



DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EDD)

'Whether we're the same or different, we're all as one.' An investigation into children's attitudes towards the practice of 'Celebrating Difference' in a small international school in Ghana

An investigation into children's thoughts on difference in the context of the 'celebration of difference' in an international school

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‘Whether we’re the same or different, we’re all as one.’
**An investigation into children’s attitudes towards the practice of
‘Celebrating Difference’ in a small international school in Ghana**

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A thesis submitted for the Professional Doctorate Degree (EdD) of
The University of Bath Department of Education
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To my helpful, articulate and thoughtful participants who were so much fun to work with and who rose to the challenge with a perfect mix of enthusiasm and gravitas.

Abstract

This qualitative study develops an idea considered in an unpublished assignment submitted for the EdD unit 'Educational Policy: Theory & Practice' at the University of Bath which presented a theoretical argument for the cessation of 'celebrating difference' in international schools. This research enquiry extends the original idea by inviting Primary school-aged children in a small international school in Ghana to share their views on 'celebrating difference' in order to consider the practice from a child's point of view. As an alternative to the celebration of difference, the idea of celebrating 'sameness' (common humanity) is also introduced. Through a series of semi-structured interviews and sentence completion exercises, the participants' opinions on various aspects of difference and sameness are explored. As very little research has been undertaken in this area, the literature review focuses on the interrelated areas of culture, difference and identity to provide a context for the enquiry. A significant finding highlights, across all ages, the participants' keen awareness of their differences and their strong belief in the importance and desirability of being different. The participants appear to accept difference as the absolute norm in their lives as they engage with it on a daily basis, but these differences are irrelevant to their friendships. With regards to sameness, while the participants acknowledge people's sameness as the connections between people and a shared need for food, education, shelter, etc., they do not appear to view sameness as something they want to celebrate, not least because of its 'invisibility'.

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‘Whether we’re the same or different, we’re all as one.’
**An Investigation into Children’s Attitudes towards the Practice of ‘Celebrating
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Chapter 1

Introduction – where it all began

This thesis builds on an idea which was submitted as an EdD assignment for the ‘Education Policy: Theory and Practice’ unit at the University of Bath. In the assignment, *‘How am I different? Making the case for a change in policy on celebrating difference in Primary schools,’* I argue that the phrase *‘we celebrate our differences,’* which I had often heard used in international schools to reflect a positive approach to cultural diversity within the school community, is no longer appropriate for a number of reasons, *inter alia*:

- Children are encouraged to focus on difference rather than commonalities
- The highlighting of difference may happen at an age when difference appears to be insignificant to children and when children may not be aware that they are regarded as different by their peers
- Celebrating specific artefacts of culture may mislead people into believing cultures do not change over time
- The highlighting of difference may lead to ‘othering’

The concerns expressed in the original paper had been slowly developing over a lengthy career in international education which allowed me to live and work on three continents and in Islamic, Buddhist, Communist and Christian countries. Despite the significant differences of these countries, I came to recognise just how much my ‘diverse’ work colleagues, parents and children had in common, and consistently observed a commonality of fundamental values such as the importance of family, respect, integrity, honesty, trust, freedom, and so on. This led me to consider that, where international schools maintain a sole focus on the celebration of difference, they may inadvertently overlook the fact that a common humanity exists, which is shared among many people worldwide and may be, I believe, an equally worthy focus for celebration. I therefore found myself questioning the need to celebrate a diversity which was increasingly becoming the ‘new normal’ and, as such, there appeared to be little justification for a celebration of the quotidian in international schools. This was particularly striking in a small school in which I worked in Siberia where, from a school roll of around thirty-six children, eleven nationalities were represented from such diverse countries as Venezuela, Nigeria, Finland, Uzbekistan, Russia and Indonesia. It was while working in that

particular school that I was first struck by how little the children cared about their differences and which, ultimately, led to this research enquiry.

My original paper offered a purely theoretical argument based on readings in the relevant literature, and my personal views, but the ideas discussed in the assignment remained in my mind. When deliberating on a focus for my EdD research enquiry, I considered that the development of these original thoughts would offer me an interesting, relevant and, what I hoped would be, a rewarding project. Having worked in Primary schools for much of my career, and being a strong advocate for the voices of children, I thought young people should be brought into the discussion to share their own opinions on the issue of ‘celebrating difference.’ As I have always respected my students’ ideas, I felt valuable insight could be gained into this issue if I involved children as active participants in my research. The willingness of children, from a variety of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, to seemingly ignore their differences, particularly in small schools with high diversity, has led me to question the wisdom of encouraging the celebration of cultural difference when it appears to be irrelevant to children who are happy just to find interesting playmates as they enter the school environment. Indeed, in my experience, being a good playmate trumps any thoughts of cultural or religious difference once children get together.

While the motto, ‘*we celebrate our differences*’ is, without doubt, well-intended, I wish to explore whether its practical enactment with young children in an international school is, indeed, something the children believe to be worthwhile. In addition, as mentioned above, I believe a singular focus on difference overlooks opportunities to explore the fact that a common humanity exists, which may be an equally worthy focus for celebration. With this thought in mind, I wanted to incorporate an additional element to my research in order to garner children’s opinions on whether the celebration of ‘sameness,’ in terms of those attributes that we share as human beings, was something which could also be considered for celebration and, if so, how ‘sameness’ could be highlighted.

My original paper makes clear that my views on the idea of shared humanity are in no way a call for cultural homogeneity but express a desire to look for what is shared between people rather than solely looking for what is different. We can acknowledge that we are unique, but we can also recognize that difference should no longer have the significance it may have had in previous generations. In accepting the view that there is no single normality, we can appreciate that we are now living in an era ‘beyond diversity’, where being different has much less relevance in a globalized world.

This thesis, therefore, is based on an investigation, through the voices of Primary school-aged children attending a small international school, of the issues surrounding the celebration of difference, along with an exploration of issues of sameness. In researching the literature both for

the original paper and for this thesis, I was unable to find information specifically focused on children's attitudes in this area, and this research therefore seeks to fill this gap in our knowledge. Through a qualitative investigation undertaken in the school where I worked, and through the use of interviews, conversations and other appropriate means, I aimed to gather children's opinions on their understanding of difference, cultural or otherwise, and explore their perspectives on the celebration of difference. In addition, I also sought children's views on 'sameness' to find out if they considered it to be a worthwhile area for celebration.

1a) Definitions of terms used

For the purposes of this research, the term 'children' will refer to those children who are of Primary school age and who are roughly between six and eleven years old. In addition, I have used the term 'celebrating difference' in this work, although I have also heard the phrase 'celebrating diversity' used in the same way. While there are nuanced differences between the two terms, in view of the ages of the children with whom I was working, I believed the phrase 'celebrating difference' would be better understood and would not need further explanation, as perhaps would the word 'diversity.' For the same reason, I opted to use the terms 'same' or 'similar' in my interviews, rather than terms such as 'shared humanity' or 'human commonalities.'

The term 'international school' is used throughout my work as it is in such schools that my experience lies and in which I conducted my research enquiry. The term therefore requires definition. Each of the international schools in which I have worked has been unique, a fact that Fail (2010: 115) explains well when she states,

'Although the basic ingredients for the recipe might be the same (teachers, students, curriculum), the amount and the type and source of the ingredients will lead to a different outcome in each situation.'

The seven international schools in which I have worked displayed significant variations in their 'ingredients' in terms of numbers, nationalities, curricula, staffing and philosophies, so I will keep the definition in its broadest form by citing Murphy (1991) in Hayden (2006: 11):

'International schools serve the children of those international organisations and multinational companies whose parents are called upon to work in many different countries and to change their assignment at frequent intervals; the schools also offer ... educational opportunities to children of host country nationals who want their children to learn English or who prefer the greater flexibility which an international school offers over the national system.'

Chapter 2

Culture, Identity and Difference - a review of the literature

The absence of significant literature in this area is an indication that little research has been published with regards to children's attitudes towards the celebration of difference. However, as noted in the original assignment, related fields have been researched extensively, so pertinent literature does exist in the areas of culture, identity and difference. A review of the literature in these areas will, to some extent, parallel aspects highlighted in the original assignment, although this thesis will allow me to expand on those ideas, include additional literature which was not covered in the original paper and incorporate work that has more recently been added to the field.

This review therefore seeks to examine the literature in three interconnected areas:

- a) Culture – my thesis investigates children's attitudes towards the celebration of cultural difference, so it is important to understand what culture is, how it is manifested in society, and why it is important to people;
- b) Identity and difference – it is important to understand how identity is shaped and how it may be connected to culture; what are the effects of 'difference' on how we are perceived by ourselves and by others?

The review will begin by taking a brief look at the context within which the motto 'celebrating difference' arose in the UK. It will then proceed to look at the literature on culture, in order to seek definitions and to understand its importance in society, before focusing on issues of identity and difference. As each area is represented by significant amounts of literature, the scope of the review will be limited to those areas which have relevance to this research enquiry. Due to the interrelated nature of these three areas, some blurring of lines between them has been unavoidable.

2a) The origin of the phrase 'celebrating difference'

The phrase 'celebrating difference' is ubiquitous - type it into any search engine and you will score a sizeable number of hits. The phrase's very ubiquity makes it difficult to pinpoint where and when, and by whom, it was coined. This problem notwithstanding, it is likely that the phrase made its appearance during the period in the UK when the policies of multiculturalism were popularised.

To set a brief context, prior to multiculturalism, immigrants in post-war UK were expected to assimilate into the host country culture. Modood (2014: 203) describes this assimilation as:

‘...where the processes affecting change and the relationship between social groups are largely one-way with the result being one where the newcomers do little to disturb the society they are settling in and become as much like their new compatriots as possible.’

Bauman (2010: 398) explains that as colonial empires disassembled, people followed their colonizers in search of employment and a better quality of life. Once in the ‘mother country’, these newcomers were expected to assimilate and to behave according to the social mores, morals and laws, while accepting wholesale the prevailing values of their newly adopted society. However, by the late 1960s, policies of assimilation were giving way to policies promoting the tolerance of difference and allowing immigrants to maintain and practise their own customs and traditions while living in the UK. Kymlicka (2010b: 97) explains:

‘From the 1970s to mid-1990s there was a clear trend across western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights. These policies ... involved a rejection of earlier ideas of unitary and homogenous nationhood.’

Thus, in the latter half of the twentieth century, multiculturalism was conceived and delivered as UK government policy. Vertovec & Wessendorf (2010: 4) explain that multiculturalism was manifested as a broad approach which concerned the *‘incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities and their modes of cultural/religious difference.’* Kymlicka (2010a: 98) observes that multiculturalism was characterised at that time as:

‘... a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music and cuisine that exist in a multi-ethnic society.’

As the policies of multiculturalism extended into education and schools, particularly those with culturally diverse student bodies, the easy focus on the ‘feel-good’ celebration of benign customs, music and cuisine was adopted as a multiculturalist approach to the diversity within classrooms. These easily identifiable cultural accessories could safely engage children in Primary schools as a way of offering a ‘multicultural education.’ Hence the *‘4Fs of Food, Festivals, Fashions and Flags’* (Skelton 2007: 388) and the *‘Saris, Samosas and Steel Bands’* (Troyna & Williams 2012: 25) were incorporated into schools’ events. The celebration of cultural accessories was expected to lead to improved understanding and tolerance of cultural minorities and demonstrate that, as Bourne (2007:

2) suggests, *'all members of society can partake in the cultural diversity that has been jointly created.'*

In response to these cultural events, immigrant families within school communities would, no doubt, have felt pride in the recognition of their cultures when showcasing their culinary skills, and displaying their fashions and traditional music, and would regard such performances as a 'celebration,' and a sign of their inclusion within their communities. It thus takes no great leap to connect the schools' highlighting of student cultural differences to the coining of the phrase, *'We celebrate our differences'* as a way of affirming support for cultural diversity. It also takes no great leap to see how the phrase could have traveled into the field of international education in international schools around the world, as western teachers spread their wings to teach in schools beyond their national borders.

However, celebrating difference was not always regarded as *'a positive approach to cultural diversity'* as mentioned in my introduction. Kymlicka (2010a: 99) critiques the '4Fs' picture of cultural celebration, where he describes a tendency *'... to choose safely inoffensive practices as the focus of multicultural celebrations – such as cuisine or music...'* could lead to cultures becoming essentialized, resulting in the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and the belief that cultures are unchanging over time. Kymlicka (2010a: 99) argues that:

'... the very assumption that each [cultural] group has its own distinctive customs ignores processes of cultural adaptation ... and renders invisible emerging cultural commonalities, thereby potentially reinforcing perceptions of minorities as eternally 'Other'.'

In Kymlicka's view, the celebration of difference through the showcasing of superficial cultural characteristics in the context of, for example, a school's International Day or United Nations Day, may preserve the notion of difference rather than promote the values that cultures share and the protean nature of cultural adaptation. Cattle (2006: 90) acknowledges that:

'We have promoted difference in so many respects ... but have generally failed to promote the things that all communities have in common.'

Phillips (2009: 25) notes that one of the ironies of multiculturalism is that, in order to show respect to others, we have been encouraged to view cultures as more different than they really are. In addition, Kersten & Abbott (2012: 324) state:

'The actual process of socially and structurally integrating cultures and differences is jarringly different from the 'beautiful' spectacle of food, music and dance. We must explore the tensions between our varied visions of diversity and uniformity, difference and sameness, inclusion and exclusion, and identity and control.'

In view of Kersten & Abbott's perspective, it is, indeed, hard to see how the celebration of cultural accessories could lead to in-depth understanding of the reality of life within diverse cultures.

Since the end of the twentieth century, multiculturalism has no longer been promoted through UK government policy, and has been overtaken by the desire for more integration of the various cultures represented in the UK. Although the policy change does not affect international schools, all UK schools are now required to develop clear strategies for promoting 'British Values,' defined as '... democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (Department for Education, 2014). This change has been due, perhaps, not only to what has been described above, but also because multiculturalism has come to be seen as 'a means of legitimising separateness and division' (Cantle 2006: 85) which has led to people living 'parallel lives' where different communities live alongside each other but never have any point of contact (p88).

Despite UK government policy changes, the celebration of difference, and its underlying philosophy, appears to have persisted. Anyone who has attended an International Day celebration of cultural difference may well argue that such occasions are, undeniably, a great diversion for young school children who can dress up in colourful costumes, sing songs in foreign languages, dance to drum, sitar or gamelan, eat unfamiliar food and partake in cultural activities to which they are not normally exposed. Indeed, in the right hands, these events can provide children with memorable experiences and excellent learning opportunities. However, in view of the critiques of multiculturalism highlighted in the literature cited above, I believe this form of cultural celebration needs to be given more careful consideration. Where any such celebration of difference is being directed by those who may not have an understanding of the nuances of cultural identity, who may not understand children's perception of cultural difference, and who thus rely on cultural stereotyping, the results could lead to unanticipated outcomes, particularly where the children themselves have not been fully engaged in the decision-making process regarding the celebration.

2b) Maintaining a balance between the highlighting of difference and sameness

As stated above, I believe the celebration of difference needs to be given more careful consideration. While it can present a valuable learning experience for children, I feel it should not be regarded as

an exclusive practice which overlooks the importance of also exploring the values and behaviours which are shared between cultures and individuals, (and which are discussed later in this chapter.) However, difference and sameness should not be viewed as a binary construct or two sides of the same coin; I do not consider them as a simple, clear-cut pairing of opposites. Indeed, I am not suggesting that we replace the celebration of difference with the celebration of sameness, but of seeking a better balance between the two concepts, and an understanding of how they resonate with each other, and with other inter-related ideas, as Kersten & Abbot (2012: 324) outline above when they explain that we need to *'explore the tensions' between 'diversity and uniformity, difference and sameness, inclusion and exclusion, and identity and control.'*

The sole promotion of difference for the purpose of celebration can lead to unanticipated outcomes, as discussed above. Waterson and Hayden (1999: 18) cite Enloe (1985) who states that:

'... a global perspective deeply respects the rich diversity of human cultures ... but also very clearly recognizes that an appreciation for, and understanding of, diverse cultural forms must be based on an awareness of what human beings have in common.'

Enloe's discussion is in the context of global citizenship which he believes can only become reality when the *'us-them' world view has been exposed* and *'with international education focusing on the commonalities between countries, people and culture.'* However, Noddings (2005: 14) counters this argument when she says:

'So long as differences exist and are considered important, ignoring them is the equivalent to not listening – hence to not caring. Where people not only claim difference but also celebrate it, global citizens cannot pretend that differences are unimportant.'

Therefore, in seeking out what is shared between people, we also have to recognize and understand what is different. This is succinctly argued by Appiah (2008: 87) who states:

'... you can't give real meaning to the idea that we're all fellow citizens if you can't affect each other and you don't know about each other.'

Therefore, I feel that international schools need to find a better balance between their approach to difference and sameness by perhaps focusing more on what connects us and less on what separates us, not least because children need to engage with these complex issues and understand that, despite our differences, there are human commonalities which we all share. As Rizvi (2015: 346) explains,

'...an alternative form of globalization ... demands an education that teaches students to see our problems as inextricably linked to the problems of others. It demands the

development of critical skills and attitudes that enable students to imagine our collective futures, for humanity as a whole.'

In an increasingly globalised world, and one in which international school students inhabit, I believe maintaining a focus on the celebration of difference alone is not enough.

2c) Culture

As outlined above, multiculturalism policies allowed immigrants in the UK to maintain their own customs and traditions rather than assimilating into the dominant culture. Kymlicka (2010a: 98), Skelton (2007: 388), Troyna & Williams (2012: 25) and Bourne (2007: 2) explain that it is generally those inoffensive and more visible artefacts of culture such as food, music and fashion, that were showcased, hence the '3S' and '4F' descriptions of how the celebration of difference was realised in international schools. Although the word 'culture' has been used throughout, definitions regarding what exactly culture is have not yet been explored. Thus, the following section of the review will look at the literature which attempts to define the concept and will seek to determine why culture is regarded as important enough for people to feel they have to hold on to it when they settle in new countries.

2c) i. What is Culture?

A scrutiny of the literature shows that, in terms of offering a standard definition for culture, consensus cannot be assumed. Van Oord (2008: 132) suggests the main problem underlying this lack of consensus is theoretical:

'At present, the social sciences lack a generally accepted theory of culture that explains what makes human differences into cultural differences ... a theory that identifies particular human behaviours as facets of a culture.'

This comment is particularly relevant to my research enquiry and I will return to it later in my thesis.

2c) i.i Culture vs Religion

Before looking at definitions of culture, it is important to clarify that religion and culture are not the same thing. Keba (2008: 59) explains that culture differs from religion in that it '*seems to capture a larger slice of social life.*' He suggests that culture includes, '*communal activities, habits, tastes,*

ideals, patterns of social control, and so on...’ so, while religion may constitute part of a culture, and dictate certain forms of behaviour, the two are separate realms.

Roy (2014: 34) offers a useful example of how religion and culture differ when he uses the case of ‘conversion’ in the context of changing religion. Roy explains that *‘people do not convert to a culture: they may adopt it or learn it.’* This example illustrates that while it is possible to change religion over a relatively short period of time, our culture cannot be changed quite so easily. An additional way of illustrating the difference is through acknowledging that while a person can have no religion, it may be difficult for a person to have no culture.

2c) i.ii Some metaphors for culture

Notwithstanding van Oord’s opinion above, a number of researchers have tried to explain culture through the use of metaphor, for example, the *‘mental software’* of Hofstede (1994), where patterns of *‘thinking, feeling and acting’* are likened to *‘mental programs’*; the *‘iceberg model’* of Fennes & Hapgood (1997), which suggests that only a small part of culture can be observed in people as most of the expressions of culture are hidden below the surface, and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner’s (1997) onion metaphor: *‘Culture comes in layers, like an onion. To understand it you have to unpeel it layer by layer.’*

While these metaphors offer interesting images for the concept of culture, I believe they attach an unhelpful sense of permanence to culture, and do not allow for its fluidity in an interconnected world. Rizvi (2009: 262) explains, *‘... groups, while they are culturally marked, are not entirely separated from each other, and are constantly re-shaped by cross-cultural encounters.’* An additional drawback to the metaphors is that they encourage the assumption that those sharing a culture must behave in the same way. Phillips (2009) points out that culture has been redefined to represent non-western and ethnic minority groups:

‘It has become a prominent component in the stereotyping and disparagement of people from minority ethnic groups that everything they do is attributed to their culture.’ (p29)

Van Oord & Corn (2013: 26) explain this attitude as being due to a human tendency to *‘focus on separateness and difference instead of commonality’* which stems from *‘our inclination towards mental categorization.’* Phillips (2009: 31) adds that the perception of people as *‘products of their culture’* is prevalent as a way of trying to understand people from non-western cultures, but she

believes that the ‘*exoticisation of other cultures*’ should stop as it leads to the misguided belief that they are very different from our own (p50/51).

2c) i.iii Anthropological and cultural-historical definitions of culture

While the metaphors above may provide us with creative images of culture, they are not helpful when setting a context for researching children’s awareness of cultural differences. For a more comprehensive definition it is more helpful to look at culture from an anthropological and cultural-historical perspective.

Phillips (2009: 42) cites what she considers to be a classical conception of culture from anthropologist Edward B. Tyler given in 1817:

‘Culture or civilization ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society.’

Keba (2008: 61) complements this idea with a more modern view when he cites Bates & Plog’s (1990: 7) definition:

‘... the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.’

Smith (1990: 179) also raises the temporal element in culture formation and transmission when he explains that cultural traditions and identities are formed within historical circumstances over long periods of time. Smith suggests that this collective cultural identity is made up of three components:

‘a sense of continuity between the experiences of succeeding generations of the unit of population; shared memories of specific events and personages which have been turning-points of a collective history; a sense of common destiny on the part of the collectivity sharing those experiences.’

