morrow, 2008). Ethical codes usually require participants' voluntary informed consent – and in the case of children, consent from their primary carers' - before an enquiry can begin (Homan, 1991)	Some propose that children's assent – rather than consent or dissent – may suffice because it is easier to secure (Rossi *et al.,* 2003; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005) Primary carers or setting leaders may deny consent for research with children. Gatekeepers often take decisions on children's behalf (Homan, 2001; Sime, 2008) In these ways children's rights as social actors can be denied (UN, 1989; Lewis and Porter, 2004; Greig et al., 2007 Skelton, 2008; Coyne, 2010)

This enquiry was about children accessing research

Issues of access relating to children in research refer increasingly to children's involvement in research about themselves (Brownlie *et al.,* 2006; Morrow, 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008).

Internationally we have seen emerging discourses on

- Children as researchers - progression from

  research <u>on</u> children…<u>with</u> children…<u>by</u> children

  (Clark and Moss, 2001; Brownlie *et al.,* 2006;

  Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008)

- 'New sociology of childhood' (James, *et al.,* 1998;

   Corsaro, 2005).

- Children's rights (Alderson, 1995; 2001; CRAE, 2009; UN 1989; UN 2000)

There is now patchy recognition of the child as autonomous and active, rather than an object being prepared for adulthood (Hart, 1992; Qvortrup, 1994)

Such recognition is relatively weak in England (UNCRC, 2008; DCSF, 2009)
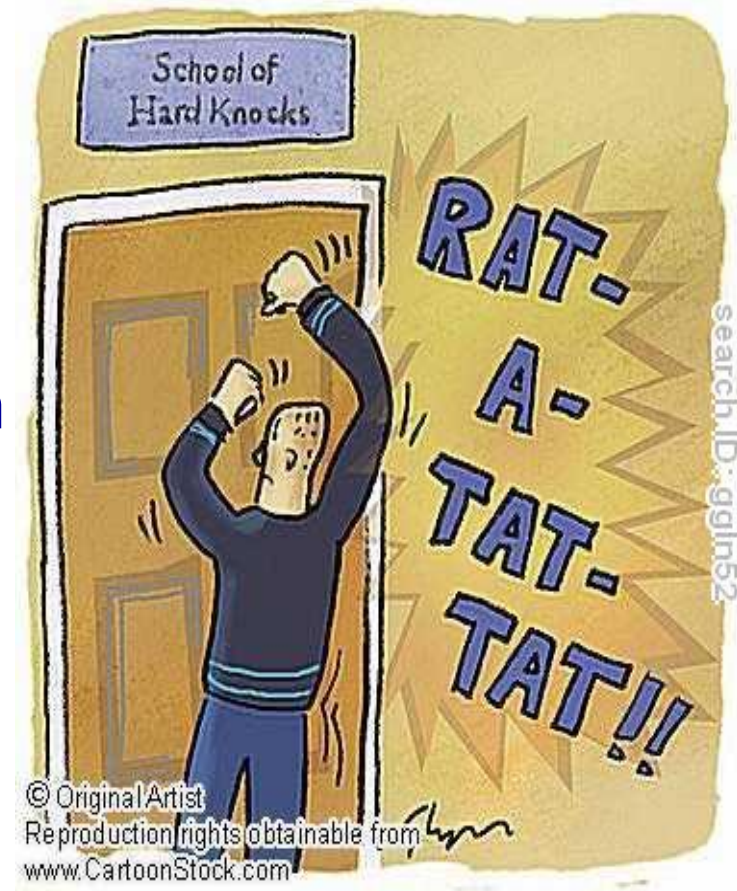
Five challenges encountered while accessing data in the 'real world' for YCaR

1. Establishing an instrument fit for purpose

2. Getting inside an ECEC setting

3. Gaining acceptance from setting staff

4. Gaining informed consent from primary carers

5. Gathering data on children's natural behaviours in their homes

How did I address these challenges?