Thus, it appears that peoples’ shared histories are important to them and integral to their way of life, particularly where that shared history has involved struggle and hardship. Cole (2010: 462) supports this idea and explains that culture is a ‘*symbolic and materially constituted social inheritance*’ which ‘*constitutes the cultural tool kit essential to human social and biological reproduction.*’

Both Cole and Smith suggest cultures must have continuity in order for shared behaviours to be passed from one generation to the next, but the outcome of increased diaspora, mobility and globalization dictates that the transmission of culture through generations can no longer proceed unchallenged. This concern is addressed by Rogoff (2003: 11) who acknowledges the changing nature of culture when she states, *'Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.'*

Keba (2008: 70) believes that, although we express ourselves according to our *'cultural codes,'* we are not prevented from distancing ourselves from established practices, and there is nothing to prevent us from pursuing interests that diverge from community norms. Keba recognises that individuals can act as *'cultural dissidents'* and offer fresh interpretations of their respective society's interests and ideals. In this way, we are not bound by our culture. Indeed, Rogoff (2003: 12) adds that, *'variations among members of communities are to be expected, because individuals connect in various ways with other communities and experiences.'*

2c) i.iv The challenging nature of defining culture

The main difficulty in explaining comprehensively what culture is, notwithstanding van Oord's concern regarding what makes *'human differences into cultural differences'*, lies in the fact that we are rarely asked to consider it in abstract terms. It is always easier to describe other people's cultures, as our own culture tends to be invisible to us. Cushner, McClelland & Safford (1992: 28) explain that cultural knowledge is often taken for granted because:

'Few people ever take a formal course in 'culture'. Few ever learn why they behave the way they do, or why they think many of the things they do.'

Consequently, we only notice cultural behaviours when we come across people who behave in a noticeably different way to us, and when we realize our taken-for-granted behaviour is being challenged. Cole (1997: 8) says that, *'Like a fish in water, we fail to 'see' culture because it is the medium within which we exist,'* while Fennes & Hapgood (1997: 13) explain the dilemma as *'trying to reflect on something we are part of.'* They suggest that our reflection on our own culture will *'always be limited by the restricted view of our consciousness and our understanding.'*

However, in contrast to what is stated above, Hoggart, in his Reith Lecture (1971: transcript p3), believes that we need to know our own culture *'sensitively and intelligently'* in order to respond *'anything like fully to cultures not our own.'* Hoggart warns that, *'our own culture will be a prison unless we can surmount it and become in a certain sense cultureless, international.'* Despite

Hoggart speaking almost fifty years ago, his comment is reflected in Keba's (2008: 70) belief mentioned above that we are not '*bound by our culture.*'

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties in achieving consensus over defining the concept of culture, most people who have visited, or who have lived in, a multicultural society, have some notion of what it represents.

2c) i.v The transmission of culture to children

As this research enquiry has children's views as its focus, it is important to understand how cultural behaviours are acquired in childhood. Pearce (1998: 48) explains that the transfer of culture from one generation to the next '*demands a high level of engagement between adult and child.*' Pearce adds that this engagement is generally undertaken through the child's mother who provides '*value judgments for the child... these qualitative scales make up the constructs by which the child measures the perceptible world.* (p49)' However, I would suggest that the interactions between mother (or care-giver) and young child reflect the expectations and values of the mother, and not necessarily those of the cultural group. The mother is an individual within the group so will pass on group behaviour to a lesser or greater extent, depending on which traits she holds important. Rogoff, Dahl & Callanan (2018: 7) point out that children's cultural participation '*is not limited to the aspects of their lives that vary across communities*' but also '*involves features that are held in common across communities.* They further explain that:

'Children observe, contribute to, discuss, and are instructed about cultural practices through everyday interactions with siblings, peers, parents, and other community members. While participating in cultural practices, children grow and transform their ways of being. (p6)'

At this point, it is worth noting what Ramsey (1998: 69) observes about children and culture:

'Despite the profound influence of culture on all aspects of learning and development, the concept of culture itself is abstract, and most children are not consciously aware of their own or others' cultures... they probably do not see their family's behaviours or those of other people as 'cultural.''

In view of what Fennes & Hapgood (1997) and Cole (1997) state above, regarding the difficulties in understanding our own culture, it is unsurprising that children may not be aware of such differences. Alternatively, it could simply be that young people do not identify different human

behaviours as cultural, which takes us back to van Oord's (2008) earlier question regarding what turns human behaviour into cultural behaviour.

2c) ii. Why culture matters

As explained above, from a cultural-historical perspective, culture is about people and communities, and a way of living based on a shared history that is passed down through the generations. In this way, culture has significance in our personal identities, which is why the right to practise our beliefs, religion and freedom of speech, along with the right to do so without discrimination, is enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948). Indeed, Noddings (2005: 13) believes that, on a human level, *'human life is certainly enriched by the existence of different cultural practices.'*

On a more theoretical level, the importance of the preservation of culture, as suggested by Keba (2008: 58), is that it is generally held to be because it has *'moral worth'* and this necessitates public acknowledgement, which is then realised through *'institutionalized politics of cultural recognition.'* If something is regarded as having a moral worth, then it is reasonable to believe that it merits safeguarding. Taylor (1994: 68) argues that just as there is a necessity for humans to have equality of both civil rights and voting rights, *'so all should enjoy the presumption that their traditional culture has value.'* Taylor expands on this *'presumption'* when he explains it is the claim that *'all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings (p66).'* Rockefeller (1994: 87) further adds to the argument by highlighting the importance of developing our understanding that:

'... respect for the individual is understood to involve not only respect for the universal human potential in every person but also respect for the intrinsic value of the different cultural forms in and through which individuals actualize their humanity and express their unique personalities.'

In practical terms, Gupta & Ferguson (1992: 11) say that culture should be preserved because *'remembered places'* serve as *'symbolic anchors of community.'* They suggest that the memory of the *'homeland'* ... *remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced peoples.'* Levy (2000: 5/6) expands on the importance of *'home'* when he states:

'... we need to take seriously the enduring power of group loyalty and attachment, and the durability of ethnic and cultural groups ... They seek places that feel like home, and seek to protect those places ... These feelings are powerful ... and ignored at our peril.'

If we accept Cole's (2010: 462) belief that culture represents '*social inheritance*,' and that people are shaped in ways that are conscious as well as unconscious, '*by the practices through which we have become the people we currently are*' (Phillips 2009: 52), then it is understandable that people will feel a close connection between their culture and their identity. Thus, if you threaten a person's culture then you may also be threatening that person's identity, although the extent of the threat would depend on how invested the person was with their own culture, and how they engaged with people from other cultures.

As stated previously, culture cannot be regarded as unchanging and there is no clear consensus on the importance of maintaining traditional cultural recognition and Taylor's (1994: 66) '*presumption*' mentioned above. Indeed, Sen (2006: 113) clearly disagrees with Gupta & Ferguson's metaphoric '*symbolic anchors*' when he uses the same metaphor to argue that:

'The temptation toward using cultural determinism often takes the hopeless form of trying to moor the cultural anchor on a rapidly moving boat.'

Sen (2006: 116) promotes the idea of cultural freedom, which he believes all humans should have, and questions whether we should support '*cultural conservatism*' by asking people to '*stick to their own cultural background*' solely to maintain cultural diversity. Sen (p116) further contends that to '*plead for cultural diversity*' on the basis that '*this is what different groups of people have inherited*,' contradicts the idea of cultural freedom.

While Hutnyck (2006: 354) does not argue against Taylor's conviction that traditional culture has value, he does question the connection between culture and identity, and believes that the two are not equivalent as '*...culture morphs from something you have to something you do*.' Looking at culture in terms of how some international schools celebrate difference, we can see that culture has, indeed, been transformed into something we 'do' rather than something we 'have,' not least because of the practical need for schools to showcase their celebrations: cultural behaviours need to be made concrete and visible in order to allow for reproduction in public performance or exhibition. In translating culture in this way, it is evident that we are not showcasing peoples' identities, merely showcasing the visible artefacts of their culture. Thus, it would appear that Hutnyck makes a legitimate argument.

Phillips (2009: 48) takes the argument further when she queries whether we should bother with culture at all. She suggests that we should abandon it as '*an absurd simplification or hopelessly compromised concept*' and states:

'Many social theorists now stress hybridity, diaspora, border crossing, and translation, arguing that the characteristic phenomenon today is a mixture of cultural assertion and refusal, cultural borrowing and reimagining; a complex negotiation and renegotiation of identities that defies the simple categories of original or traditional culture.'

It is true that the lines between culture (what we have) and behaviour (what we do) have become blurred, as Hutnyck has suggested, and highlights the dangers of conflating the two concepts. The linking of culture and behaviour has led to people tolerating abusive behaviours, which are 'excused' in the belief that they are part of a group's culture. For example, practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage have, until relatively recently, been allowed to continue under the assumption that they were 'part of the culture' of those people observing such practices; the authorities who did not share that culture did not want to interfere for fear of passing judgment on another's culture and the consequent charge of racism. Accordingly, there is an argument to be made for creating a distinction between the terms 'culture' and 'behaviour' which would help clarify that harmful activities cannot be excused as cultural practices. Van Oord (2008: 144) expresses concern at the eagerness with which we '*pin human differences down as cultural differences.*' He believes that once human differences are labelled '*cultural*' we accept them as fundamental differences. Van Oord explains the danger in this within a school context:

'If we teach students to interpret human differences in terms of culture, we foster a situation whereby in future experiences they will perceive most human differences as cultural.'(p144)

Keba (2008: 71) goes further when he states that, '*culture*' *does not deserve the inviolable status it is accorded in defence of multiculturalism.*' He suggests that culture does have some worth in identity-formation (a point on which Hutnyck disagrees as stated above) and that it is our unique individual identities that should be publicly protected, rather than our notions of culture.

Keba's ideas relate to my research enquiry in that they acknowledge our unique identities, while questioning the idea of cultural celebration. Indeed, as Olssen (2004: 188) argues:

'No minority, and no culture, can guarantee their own survival forever in any traditional or theoretically 'pure' sense, as openness to others, and to the world outside, is one necessary principle of democracy.'

Despite the ‘anti-culture’ argument outlined above, and Phillips’ rather extreme assertion that culture should be abandoned, I believe that humanity is not yet ready to do away with the idea of culture, not least because it is intertwined with people’s identities and their social histories, which is discussed in section 2e). However, I believe it is important to accept that, as Olssen states, culture cannot survive in its ‘pure’ sense in an increasingly interconnected world. The reality is that culture is still important in peoples’ lives and continues to play a major role in public discourse in culturally diverse societies, but it must be recognized that culture is not immutable.

2d) Organisational culture – the culture of international schools

The concept of culture is not only limited to human groups, but has also been applied to organisations, which include schools.

2d) i. Defining school culture

Prosser (1999: 14) explains that school culture, with reference to all schools in general, is:

‘... an unseen and unobservable force behind school activities, a unifying theme that provides meaning, direction, and mobilisation for school members.’

Prosser states that one way of looking at school culture is to ‘*see it as a holistic entity that pervades and influences everyone within a school (p14).*’ MacNeil, Prater & Busch (2009: 74) capture the subtlety of school culture when they highlight its complex nature and its ‘*very unique and idiosyncratic ways of working.*’ Lumby (2013: 21) tries to use a more creative metaphor to explain school culture when she describes it as the ‘*Higgs boson of schools.*’ She goes on to clarify that it is ‘*the element that gives shape and impels or prevents the movement of everything else. Culture shapes what can be done.*’ Deal & Peterson (2016: 15) add that school culture ‘*can also influence the emotional and psychological orientation of a school.*’ Therefore, a school’s culture is important as it has a significant effect on children’s learning, and a strong influence on ‘*... the ways of behaving and thinking that perhaps unconsciously shape the actions of leaders, teachers and pupils (Lumby 2013: 23).*’ Indeed, MacNeil, Prater & Busch (2009: 74) tell us that school principals understand ‘*the critical role that the organizational culture plays in developing a successful school.*’

2d) ii. School cultures in international schools

The above definitions can be applied to international schools, although there are further factors affecting the organisational culture in such schools due to, *inter alia*, their location, diverse student/teacher body, languages spoken and curricula. Bates (2010: 5), citing Hill (2007), explains

that international education '*seeks to integrate students into an international system where differences in culture are the norm.*' He adds that an international education focuses on curricula and approaches to teaching which develop '*skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to function effectively as citizens of the world.*' Because of these factors, acceptance of diversity, for example, will be embedded in a school's values and thus be strongly reflected in the school culture. Blandford & Shaw (2013: 155) explain that international school culture:

'... affects the manner in which all members of the school community relate to each other. The school culture may be visible and explicit, or vague and implicit. It may be strong and dominant, or virtually impotent.'

In my experience, in the international schools in which I worked, a culture of acceptance of diversity as a norm was consistently explicit and strong, and particularly in those schools with low student numbers and high diversity. However, Caffyn (2010: 66) challenges the idea of an international school culture when he states that its creation is '*... at odds with a profession that thrives on diversity.*' Caffyn describes such international school cultures as:

'... artificial structures placed in complex environments with a diverse populace. They cannot create consensus because they are too diverse.'

Caffyn's argument does not appear to be generally shared in the literature, not least perhaps, because he believes international schools are '*too diverse.*' I would suggest that no international school can be '*too diverse*' and all schools, whether international or national, will develop a unique school culture regardless, or because of their circumstances. However, these school cultures can range along a continuum from being highly child-centred and supportive cultures, through to highly toxic cultures that impede or stifle effective teaching and learning. Nevertheless, just as it may be difficult to imagine a person with no culture, I believe it would also be difficult to imagine a school with no culture.

2d) iii. The influence of school culture on children

As stated above, school culture can influence the behaviours, actions, and ways of thinking as it '*pervades and influences everyone within a school.*' School culture is therefore significant to the way a school performs and the ways in which it can influence the children who attend the school, as Allan (2002: 45) states, '*Students will interact with the school culture as much as with one another.*' The length of time children spend in the school will increase the influence of the school culture, particularly in young children's formative years. Therefore, the effect of school culture on children's attitudes and beliefs cannot be underestimated.

The influence of school culture on children will be further discussed later in this thesis in section 7a) Limitations of the Research Enquiry.

2e) Identity and Difference

2e) i. Identity

While Hutnyck (2006: 354) argues that culture is not equivalent to identity, it makes sense to recognise that issues of identity are linked with culture in terms of the communities in which we grow up (for example, home, school, faith-group) and the influences brought to bear upon us by our parents and friends, along with accepted behaviours within those communities. In addition, once we acknowledge identity, we also have to recognise difference: I am ‘me’ because I have a unique identity; ‘you’ are not the same as ‘me’ so therefore ‘you’ must be different. At a simple level, and particularly within the same community, this me/you difference is irrelevant as even very young children are aware that we do not all look or sound the same, and do not behave in the same way. However, where the me/you difference results in an unequal power difference, then the effects can lead to potential conflict. The next section will look at literature on identity, in a variety of forms, in those areas which are relevant to the research enquiry, and how being perceived as ‘different’ may influence social outcomes.

2e) i.i The relational nature of identity

Your identity presents you with the perception that you are unique and there is no other person just like you, as Maalouf (2000: 10) states, ‘*my identity is what prevents me from being identical to anybody else.*’ Gewirtz & Cribb (2008: 40) suggest that our identity is the account that we give of ourselves and not the accounts that others give. However, Baumeister (2011: 49) disagrees and believes a person’s identity exists only in relation to other people:

‘Attachments, by definition, link different people together, and roles prescribe how multiple individuals do/should interact (teachers have students, leaders have followers, helpers have recipients, lawyers have clients, physicians have patients, and so forth).’

This makes sense as, for example, where a person self-identifies as kind and generous, but others regard that person as selfish and stingy, then there is an incompatibility between self-perception and perceived reality. In this respect, your ‘unique you’ cannot be separated from how you are regarded by others through the relationships you form within communities; your identity has to be validated

by your peers. Thus, your identity is a product of your environment as you are growing up. Parekh (2000: pS252) explains:

'...our humanity, gender, culture, religion, values, moral commitments, dominant passions, psychological and moral dispositions, and so forth are constitutive of us in the sense that we either cannot abandon them at all or cannot do so without becoming different kinds of persons.'

2e) i.ii Identity as a narrative

Giddens (1995: 54) frames the idea of identity in an alternative way when he states that *'identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.'* Giddens connects identity with an individual's biography which must *'continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.'* While Giddens' connection of identity with narrative-creation sits well with how I believe children develop their identities, I would suggest that it still has to be relational as our identity underpins our behaviour which, in turn, is viewed by those around us; the reaction of others to what we say and do must have an impact on identity formation. Sfard & Prusack (2005: 21) also make connections between identity and stories but, unlike Giddens, they uphold the relational nature of identity:

'These are stories that people tell about themselves or about others to their friends, teachers, parents, children, and bosses, as well as to researchers.'

Giddens' and Sfard & Prusack's views on identity development have particular relevance to those globally mobile children in international schools who, according to Sears (2011: 83), may use narrative *'... to form and maintain their identity...'* Sears (2011: 84) suggests that,

'Narrative is ... a mechanism that unifies the multiple social, cultural and linguistic experiences to which participants have been exposed, and is used as the means whereby they offer an account of themselves to others.'

Clearly young children will not be conscious of the *'stories'* they are telling others about themselves as they develop their identities through their personal narratives, but their behaviours can be observed by others and, as stated above, the positive or negative reactions of peers will influence the narratives being developed.

Baumeister (2011: 49) suggests our identity in society accumulates its meaning *‘in terms of what it contributes or inflicts, thus fleshing out who the person ends up being.’* Thus, our identity is initially dependent upon our social group, along with the cultural behaviours that influence that group. However, Baumeister’s comment, *‘... who the person ends up being’* gives a sense of finality to our identities, whereas, if we believe Giddens and Sfard & Prusack, our identities are never fully realized as there will always be another story to tell, another narrative to complement our developing identities. Our identities can only be complete when there are no more stories to tell.

2e) i.iii Identity and habitus

Bourdieu links identity to social grouping when he writes about his notion of ‘habitus.’ Edgerton & Roberts (2014: 195) cite Bourdieu (2002: 27) who defines habitus as:

‘... the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world. It is a system of durable, transposable, cognitive ‘schemata’ or structures of perception, conception and action... Habitus is rooted in family upbringing (socialization within the family) and conditioned by one’s position in the social structure.’

Bourdieu suggests that, as our habitus develops in early childhood, it operates at the sub-conscious level and becomes ‘embodied.’ Thus, habitus unconsciously shapes the minutiae of who we are: the way we walk, the way we talk, the language choices we make and our world view. Habitus operates within a ‘field,’ or what we could call our social circles, and allows us to navigate these familiar circles competently, with what Bourdieu (1990), cited in Adams (2006: 514), calls *‘le sens pratique,’* or what McNamara Horvat & Davis (2011: 144) suggest is *‘the basis of our ‘common sense’ way of operating in the world.’*

Bourdieu originally applied his concept of habitus to the study of the working classes, as a way of explaining their lack of social mobility. He suggested that it is our habitus that influences our fundamental identity, dispositions and aspirations, although, if we accept Bourdieu’s view of habitus, it is not difficult to see how a merging of habitus and culture can have an underlying and deep-seated effect on our identities through the expectations of the social (or cultural) group to which we belong, particularly during our formative years.

Nevertheless, just as culture is protean in nature, Bourdieu argues that our habitus can also change. This aligns with Keba’s view (2008: 70) stated above that, although we express ourselves according

to our *'cultural codes,'* there is nothing to stop us from pursuing interests that diverge from community norms; just as we are not tied to our culture, we are not bound by our habitus. Edgerton & Roberts (2014: 202) explain that although our choices and actions *'are shaped by our habitus'* they are not *'programmed'* by it: *'we cannot fully escape nor are we caged by our history.'* Bourdieu sees habitus as the reproduction of a group's history through time in order to maintain the *'status quo.'* However, as Edgerton & Roberts (2014: 199) point out, our habitus can be altered:

'Primary socialization experiences are indeed foundational, and although wholesale change is unlikely as new experiences are 'perceived through categories already constructed by prior experiences' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133), habitus continues to be molded by new experiences.'

Thus, when our habitus encounters an unfamiliar field, *'the resulting disjuncture can generate change and transformation,'* Reay (2004: 436).

2e) i.iv The problem of ascribing shared cultural characteristics

While our identity is not necessarily discernible to others, the actions we take and the decisions we make reflect aspects of our identity in the social sphere. However, while our identity initially develops within our cultural group (or social group if we are to apply Bourdieu's concept of habitus), the belief that we must therefore share common identities with all other members of that group is mistaken. With regards to habitus, Bourdieu suggested that it is unique when he explained that, *'just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual habituses are identical.'* (Bourdieu, 1990c: 46, cited in Reay (2004: 434). Nevertheless, Kim (2008: 362) explains, *'some researchers have tended to lump together all individuals ascribed to a particular group and portray them as though they are a homogeneous group with identical characteristics.'* This notion is clearly as absurd as the suggestion that if I am classified as English (based on my country of birth, first language and passport), then I must subsequently share *'English cultural traits'* with all other people who are also classified as English. Indeed, Maalouf (2000: 101/2) observes:

'Would it be an exaggeration to say I have much more in common with a random passerby in a street in Prague or Seoul or San Francisco than with my own great-grandfather?'

Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest we may have more in common with people from different countries and cultures who share our values regarding human rights, democracy and social justice, than with a neighbour from our own culture who may show racist, misogynistic or bigoted attitudes.

When applying such logic to the issue, it is clear that the idea of complete cultural homogeneity is incongruous and, as a result, just as we acknowledge that not all English people are the same, then it follows that, for example, not all Indians, Arabs, Africans, Muslims, Jews or Christians are the same. However, it is still common practice to classify people wholly by their race or religion. Maalouf (2000: 21) underlines this behaviour when he notes:

'Taking the line of least resistance, we lump the most different people together under the same heading. Taking the line of least resistance, we ascribe to them collective crimes, collective acts and opinions.'

The difficulties of preventing people from regarding cultural groups as uniform is further complicated when people feel they can make uninformed assumptions regarding others' identities and ascribe these to people based on stereotypical beliefs. Sen (2006: 6) states that, despite how we see ourselves, *'our freedom to assert our personal identities can sometimes be extraordinarily limited in the eyes of others.'* Sen (2006: 37) argues that although we may have a strong sense of belonging to a particular community, this should not overwhelm our other affiliations and connections. Sen (2006: 150) raises the question regarding whether humans should be so narrowly defined when he wonders if we should be:

'... categorized in terms of inherited traditions, particularly the inherited religion, of the community in which they happen to be born, taking that unchosen identity to have automatic priority over other affiliations...?'

This argument is further advanced by Sleeter (2012: 570) who warns against *'essentialising'* cultures into fixed characteristics, which are then ascribed to groups, and then assuming that students who are assigned to that group share the same characteristics, assuming a group identity rather than an individual identity. This argument is also made by Gewirtz & Cribb (2008: 44) who believe that *'people do not necessarily identify with the groups they are classified by others as belonging to.'* They suggest that our group identity is only one small part of our identity, which leads us to the issue of whether we have single or multiple identities.

2e) i.v Single or multiple identities?

Grimshaw & Sears (2008: 266) ask whether we have a *'multiplicity of selves'* or a dominant self with *'satellite selves'* attached. Maalouf (2000: 2) offers a response to this query when he states that, rather than having several identities, we have just one, *'made up of many components in a*

mixture that is unique to me.’ Baumeister (2011: 52) also believes that all our possible selves are possible versions of us but they are not separate, *‘like strangers passing one another in a mall.’*

Thus, our identities reflect who we are through a variety of facets which continue to be fashioned and shaped as we grow and expose ourselves to different behaviours and ideas, and develop a growing acceptance of the fact that our way of doing things is just one of many. This idea is espoused by Qu (2013: 148) who states:

‘Quite often identity formation is not perceived as a dynamic and interactive ongoing process that engages other cultures and involves change in its responses to different challenges at different times.’

Bauman (2011: 431) suggests that our identities are in the process of *‘continuous renegotiation’* and are at no point *‘final.’* Thus, the more open-minded we are, the more facets will be created although, conversely, being less open-minded may result in fewer ‘possible selves’ as we shut-down or limit the opportunities for engaging with those whom we regard as culturally different from ourselves.

The idea of having multiple identities is particularly applicable to those internationally mobile students who attend international schools. Wilkinson (1998: 228) suggests these students adopt a *‘multiple cultural identity’* as their mobility takes them beyond their own cultural identity. Wilkinson sees this as *‘positive value to the growth of the individual’* in a world of increasing globalization. Sears (2011: 79) supports this idea when she states:

‘With global mobility and the movement of peoples ... people tend to assume multiple identities as they move from context to context arising from the different aspects and phases of their lives... globally mobile children and young people might be cited as exemplars of this life of change.’

With regards to younger children’s identities, it is logical to believe that they, like adults, will experience the *‘continuous negotiation’* of their identities as they grow and mature under the influence of family, friends and school. Osler and Lybaek (2014: 561) remind us that *‘the right of children to develop their own identities is critical’* and schooling should be an opportunity to extend learners’ identities.

2e) i.vi The dangers of stereotyping

Gewirtz & Cribb (2008: 43) highlight the importance of understanding children’s identities to teacher/student relationships in the classroom when they state:

'... given that identity is hybrid, plural and fluid, there is a fundamental problem for educators in determining the nature of an individual learner's identity, and the investment of time and energy needed to try to understand the identity of any individual learner should not be underestimated.'

To teach effectively, teachers need to know their students well. Conversely, where teachers do not understand their students, the ability to deliver lessons adequately and maintain high expectations will be weakened. It is understandable that, in a busy class of twenty or so children, attempting to understand all of the developing identities, along with academic strengths and weaknesses, can present a mammoth undertaking for educators. Nevertheless, I believe that this is one of the key responsibilities of international school teachers, who are teaching children from diverse backgrounds. However, therein lies a danger: the pressures that go hand-in-hand with the job of teaching may result in teachers, particularly those who lack sufficient cultural awareness, taking the short-cut of ascribing identities to children which are based on cultural stereotypes and assumptions, and which tend to depict a cultural group as homogenous and displaying the same essentialised behaviours as discussed above. Allan (2003: 99) believes that stereotyping is not necessarily deliberate but arises from a human tendency *'to use categories to interpret our experiences.'* Allan states that although we are knowledgeable about our own societies:

'... ambiguity produced by the lack of fit of experiences with people in other cultures may lead us to categorize wrongly.'

Pickering (2001: 73) adds to this concern when explaining the dangers of applying stereotypes as *'divesting'* people of their identities by *'diminishing them to their stereotyped characteristics.'* As stated by Sen (2006: 6) above, this attitude limits our ability to *'assert our own identities in the eyes of others.'* Indeed, Osler & Lybaek (2014: 561) suggest that *'ascribed identities have an impact on self-identity, learning and sense of belonging,'* while Hopkins, Blackwood & Condor (2011: 218) warn of the *'psychological threat'* that is experienced when *'others fail to recognise ... us in terms that are consistent with how we see ourselves.'*

Many teachers working in international schools do not fit the picture painted above and are professional, conscientious teachers. Sears (1998: 18) describes those effective international school practitioners who are *'... knowledgeable about the languages and cultures of their students.'* Such teachers would, therefore, take the time to understand their students' identities and avoid stereotyping. However, Gay (1986: 156) offers a harsher view when she states:

'We cannot afford to gamble students' school success on the pretentious assumption that untrained or ill-trained teachers can teach that which and those whom they neither know culturally nor value unprejudicially.'

While a situation such as this may represent the 'worst case scenario' in international schools, ignorance of students' cultural practice does exist, as I have personally observed and as Poore (2005: 354) describes:

'... I have seen teachers pursue the moral high ground from a Western perspective when a student did something wrong, rather than proceed so that all involved could save face, a cultural imperative in much of our world. I have observed teachers from individualistic cultures penalize students from collectivist cultures for cheating simply because they were doing their homework as a group...'

Where teachers are unwittingly misinterpreting children's cultural behaviours through a less-than-ideal understanding of what might be at stake, children may well bear the brunt of this ignorance and may be affected by unanticipated outcomes such as the '*psychological threat*' mentioned above.

2e) ii. Difference

As previously stated, in recognising that we each have a unique identity, we are acknowledging that everyone else must be different. Parekh (2000: S252) states that although identity is related to difference, it is not the same, as he points out that:

'... it is wrong to suggest that my identity consists in my difference from others. I differ from them because I am already constituted in a certain way, not the other way round.'

2e) ii.i Engaging with difference

'Difference' itself is not the problem, but the way in which we engage with that 'difference.' As mentioned above, the me/you difference is irrelevant unless it becomes the source of conflict. If we look at the world and see it as populated by unique individuals, where difference is the absolute norm, then no judgement is required. However, this is not the reality of our world where groups choose to regard those who are not 'us,' (those not belonging to our cultural or social group, whether we feel affiliated with that group or not) as 'different,' and when this 'difference' becomes pejorative it can present those who are not 'us' as the undesirable 'other.' Thus, it is the way in which society constructs the 'us/them' binary that can lead to conflict rather than difference itself.

2e) ii.ii The construction of the 'other'

The socially constructed binary of separation between 'them' and 'us' has existed in humans throughout history. Indeed, De Beauvoir (1997: 17) regards 'otherness' as an essential category of human thought:

'... no group ever sets itself up at the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself...'

Pickering (2001: 73) explains the implications of difference when he suggests that the Other is constructed for its '*subordination and inferiority*' to the dominant self. Krumer-Nevo & Sidi (2012: 299) state that representing the other is '*always a process of dominance and control, in which the person represented is reduced to an object.*' Grove & Zwi (2006: 1933) add that the creation of the other:

'... is to reinforce notions of our own 'normality', and to set up the difference of others as a point of deviance. The person or group being 'othered' experiences this as a process of marginalisation, disempowerment and social exclusion.'

The issue becomes complex in those international schools where many of the teaching staff tend to be of white, western origin. Hayden (2006: 74) explains this is the case due to the large number of British and American international schools that exist around the world and Shaklee & Merz (2012: 13) elaborate:

'The most predominant groups choosing to teach in international schools are from western nations, primarily Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.'

In addition, Poore (2005: 352) notes that these schools are '*largely headed by white educators from the first world who are trained in leadership theories which are culturally biased.*'

Consequently, in making the choice to celebrate difference, and to identify where those differences may lie, the possibility arises where it is the western teachers who find themselves making selections regarding what cultural accessories should be seen as 'different.' In some international schools, it is therefore the dominant culture which directs the celebration of difference by highlighting the way other cultures look in contrast to 'the West.' Thus, we enter the territory of Said's (2003: 7)

‘Orientalism’ where we see *‘the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.’* Said reminds us:

‘In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the ... upper hand.’

In deciding that the differences represented in our ‘celebration of difference’ boil down to the difference between ‘us’ (westerners) and ‘them’ (non-westerners), we are perhaps unconsciously perpetuating the idea of superiority/inferiority raised by Said, although Abizadeh (2005: 45) offers a more optimistic opinion: *‘It is one thing to say that identity presupposes difference; it is quite another to say that it presupposes an external other.’*

It is likely that international schools will continue to celebrate difference in one form or another not least because, as stated above, *‘these events can provide young children with memorable experiences and excellent learning opportunities.’* However, I believe the inclusion of children’s voices in the organisation of any such event, along with their full engagement in the proceedings, may lead to more valuable outcomes.

2f) Literature Review – Summary

In this section, I will pull out the key ideas mentioned in each of the sub-sections above.

2f) i. Multiculturalism

The literature on multiculturalism sets a context for the phrase ‘we celebrate our differences’ and how it was used when UK government policies of assimilation gave way to a more tolerant approach allowing immigrants to practise their own customs and traditions. The twenty-first century saw a change in policies of multiculturalism, which were deemed to have promoted *‘parallel lives’* rather than integration, and UK government policy consequently promoted ‘British Values.’ The literature explains how the celebration of difference, through the emphasis on the celebrations of the ‘4Fs’ and ‘3Ss’ entered UK schools to improve understanding and tolerance of cultural minorities. However, critiques of the celebration of difference highlight how the reality of integrating cultures was far removed from the celebration. In addition, the practice of celebrating difference led people to imagine that we are more different than we actually are, at the expense of focusing on our common humanity.

2f) ii. Culture

The literature review on culture opens with van Oord's comment that there is currently no theory to explain the distinction between human difference and cultural difference, which is particularly pertinent to this research enquiry. Metaphors have been developed to define culture, but they give a misleading impression that cultures are unchanging, which belies the fact they are protean in nature. The anthropological and cultural-historical perspectives on culture are more helpful and explain the need for continuity in order for shared behaviours to be passed down through generations. The literature suggests that culture is constantly being shaped by the blending with other cultures, so cannot be regarded as inviolable over time. Children pick up cultural behaviours through spending time with family, friends and community members, but Ramsey (1998) states that children do not appear to recognise behaviours as cultural behaviours.

Culture is regarded as important because people feel it represents who they are. However, Sen (2006) believes people should have '*cultural freedom*,' while Hutnyck (2006) questions the connection between culture and identity and how culture has become something we do, rather than something we have. Van Oord (2008) warns that students should not be encouraged to believe that human differences are all cultural differences, as this sets us further apart.

Despite the 'anti-culture' arguments, the idea of culture will persist as it is intertwined with people's identities and social histories. Nevertheless, culture cannot be regarded as immutable in an increasingly interconnected world.

This section also contains information on the organizational culture of schools, and international schools in particular, with regards to how it is manifested and how it can influence children's attitudes and behaviours. The section highlights that school cultures are significant to all members of a school community and their effects on children's attitudes and behaviours should not be underestimated.

2f) iii. Identity and difference

The literature explains how identity is fashioned by exposure to different behaviours and ideas, and how it is in constant 'renegotiation' as long as we remain open-minded. While our identity makes us unique, the literature recognises some disagreement over whether our identity is the account we give of ourselves or whether it exists in relation to others. An alternative view is that identity connects with a personal narrative and becomes an '*on-going story about the self*.' This view is

particularly relevant with regards to how children in international schools develop their identities. There is further disagreement in the literature as to whether our identities are finite, or whether our identities are never finally realised until there are no more stories to tell.

The literature touches on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which represents a '*learned set of preferences*' through which a person adapts to their social, rather than cultural, world. Our habitus is closely linked to our social group and develops in early childhood, influences our identity and shapes who we are, although it can change and develop.

The review then looks at the mistaken practice of classifying people by their race and religion, and regarding such groups as homogenous. Some literature resists the idea of cultural homogeneity and suggests that we could have more in common with people from different cultures who share our values than with a people from our own culture. Sleeter (2012) warns against essentializing cultures into fixed characteristics and then assuming that all students who are assigned to a group share the same characteristics.

With regards to whether we have single or multiple identities, Maalouf (2000: 2) states that rather than having several identities, we have just one, '*made up of many components in a mixture that is unique to me.*' Thus, our identities continue to be formed as we grow and expose ourselves to different behaviours and ideas. Qu (2013) states that identity formation should be perceived as a '*dynamic and interactive ongoing process that engages other cultures and involves change...*' International school students, in particular, are believed to develop multiple identities as they negotiate new countries and cultures. The literature notes the importance of teachers recognising and acknowledging their students' identities in order for teaching to be effective, and to avoid the dangers of ascribing false identities to students, which can lead to a '*psychological threat.*'

On issues of difference, the us/them separation has existed in humans throughout history as a socially constructed binary. However, the literature highlights that people should be regarded as unique individuals, and difference should represent the norm, rather than something that sets us apart. Difference itself is not a problem, only the way in which we engage with difference. Labelling someone as different may lead to 'othering' which may diminish that person. This is pertinent to international schools where it is sometimes predominantly western teachers who are the decision-makers when celebrating difference.

Having set the context of my enquiry through the relevant literature, I will now discuss the methodology which I employed in my research into children's views on the celebration of difference and sameness. Maalouf (2000: 103) states that despite our conflicts and age-old enmities, '*each day*

that goes by reduces our differences and increases our likenesses a little bit more.’ I was curious to find out if my young participants agreed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3a) Chapter Overview

This chapter looks at the main research focus and sub-questions used to lay a foundation for the gathering of data. The overall methodology used in the enquiry will be justified to ensure it aligns with the ontological and epistemological positions taken. The chapter will proceed to discuss the issues of sampling and access, before moving on to how data was collected and why specific research methods were used. This will be followed by a discussion of how the data was analysed, along with issues of reliability and validity. There will also be a section on the specific ethics which need to be observed when working with children. The chapter will conclude with a critique of the methods used in term of strengths and weaknesses, and a summary of the chapter. As this research enquiry actively involved child participants, which significantly influenced the methodology, I will start the chapter with a section explaining why I believed it was important to include children's voices in my research.

3b) Research with children

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives children the right to a voice in matters affecting them. Children spend much of their childhood at school and therefore, I believe, have a right to express their opinions on issues that are pertinent to their lives at school. As a teacher with lengthy experience in international school classrooms, I have always encouraged my students to share their opinions as I know they have interesting, valid and valuable things to say. My beliefs regarding children align with those of Dockett & Perry (2007: 60) who consider children to be:

'... competent, capable, and effective reporters of their own experiences ... we regard children as valuable and trustworthy informants. While each child's individual experiences are unique, we do not regard this as sufficient reason for suggesting that their accounts of that experience are unreliable.'

It therefore seemed appropriate that, when planning a research project on the issue of celebrating difference at the school where I worked, I would want to involve my students. I understood that working with young children would bring its own complications, for example, the vocabulary used to question children had to be age-appropriate, extreme care had to be taken to avoid children

responding in a way that tried to ‘please the teacher,’ and inadvertently ‘planting’ ideas in the children’s minds had to be avoided at all costs. Despite these challenges, I was excited by the idea of working with young participants and hearing their voices in the context of a formal research project.

A study of the literature within the scope of my research highlighted a marked absence of children’s voices. While there is research *about* children, and research that includes the voices of teenagers and young adults, little research appears to have been undertaken with Primary school-aged children. I regarded this as problematic and wished to redress the situation through my own research. This is not to say that international schools are not engaging children in discussions on issues pertaining to my research area, but only that such discussions have not yet made their way into the literature.

3c) Research focus and supporting sub-questions

This research enquiry does not seek to respond to one specific question but aims to determine what children think about difference within the context of the phrase ‘we celebrate our differences.’ Thus, the research focus for this enquiry is:

An investigation into children’s thoughts on difference in the context of the ‘celebration of difference’ in an international school

Sub-questions will support the main focus area to build a ‘big picture’ through data-gathering and analysis:

- a) *To what extent are my participant aware of their own or others' differences?*
- b) *To what extent are my participants aware of their own or others' cultural differences?*
- c) *To what extent are my participants aware of human commonalities (sameness) and what are their thoughts on the celebration of 'sameness'?*

3d) Qualitative research

My research focus makes clear my intention to work with young participants in order to garner their opinions, as outlined above. While I may have held some notions of how my participants might respond to my questions before my research began, their thoughts were essentially unknown to me, and I did not have a hypothesis to test, prove, or disprove. My research focus sought to improve knowledge of how diverse children of different ages thought about difference (and sameness), and

the celebration thereof, within the context of the international school in which they were being educated. My data was to be collected mainly through a series of semi-structured interviews and conversations between myself, as researcher, and the children, as participants, who had chosen to join me in my research enquiry. The data, once collected, would undergo interpretive, inductive analysis. Thus, my research was to be qualitative in nature. Hammersley (2013: 12) offers an apt definition when he explains that qualitative research is:

'... a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach.'

Greig, Taylor & MacKay (2007: 136) suggest that qualitative research aims for a depth of understanding in a world where the *'experiences and perspectives of individuals are socially constructed.'* Sarantakos (2005: 50) states that qualitative methods *'capture reality in action,'* adding that data from such research is presented in words and pictures, and through close contact with participants. In addition, Creswell & Miller (1997: 37) describe the qualitative researcher as giving an account which is *'up close and personal'* as data is gathered first-hand, while Mertens (2010: 249) points out that qualitative studies require the researcher to be the instrument for collecting data.

With a specific focus on undertaking research with children, Greig, Taylor & MacKay (2007: 138) explain that qualitative research is particularly appropriate:

'...children represent an excellent source of the kind of data that are at the heart of qualitative research — rich descriptions in words and pictures that capture children's experiences and understandings.'

Smith (2011: 14) adds that, where *'children's 'voice' is being sought, then children have to be positioned as participating subjects ... rather than as objects of the researcher's gaze.'*

Identifying qualitative research as being the appropriate methodology for carrying out my research was relatively straightforward. However, seeking to identify a particular 'style' of research within the family of qualitative research methods was not so obvious as my study did not fit comfortably into the main traditions, for example, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and so on. The closest fit was action research due to the iterative nature of my data gathering.

I had concerns, based on personal observations which I mention in the introduction, that *'the ... celebration of cultural differences gives the reality of being different a significance in the eyes of children which they might not previously have recognised.'* It was therefore extremely important that I broached the subject of 'being different' carefully during initial interviews, not least due to the ethical issues of *'the researcher should do no harm to the participants'* which is mentioned in the Ethics section later in this chapter. Once I had gathered data from these first cycle interviews it needed immediate analysis to allow planning for the second cycle interviews, and so on. This is explained by Herr & Anderson (2005: 80) who say that, during action research, data analysis starts immediately as this guides the next stage of data construction, unlike in more formal research situations where all data is collected before analysis can begin. Dick (2015: 440) adds that:

'Participants can make a start even when their initial comprehension of the situation is unavoidably superficial. Even a shallow understanding can allow a first step to be envisaged. Engaging with the situation and taking that first step then reveals other aspects not originally taken into account.'

The very fact that action research builds up knowledge from one cycle to the next means that detailed forward planning is never possible. The first cycle can be planned, but the next cycle is dependent upon what has been learned from the first cycle, which entails a period of critical reflection, and this unpredictability continues as the research progresses. This pattern is a necessary component of the research process: what has been learned in the first action has to be applied to the next action – there are no short-cuts. This process described the way in which I intended to carry out my research.

Despite many definitions of action research being proffered, no single one has been adopted, not least because of the many fields that exist within the action research paradigm. Nevertheless, there are aspects of action research which can be gleaned from the literature and which achieve consensus as essential components:

- always iterative, with a cycle of the elements of 'observation, reflection, action' which are constantly repeated, although the cycle is not necessarily linear
- clearly and consistently focussed on action for positive change
- usually small-scale, personal and always democratic and participatory
- systematic, disciplined and rigorous
- conditional upon honest and transparent self-reflection
- 'work in progress' rather than definitive

Therefore, it can be seen that my research enquiry, in many ways, fits the pattern of action research. However, one major element was not met by my research and that was the ‘action for positive change.’ My research sought solely to contribute to existing knowledge through gaining insight into my participants’ ideas and opinions - there was no attempt on my part to institute change. It therefore became clear that, although my study closely matched many of the ‘essential components’ of action research, a vital element was missing. Consequently, my study could be regarded as a hybrid of elements of action research and inductive research, which is described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2017: 645) as a process where:

‘... the researcher reads, rereads, reflects on, infers from and interprets the raw data/transcripts/memos etc. From this, without preconceptions or deductions ... the researcher develops interpretations of the data and derives themes, concepts, theories, explanations ... which fairly and comprehensively explain the data ...’