Access Challenge 1:
An instrument fit for purpose

Professional Educational Researchers (PERs) → **Mixed methods** → **Survey [n=20]** → **n=1**

↓

Interview

←

Qualitative Design

←

Critical ethnography within constructivist grounded theory approach

↓

PERs (n=9) Interview Conversations	**+**	ECEC PERs (n=5) Focus Group

Webb and Webb,1932; Charmaz, 2006; Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2008

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Explore with an aim

Explore broadly

Find out why things happen

Want to explore

Go beyond instinct

Gather data

Explore with a fine focus

Plan

Investigate

Explore without an aim

Increase knowledge

Explore with an aim which changes during the process

Believe what they are doing is good

Question

Take account of context

Enquire

Can replicate output

Do no harm

Find a solution

Research Behaviours

Are focused on their chosen activity

Examine problems

Conceptualise

Use and apply findings in new contexts

Make links

Reflect on results

Can communicate what they have achieved

Can communicate what they attempt to do

?

Can replicate process

Use processes that are fit for purpose

Reflect on process

Develop increasingly better understanding of the world through exploration

Base decisions on evidence

Are objective

Are systematic

Participate with others

Test and check

Seek a solution

Build on others' work

Find out how things happen

Access Challenge 2:
Getting inside an ECEC setting

→ | **PERs suggest data collection from children and adults in ECEC settings [n=3]** | → | **Homes also indicated [n=5]** | →
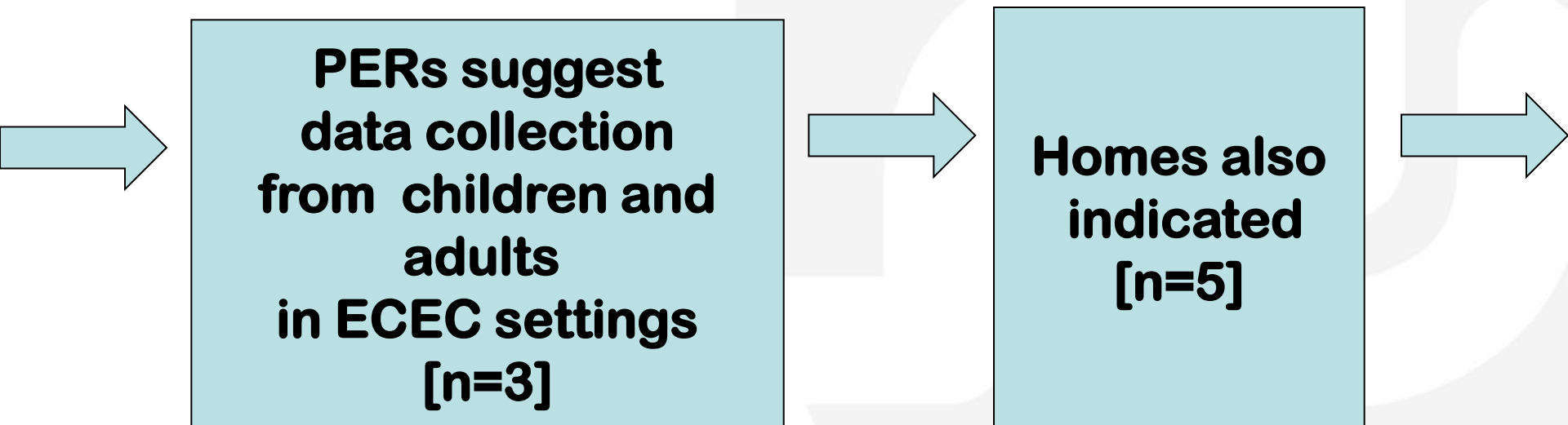
Sylva et al., 2004; Feinstein *et al.,* 2008; Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1986; Hart and Risley, 1995; Yee and Andrews, 2006

Participating Settings in Primary Schools (n=3)