3d) i. Ontological and epistemological positions

In addition to making the decision to employ a qualitative approach to my research, the methodology also had to be contingent on my epistemology and ontology, and compatible with both if my research was to have cohesion. Thus, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2003: 31/32), my research was based on a relativist ontology, where I understood there to be multiple constructed realities in the world, rather than one fixed ‘truth’; a subjective, interpretive epistemology, where my understanding would be co-created with my young participants; and a naturalistic and interpretive methodology which would be used to gather and analyse my data. In making these choices, I aligned my ontology, epistemology and methodology under what Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007: 33) describe as the ‘interpretive paradigm.’

3d) ii. The role of the researcher in qualitative research

Having established the underlying philosophy of my research, I then had to determine the function that I, as researcher, would have within the enquiry, and consider the responsibilities that this role engendered. As my data would come from the joint construction of knowledge negotiated between my young participants and myself, it was clear that there would have to be a close and trusting relationship between us. The joint construction could not happen at a distance and, as Davies (1998: 3) reminds us, ‘*we cannot research something with which we have no contact.*’ However, the fact that I had an actual part to play in the research process, rather than being just a neutral interviewer, raised some questions with regards to my influence upon the research in terms of personal values,

perspectives or bias, and trustworthiness. In response to this concern, Angen (2000: 384) argues that we are all morally implicated just by being in the world and that our values will be apparent in our actions regardless. Undeniably, it would be impossible to completely disregard those qualities and values, which we have developed over time, in order to become impartial. My values and beliefs were already heavily implicated by the very nature of my research enquiry, the reasons why I wished to undertake such research, and my choice of methodology. Indeed, Angen (2000: 384) cites Creswell (1998) when stating that the values of a researcher are intrinsic to the enquiry process. Angen further suggests that our subjectivity is an inherent part of our understanding of the world, as we cannot separate ourselves from what we are part of, while Eisener (1988: 19) believes a value-neutral approach does not exist. Furthermore, Mantzoukas (2004: 1000) states that not only has it become generally accepted in qualitative enquiry for the researcher to be part of the process, but also that:

'...non-representation of the researcher in the research text is not only insincere but fundamentally out of line with the rules, convictions, and models commonly agreed within these paradigms. Therefore, any qualitative research adhering to non-positivist paradigms, if it does not overtly include the researcher, violates in principle what is viewed as valid for these paradigms.' (p1002)

Usher (1996: 21) goes further and suggests, citing Gadamer (1975), that our '*pre-understandings*' are essential to the interpretation process, as the interplay between what we think we know and what we are trying to understand through our research makes us more open-minded; this tension tests and modifies our understanding.

3e) The School Context

Before I can detail how participants were chosen, it is important to set the context within which my research took place. While I have previously mentioned that it was at the school where I worked, and which my participants attended, much more detail is required to better understand influences that may have been at play during the research enquiry.

While all schools, whether international or national, are unique in the way that Fail (2010: 115) describes above when she talks about the '*basic ingredients*' being the same, but the '*amount and the type and source of the ingredients*' leading to different outcomes, the school in which my research took place had an inordinate number of unique characteristics. These characteristics are noteworthy and had a significant influence on decision-making with regards to sampling, data collection

methods, the depth of research, and the quality and authenticity of the data produced by the participants involved in the research. It is therefore important that the school context is described in detail, so that the choices made regarding research methods can better understood.

3e) i. School context and factors influencing participants

Brief History

The international school in which my research took place is located in a remote area of the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana, a democratic and politically stable country in West Africa. It is a very small co-educational day school, which was initially set up for the sole purpose of educating the children of management-level employees at the nearby gold mine, which is run by an international mining company, with a Head Office in the USA.

While it originally opened in 2007, and operated successfully for some time thereafter, the mining company wished to divest itself of the school in 2014 due to falling gold prices and the increasing running costs of the school, which had been given few budget limitations. The school was therefore re-established in January 2015 with a new staff, curriculum and leadership team, and with a remit to become financially independent of the mining company within three years by opening up to the local community, under the oversight of a Board of Parent Governors. However, within six months of the school being 'turned around,' and consequently operating at a fraction of the original budget and with a much-improved academic reputation, the mining company changed its mind, opting to keep the school and maintain it, once again, solely for the children of the managers at the mine.

Understandably, this strategic decision had a significant impact on numbers as the school was, again, exclusively dependent upon the mine and the Human Resource recruitment policies for its students. Numbers at the school therefore stagnated at around 32 students on roll (at the time this research enquiry began.) Nevertheless, the school was seen as offering an excellent education for its students due to the small numbers, the implementation of international curricula and the recruitment of internationally experienced staff.

Student nationalities and length of time spent in Brong Ahafo

The families of the management-level mine workers, who are both expatriate and Ghanaian, are housed together, not far from the mine, on a large, attractive, secure and comfortable residential compound of sixty-nine bungalows, where the purpose-built

school is also located. The children attending the school are of diverse nationalities which are generally representative of the world's mining centres: Ghana, Peru, Chile, Indonesia, Australia, Zimbabwe, United Kingdom and South Africa. The expatriate families, while internationally mobile, tend to stay for a number of years as the academic and social experiences for their children are seen as positive, not least because free schooling is part of the employment package offered by the mining company. As the location is remote, employment at the mine is regarded as a 'hardship posting' and is therefore well remunerated. Most expatriate contracts run for around three years and have generally been renewable by mutual consent, although the company now has in place a nationalization policy which seeks to ultimately replace expatriate workers with suitably qualified and experienced Ghanaian workers. The Ghanaian families also stay for a number of years, for the reasons given above, although local management employees are sometimes transferred, or promoted, to the Head Office in Accra, at which time the whole family leaves the site and relocates to the city, which is approximately 350 kilometres away. This distance determines that children will have to leave the school when family relocation takes place.

Curriculum

In terms of its curriculum, the school offers the Cambridge Primary and Secondary 1 curricula for English, Mathematics and Science, along with the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) which is used to support teaching in other areas of the curriculum. The school accepts children from Reception (age 4 – 5 years) to Year 9 (age 13 - 14 years), and classes are of mixed age due to the small numbers attending the school. The structure of the school is representative of the English system in that it educates children in Early Years and Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. As the school is wholly supported financially by the mine, it is non-fee-paying and, as the school Admissions Policy states, it '*welcomes all those children who are able to access its curriculum and whose needs can be met with the resources available.*'

Languages spoken at the school

The student body, which has a reasonable balance of boys and girls across the school, is currently made up of either native English speakers, or strong bilinguals. All management level employees at the mine, whether local or expatriate, have to communicate in English so are all reasonably fluent speakers. The Ghanaian children at the school are regarded as native English speakers, with only a very few able to converse in any of the local tribal languages (Twi, Ewe, Fanti) although some parents speak local

languages in the home, alongside English. The children from non-English speaking countries (Peru, Chile and Indonesia) have been at the school for some time and have gained skills in English to the point where they are bilingual in all areas of speaking, reading and writing. When sitting the Cambridge Checkpoint external assessments in Year 6 and Year 9, all children are entered as first language English speakers. (Details of participants' age, nationality, gender, and so on, are shown below.)

Staff and classes

The school employs three expatriate teachers (including a teaching Principal), who hail from South Africa, Australia and the UK, and most of whom have international school experience. In addition, there are two national teachers and a national Business and Communications Manager, who are all academically qualified to either first-degree or Masters level. In acknowledgement of the host country's importance to the school, class names had been taken from the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, which are used to represent concepts and local sayings (see Appendix V.) The Ghanaian teachers chose the names of the Primary classes when the school opened, but when the senior class was established, the children were asked to choose which symbol they wanted to represent their class.

Remote location

The fact that the school and residential compound are located in such a remote area means the community members exist in close proximity to each other, with the sole community club-house being the only shared venue for general socialising. Expatriate families have opportunities to leave the compound and travel home during company 'R & R' periods, which are not always fixed to the academic calendar, so some expatriate children are out of school during term time. Ghanaian families generally leave the compound only during the school holidays and return to Accra, where their main family homes are located.

Unique advantages for the children

While there may be downsides to this insulated lifestyle for the non-working adults, for example, expatriate wives can feel 'trapped' on the compound as they cannot find employment in the local area; people know each other's business; it is akin to living in a fish-bowl, and so on, the benefits for the children are significant. They have the freedom to roam around the compound without adult supervision, they can walk/cycle to their friends' houses on roads free from traffic, there is a swimming pool and dedicated play areas around the compound, they can walk/cycle to school independently from a young age, and all the children know each other well, developing close personal relationships as they play on a daily basis at school and around the compound in their free time. Some

of the longest-staying children have grown up together and have known each other (and each other's families) for more than four years and, for many of the children, this is the only school they have ever attended. All the children know they are part of the mining company community as that is where either 'mum' or 'dad' works. The school therefore represents a uniquely positive school experience for the children, who find themselves in small classes in which they each have a voice, a clear identity and a strong presence. In addition, while the school promotes academic rigour, and the teaching staff work hard to help children achieve their potential, it is within a relaxed, welcoming, non-threatening, caring and happy environment. This '*relatively liberal, child-centred approach*,' (Hayden 2006: 56) is typical of many international schools.

Being black in Ghana – the absolute norm

An additional and noteworthy factor regarding the school, which significantly impacts the research enquiry, is that the Ghanaian children are attending an international school in their own country where being black is the norm, and where a white face is relatively uncommon outside the capital city. All of the Ghanaian managers within the community have travelled beyond Ghana to the company Head Office in the USA for meetings and training, and many have extended family members living as part of the Ghanaian diaspora in the USA or the UK. Therefore, where my research conversations with my participants discuss their views on difference, these views are highly unlikely to be over-shadowed by issues of race. For this reason, I believe the word 'difference' in the context of my research does not have the pejorative overtones that may be present in other countries or communities, and the enquiry will not be undermined by complex race issues which are well outside the scope of the research.

3e) ii. Selecting the participants

As noted above, the total number of children attending the school was thirty-two at the time the research enquiry began. I had made an early decision to focus my research solely on Primary school-aged children, who were roughly between six and eleven years old (Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in the UK system.) This was because I had spent most of my teaching career working with children in this age range and therefore felt I could approach our interviews and conversations with confidence. This decision therefore excluded the children in the Reception class (two children), whom I believed were too young to articulate thoughts on complex ideas, and the Senior class members who were young adolescents of 12 – 14 years old (eight children.)

The total number of children available to participate in my research was twenty-two spread over three classes (Sankofa, Nkyinkyim and Gye Nyame – see details below), and these small numbers meant that all the children who wanted to participate in the research enquiry were able to do so. There were no specific selection criteria for this group as I wanted to have as many ‘voices’ as possible and all the children were fluent English speakers.

The next step was to seek informed consent from the parents of my participants, so they could give permission for their children to participate in the research. However, it was very important to me that I also sought consent from the young participants themselves. Flewitt (2005: 555) reminds us that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) ‘*clearly states children’s rights to express their views on all matters that affect them.*’ This right, coupled with my belief that children have views that are worth expressing, guided my efforts to secure participant consent in addition to parental consent. Hill (2005: 63) argues that, due to the power differential, children are perceived as being particularly vulnerable to influence by adults, and it is therefore essential that they are not pressured into taking part in research that has not been clearly explained to them. In order to ensure my potential participants were properly informed regarding the focus of my research, I created a physical information sheet, in child-friendly language, which could be taken home and read carefully (see Appendix I). These leaflets were to be shared with parents and discussed at home so that there was clarity of intent. However, consent had to be underpinned by adequate understanding rather than a child just wanting to ‘please the teacher,’ so further opportunities were offered, via emails to all parents, to discuss any concerns that either parents or children may have had before the research began.

At the same time as I distributed the information sheets, I started an electronic journal in which I logged my thoughts as I embarked upon the fieldwork. Entries to this journal were made after conversations with the participants, or at times when ideas or thoughts occurred to me either in response to what my participants had shared, or how I could further develop ways of data construction. The journal offered me a physical medium in which I could reflect on my research as it progressed and revisit my thoughts throughout the process.

Once I had distributed the information sheets I assumed, perhaps naively, that all the children would want to participate so I eagerly awaited the return of signed forms. I was therefore surprised when not all children wished to be part of the research. One very quiet 9-year-old girl returned the sheet unsigned and informed me that she did not want to take part. In addition, one 7-year-old boy did not return his sheet. His father informed me that the young boy did not wish to participate as he felt ‘too shy.’ A third child presented me with an ethical dilemma - she informed me that her mother had made her sign the form but she did not want to join in. I therefore left the decision to participate

to the child and, while choosing not to participate in the first interview, she opted back in for the second and third interviews. The collection of signed sheets resulted in eighteen participants out of twenty-two eligible children. Of those children who did not wish to participate, two were Ghanaian (one boy from Sankofa class and one girl from Nkyinkyim class) and two were Australian (both boys from Gye Nyame class.)

The wish not to participate was unexpected, but it was pleasing to see that children were exercising their rights, and I respected their position by not asking them to give reasons for their decisions. While I might have gained some insight into the children's decision not to participate through questioning, I felt it was ethically inappropriate for this questioning to take place after they had made clear their intention not to be a part of the research, particularly in view of Hill's (2005: 63) comment above regarding children being perceived as vulnerable to influence by adults. The non-participants were allowed to sit in the reading corner of the classroom and look at books, or quietly listen while the interviews were taking place.

Once the consent forms had been returned, the children were grouped by class so that interviews could be held with cohorts of similar-aged children. This meant that I could adapt my language accordingly for the younger children and, in practical terms, I could interview all the children participating from the same class at the same time:

Sankofa Class: Year 1 and Year 2 (5 – 7 years old): seven children from Ghana, South Africa, UK and Australia made up of 2 boys and 5 girls

Nkyinkyim Class: Year 3 and Year 4 (7 – 9 years old): six children from Ghana, Zimbabwe, Chile and Australia made up of 4 girls and 1 boy

Gye Nyame Class: Year 5 and Year 6 (9 – 11 years old): five children from Ghana, Chile and Zimbabwe made up of 2 boys and 3 girls

By having interviews with these three different age groups, I hoped to gauge if there were any age-related disparities in attitudes or opinions due to a difference in the developmental stages of the children. While there would be predictable differences in terms of the maturity of language used, the ability to grasp abstract ideas and the way responses might be articulated, I wanted to explore the various understandings and significance of difference to children at each of these stages.

The groups were made up of the following eighteen children and the ages given are those calculated at the time of the first interviews. In some interviews all the children in each group were present, but in other interviews one or two participants were absent due to illness or being off-site.

Group 1 - Sankofa

<i>Name *</i>	<i>Age at first interview</i>	<i>Length of time at the school</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Mother tongue</i>
Nina	5yrs 9m	<2 years	F	Ghanaian	English
Flo	6yrs 7m	<2 years	F	British	English
Nial	6yrs 7m	< 1 year	M	Australian	English
Peta	7yrs 5m	> 3 years	F	South African	English
Will	7yrs 5m	> 3 years	M	South African	English
May	7yrs 6m	> 3years	F	Ghanaian	English
Ellie	7yrs 7m	> 3 years	F	Ghanaian	English

Group 2 - Nkyinkyim

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age at first interview</i>	<i>Length of time at the school</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Mother tongue</i>
Sara	7 yrs 11m	> 3yrs	F	Ghanaian	English
Nancy	8yrs	> 2 yrs	F	Zimbabwean	English
Jo	8yrs 6m	> 3 yrs	M	Chilean	Spanish/Eng.
Lela	8yrs 8m	> 2yrs	F	Ghanaian	English
Ann	8yrs 11m	> 2yrs	F	Ghanaian	English
Alex	9yrs 4m	< 1yr	F	Australian	English

Group 3 - Gye Nyame

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age at first interview</i>	<i>Length of time at the school</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Mother tongue</i>
Mary	9yrs 9m	> 3yrs	F	Ghanaian	English
Ned	10yrs	> 2 yrs	M	Zimbabwean	English
Selma	10yrs 8m	> 3yrs	F	Ghanaian	English
Geena	10yrs 10m	> 3 yrs	F	Chilean	Spanish/Eng.
Sam	11yrs 1m	> 3 yrs	M	Ghanaian	English

**Names have been changed to comply with ethical procedures*

Some of the children were brothers and sisters:

- Nina and Ann were sisters
- Nial and Alex were brother and sister
- Peta and Will were fraternal twins
- May and Selma were sisters

- Sam, Mary and Sara were brother and sisters
- Ned and Nancy were brother and sister
- Jo and Geena were brother and sister

The children who had agreed to participate in the research were generally enthusiastic and very keen to get started, which was demonstrated by the children's constant questioning regarding when we were going to begin. The excitement generated among the children by the thought of being part of a research project was gratifying to me as the researcher and encouraged me to make a start as soon as all the information sheets had been signed and collected.

3e) iii. 'Payback' for Participation

Having planned the 'who' aspects of the enquiry, it was worth noting advice given by Holstein & Gubrium (2003: 37) who believe that researchers should give participants something in return for their help in the research as yet another way of reducing the power inequality. Holstein & Gubrium suggest that this could consist of something such as a '*greater sense of empowerment*' or a '*greater understanding of their own life experiences*' (p38). I therefore intended to offer the children an opportunity to give input into the school's International Evening which was held at the end of every year and which represented the culmination of International Week. While I have never personally used the term 'celebrating difference' at the school due to my reservations regarding the phrase, the children spend the International Week learning about each other's countries, and staging a whole-school performance showing what they have learnt to parents and friends. After the research had been undertaken, the children would be in a position to see that what we had learnt together would have a real-life application inasmuch as the ideas we had co-constructed would be translated into reality. The participants would see that the research with which they had engaged was meaningful.

3e) iv. Access

When considering where and when my research would take place, and taking into account the nature of the school as described above, I decided that the most obvious venue was the school itself. This would present the children with a familiar setting, although Westcott & Littleton (2005: 144/5) point out:

'Children have expectations regarding what is required of them when interacting with an adult in school contexts and their responses in interview contexts may well reflect these expectations.'

However, Westcott & Littleton (2005: 145) argue that as long as the expectations of both the participants and the researcher are made explicit, the young participants are likely to contribute freely. Due to the favourable perception of the school, I believed the participants were less likely to feel intimidated or uncomfortable when participating in the interviews in what would be familiar territory.

In using the school facilities as the venue for the interviews, I could also establish times for the research, which I decided would be during the school day. As a teaching Principal, and if my participants agreed, I intended to use my lesson times for the interviews and sought permission from my teaching colleagues to take some of their lesson times to cover all the age groups which I was targeting for my enquiry.

3f) Research design: co-creating and collecting the data

Having established who my participants were to be, the nature of the school and the context in which my research took place, I will now focus on my choice of methods and the way in which the research was carried out.

The major consideration for my enquiry was that it would involve children of Primary School age. Greig, Taylor & MacKay (2007: 7) remind us that children are not just '*miniature adults*' and are at a stage in their lives where their '*social and emotional relationships are more fluid than at any other time.*' In addition, Westcott & Littleton (2005: 147) highlight the need to develop a good rapport with young participants so that they feel '*empowered rather than subjected to a list of commands or instructions.*' As I had known many of my participants for at least two years within the small school environment, and having personally taught a number of them, I believed I had already established positive relationships. However, these facts did not lead me to make assumptions that the enquiry could be approached with complacency. While I was comfortable working with children, it was always in the role of teacher rather than researcher, and I was aware that these two roles were significantly different. Nevertheless, I felt confident in my ability to talk unassumingly with young children and to work alongside them with sincerity and honesty. The fact that I had worked extensively with children also increased my understanding of their unpredictability, their desire to please, their vulnerability to persuasion, and the differentials in the power relationships between teachers and their students.

3f) i. Informal interviews

The data I required to respond to my research focus was children's thoughts and opinions. In view

of my existing rapport with the participants, I felt that the most useful tool for the gathering and joint-construction of data would be conversations held with my participants through semi-structured, open-ended, informal interviews. I therefore chose to hold a series of group interviews as, in my personal experience, children are prompted to say more when they are sharing a discussion with their friends. This view is supported by Borland et al (2001, point 4.46) who suggest that children feel less shy when they were in a group, and hearing other children's ideas prompts them to think of more ideas themselves. In addition, Eder & Fingerson (2001: 182) argue that group interviews reduce the researcher's power by making the context more natural. They suggest that group interviews '*can elicit more accurate accounts, as participants must defend their statements to their peers*' (p.183). There was a chance that some children might parrot their friends' ideas, so I had to be sensitive to what the children were telling me; any obvious repetitions would be picked up at the interview transcription stage.

As the research involved children of varying ages, the semi-structured aspect of the interviews consisted of questions, question card prompts, and video or story prompts appropriate for each age group, details of which are given below. The questions were carefully formulated in the hope that they would elicit relevant and interesting responses. By using a conversation format, I could ensure that the questions I asked would be understood and, if there was any misunderstanding, I would be able to clarify issues immediately. While the participants were fluent English speakers or strong bilinguals, it was not so much the participation in the conversations that concerned me, but the complexity of the ideas we were to discuss. Each interview took place during one lesson time and each lesson was one hour long. While I did not plan to have hour-long interviews, and judged each interview length by how well the children were concentrating and responding (particularly the youngest group), the generous time factor meant that I did not have to 'watch the clock.'

All conversations were recorded for later transcription and analysis and, in order to reduce any tensions that the children may have felt when being told that their voices would be recorded, the first session with the younger groups started with the children playing with the voice recorder for a few minutes and listening to their own voices. By the end of the informal interview process, each participant group had been interviewed three times.

3f) i.i First cycle interviews using open-ended, semi-structured questions

The open-ended group interviews in the first cycle of my research consisted of the following neutral type of questioning which was designed to establish initial understanding of the vocabulary, and to prompt conversations without suggesting partiality in one way or another:

- i) What does the word 'different' mean to you?
- ii) What does the word 'same' or 'similar' mean to you?
- iii) Do you think that any of the people you know are different from you? In what way?
- iv) Do you think that any of the people you know are the same as you? In what way?
- v) Why are people different or the same?
- vi) How do you feel about people who are different to you?
- vii) How do you feel about people who are the same as you?
- viii) Is being different important? Why?
- ix) Is being the same important? Why?