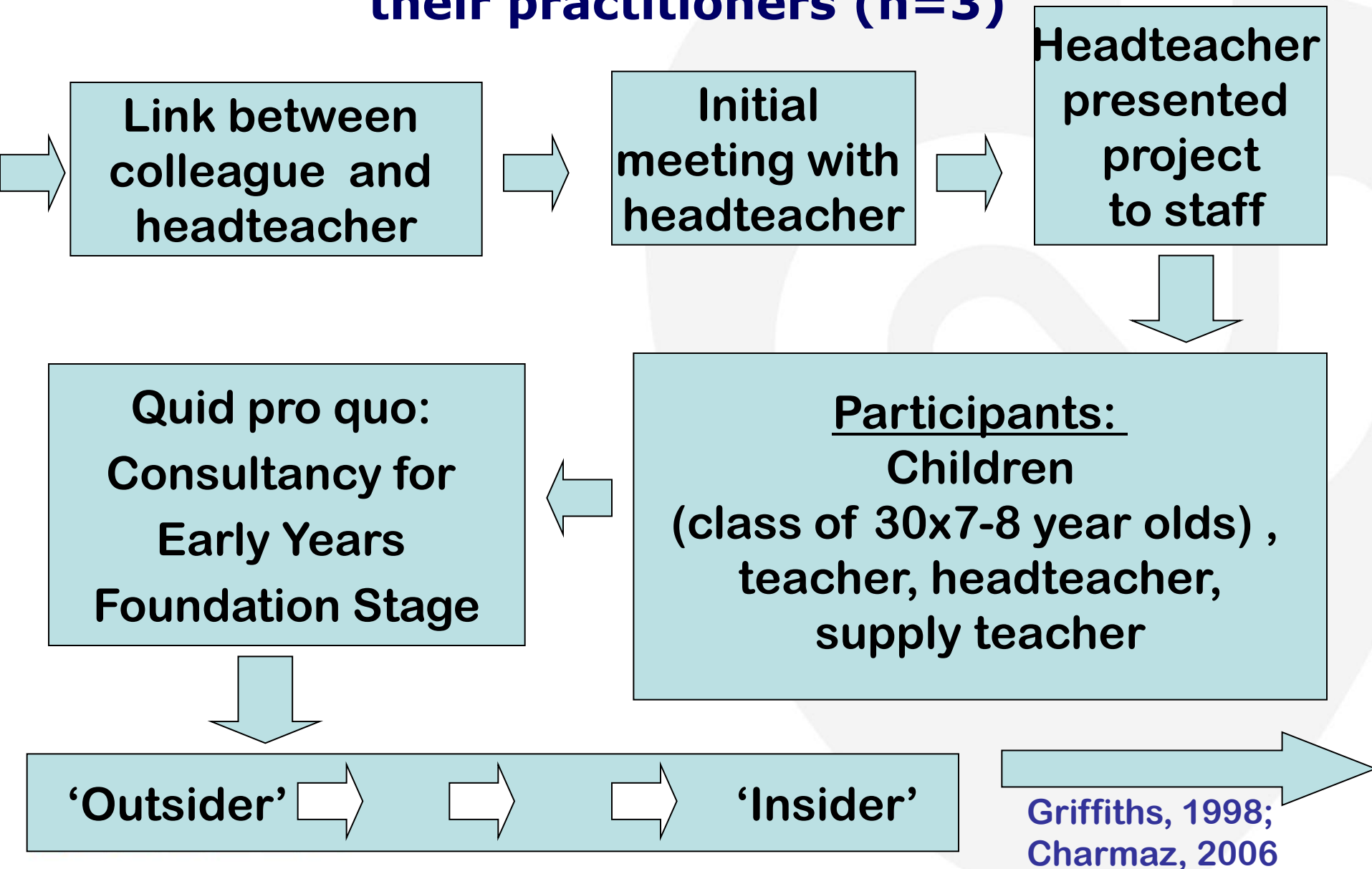| Setting A	Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)
Setting B	4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=7)
Setting C	4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=5)

Pollard and Filer, 1996

Participating Families (n=5)

From	Child (age)	Other participating family members
Setting A	Child A (7)	Family A: Mother / Father [no siblings]
	Child B (8)	Family B: Mother / Father / Sister (10)
Setting B	Child G (4/5)	Family C: Mother / Father / Brother (8) / Grandmother 1 / Grandfather 1 / Grandmother 2 / Grandfather 2
	Child H (5)	Family D: Mother / Father / Brother (4)
Setting C	Child M (5)	Family E: Mother / Father / Sister (4)

Study Design for Accessing Data in Settings and Homes

1) Personal CRB check and UoN ethics committee approval

2) Gain access to ECEC setting

3) Secure informed consent

4) Work as Volunteer TA

5) Collect multiple layers of data in the setting WHILE identifying children for closer focus

6) Home visits 1 and 2 – multiple layers of data collected by families

Ryle, 1968; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; CRB, 2010

7) Share data, review and analyse then develop next steps in study

8) Share outcomes

Accessing Setting A:
Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)

Link between colleague and headteacher → **Initial meeting with headteacher** → **Headteacher presented project to staff**