The above questions offered the participants their first opportunity to share general opinions about sameness and difference, and developed their confidence in responding to questions in front of their peers knowing that their voices were being recorded. These initial conversations also offered me insight into the kind of responses I was to expect from my participants. While some of the questions seemed to be very similar, I was attempting to tease out nuances that might be revealed in the children's thinking if I asked the questions in a slightly different way. By asking the children similar questions I would also be able to check on the consistency of their answers and how secure they were in their responses.

Solberg (2014: 244) identifies three key elements when interviewing children: clarity regarding the purpose of the research, guidance in the co-production of knowledge, and careful listening on the part of the researcher. In addition to heeding these three elements, I took great care that the initial questions did not infer that the young participants were considered as different, especially if they did not regard themselves as such. However, where children openly acknowledged that they were different, and were happy with this fact, then our discussions developed to investigate opinions on this aspect further.

3f) i.ii Second cycle interviews using card prompts as semi-structured questions

While the first group interviews were straightforward conversations in which I was generally asking the questions while the children answered in turn, Hill (2006: 80) cites Punch (2002) when stating:

'Children are attracted to methods that give very immediate pleasure. Thus, it is commonly reported that group discussions are fun, especially when there are activities and exercises.'

Therefore, for the second round of interviews/conversations, I printed out each question on separate cards so that the children could take it in turns to pick a card and read the question to their peers in order to initiate the conversation (all the participants in the youngest class could read with reasonable fluency). A specific sequence was necessary to make sense of the subject matter, so the cards were laid out in order and the children took turns to read them out. In this way, I was not only increasing participation, but was also helping to reduce the power differential between myself and my participants.

For the second cycle of interviews the questions were more directly related to my main research focus. The first questions set out to establish everyone understood the meaning of the word 'celebrate,' and the context in which we were using the word, while the latter questions were more direct questions which required participants to express their opinions on the subject. I felt able to be more specific with my questions in this cycle of conversations as, based on what I had learned from the first cycle, I found that my participants were happy to discuss their differences.

- a) Have you ever heard the saying 'we celebrate our differences?'
- b) Do you understand what the word 'celebrate' means?
- c) Can you tell me what you think 'celebrating difference' means?
- d) How do you feel about celebrating difference?
- e) How can we decide what differences to celebrate?
- f) Who do you think should decide who is different?
- g) Who do you think should decide what to celebrate?
- h) Do you think celebrating our sameness can be done?
- i) How do you feel about celebrating our 'sameness?'
- j) Is there anything else we can celebrate?

3f) i.iii Third cycle interviews using video/story prompt

For the third cycle of conversations, and again in response to Punch's comment cited above that, '*Children are attracted to methods that give very immediate pleasure,*' I made use of a video prompt which I hoped would generate an interesting discussion. The video was a cartoon, one of many found on YouTube, which told the story of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale '*The Ugly Duckling.*' The point of this story is that the 'ugly duckling' is treated unkindly due to being different – he is large and grey rather than small and yellow (unbeknownst to the characters in the story, he is actually a cygnet not a duckling). I felt that this would be an appropriate prompt for discussion on being different for the younger children as the story is well-known, very accessible and raises interesting issues relevant to my research. The conversations following the watching of the video

were deliberately less structured than in the previous interviews as I wanted to generate more of a discussion rather than a question and answer session.

While I felt the video of the '*Ugly Duckling*' would appeal to the two younger groups, I thought the older children needed something less simplistic and more age-appropriate, so the prompt for the third cycle conversation with this group was the story, '*The Little Blue Boy*' by Fatou Keita (see Appendix VI.) The story takes place in an African country and is on the theme of 'difference.' The blurb on the back states, '*A little boy is born in the heart of Africa. He is a beautiful, healthy little boy – but he is blue! The other children in the village laugh at him. But they will learn an important lesson from the little blue boy.*' Again, the session was very loosely structured in order to generate a discussion rather than purely questions and answers, although questions were asked as prompts to discussions.

3f) i.iv Maintaining interviewer neutrality

It was very important that I maintained a neutral tone with my questions as I was conscious that my participants may have attempted to respond in a way that they thought would please me. Greene & Hill (2005: 26) explain that power is linked with adult status, as adults have authority over children. Children therefore may find it difficult to disagree or say things which they fear may not be acceptable. Greene & Hill (2005: 24) tell us that children may '*... give answers that are determined more by their desire to please than their desire to be truthful.*' Consequently, the questions used to stimulate the participant groups' responses deliberately avoided the duality of 'right or wrong' so that the participants would not try to 'second-guess' what I was expecting them to say. This proved to be a salient issue as during the initial stages of all my participant interviews, across all age ranges, I felt that children were looking to me for 'clues' as to whether their responses were 'good.' As a generally talkative teacher, I recognized that, in my role as researcher, I had to exercise restraint when responding to their opinions so that I could not be seen to approve or disapprove of what they had said. Despite this restraint, there were times when I responded positively when a particularly interesting or unexpected comment was voiced, although I noted that this did not lead to other children trying to construct a similar reply when it was their turn to speak. Polkinghorne (2007: 482) raises this issue when he cautions researchers against leading participants where interview responses are co-created, and how they need to '*guard against simply producing the texts they had expected.*' Sanders (2014: 19) adds another cautionary note when stating:

'If seeking an answer to the specific research question is paramount in the interviewer's mind, it is possible to attend only to those responses that appear to

directly contribute to the research, thus maybe failing to uncover information which could be crucial.'

In conducting research which sought to find children's opinions on difference and commonalities, I was conscious of having to be scrupulous in ensuring that I listened carefully to my participants while keeping my voice and input brief, balanced and unbiased. However, I also needed to take an encouraging tone so that children felt confident when sharing their thoughts. Eder & Fingerson (2001: 185) advise the researcher to encourage respondents to ask questions as well as to offer answers. In doing this, the power balance is improved as the respondents feel empowered by taking some control of the questioning. Eder & Fingerson recommend that the researcher should:

'... be willing to let the interview develop by allowing opportunities for new questions to emerge based on what is shared during the interview. These questions may arise from anyone, not just the researcher.' (p185)

3f) i.v Sentence completion exercises

In addition to the interviews and discussions, there were other methods of data gathering which, from prior experience, I knew worked well with children who could read and write with some confidence (which included all my participants, who were competent, if not wholly accurate, writers.) For those children, I produced a page of sentence completion exercises which consisted of unfinished sentences which the children were asked to complete using their own words. The children were asked to work on their own and not in tandem with a friend or with the teacher. By the time the children undertook this writing exercise, they had already been involved in at least two sessions in which they had had the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and opinions regarding the issues involved. I judged that the exercise of completing sentences would not prove to be difficult as the participants were already familiar with the subject matter and it would be interesting to see if the participants' individual written answers were consistent with their group interview responses.

Because of the either/or aspects of the sentences, I guided the younger group through the questions, but my role was solely to ensure that my participants understood how to complete the sentences; there was no discussion regarding the content of the statements. The older participants were left to complete the sentences on their own, once a full understanding of the instructions had been established.

Figure 3.1 Sentence Completion Exercise Statements

Either:

1.a) I think it would be good to celebrate being different because

Or:

1.b) I think it would not be good to celebrate being different because

Either:

2.a) I think I would like to celebrate being the same as my friends because

Or:

2.b) I think I would not like to celebrate being the same as my friends because . . .

3. If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would celebrate are

4. If I could celebrate being the same as others, I think the things about me I would celebrate are

5. If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school should celebrate because

For those younger children whom I believed were not so confident in reading or writing, I had considered the option of drawing pictures on the theme of difference. Einarsdóttir (2007: 201) explains that:

'The advantages of using drawings in research with children have been that they provide a non-verbal expression, and the children are active and creative while they draw Drawings are visual data that can give insight into how children view things.'

However, on viewing the results of the sentence completion exercise, I realized the younger children were skilled enough in writing to express their views with coherence and confidence. While spellings were inaccurate and typical for the age group, the meaning-making was clear.

The interviews and sentence completion exercises were planned for Term 2 and Term 3 of the academic year and I hoped to have the data gathering completed by the end of that academic year. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete all the interviews in the expected time due to staffing issues at the school, so one final interview with the Gye Nyame group had to be carried over to Term 1 of the following academic year.

3g) Dealing with the data

After the completion of the data co-construction and data-gathering sections of my research enquiry, I was in possession of the transcripts from nine interviews/discussions and a number of sentence completion sheets from a total of eighteen young participants across three age groups. I personally transcribed each interview verbatim shortly after each one took place (see example in Appendix II), and electronically transcribed all pages of the sentence completion exercises (see example in Appendix V) so there was a permanent record of what the children had written, and so that comments made could be added to the interview transcripts. I also had several pages of personal notes from my research journal. This data made up the 'thick description' which represented Denzin's (2001: 100) '*...voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals... made visible.*'

My next step was to, '*manage, organize, and make sense of all the separate pieces of accumulated information*' (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008: 95) before ordering, analysis and interpretation could take place. Byrne (2001: 904) uses the analogy of '*sorting a box of buttons*' when she discusses thematic analysis and explains that the researcher has to decide what criteria are being used for sorting – shape, size, colour, and so on, before the exercise can begin. I initially felt this was an apt analogy as, before I could make any sense of my data, it needed some kind of sorting process as I started to examine the data in more depth. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007: 461) remind the researcher that he or she, '*must be clear what he or she wants the data analysis to do as this will determine the kind of analysis that is undertaken.*' Consequently, before embarking on the process of analyzing my data, it was important to revisit the original research question, sub-questions and interview questions to ensure that the data generated actually responded appropriately and had not wandered off-course or become side-tracked in any way by the participants (or the researcher.) For the sake of expediency, the research focus and sub-questions are laid out again below:

Table 3.1

Research focus, supporting sub-questions and interview questions used in the enquiry

Research focus: An investigation of children's thoughts on difference in the context of the 'celebration of difference' in an international school
Sub-question a): To what extent are my participants aware of their own or others' differences?
First cycle interview questions: i) What does the word 'different' mean to you? ii) What does the word 'same' or 'similar' mean to you? iii) Do you think that any of the people you know are different from you? In what way? iv) Do you think that any of the people you know are the same as you? In what way? v) Why are people different or the same? vi) How do you feel about people who are different to you? vii) How do you feel about people who are the same as you? viii) Is being different important? Why? ix) Is being the same important? Why?
Sub-question b): To what extent are my participants aware of their own or others' cultural differences?
Second cycle interview questions: a) Have you ever heard the saying 'we celebrate our differences?' b) Do you understand what the word 'celebrate' means? c) Can you tell me what you think 'celebrating difference' means? d) How do you feel about celebrating difference? e) How can we decide what differences to celebrate? k) Who do you think should decide who is different? g) Is there anything else we can celebrate? h) Do you think celebrating our sameness (or similarities) can be done? i) How do you feel about celebrating our 'sameness'? j) How can we decide what 'sameness' to celebrate? k) Who do you think should decide what to celebrate?
Sub-question c) To what extent are my participants aware of human commonalities (sameness) and what are their thoughts on the celebration of 'sameness'?
Third cycle interview – open, non-structured, conversations to discuss issues arising from the 'Ugly Duckling' video and 'The Little Blue Boy' story.

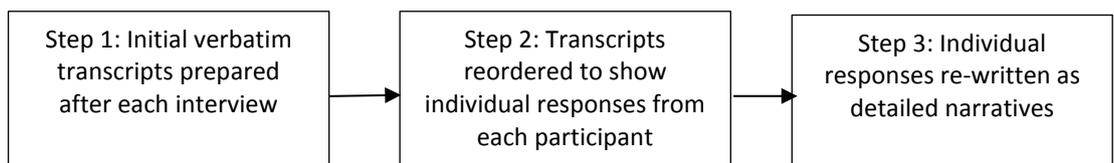
3g) i. Data Organisation

As my research followed the action research cycle of '*observation, reflection, action*' as mentioned above, my data collection and data analysis were intertwined, with each cycle contingent on the previous one. Therefore, as analysis started directly after the first cycle interviews, I made an early decision to reformat the interview comments by child, rather than by group (see example in Appendix III). As participant numbers were small, I felt that it would be more valuable seeing each child as an individual rather than as a fragment of a group. In doing this, I would have a more holistic picture of each participant's opinions and would be able to see whether their views were

held consistently over time through each interview and writing exercise. I would also be in a better position to compare my participants' opinions to see if they were similar, or whether some participants' views differed significantly from others. In addition, comparisons across age groups, to see if younger children shared similar opinions with their older peers, or whether opinions changed with growing maturity, would also be facilitated.

Each interview was therefore unpicked and all the responses made by each individual participant, in their original verbatim form, were grouped together with minimal editing used only to ensure that the script made sense. These grouped responses were then re-written as detailed narratives of each child's comments (see example in Appendix IV), which I ensured captured all the important elements of what had been said. The narratives were written with my own comments removed, as they tended to be prompts and 'teacher devices' used to encourage the participants to share their thoughts. By removing these researcher remarks from the summaries, I was not only reducing the amount of text, but also allowing what the children were saying to be more clearly revealed. This restructuring produced prose paragraphs which, while making the data more readable, allowed me to check more efficiently for consistency of opinions and key words or phrases. The summaries were written at the end of each participant's transcript so verbatim quotes could still be easily accessed for categorization and grouping purposes. The data organization is outlined more succinctly in the following diagram:

Diagram 3.1 – Preparation of Transcripts



The process of extracting individual comments from each group interview and putting them together for each participant also provided me with the opportunity to start focusing more closely on what each child had said. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007: 467) believe that looking at single participant responses '*preserves the coherence and integrity of the individual's response and enables a whole picture of that person to be presented...*' which I felt would be appropriate to my research. They further add that:

'The great tension in data analysis is between maintaining a sense of the holism of the data – the text – and the tendency for analysis to ... fragment the data – to separate

them into constituent elements, thereby losing the synergy of the whole, and often the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.’ (2007: 470)

By creating the narratives for each participant, I could see that the integrity of the data was maintained, but the process of analysis meant that the data would unavoidably need unpicking again in order for the grouping and sorting stages required for later interpretation.

The results of this transcript restructuring led to eighteen assorted sets of interview responses plus sentence completion comments. These responses, once grouped together, showed an unexpected, but very satisfying, level of cohesion and consistency. There was an expectation that some of my younger participants might change their minds from interview to interview and make conflicting statements over time. However, this was far from the case and the results reflected a strong level of consistency. This included the final story-prompt discussion with the Gye Nyame group that had to be carried over to the new academic year, as mentioned above. Despite the four-month hiatus, the participants still held the same opinions and, surprisingly, could even remember close approximations of the responses they had offered the previous term.

I had now reached the stage where my collected data needed the ‘*button box*’ treatment but at this point I started to feel that Byrne’s analogy, as cited above, was not quite so apt: creating categories for the attributes of buttons is a relatively simple exercise, whereas creating categories for complex data interpretation is less so, as Dickie (2003: 55) points out:

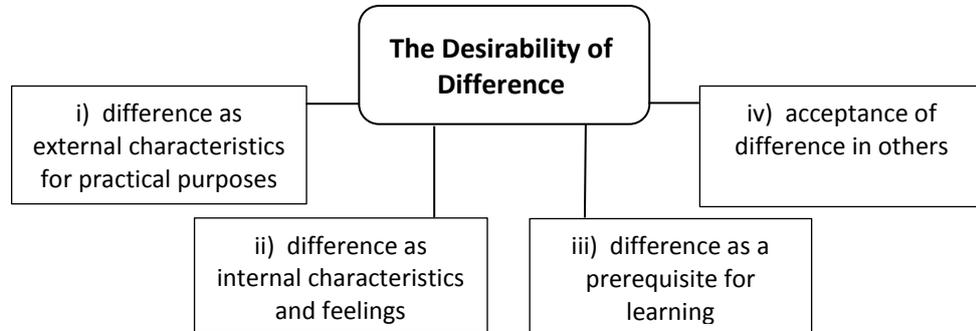
‘Ultimately it takes an enormous amount of intellectual “sweat” by the humans who are trying to make sense out of a situation, a setting, or a culture they thought was interesting enough to study.’

Bloomberg & Volpe (2008), among others, recommend the use of coding as a method of organizing qualitative data. However, as the scope of my research enquiry was relatively small, I wished to avoid unnecessarily fragmenting the data, and possibly distorting what the children were saying, which would be unhelpful at the interpretation stage.

By the end of the first and second cycle interviews, it had become clear that some compelling ideas and opinions were emerging from the data and this guided my decision to organise my findings thematically. The data was thus organized around three themes in which my participants displayed varying degrees of consensus. ‘The desirability of difference’ was the strongest theme as my

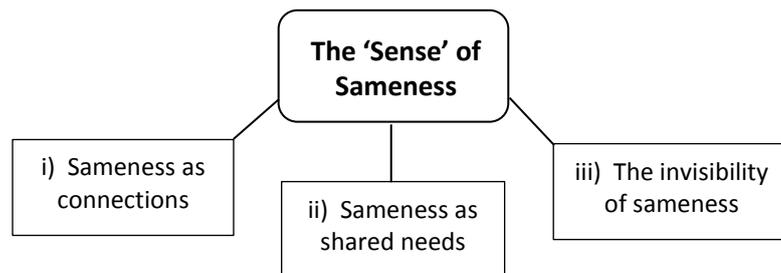
participants all agreed on the importance of being different for a variety of reasons and from varying perspectives, as can be seen in diagram 3.2 below.

Diagram 3.2 Data Organisation – Theme 1



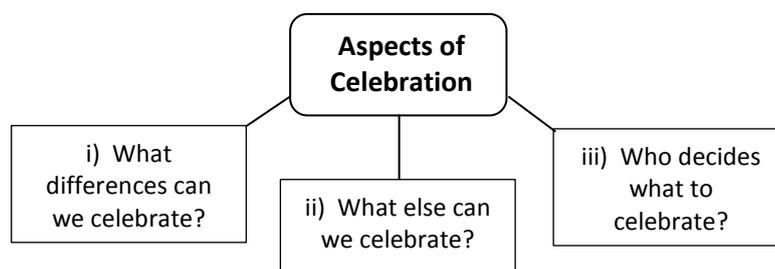
The second theme, shown in diagram 3.3, revolved around the theme of ‘sameness.’ I called this theme the ‘sense’ of sameness because, although my participants were able to offer their ideas on sameness in terms of matching physical attributes, some of them found the concept of ‘sameness’, with regards to connections and shared needs, somewhat elusive and were not always able to clearly articulate their thoughts on the subject due to its ‘invisibility.’

Diagram 3.3 Data Organisation – Theme 2



The third theme, as shown in diagram 3.4, was based on the idea of ‘celebration’ which offered valuable insight into my participants’ thoughts on what could be celebrated. This theme aligned more closely with the actual interview questions, as responses were varied and there was little consensus among the children.

Diagram 3.4 Data organisation – Theme 3



The data organized under each theme came from across all the interviews and discussions and included the data derived from the sentence completion exercise. Although the third cycle conversations (using video and book prompts) were carried out in a looser, unstructured format, which resulted in more multifaceted responses which could not be categorised so easily, comments were made by the participants which resonated strongly with the themes and provided further insight into their thoughts and attitudes, which I felt would prove useful at the interpretation stage. The findings were grouped as responses according to age, starting with the youngest group (Sankofa), followed by the middle and oldest groups (Nkyinkyim and Gye Nyame) to allow for easy comparisons to be made between the groups to see if there were significant age-related differences in responses. The findings can be seen in Chapter 4.

3h) Ethics and research with children

While the observation of all ethical issues is important when undertaking research with adults, it is even more important when working with children. Thomas & O’Kane (1998: 337) explain that this is due to:

‘... children's understanding and experience of the world being different from that of adults, and in part to the different ways in which they communicate. Above all it is due to different power relationships.

Greig, Taylor & MacKay (2007: 170) cite Beauchamp and Childress (2001) who identify the three core ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence and justice. Although these relate to biomedical ethics, they easily cross over into research in the social sciences, where I interpret them as follows: children should not be controlled or given limited information about the research being undertaken, the researcher should do no harm to the participants during the research process, and the research should be seen as fair. Morrison (2013: 322) adds:

'The researcher has to keep uppermost in her/his mind the need to respect and serve the welfare of the child, the dignity of the child, and the recognition that children have equal rights to adults in having these principles respected.'

Hill (2005: 68) cites Harker (2002) when reminding the researcher that getting and giving consent should not be considered as a 'one time only' event. Children need to know they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time during the research process, either for a short period, or permanently. Children also need reassurance that there will be absolutely no consequences to their withdrawing consent and cannot be allowed at any point to feel guilty about letting the researcher down.

While seeking informed consent from my participants, I also had to address the issues of my participants' confidentiality. Alderson & Morrow (2011: 39) point out that some children may be happy to be recognized for their work within the research but, if one child is named then other participants will also be more easily identified. Alderson & Morrow advise discussing these issues with the participants so that solutions can be found. Needless to say, my participants were given assurances regarding who would be accessing the information generated and had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms to avoid identification.

In my role as School Principal, I was bound to inform the Chair of the Board of Governors of my intention to conduct research with the children at the school. In addition, it was also right that I informed my teaching colleagues of my intentions; it would be both useful and judicious to alert my colleagues of the research process in case they found their children wanting to discuss the interview questions beyond the actual interview, or if they noticed that any children seemed disturbed by the discussions in which they had taken part. Kirk (2007: 1253/4) highlights that contributing to the research process may cause distress to some children so researchers are ethically responsible for addressing any negative emotions their young participants experience as a result of their involvement. Therefore, if teaching colleagues were aware of the research, they would be in a position to support participants when or if issues were identified. As the researcher, I was prepared to stop interviews if there was evidence of my participants becoming troubled by our discussions. Nevertheless, I was pleased to note that at no time during our conversations did my participants appear unhappy with our conversations. Throughout the interview process, they appeared enthusiastic and interested and no negative feedback was reported by my teaching colleagues.

3j) Research dependability and trustworthiness

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2017: 271) state that, in qualitative methodologies, *'reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail,*

honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents.’ One way of making qualitative research more trustworthy is the use of ‘thick description.’

3j) i. The use of ‘thick description’ to improve trustworthiness

A number of authors, (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005; Ponterotto 2006), write about ‘thick description’ and believe it can add to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Creswell & Miller (2000: 128/129) explain the purpose of thick description:

‘...it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study.’

Denzin (2001: 100) tells us that in thick description, *‘the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard, made visible.’* Sarantakos (2005: 50), on the other hand, simply offers the collection of thick description as one of the main criteria of conducting qualitative enquiry, prompting an expectation that researchers will routinely incorporate thick description into their research strategies. To construct thick description, the researcher gathers rich data and writes compelling descriptions with a strong focus on detail. In this way, the researcher brings the research experience more ‘alive’ and closer to the reader. The writer offers the reader convincing insight into the research, and it is the reader who can consequently judge whether the work is trustworthy. This idea is put forward by Polkinghorne (2007: 484) who says that it is *‘... the readers who make the judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher.’* The researcher, thus, needs to provide the detail required for the reader to make that judgement.

Creswell & Miller (2000: 129) believe that the use of thick description also allows readers to decide whether the findings of the research can be applied to similar settings or contexts. By including powerful detail into the work, the reader can visualise how outcomes may be viewed in alternative circumstances. Schofield (2009: 71) reminds us that, ultimately, the purpose of qualitative research is not to produce a standardized set of outcomes but, *‘a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is...consistent with detailed study of that situation.’*

3j) ii. Reflexivity in the research process

An additional way of maintaining the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research is for the researcher to exercise constant reflexivity about the enquiry being undertaken. While much has been written on the terms reflection and reflexivity, (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Rallis &

Rossman, 2010; Gabriel, 2015), a succinct definition is offered by Pillow (2003: 178) who describes reflexivity as:

‘...an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research.’

Pillow (2003: 179) explains that showing explicit reflexivity can demonstrate the researcher’s awareness of any difficulties experienced in the research and can thus be used to validate the research by raising questions regarding the enquiry process. This idea is also discussed by Gabriel (2015: 3) who believes that a reflexive researcher is, *‘constantly aware of the effects of her own presence in the field,’* and is aware that there could be hidden insecurities encountered by the researcher which may emerge during the research process. The most appropriate way the researcher can document reflexivity in order to make it explicit, according to Guba & Lincoln (1982: 248), is to keep a reflective journal in the field which details, among other things, what Guba & Lincoln describe as *‘the implicit assumptions, biases, or prejudices about the context or problem.’* Notes from the journal can be incorporated, where necessary, to add to the thick description discussed above, or during analysis in order to show that pertinent issues have been reflected on in appropriate depth. Altrichter et al (2005: 11) remind us that the journal should be regarded as a *‘companion’* during the enquiry and not as a means of data collection.

Rallis & Rossman (2010: 496) add a note of caution when stating that while reflexivity is necessary, it does not produce more trustworthy research, *‘if the researcher’s decisions produce incompetent actions.’* Therefore, how can we know if the work is successful? Erickson (2009: 504) offers a list of criteria which he believes constitutes a good piece of qualitative research:

- *‘the study involved a substantial amount of time in fieldwork;*
- *careful, repeated sifting through information sources that were collected to identify ‘data’ from them;*
- *careful, repeated analysis of data to identify patterns in them;*
- *clear reporting on how the study was done and how conclusions followed from evidence.’*

In view of what was stated earlier regarding reflexivity, I would add to the list that the researcher positions him or herself appropriately within the enquiry in order to incorporate the personal thoughts, doubts, pre-understandings, values and bias that have been noted throughout the research in the reflexive journal, and include the tensions or conflicts that may have arisen. In this way,

growth in understanding can be shown as the '*interplay*' mentioned by Usher (1996), between what you thought you knew and what you now know.

3k) Strengths and limitations

While researchers make every effort to ensure their work is the best it can be, there are always going to be limitations and my own research enquiry was no exception. While the most important element of my research was to give my young participants a voice and to offer them the opportunity to have their opinions and views heard and given credence, my choice of methodology was governed by the limitations of timescale, the fact that I was taking up valuable teaching time of my own class and of other teachers' classes when I was working with my participants, and the fact that, as Principal (as well as class teacher), I needed to attend to the administrative work that running a school entails.

3k) i. The choice of methodology and methods

The initial decision over methodology has been outlined earlier in this chapter, in that the research would be qualitative in nature and would be a hybrid of inductive and action research. However, there were alternative methodologies which were considered at the time. In seeking to find out what people think, surveys can play a very useful role. With a small group they can be completed and returned relatively quickly so would fit in with a limited timescale. However, I felt the use of questionnaires with children presented several problems not least because of the varying ages of the participants which ranged from around six to eleven years old. The language and wording required to ask written questions would need very careful thought, the use of a Likert scale with degrees of feeling would be difficult and possibly too nuanced for a young child to complete with any real accuracy due to a lack of maturity and clear understanding of the issues, and I felt a questionnaire would give me merely superficial and simple responses to what I felt was a complex issue. Furthermore, a questionnaire, as a written exercise, appears to be 'school work' which may have led my participants to focus more on spelling and sentence structure rather than allowing them free rein to write their feelings and opinions.

Ultimately, using questionnaires would not have allowed the children to have a clear and sustained voice, which is what I really wanted my research to support. However, if time had allowed, and due to the iterative nature of my study, I could have used information gleaned from my interviews to construct questionnaires to support what the children were saying and use them to show consistency in what they were telling me. However, I opted instead to use the sentence completion exercise to offer a reinforcement of what the children were saying, and I believe it performed this function well.

An alternative methodology which may have produced interesting data is the use of narratives. Children enjoy telling stories, which can be written down or audio-recorded, and my participants may well have enjoyed offering narratives on what they felt about sameness and difference. However, this would have involved the collection of eighteen individual narratives which may or may not have included relevant data. In my experience, young children can be distracted by their own ideas and tell stories that travel away from the area being researched. In addition, writing or telling personal narratives is a solitary activity and I wanted the children to talk in groups together not only because, in my experience, this is a more natural way of working with children but also, as stated earlier, *'children are prompted to say more when they are sharing a discussion with their friends.'*

With regards to the actual methods used for the co-construction of data, had time permitted, I would have promoted more active participation by the children in exercises such as roleplay and drama. Indeed, these activities were included in the initial draft planning at the outset of my research enquiry and may have offered an interesting contribution to my 'thick description.' However, as I had already had to move the final Gye Nyame group interview to the new academic year due to a lack of time, these physical activities were removed from the planning.

While further activities may have added more to my thick description, I was also aware that young children could get bored with *'Mrs Deveney's Research Project'* and I felt it was important to sustain their enthusiasm. Finding time in the day for conversations with my different groups was always going to be an issue as all the teachers, myself included, needed the morning teaching sessions for serious curriculum time. This sometimes left me with only the afternoon sessions in which to work with my participants, which was not always ideal, as stated in my research journal:

'I talked with Sankofa at the end of the day this time, but it was not so good as one or two of the younger children (Nina and Flo) were tired and tended to include a bit of silliness in their responses.'

3k) ii. The size of the school

The effect that the size, nature and location of the school had on the research enquiry cannot be underestimated. Due to the small size of the school, the low number of participants and their strong relationships with each other, I was able to gather the *'thick descriptions'* through multiple conversations and written exercises, which gave depth to my study. The fact that the research took place in Ghana also meant that issues of race did not affect the study and my participants were able to talk about skin colour without it having any pejorative implications.

While the school in which my research took place would be hard to replicate, such schools do exist. As mentioned in the introduction, I had previously worked in a similarly small organisation in Siberia, with around thirty-six children on roll, and it was while working in that school that I was first struck by how little the children cared about their differences. Thus, I believe similar research findings could be made in small schools with diverse student bodies.

3k) iii. Working with children

A further strength of the research was the input made by the young participants who were free to express their views in an informal and safe forum. Being the major part of a formal research exercise was a very positive experience for the participants as it gave them an opportunity to think about complex ideas, made them feel proud of being involved in ‘real research’ and demonstrated how valuable children’s voices can be to researchers. It allowed participants to have a ‘*voice in matters affecting them*’ as enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). I believe it reminds us that children are very capable of reflecting on complex issues and can surprise us with their depth of thought and serious consideration of real-life issues.

3k) iv. Parental influence

When sending home the information sheet regarding the research focus, I actively asked parents to go through the sheet to ensure that my participants understood the nature of my enquiry so that they could give ‘informed consent’. This was, therefore, an invitation of sorts for parents and children to discuss at home some of the issues involved. While there was some risk that my participants were echoing some of their parents’ ideas, in working through the interviews I noted the participants seemed to be very consistent and genuine in their opinions, and appeared to be articulating their own views rather than repeating those heard at home. However, there could be no guarantee that some of my participants were not influenced in some way by discussions held outside the research enquiry.

3k) v. Use of simplified language

The words used throughout the research conversations – ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’ – were simplified due to the age of the participants. However, the words used do not reflect the nuances contained in the words such as ‘diversity’ and ‘common humanity.’ This may have had some influence on the participant’s understanding but there was little alternative to simplifying the words as any attempt to explain concepts in order to use more appropriate words may have coloured the participants’ opinions and influenced their responses.

Chapter 4

Findings – what did the children say?

From the early stages of the transcript restructuring process, data analysis was already underway. Decisions with regards to the identification of relevant participant comments in response to the interview questions, the categorization of comments under the themes, working out which responses were important, and so on, needed to be undertaken and scrutiny was required even before the summaries of each participant's responses had been drawn up.

However, it soon became evident that certain messages were flying out of the first cycle interviews, which were unanimously shared by all my participants, and which would have implications for my second cycle questions.

The initial responses to questions with regards to difference made clear to me that one of my main worries concerning children being unaware of their differences proved to be unfounded. As stated in Chapter 1, I held personal reservations that, *'the celebration of difference gives the reality of being different a significance in ... at an age when children do not necessarily realise that they themselves are regarded as significantly different by those around them.'* This idea was convincingly dismissed by my participants as the responses indicate. Not only were the children loudly voicing the fact that they regarded themselves as unique and were fully recognizant of their differences, they were also elaborating on why they thought we needed to be different and why it was so important. This made the second cycle questions much more straightforward as, with the knowledge that I was not undermining my participants' self-perception, I could be confident that I was upholding the ethical principle that *'the researcher should do no harm to the participants during the research process.'*

As mentioned in the Data Organisation section above, the findings were organized under the themes that emanated from the data:

- Theme 1 – The desirability of difference
- Theme 2 – The 'sense' of sameness
- Theme 3 – Aspects of celebration

Each of these themes was supported by specific areas of discussion with my participants that underpinned the main theme, as can be seen from the data organisation diagrams.

With regards to the findings, although there were eighteen participants in total in the research enquiry, not all eighteen were consistently represented in the data shown. This was due to participants being absent on the day of the interview or because their views coincided with those of their peers and they had nothing further to add.

4a) Theme 1 – The desirability of difference

The clearest message which came across from the first cycle interviews was that the participants fully embraced the fact that they were all different and saw it as normal, necessary and desirable.

4a) i. Theme 1 - i. Difference as external characteristics for practical purposes

Across all age ranges, the participants were confident in expressing the view that they saw themselves as different. The younger children mainly took the term ‘different’ at face value and recognised people differed due to external characteristics such as looking different, as Nial stated:

BD: Do you think any of the people you know are different to you?*

Nial: Will, Peta, May... Everybody else in the world!

BD: And why are they different?

Nial: Because they don't look like me.

**BD - the researcher's initials used throughout all interviews*

Will echoed Nial's sentiments:

BD: ... do you think any of the people you know are different from you?

Will: Yes.

BD: Who?

Will: May.

BD: May's different – who else is different from you?

Will: And everyone else in the world.

May also recognised the external nature of difference when she said:

May: I think it [difference] means ... it's like something that you are and like when somebody is not like you ... I think that people who are different to you is how they talk and how they look like.

Nina, who was the youngest participant at 5 years and 9 months at the time of the interview, recognised difference in terms of external differences without difficulty:

Nina: My friend, she's a girl but she doesn't have the same hairstyle ... she has beads in her hair... it's not like mine, and she wears a different dress.

When asked the question, 'why are people different?' most of the younger children shared the opinion that people are different for the purely practical reason that we need to tell each other apart, as Nina confidently explained:

BD: Okay, Nina, why are people different?

Nina: Because if they are the same as you, we won't know ... if they look like you and you won't know who it is and you think it's all you so...

BD: So you think that it's all you?

Nina: Yes. And you think it's one person like you and you think 'hey, those are my friends' and no, they're my shadow.

Will stated that you needed to be different 'So you know who you're talking to.' He continued:

Will: ... if everybody's the same then you can say the wrong name because you ... because it looks exactly ...

BD: Because you all look exactly the same, yeah.

Peta also recognised why people were different, although not necessarily through external characteristics:

BD: What's the reason for people being different?

Peta: Because they don't think what you think.

Children in the Nkyinkyim group also explained the ways in which they were different from each other. Alex and Jo listed external characteristics of difference:

Alex: ... we're all different to each other and even if you're brother or sister... you are still different to each other... it's like you have a little bit ... you have like a little bit of different DNA ...

Jo: ... a lot of people are different from me. They're taller, shorter, other skin colour, different DNA (laughs because he knows he's said the same as Alex.)

With regards to why we are different, some Nkyinkyim group participants, as with the Sankofa group, connected it to practical reasons, as Ann explained comprehensively:

Ann: 'People are different so that we will know about ourselves, like if we all looked the same you would always think, hmm, you would always be thinking the same thing and then there won't be enough for everybody in the world so you're thinking, 'ooh, I like ice-cream' and then everybody else is thinking, 'ooh, I like ice-cream' and then they'll all be rushing into somewhere and they'll be picking ice-cream but there's not enough for everyone ... Also when it comes to education, you'll be thinking I want to go to school and you'll go to school and everybody else is there and it's crowded.'

Lela also mentioned the need to be different in this context:

Lela: People are different because ... if everyone in the world was the same we'd never know which one is which, you'd always be thinking maybe Ann is me and like [say] Lela, but instead it's Ann.

When looking at the Gye Nyame group comments, as might be expected with older children, the group recognized difference in each other, but not generally through external characteristics, as shown in the section below.

4a) ii. Theme 1 - ii. Difference as internal characteristics and feelings

Many participants recognised that there were internal characteristics and feelings related to difference such as, '*opinions of the world*', '*likes and dislikes*' and other people '*don't think what you think*.' Not all the participants in the Sankofa group were limited to simple responses in terms of difference being something that allows us to tell each other apart, as Will described his feelings:

Will: I feel special.

BD: Why do you feel special if we're celebrating difference?

Will: Because nobody's like me.

This was also true for some of the Nkyinkyim group, for example, Lela, who recognised difference not only in the more practical way she mentions above but also in a range of other ways:

Lela: Difference means to me what makes you special and what is not the same about you and someone else, which makes you special.

BD: Do you think that any people you know are different from you?

Lela: Yes...

BD: And how are they different?

Lela: By skin colour, by blood type, by what's wrong with you, your problems, your father and your mother, your family, your favourite food ...

BD: Wow, lots and lots ...

Lela added that being different was very important in human life because, '*... being different makes you who you are, who you want to be, and who you will be.*' Ann raised the idea of feeling special when she said: '*I think different to me means that ... to be special and be happy and ... about how you are.*'

The participants in the Gye Nyame group all spoke about internal characteristics when discussing difference. Mary suggested that being different meant not having '*... all the same qualities and stuff.*' She later added that, '*...we don't have the same views as everybody else.*'

Sam elaborated on this notion when he said:

Sam: '...we are all ... we are not equal; we have our own thoughts and our own reasons for the things we do.'

Selma expanded on these ideas when she said that other people were different from her due to '*their opinions, their questions of the world, their likes, their dislikes, their complexions and their families.*' She added that being different means:

Selma: 'You're leading your own life, you're standing out of the crowd, not listening to what people say and you're doing it your own way.'

Sam added to his opinions on what being different meant to him:

Sam: I think it [difference] means that you're special in your own way, you're not like everybody else so you can do things your way and feel like you're doing it how you feel and you're not just doing what someone else says, you're being independent.

While not as vocal as his friends, Ned shared his idea that, to him, being different meant '*we are all unique to ourselves.*'

4a) iii. Theme 1 – iii. Difference as a prerequisite for learning

While the youngest participants made little mention of why it is important to be different beyond the need to be able to tell each other apart, the older participants from both Nkyinkyim and Gye Nyame groups regarded difference as an important factor in learning.

BD: And Ann, how about you? Is being different important?

Ann: Yes, very, very important, in fact difference is one of the most important things.

BD: Why?

Ann: Because if ... like if ... we were all like we were, like we were all the same, but we were all children, nobody would get to know anything so that ... wouldn't be good ... so that's why it's important that we are all different.

Mary was more explicit when she said:

Mary: ... if everyone in this world were not different then what would be the purpose? Because we need to be different to learn more things.

Sam and Ned were both in agreement with Mary:

BD: Sam, is being different important?

Sam: It is. You have to be different to experience new things. If we were all the same we couldn't experience new things...

BD: Ned?

Ned: Yes, very important.

BD: Tell me why.

Dan: Because when you're different you can do more stuff and expand your knowledge but when you're the same you can't expand your knowledge, because nobody will know other things.

4a) iv. Theme 1 – iv. Acceptance of difference in others

In view of my participants' positive attitudes towards regarding themselves as different, it was unsurprising that they viewed difference in others as equally positive. All participants were unambiguous and unanimous in their responses, and May (Sankofa group) was able to articulate this viewpoint succinctly when she said children who are different from her, '*they are just my normal friends.*'

When responding to the question regarding how they felt about people who were different, Peta stated, 'I feel happy,' and Nina said, 'I don't care [if people are different.]' Nial and Will were equally positive about people who were different.

In the Nkyinkyim group, the participants were also very positive about people who were different:

Alex: I like it because we should all have our differences so nobody looks the same, because it's boring to just be the same...

Lela: ... I feel very, very happy that we are different from each other. That's what makes us special.

Ann: Oh, I am relieved that we are all different because if I was the same as my siblings it would be pretty difficult and we'd always want the same things ... I'm relieved I'm different from everybody else I know.

The following responses from the oldest group maintain a consistency with the younger groups with regards to difference in others as being a good thing:

BD: How do you feel about people who are different from you?'

Mary: I feel excited to find out what they know and how they live their lives.

Sam: ... I feel like we can be friends and we can share our ideas and maybe one day we can do something great!

Selma: I feel like... umm... I feel OK, I guess, 'cos I can learn some stuff, some things from them 'cos they're different they have different opinions and things...

Geena: I feel fine because we can learn from them ...

Ned: I feel like you can learn, like learn different cultures...

Although the younger participants saw difference in the practical terms of needing to tell each other apart, the older participants made strong links between being different and the ability to gain knowledge, to be independent and to develop personal opinions. Therefore, the participants of this age regarded being different as a prerequisite for learning from each other, which was a pertinent, if unexpected, point of view.

4a) v. Theme 1 - Summary

To summarise the findings to Theme 1, all the participants, across all age ranges, recognised unequivocally that they were different. Some of the participants associated being different with feeling special and being seen as unique – being the only one 'in the world.' All participants

regarded difference in others as something positive and ‘normal.’ While some of the younger children emphasised the fact that people were different so we could tell each other apart, older children saw difference as a necessary attribute for learning, being independent and having a voice; they considered that it would be difficult to learn new things if we were not different.

4b) Theme 2 – The ‘sense’ of sameness

The confidence with which the participants declared their differences had obvious implications for my further questions regarding ‘sameness,’ which, in view of the strength of feeling towards the desirability of difference, the children might have dismissed as either unimportant or irrelevant. Nevertheless, despite the fact that my participants were strikingly pro-difference, I felt it was important to bring these questions into the interview process, not only because it was a significant part of my research, but also to see if the children’s opinions regarding difference were secure. I was curious to see whether my participants’ resolve would be tested, particularly in view of the fact that children like to please their teacher and may alter their opinions to match a change in questions.

4b) i. Theme 2 – i. Sameness as connections

The questions regarding sameness did not produce the unanimous responses as did the questions on the recognition of difference, and the children seemed split between those who recognised sameness in those around them, in friends and family members, and those who did not appear to. The responses given by those participants who acknowledged there was a sameness, did not compromise their belief that they were different, but recognised specific aspects of sameness as connections between themselves and others:

BD: Is it ever important to be the same?

Will: No, it isn’t.

May: Yes, it is.

BD: Why, May? Tell me when is it important to be the same?

May: Because, when you are the same, then it’s like... if the person is the same as you and looks like you, then... and if you are the only child in your family, then you’ll feel like that’s your sister.

BD: Oh right, so if someone’s like you they can be like your sister and would that make them a good friend?

May: Yes.

The younger boys, Will and Nial, stated categorically that there was no one the same as them, which was unsurprising as they had both stated that they were unique earlier on in the interview. Nevertheless, Nial understood that sameness could be as simple a connection as attending the same school, and Will was aware that the same feelings could be shared between different people:

Will: We share... we have the same feelings. Everybody can be sad, everyone can be happy, everyone can be angry

In the Nkyinkyim group, Ann recognised basic connections between herself and her family when she said: *'I'm the same as my family, because we all come from the same tribe.'* Jo also recognised connections:

BD: OK, Jo, is there anything the same about us?