Quid pro quo: Consultancy for Early Years Foundation Stage ← **Participants: Children (class of 30x7-8 year olds) , teacher, headteacher, supply teacher**
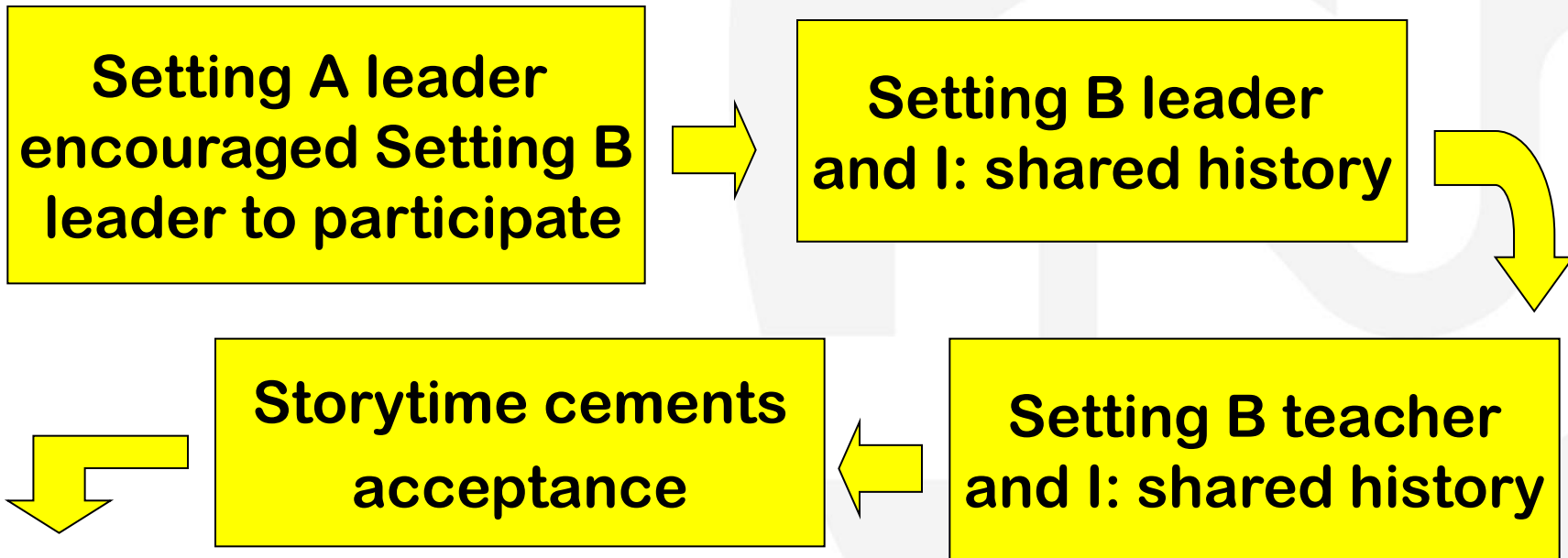
'Outsider' ⇨ ⇨ ⇨ 'Insider'

Griffiths, 1998; Charmaz, 2006

Access Challenge 3:
Gaining acceptance from setting staff in Setting B

4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an EYFS unit and their practitioners (n=7)

Setting A leader encouraged Setting B leader to participate → **Setting B leader and I: shared history**

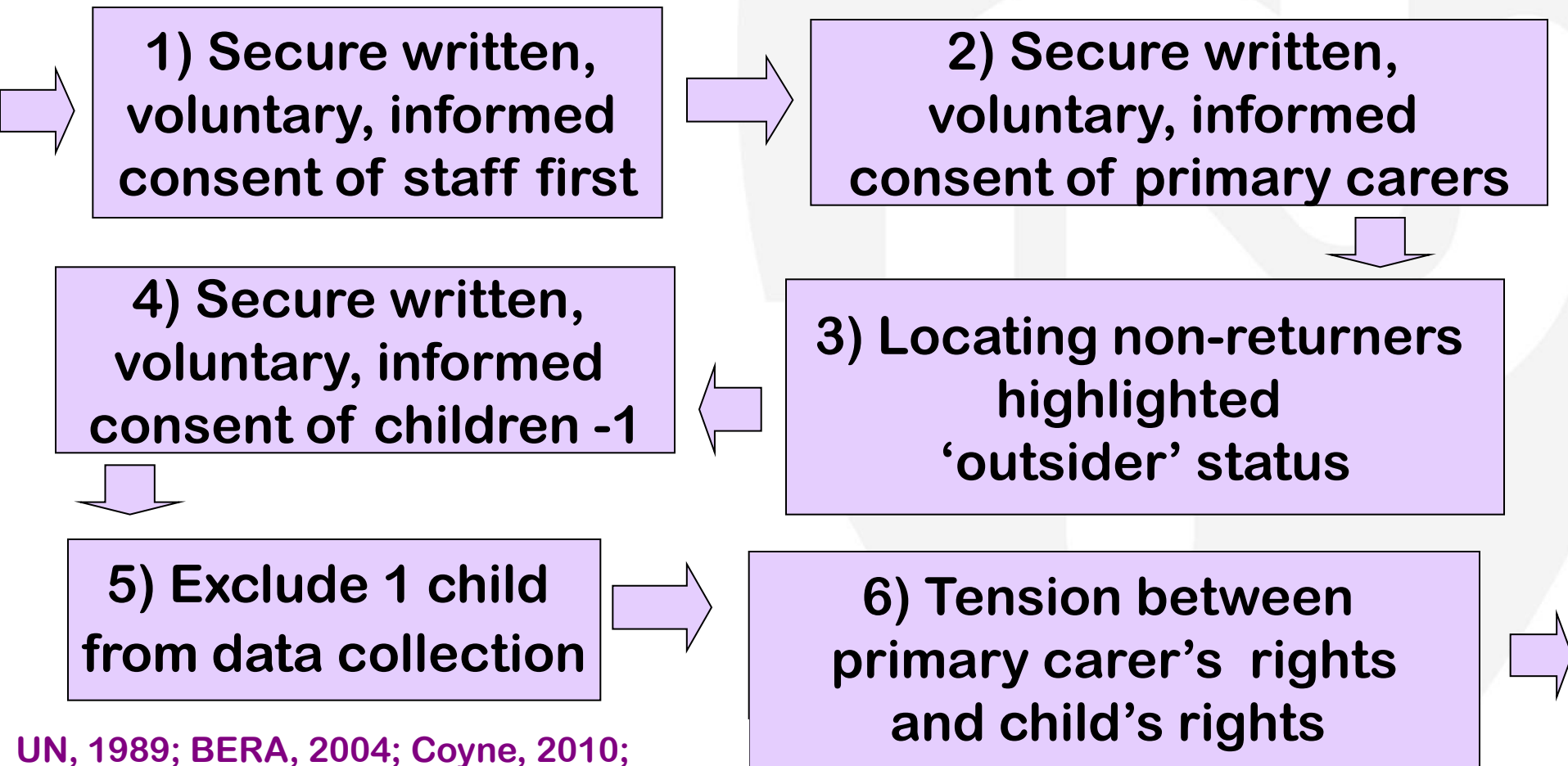**Storytime cements acceptance** ← **Setting B teacher and I: shared history**

Weak acceptance by new Practitioner
Indicates importance of trust and positive relationships through communication and actions over time