Jo: Yes, we ... some of us have the same skin colour, some of us go to the same school, and some, of course, have the same age.

Lela added, *'... celebrating our sameness tells us that even if we are different, we still have something that's common and that also makes us special.'*

The older participants in the Gye Nyame group had little consensus in their opinions on sameness. Sam felt that there was no-one the same as him and did not appear to give too much weight to connections between people:

Sam: Well, we all play the same games and we enjoy a lot but I'd say we're all very different.

Despite this comment, Sam agreed that, *'We're not all the same but we're the same human race.'* Ned also did not appear to regard being the same as very important and echoed Sam's comment:

Ned: ... we play the same games but I think we are all mostly different.

However, Ned recognised that he had connections with his family members, *'Me and my sister are the same: DNA, family, house ... we all live in the same house...'*

Selma and Geena both acknowledged that they had connections with other people:

BD: OK, Geena? [do you think any of the people you know are the same as you?]

Geena: It would be my brother Jo because we have the same dislikes, likes and favourite food, favourite toys ...

BD: So you are saying you are the same in some ways?

Geena: Yes.

Selma: I'd say most of my friends are the same as me with their opinions and personalities but not their complexions.

Across all the age groups, most participants recognised sameness on the practical level of things being the same in terms of physical attributes, being in the same family or coming from the same country. In addition, May recognised that being the same in some ways can make you a good friend and Will recognised that we can share emotions.

4b) ii Theme 2 – ii. Sameness as shared needs

The recognition of shared needs was reflected in comments mainly from the Nkyinkyim group as the things we need to help us to thrive and keep us alive.

BD: ... is there anything that is the same about us?

Lela: Yes, all of us need an education.

BD: OK, ... is there anything else?

Lela: Second, we all need water to survive, we need food, we need a good environment to go to school, we need to be treated when we are sick or we might die

BD: OK, Ann, what do you think? Is there anything that is the same about us?

Ann: Learning and ... learning.

BD: Learning. Alex, is there anything that is the same about us?

Alex: Yes, we do all need an education, we all need water and food, and we all need somewhere to live, like even on the street or in a house, we still need somewhere.

BD: And is this thing that is the same important or not?

Lela: Yes, it is important, because all of us need love, we need to be educated, as I said first, and that is very, very important. If we don't have all these things we won't survive in this life.

BD: Ann, the things we have the same, are they important?

Ann: Yes, because I think the things we have in common are good ...

BD: Okay. Jo, the thing that is the same, is it important?

Jo: Yes ... if we did not all of us have a brain and be different we would die. We need to learn to survive, eat to survive, that's what keeps us living ... and drinking to survive.

Although some of the participants were identifying shared needs as important, and even vital, others disagreed. When asked if 'sameness' was important Will in the Sankofa group stated, '*No it isn't*' which, again, shows consistency with his earlier remarks on being unique. Ned and Mary in the Gye Nyame group both expressed the view that being the same was '*not so important.*'

*BD: ... is being the same ever important?
(At this point the children in the group all quietly talk together saying 'No, yeah, maybe...')*

Ned: Not really.

Mary: ... I think being the same it's not so important because sometimes... we usually have some stuff in common, not all of our stuff is in common sometimes.

The lack of Gye Nyame group responses showed that the issue of shared needs was not a topic of conversation in their interview, as their focus centred more around difference. This is not to say that the children in this group dismissed the importance of shared needs in any way, only that they did not raise the issue in our discussions, despite being asked the same questions as the other groups.

4b) iii. Theme 2 – iii. The invisibility of sameness

The responses made by the participants implied the difficulty of seeing 'sameness' as it is not always visible, although watching people's behaviours may help to identify if they share anything in common with you. Will, from the Sankofa group, expressed the following:

BD: How do you think we know who is the same?

Will: We don't know.

BD: You don't know who is the same?

Will: It's inside you.

BD: Because it's inside you ...?

Needless to say, the oldest children in the Gye Nyame group were able to elaborate more on the theme of the invisibility of sameness:

BD: Can we ... do you think celebrating our sameness can be done ...?

Mary: Yes, but... no, because sometimes you can see that they're different just looking at them because they have a different face ... they have, yeah, but you can't just look at them and see if they are the same as you because you don't know much about them and you haven't met them yet.

BD: How do we know who is the same? If we want to celebrate sameness, how do we know who is the same?

Sam: You can know by how they react towards you as a person, or anything ... or their opinions and what they say and why they said it.

BD: Ok, Selma, how do you think we know who's the same?

Selma: Umm, if someone... like ... you can listen to their opinions and look at them and also like if this person is... like let's say you are nice or you're kind and you see this person acting with kindness you say 'oh this person is similar to me,' or if the person is doing something you normally do or is reading something you normally read. watching something you normally watch or doing the things you normally do yourself, you could say that person is similar to you.

Selma then made a comment below which encapsulates the tension in ideas of difference and sameness, and which reflects the complexity of the issues being discussed. It also reflects the ability of children to seriously contemplate such ideas and express their views with maturity:

'It's important that we keep in mind that we're also the same, like we're all equal and we're the same, but sometimes ... it's not good to be... to be completely the same, like same opinions and all those things, and it's also not good to be too different, because if you're too different then ... it would cause war or battles and if you're too ... if you're the same you'll have the same opinions or ... and that could also cause war...'

All participants appeared to be in agreement that sameness is difficult to discern due to its invisibility.

4b) iv Theme 2 - Summary

To summarise the responses to questions about sameness, the children were not as confident in their views as they were on issues of difference. There was not always consensus between the participants, and some found it more difficult to articulate their thoughts. Nevertheless, some children, particularly the youngest ones, could identify sameness in connection to physical matching, while others were able to recognise sameness in their family members and friends, such as habits, likes/dislikes and opinions, and recognising that if you see sameness in someone, they could become

close to you; Will recognised that we could share emotions. With regards to the importance of sameness, some children identified aspects of a shared need in everyone to have food, water, healthcare and an education for survival. A few children went beyond the idea of acknowledging this shared need in people and attempted to express opinions on the conflict between being the same and being different; these latter ideas were often difficult for the children to articulate coherently but reflected their ability to recognise they were dealing with quite complex issues.

4c) Theme 3 – Aspects of celebration

While the participants did not reach consensus in their responses to questions regarding celebration, it was a significant part of the research focus and thus worthy of its own theme.

4c) i. Theme 3 – i. What differences can we celebrate?

Many of the children had never heard the expression ‘*we celebrate our differences*,’ although five of the younger participants recognised the phrase and had heard it either at school or at home. However, the participants who had heard it at school (either their current school or in a previous one) were unable to explain what they were learning when the phrase was used, only that it was to do with ‘*learning about differences*.’ The children who had heard the phrase used at home explained that it was in the context of not comparing yourself to others, and when meeting new family members. The participants from the older group had never heard the phrase in any context. Thus, when the question was raised regarding what differences we should celebrate, the children’s opinions did not appear to be influenced by the way in which the phrase ‘*we celebrate our differences*’ tends to be used in culturally diverse international schools.

The youngest children initially struggled to dissociate the meaning of the word ‘celebration’ from birthdays, and hence eating cake, wearing a new dress and sharing time with siblings and relatives.

BD: Flo, how do you feel about celebrating difference?

Flo: Really, really special.

BD: Right, why is that?

Flo: Because I get to celebrate my friend’s birthday ... I feel excited ‘cos I help my grandpa to cut the cake.

BD: It’s all about food then isn’t it! (Everybody laughing)

However, when asked what differences should be celebrated, and having acknowledged that they were different and ‘unique,’ I was interested in finding out if my participants were prepared to identify the traits that made them different and that were worthy of celebration.

BD: ... how do we decide ... how do we know what to celebrate?

May: You choose what you like more than anything.

BD: You choose what you like more than anything and because that's part of you, you want to celebrate it?

May: Yes.

BD: OK, Will, how can we decide which differences to celebrate? You've said that there's only one you in the world so what difference are we going to pick to celebrate about you?

Will: Celebrate I'm alive.

BD: Celebrate the fact that you're alive – that's pretty good isn't it? What about you Nial, what can we celebrate about you?

Nial: Birthday.

BD: Just your birthday? ... Have you got any differences that you want to celebrate?

Nial: No-one has the same brain as me.

Participants in the Nkyinkyim group were able to articulate their ideas more succinctly in the sentence completion exercise when completing the statement '*If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are....*':

Alex: I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my culture and my history, and having a personality.

Lela: I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my traditions and food.

Jo: I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my favourite food, the day we were born, the country we are born in and our favourite games.

Sara: I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my clothes, my favourite food, my hairstyle, my naming ceremony, my birthday, my country and my friends.

The participants in the Gye Nyame group also identified and shared lists of what differences they wanted to celebrate through our conversations:

- BD: You said that we were all different, so if we're celebrating difference, what are the differences that we celebrate?*
- Selma: Our opinions, our cultures, our backgrounds, our colour, our voices, hair, family...*
- BD: Sam ... what differences do you want to celebrate?*
- Sam: Um ... where I come from, what I'm good at ... or anything I do.*
- BD: Ok, what about you Mary? How can you decide what differences to celebrate?*
- Mary: I would ... the differences we celebrate are our opinions, our religion, our skin colour, our country. I would like to celebrate how I do things and what I like to do.*

Geena and Ned from the Gye Nyame group found it easier to formulate their ideas through the sentence completion exercise and explained the following:

- Geena: If I could celebrate being different from others, I think I would like to celebrate what I like the most and some of my personality.*
- Ned: If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my favourite sports, foods, games and subjects.*

The findings show that the youngest participants were able to articulate interesting ideas which were ultimately unconnected with familiar family celebrations and showed an interesting perspective. The older participants gave lists of suggestions regarding which differences should be celebrated but the responses show that most participants' ideas appeared to be personal and included individual attributes (*my clothes, hairstyle, opinions*) and individual abilities (*how I do things, what I'm good at*), although two children mention 'my culture' in their lists. One of these responses offered a cautionary comment by Selma in the Gye Nyame group:

'It's like you celebrate your differences ... you shouldn't wish you were someone else and everyone is different and you should... you shouldn't really stress on, 'oh, I'm not like this person, that's bad.' It's not bad, it's good.

4c) ii. Theme 3 – ii. What else can we celebrate?

With regards to the discussions based on 'what else can we celebrate?' the responses show a wide variety of suggestions where some children had similar ideas, while others were quite different. The

younger children were highly creative, although their suggestions had likely grown from recent work activities in their classroom based on helping each other and being kind:

BD: [Is there] anything else that we would like to celebrate?

May: I'm still thinking.

BD: You're still thinking. OK, Nina?

Nina: Celebrate... umm... Happy Day!

BD: What would we do on Happy Day, Nina?

Nina: On Happy Day you'll do happy stuff and you will cut out a heart and write something that you love the person or you could hold the person's hand and smile at them.

BD: OK, is there anything else we could celebrate... about us?

Will: Kindness Day ...

BD: Right, we could have a Kindness Day – what things could we do on Kindness Day?

Will: We could share... and give people letters that say you love them.

BD: Wouldn't that be a wonderful day?

Will: There's another ... we can celebrate the things that they ... make a Kindness Council.

BD: Oh ... we could have a Kindness Council, and then the children have to go around making sure everyone is kind to each other?

Nial and Flo gave their responses in the sentence completion exercise:

Nial: If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate being happy!

Flo: If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate how good we are, how special we are.

Some children in the Nkyinkyim group struggled to get past celebrations being connected to birthdays and other common celebrations, although the two sentence completion responses shown below suggest that certain members of the group could consider ideas beyond the familiar.

Lela: If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think we could celebrate being the same and being different because we would teach others about our differences and similarities and what makes us unique.

Sara: *If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think we could celebrate how we paint, how we read, how we grow, your age, what we eat, how we eat, and how we dress because if we don't learn them we won't be able to get ready for your future.*

The oldest participants were able to offer more altruistic suggestions with Selma making the pithy comment that ‘... we could celebrate that we aren’t making a war on our similarities and differences...’

BD: *OK, we’ve talked about celebrating difference, we’ve talked about celebrating sameness ... is there something else we should celebrate that’s not difference, that’s not sameness?*

Mary: *Togetherness? Instead of being the same or different why don’t you just together? I would like to celebrate togetherness because we need to be together and we need to cooperate.*

Selma: *I think we should celebrate that ... like kind of what Mary said that we’re together or that we’re all as ... we’re just as one. Whether we’re the same or different we’re all as one, whether we hate each other or love each other.*

Geena wrote in her sentence completion statement, ‘*If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think we could celebrate helping others because helping others is really important.*’

4c) iii. Theme 3 - iii Who decides what to celebrate?

A varied response was shown when participants were asked who should decide which differences we should celebrate.

BD: *... if we were going to celebrate our differences **who** do you think should make that decision ... May?*

May: *I think all the presidents should decide...*

BD: *We’re talking about the school here ... so it should be someone connected to the school ... so who ... should make those decisions?*

May: *The Principal.*

BD: *You think the Principal should decide what differences we should celebrate? What about you Ellie ...?*

Ellie: *I think the students.*

BD: What do you think Peta ...?

Peta: I think it must be the Student Council.

BD: The Student Council, what about you Nial?

Nial: I think it should be our teacher.

BD: You think your class teacher should decide ... Will?

Will: I think God should.

BD: Who do you think in this school should be deciding...?

Will: The teachers.

BD: Flo, who do you think?

Flo: You.

BD: OK, like the Principal?

The conversation with the participants in the Nkyinkyim group offered more discussion and the responses tended to align more with the older Gye Nyame group, although Sara echoed May's initial idea:

BD: Who do you think should decide what differences to celebrate?

Ann: Us.

Lela: Anyone.

BD: Anyone? Like who?

Lela: Any person who wants to do it can do it... but we also have to make sure that we pick the right person ... the person who knows what to celebrate ...

BD: Nancy, who do you think should decide what differences to celebrate?

Nancy: I don't think anyone should choose for you, I think you should choose for yourself.

BD: Sara, who do you think should decide what to celebrate?

Sara: The President, because if he has to choose ... so he will ask if the people like it so that we'll all like it...

Nancy: No, you should ... and us (said emphatically).

The participants in the Gye Nyame group stated, on the whole, that they themselves should choose what to celebrate, although Geena echoed the responses made by some of the younger participants' comments:

BD: OK, who do you think should decide what to celebrate? If we're celebrating our differences, who should decide what we celebrate? Geena, who decides?

Geena: Mmm ... well maybe it might be the government ... and the Principal of the school and if everyone agrees with it...

BD: Ok, Mary, who do you think should decide what to celebrate? Let's keep it to the school because it's easier if we just talk about you at school. Who do you think should decide what to celebrate?

Mary: I don't think anyone should decide what we celebrate because we can celebrate what we want to celebrate ...

BD: OK, what about you Selma? Who do you think should decide what to celebrate?

Selma: I think everyone should celebrate what they want to celebrate, like you shouldn't ... if you don't want to celebrate something you shouldn't listen to the person ...

BD: So you should choose for yourself?

Selma: Yes.

Every participant was able to offer an opinion and the responses were wide-ranging, covering the more obvious choices of school-based people: the teachers, the students, the Student Council, the Principal and 'us', along with less obvious choices including, God and the President, which were unexpected. While their responses were respected, those participants who mentioned God or the President were invited to choose someone 'a little closer to home,' which can be seen in Will's and May's additional responses.

4c) iv. Theme 3 - Summary

To summarise the responses in the 'Aspects of celebration' theme, many of the participants had never heard of the phrase '*we celebrate our differences,*' and those who had were unable to explain what it meant. The youngest participants struggled to explain what 'celebrating difference' might mean as the idea of celebration was so firmly connected to having birthday parties, which is not necessarily surprising for children at that age. However, they were able to respond well to the question regarding what differences could be celebrated and provided some very creative responses to the question regarding what else could be celebrated. With regards to which differences the children wanted to celebrate, all participants were able to give suggestions, many of which were either connected to personal characteristics, personal abilities, or activities that promoted being kind to each other.

4d) Summary of all findings

From early on in the interview process, it became clear that participants from across all age ranges, were happy to regard themselves as different, and were able to support their opinions with rational,

and coherent arguments. Therefore, pre-interview concerns that some children may not recognize difference in themselves were shown to be unwarranted. While the younger participants tended to see difference through the external physical characteristics of, for example, hairstyle, clothes and skin colour, the older participants talked more about the less visible characteristics of difference such as opinions, beliefs and likes/dislikes. When reasoning why it was important to be different, the children explained that, along with the practical purpose of being able to tell each other apart, being different made them feel special. With regards to how children felt about those who were different from them, all participants actively accepted difference in others as a positive attribute. The older participants suggested that being different was important as it allowed you to increase your knowledge, to develop your own opinions and to become more independent; they thus viewed difference as a prerequisite for learning.

On the subject of sameness, some of the younger participants found it difficult to articulate their thoughts in this area and were not as assured in their responses when compared to voicing their thoughts on difference. However, this did not prevent them from offering their opinions. The younger children could understand sameness through connections in obvious things like skin colour and being from the same country, whereas the older children discussed sameness as connections between family members, and their friends sharing the same opinions and behaviours. Some participants were also able to recognize the importance of sameness with regards to the shared needs of people in the broader terms of food, water, education, etc. with one participant noting that everyone was from the same human race. However, there was no strong consensus in believing that sameness was significant, and a few participants voiced the opinion that sameness was '*not so important.*' The main difficulties in recognizing sameness was due to its invisibility and because '*it's inside you.*' Participants agreed that you had to get to know someone, or to observe them over time, before you were able to recognise things you may have in common.

When moving to the 'celebration' theme, many of the children stated that they had never heard the phrase '*we celebrate our differences,*' and were therefore unsure of its meaning. The younger members of the Sankofa and Nkyinkyim groups initially linked the word 'celebration' to parties but were confident in offering ideas on what differences could be celebrated. The other groups were also confident in identifying differences for celebration but all suggestions were based on individual attributes or abilities. The participants enjoyed sharing ideas for alternative celebrations which ranged from celebrating a 'Happy Day' or a 'Kindness Day,' to celebrating the recognition that '*we are all as one.*' When responding to the question of who gets to decide what to celebrate, the responses were generally people at school: teachers, children themselves, the Student Council or the Principal. However, a few children suggested that God could decide, or the President.

Chapter 5

Analysis and discussion – what does it all mean?

By this point, I had collected the pieces of my jointly-constructed knowledge and now had to decide how to weave these various pieces together to create a meaningful picture of what my participants were telling me – focusing not solely on their words, but on the underlying meaning they were making. In this way, I could see to what extent the children had responded to my research focus. O’Hara, Wainwright & Kay (2011: 213) explain that, in qualitative analysis, *‘there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that the analysis remains true to the ‘participants’ voices’ and that interpretation of the raw data does not move away from this.’* As the views and opinions of the children participating in my enquiry were at the heart of my research, I viewed this as good advice

As stated in the literature review, while there is currently very little research which would be helpful in guiding me towards a framework within which to analyse my findings, research with which I could compare my own findings (an important fact in the decision to undertake my enquiry), other areas could provide some context for my investigation. These three areas: culture, identity and difference, now provide the context for the analysis of my findings. Consequently, the structure I will use for analysis and discussion will be an examination of my participants’ themed responses within the context of culture, identity and difference. I have attempted to discuss the findings under the three separate headings but, due to the overlap of the subject areas, the lines between these areas may be blurred due to nuance, interconnectivity and the simplified language I used with my participants.

5a) Identity

Looking at the findings, it is evident that the word ‘identity’ was not used in the interview questions or the resulting participant responses. The decision not to use the term ‘identity’ was because I felt the concept was too abstract for the younger children to grasp with any objective understanding, and without lengthy explanations; the older participants may also have been challenged to discuss their own identities with objectivity. Therefore, in attempting to analyse issues of identity in my research, I have opted to determine if there were any specific factors at play in my participants’ lives which allowed the children to affirm their difference and uniqueness with such confidence.

While the word ‘identity’ was not used in our interviews, comments on self-perception were made, for example:

‘... there’s no one like me in the world...’ (Nial)

‘... being different makes me feel special...’ (Will)

‘... it’s great to be different...’ (Nina)

These responses given by the Sankofa group showed that even the youngest participants appeared to have a strong sense of self. The robust belief in their difference and uniqueness chimes with Maalouf’s (2000: 10) comment that *‘my identity is what prevents me from being identical to anybody else.’* My interviews consistently showed the children’s *‘personal narratives’* (Giddens, 1995: 54) appeared firmly rooted in the idea of their own uniqueness.

I therefore needed to find out whether there was any specific underlying cause for this consensus in the youngest class. I was already aware that some of the songs we sang in our weekly assemblies promoted uniqueness with words such as, *‘You’ll never find another one who’s just like me!’* (see Appendix IV for lyrics), but I wanted to know if there were any other influences on the children in the classroom. Although the staff at the school were not directly involved in my research, other than being informed that it was being undertaken, I approached the Sankofa class teacher, whom I will call Miss Yvonne, for an informal conversation regarding my research findings to see if she could offer any explanations for her students’ confidence in their declaration of difference. Miss Yvonne, a white South African with thirty-five years of national and international teaching experience, was happy to share the following narrative of her early teaching practice:

Figure 5.1 – Sankofa class teacher’s background information

‘When I started teaching in South Africa after apartheid, I had mixed classes (no longer just white) with coloured and black children. I wanted the children to feel good in their own skin whatever colour they were and tried to instill and cultivate in my children sound self-esteem which would be a great tool for life; I wanted them to have ‘ten out of ten’ self-esteem. As a teacher I could influence children and let them know it was OK to have curly hair or straight hair, as everyone was different. I wanted the children to feel secure as this would affect all their relationships – with peers, family and colleagues in the future. I wanted the children to feel secure in who they were – if it was in the words of a song they could sing it at home and this would confirm their specialness. How they feel affects children’s work in class - if they are secure they can be risk takers and then it doesn’t matter if you get things wrong. However, children still seek reassurance. If this doesn’t happen at home, then the teacher has to do it. The influence of a teacher on your life, someone who is genuinely interested in you, makes you feel worthwhile.’