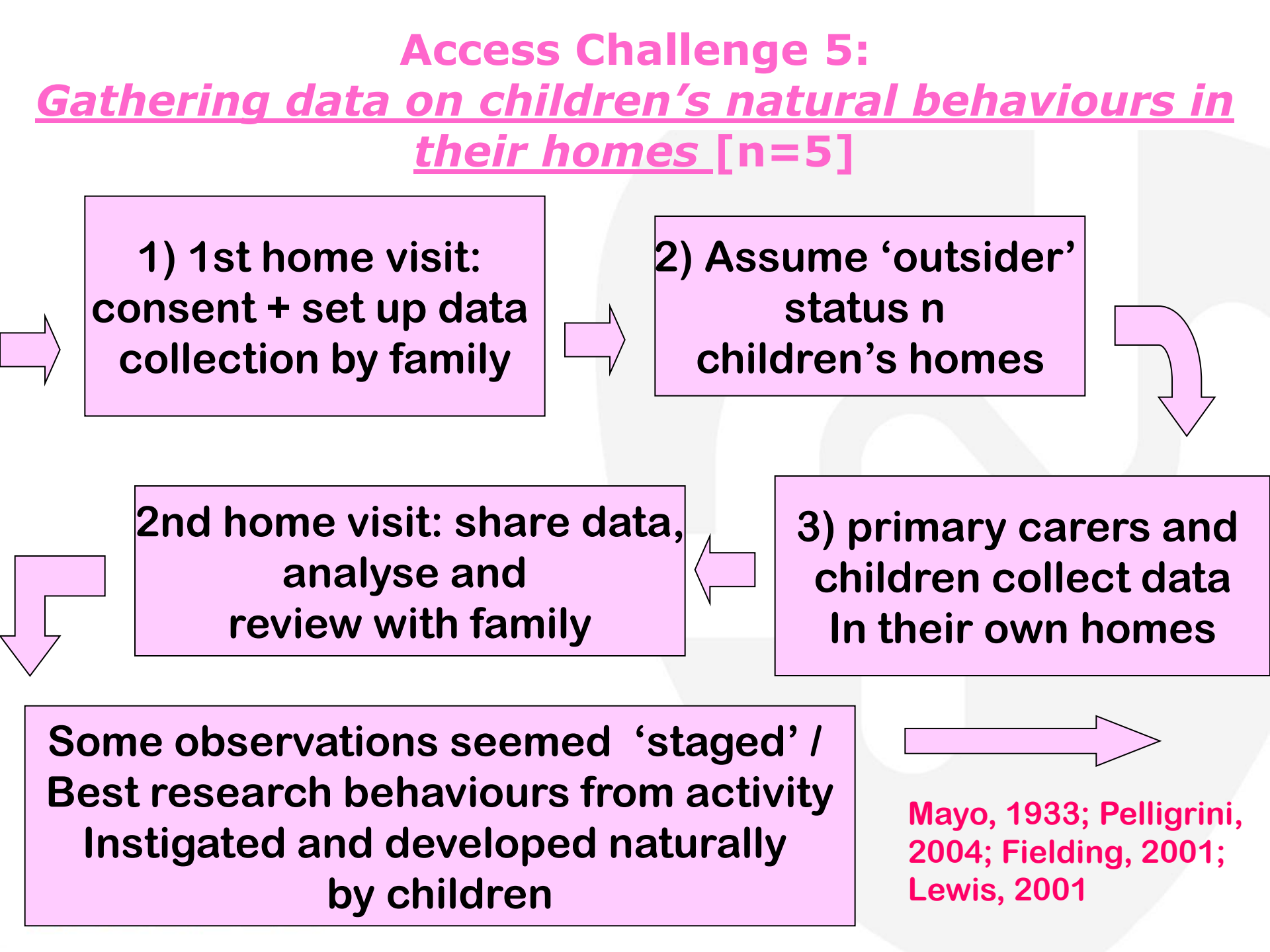Corsaro and Molinari, 2008; Greig et al., 2007

Access Challenge 4:
Gaining informed consent from primary carers in Setting C

4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in EYFS unit and their practitioners (n=5)

1) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of staff first

2) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of primary carers

4) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of children -1

3) Locating non-returners highlighted 'outsider' status

5) Exclude 1 child from data collection

6) Tension between primary carer's rights and child's rights

UN, 1989; BERA, 2004; Coyne, 2010; Skelton, 2008; UN, 1989; BERA, 2004

Access Challenge 5:
Gathering data on children's natural behaviours in their homes [n=5]

1) 1st home visit: consent + set up data collection by family

2) Assume 'outsider' status n children's homes

2nd home visit: share data, analyse and review with family

3) primary carers and children collect data In their own homes

Some observations seemed 'staged' / Best research behaviours from activity Instigated and developed naturally by children

Mayo, 1933; Pelligrini, 2004; Fielding, 2001; Lewis, 2001

Conclusions: What did I learn about securing access to 'real world' data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry?

- Researching with young children in England presents a challenging context

- Researchers cannot expect access to settings 'as a matter of right' (Cohen *et al*., 2007: 55)

- Accessing children's research behaviours presented challenges

- The majority of staff, children and parents were amenable to participating in this study. However, problems presented by a minority can significantly affect access to empirical data

- Legislation and guidance (UN, 1989; BERA, 2004) have limitations

- Legislation and guidance can deny children their rights

What enabled me to address challenges to accessing 'real world' data for the YCaR enquiry?

- Detailed preparation

- Time to create shared experiences with participants

- Sensitivity to participants

- Strong communication

- Drive for positive, equalised relationships

- Facilitation of trust

- A little luck

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