I knew, through regular classroom visits, that Miss Yvonne exemplified what she described in the above vignette when teaching her class. She built warm and effective bonds with all her students, and her classroom was a happy and engaging environment filled with the children's work proudly displayed around the walls. In addition to her day-to-day teaching, Miss Yvonne was also responsible for choosing the songs which were sung by the whole school in weekly assemblies and she had sometimes chosen songs that emphasized uniqueness. Nevertheless, while promoting uniqueness in every child, Miss Yvonne was not endorsing 'separateness' and ensured that while each child was regarded as unique, they were also strong members of the Sankofa class where they worked and played together. With only ten children in the class (seven of whom were my research participants), each child would have the attention and support of the teacher within a happy environment which allowed them all to feel 'special' and enabled them to feel secure in their unique identities as both learners in the class and as individuals. If we share Giddens (1995) and Sfard & Prusack's (2005) belief that our identities are '*narratives of self*', then Miss Yvonne could be seen as playing an important role in helping her young children to create and develop their personal narratives, which were subsequently reinforced on a daily basis in the classroom and around the school.

An additional factor which could impact the children's self-perception and confidence was the fact that Sankofa Class was a mixed-age class made up of children from Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 (age 4 – 7 years) who were taught together by the same teacher in the same classroom (with work differentiated accordingly for each level). A child in the Reception class could, therefore, be with the same teacher for three academic years. It is not difficult to see how, under these conditions, a class teacher such as Miss Yvonne would exert a significant influence on her children in the development and validation of their identities.

While Miss Yvonne's close relationship with her students, and her regular affirmation of their uniqueness through words, actions and songs, may have gone some way towards explaining why the youngest children were confidently aware of their differences, it did not account for the children in the older two classes being equally confident in acknowledging their differences. The older classes were also taught by experienced, professional and caring teachers who developed good relationships with their students, although these teachers were not asked whether they encouraged the idea of uniqueness in their daily teaching. Lela's comment (in Theme 1.ii) that '*being different makes you who you are, who you want to be, and who you will be*' strongly connects with the concept of identity and shows a surprising awareness for an eight-year-old. Other comments from Alex and Ann (Theme 1.i) suggesting that they were always going to be different from their friends, along with Sam's and Selma's comments noting that we differ from our friends in the way we think and

our '*questions of the world*,' also demonstrate an awareness that goes beyond singing assembly songs about uniqueness, and therefore additional factors must have been in play.

As mentioned earlier, Giddens (1995: 54) frames the idea of self-identity as '*...the capacity to keep a particular narrative going*' where we must '*continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.*' If we apply this concept to the research participants in the older two classes, it can be seen that many of them, and particularly those who had been living on the compound and attending the school for some years, could build stable narratives of themselves, and '*keep them going*', as these narratives were secure and relatively uncontested inasmuch as the children's lives, at least during the time they were at school, were spent with the same close-knit, familiar and friendly group of people. The children were also able to incorporate many shared events into their personal '*stories about the self*', as they played, learned and grew together within a supportive community. Bauman (2011: 431) and Qu (2013: 148) both promote the idea of the shifting and mutable nature of identity formation, with their '*continuous renegotiation*' and a '*dynamic and interactive, ongoing process*' respectively. Each time the children encountered a new experience, whether it was visiting the village school to help with reading, or welcoming a new student into their class, they would have shared their perceptions and allowed these experiences to be incorporated into their developing notions of self, aligning with Maalouf's (2000: 2) idea that we have one identity but made up of '*many components in a mixture that is unique to me.*'

Importantly, any new experiences which occurred would have happened within the secure environment that the school offered and where open-mindedness was actively encouraged. During the interviews, all participants appeared 'comfortable in their own skins' when discussing issues of difference, which I believe was due to how secure they felt within themselves, and the mutual reinforcement regarding identity they would have received from their peers and teachers as an on-going process. While the children could see that they looked physically different, had different views and came from different backgrounds, the fact that they shared parts of each other's narratives rendered their differences insignificant and negated by their close friendships. Needless to say, young children would not objectively consider their own developing identities, but in acknowledging their differences in such a confident manner, they were demonstrating a self-assurance in who they believed themselves to be. Osler & Lybaek (2014: 561) suggest schooling should be an opportunity to extend learners' identities, and this is what I believe was occurring through shared experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, which would strengthen the participants' '*stories of the self*' and reinforce their belief in who they were.

In the literature review, the issue of the development of multiple identities in '*transnationally mobile students who attend International Schools*' was raised by Wilkinson (1998: 228) and Sears (2011: 79). However, the participants in my research did not align well with the classic picture of such children who move schools and countries every two or three years. Instead, as can be seen from the 'School Context' section in Chapter 3, for many of my participants, the school in which the research took place was the only school they had ever attended. This fact places my research participants in a unique situation where children from a variety of countries and cultures are growing up and being educated together over a significant number of years in a remote part of a country that is not their own. The Ghanaian children were also uniquely situated as, although they were living in their home country, they were experiencing a privileged lifestyle on the compound and an education which was light years away from what was being experienced by children in the local village just a short walk away. Therefore, I would suggest that my participants' identities better aligned with Maalouf's (2000) idea of a single identity with many components, which would accrue as new experiences were encountered, or, as I stated previously, their identities were reflected '*through a variety of facets which continue to be fashioned and shaped as we grow and expose ourselves to different behaviours and ideas.*' The concept of constructing identities using an accumulation of experiences that continue to build through our lives is, I believe, a more apt fit for my participants, rather than the 'multiple identities' concept mooted by Wilkinson (1998) and Sears (2011), which suggests a certain partitioning of the self. Although there is 'change' as the children travel home to a different continent, or to Accra for the long holidays, where the children can see that lives and behaviours are different, the school presents a 'constant' in the children's lives and their confidence in who they believe themselves to be may be due to the fact that their '*stories of self*' were not challenged by recurrent change and movement through different cultures and countries.

In Chapter 2, the issue of busy teachers ascribing identities to their students based on cultural stereotypes was raised. Pickering (2001: 73) comments this practice '*divests*' people of their real identities, Osler & Lybaek (2014: 561) suggest that it can '*have an impact on self-identity*' and Hopkins, Blackwood & Condor (2011: 218) warn of the psychological threat of others failing '*to recognize us ... in terms of how we see ourselves.*' The responses of the participants did not indicate that this was happening in their classrooms and, in looking at the nature of the school and the structure of the classes, it can be seen there was little danger of this happening for a number of reasons. First, there was no single significant cultural group at the school that could easily be stereotyped. Although there were slightly more Ghanaians among my participants than other nationalities (see participant list in Chapter 3), they were of different ages and genders, were taught in different classes and were very different from each other, as my participants clearly identified. In addition, the fact that the Ghanaians were not essentially living within their own culture while they were at school, returning to Accra only for the school holidays, meant that they themselves were not

likely to conform to a typical Ghanaian national stereotype (if one exists.) Second, the children representing the other nationalities at the school were in such small numbers that it would have been difficult for the teachers to regard these students as anything other than individuals. In addition, these expatriate children had also had very little contact with their home countries so would have found it difficult to conform to any cultural stereotype which they themselves may not have recognized. Third, the teachers at the school were experienced international school teachers and were unlikely to stereotype any of their children; they epitomized Sears' (1998: 18) description of effective teachers '*... who are knowledgeable about the cultures of their students ... draw on current thinking about teaching classes of children with differing cultures, languages and educational histories.*' Last, the size of the school, with thirty-two children on roll at the time of the research enquiry, allowed for each child to be regarded as an individual. With around six to ten children per class, and four classes in the school, it would have been difficult for the teachers *not* to treat these children as individuals.

Osler & Lybaek (2014: 561) mention the '*right of children to develop their own identities*' and Gewirtz & Cribb (2008: 43) highlight the importance of '*understanding children's identities to teacher/student relationships.*' There were undoubtedly significant beneficial effects of the school/class size on the participants' developing identities. In a class of six or so children, the relationship between teacher and student is a particularly close one, as compared to the relationships between teacher and students in a class of thirty. The dynamics of teaching a small class differ significantly from teaching a larger class. Teaching in a small class is more intimate with teachers tending to sit closely with the children and, because there are not so many voices, issues can be discussed more at length and in-depth with every child having input – there is no hiding at the back of the class when there are only six children in the room. This situation differs from the dynamic of teaching a much larger class where, in my personal experience, the teacher stands at the front of the classroom to do initial whole-class teaching, and then moves around different groups, having less time to talk to individual children, and with children having fewer opportunities to share their opinions. In small classes, teachers can take the time to understand their students well and can support children's developing identities due to the length of time (up to three years) they spend teaching due to the mixed-age class structure.

In terms of the participants having a clear national identity, while they all knew where they came from and preserved a regular connection to their home country, particularly when returning home for the long holiday in July and August, the children maintained a strong community identity in Ghana with the school at its heart. They knew that they were in remote Ghana due to one or other of their parents working for an international company, and they knew they would be staying there for a number of years. As mentioned earlier, although there may have been downsides to the

insulated lifestyle for the adults, the school offered the children a uniquely positive experience where every single child had a presence and a voice. Children played together across age groups, nationalities and genders. All the children were valued by their teachers, who created safe, secure and stimulating environments in their classrooms in which the children could enjoy engaging with their diverse playmates with acceptance rather than judgement. This open-mindedness would have supported the children in their identity formation and, perhaps, led to the confidence that my participants consistently demonstrated during the interview process.

The concept of Bourdieu's habitus is discussed in the literature review as an alternative way of looking at what influences identity in terms of dispositions, aspirations, our world view and so on. As previously mentioned, Bourdieu sees habitus as '*the reproduction of a group's history through time in order to maintain the 'status quo.'*' However, this notion is challenged by the nature of the school environment in that my participants, along with their families, had transferred to a remote location and were living with other families, with whom they had no previous connection, and who were from different countries and continents, in what could be seen as an artificial environment. Although there was a common link to the company that ran the mining operation, this disparate group of families would have no common history, other than the one they would build during their time in the community. Therefore, the children's developing habitus would have been initially disrupted by the move away from their own country, or main home in the case of the Ghanaians, and thus require the '*change and transformation*' mentioned by Reay (2004: 436). Children would therefore be redeveloping their habitus within a common 'field' (the residential compound and school) as they created a shared history, allowing the development of '*le sens pratique*' (Bourdieu 1990) together within their new environment which enabled them to function competently. Once again, the sharing of a common habitus, like the sharing of histories that underpinned a developing identity, may have led to shared beliefs about difference being unimportant and eclipsed by the importance of the relationships with friends and playmates.

5b) Difference ...

If all the participants were claiming their own uniqueness, then they had also recognized that their friends were different, which is what they did, unequivocally. It was suggested earlier that, as difference is ubiquitous, it should be regarded as normal, and this was supported by the participants in this enquiry. One young Sankofa participant, May, put this into words very succinctly when she stated that children who are different, '*... are just my normal friends.*'

It was clear from the findings that all the participants, regardless of age, viewed being different as a good thing, as Sam said concisely when discussing ‘The Little Blue Boy’, *‘I think the story is about trying to change your difference instead of embracing it, because everyone is different and that’s always a positive thing.’* The children were confident in acknowledging their own differences and regarded difference in others as a positive characteristic. The youngest children held very pragmatic views about the importance of difference, explaining that if we were all the same nobody could tell us apart and we would all want the same things at the same time, and so on. The Sankofa participants were challenged by some of the issues we discussed after watching ‘The Ugly Duckling’ as, although they understood the idea behind the story (we won’t play with you because you’re different) they appeared to be unable to relate the story to their own lives and maintained their views that it was good to be different. The children did not appear to understand that they might be treated unkindly by anyone because of their difference, which was unlikely to happen while they were living within the protected environment of the compound, and while they attended a school that promoted open-mindedness and acceptance.

The older participants offered unexpected reasons for suggesting that difference was important by linking it to learning, gaining knowledge and being independent. Ann made the point that, *‘if we were all the same, nobody would get to know anything,’* while Mary said that, *‘we need to be different to learn more things,’* and Sam explained *‘you have to be different to experience new things.’* On a simple level this view is logical – if we were all the same we would think the same things, hold the same views, and therefore share the same knowledge. When we encounter difference, we see and hear different perspectives and opinions, and we can learn more about the world. These experiences add to our *‘story of self’* when forming our identities and are, thus, necessary for becoming knowledgeable human beings. Mary stated, *‘I feel excited about people who are different because I can find out what they know and how they live their lives,’* and Sam added, *‘we can share our ideas and maybe one day we can do something great.’* Without difference, therefore, life would be incredibly dull; in the minds of my participants, homogeneity appeared to equal monotony.

Selma raised the connection between difference and being independent when she stated, *‘...it means leading your own life, standing out of the crowd, not listening to what people say and doing it your own way.’* Sam alluded to something similar when he said, *‘... being different means you’re not like everybody else, you can do things your way and you’re not just doing what someone else says, you’re being independent.’* Both these participants were in Year 6 and on the cusp of adolescence. Both were confident students and were able to consider more abstract ideas and articulate their thoughts well in our conversations. They were both of an age where they could also reflect on the concept of identity and difference with enough objectivity to recognise that *‘doing it your own way’* was possible. However, my participants could only come to these conclusions because they were

comfortable within their own identities, as discussed above. The ubiquity of the difference which surrounded the children every day over time appeared to render it inconsequential. This is not to say that difference became unimportant, indeed, the participants were saying quite the opposite, but that engaging with difference on a regular basis was not out of the ordinary for them, just as breathing is important, but is rarely considered on a day-to-day basis. The most significant features in the lives of my participants were having good friends and spending time together learning and playing; the fact that their playmates were from different continents, were different colours, ate different food or spoke different languages was rendered irrelevant by their value as friends.

Pickering (2001), Krumer-Nevo & Sidi (2012), Grove & Zwi (2006) and de Beauvoir (1949) all highlight the negative aspects of difference where people judge those who are not like them as inferior and regard them as the ‘other.’ However, when de Beauvoir (1949: 17) wrote that ‘...*no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself...*’ she was clearly not talking about children such as those represented in my research enquiry who, when seeing other children, would more likely look for friendship potential rather than be suspicious of the ‘Other.’ If my research participants regarded being different as normal, and saw difference as something that was desirable and of importance to everyone, they would not see ‘the other’ as anything less than equal. Furthermore, I believe they would welcome the ‘other’ into their community with enthusiasm. When hearing the participants’ responses to the question, ‘*How do you feel about people who are different?*’ the consensus was entirely positive. The children’s comments were sincere and indicative of the welcoming ethos of a school, where everyone is treated equally, as demonstrated by the attitudes of the children and staff. Treating children as ‘the other’ was not compatible with the participants’ belief that we are all unique.

The children at the school were also influenced by learning with a diverse teaching staff. With two Ghanaians, one UK teacher (who was also the Principal), one South African and one Australian teacher, the children had a daily model of nationalities, ages and genders working together collaboratively with trust and mutual respect. The teachers worked with children outside their classes during extra-curricular activities after school hours and therefore shared responsibility for all of the children within a school that put the interests of the children at the heart of decision making. In addition, the children were also regularly reminded that one of the school’s values was:

***We embrace diversity** - Children, staff and community members come together from all over the world and all are treated with equal respect*

In this way, the school was not ‘celebrating’ difference but accepting it as a fact of life for the school. There is a difference between picking out differences for celebration and acknowledging difference

as a given. This positive attitude of the school towards difference offered some way to understanding why the children treated each other as equals rather than engaging in ‘othering.’ The school also had a zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying, and behaviour that used any attempt at dominance and control, or that attempted to belittle others, would have been regarded as bullying and would have been dealt with as a matter of urgency.

As mentioned in the literature review, international schools develop their own unique cultures, which have a significant influence on the children who attend in terms of behaviour and attitudes towards each other. The school in which this research was undertaken had a very strong culture of open-mindedness, seeing diversity as the norm, and of welcoming everyone into its community. The school vision was supported by strong values, which were rehearsed on a regular basis, and I believe this positive approach to difference, as expressed by all participants, is very much reflected in the findings.

5c) ... and Sameness

When asking my participants their opinions on the celebration of difference, I also considered whether there could be any alternative celebration which would highlight, ‘... *a common humanity ... which is shared among people ... and may be a more worthy focus of celebration.*’ This was the reasoning behind the interview questions which sought the children’s views on ‘sameness.’ I felt that the concept of ‘*common humanity*’ was too abstract for my younger participants so used the term ‘*same*,’ although, as can be seen from the results under Theme 2 - The ‘sense’ of sameness,’ the participants in the Sankofa group, and more particularly those in Year 2, were starting to approach the ideas under discussion with more consideration and insight, albeit still consistent with a young child’s perspective.

It became apparent through the interview process that my participants were robustly affirming their differences, so I was interested to see how they would respond to questions about ‘sameness.’ At this point, it was particularly important that I maintained ‘researcher neutrality’ and avoided over-explaining the issues to the younger children, which would risk them being led into a situation where they were trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. Therefore, I did not intervene in the conversations and was curious to see how they would develop.

The youngest children, unsurprisingly, took the term ‘sameness’ quite literally so their responses were based on a superficial expression of objects being the same, rather than the issue of having the common human values. Initially, the younger children who had proudly declared their uniqueness, were reluctant to admit that anyone was the same as them, although once the conversation focused

on very simple aspects of sameness, such as *'you can have the same clothes,'* (Peta) and *'people go to the same school,'* (Nial), a discussion ensued in which the young participants listed all the physical characteristics that could be the same, for example, hair colour, eye colour, and so on. As stated previously, the response was unsurprising due to the age of the participants and the abstract nature of the ideas being discussed. However, May, a Year 2 student, was able to recognise that someone similar to you could feel like a sister and, I believe, she was trying to articulate that you share things in common with your friends and that is what makes you close. By the end of the interview, Will, another Year 2 student and one of the boys who declared there was no-one like him *'in the world,'* had reconsidered the idea of 'sameness' and had worked out that, *'... we have the same feelings. Everybody can be sad, everyone can be happy, everyone can be angry.'* It was interesting to note that he had made the leap from the obvious sameness of skin and hair colour to the less visible and more abstract ideas of sharing emotions. Thus, both May and Will had established that 'sameness' was about connections between people. By the end of the interview, Will had also added a further observation that, *'we don't know who is the same because it's inside you.'* I felt this was a good example of what Dockett & Perry (2007: 60) stated in the Ethics section above that children are, *'... competent, capable, and effective reporters of their own experiences ...'* May and Will, both aged seven, were trying hard to make sense of these conceptual issues and were offering what I believed to be very valuable and quite sophisticated contributions.

The older children were quicker to recognise aspects of sameness and their responses demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of the term. Most of the participants identified similarities between themselves and family members, along with friends who enjoyed playing the same games and having the same opinions. Again, these participants had recognised that sameness represented connections between people. Mary and Selma, when discussing the celebration of 'sameness', both expanded on what Will had said about 'sameness' being invisible because it's inside you. Mary said, *'... you can't just look at them [others] and see if they are the same as you because you don't know much about them and you don't know what sameness to celebrate with them.'* Selma elaborated further on this:

'... let's say you are nice or you're kind and you see this person acting with kindness, you say 'oh this person is similar to me' or if the person is doing something you normally do, or is reading something you normally read, watching something you normally watch or doing the things you normally do yourself, you could say that person is similar to you.'

Selma was making the observation that we cannot see what is on the inside of people, but we can recognise similarities by watching how they behave. Her observation revisits the question raised in

the 'Identity' section where we read that Baumeister (2011: 49) argues our identity '*exists only in relation to other people*' whereas Gewirtz & Cribb (2008: 40) believe identity is '*the account that we give of ourselves and not the accounts that others give.*' From what Selma said, we can favour Baumeister's argument as Selma, along with Will and Mary, make the point that our identity is not discernible unless it is revealed to others through visible actions.

While only the oldest children in Sankofa were able to touch on the more abstract ideas of 'sameness', it was less difficult for some of the Nkyinkyim group who, by the end of the first cycle interview, had recognized the shared needs of people in that '*we all need an education, we all need water and food, and we all need somewhere to live...*' (Alex), and '*all of us need an education ... we need a good environment to go to school, we need to be treated when we are sick ... all of us need love ...*' (Lela). In the Gye Nyame group, the majority of participants still upheld their opinion that we were all mainly different, although Sam noted that, '*we're not all the same but we're the same human race.*' Pearce (2014: 391) suggests: '*... in a child's experience nationality is a far earlier and more salient identification than is kinship with the population of the whole world.*' Nevertheless, I was expecting this age group to identify the idea of shared needs and demonstrate a keener understanding of the concept. However, as shown in the findings, this group did not diverge significantly from discussing issues of difference and two of the participants, Ned and Mary, agreed that sameness was not very important. It appeared that their desire for difference may have overshadowed their recognition of human connections or shared needs, although this cannot be assumed solely through the fact that the issue was not discussed during our informal interview.

The responses showed that some participants were edging towards an understanding of the concept of a common humanity as they were able to identify basic needs which humans have in common. However, the majority of the participants, regardless of age, still favoured the promotion of the virtues of 'difference' over those of 'sameness.' Indeed, while a number of children recognised the value of sameness as connections and shared needs, there was no acknowledgement of its worthiness for celebration. Although the idea of 'sameness' generated interesting discussions, the participants were not in agreement over its importance. This could have been due to the choices I made over which words to use. Understandably, the term 'sameness' was a better word to use with the youngest children, but the older participants may have better understood the conceptual term of 'common humanity.' Nevertheless, I felt slightly hesitant about promoting the more conceptual terms as, again, I was wary of 'over-explaining' and leading the children towards manipulated conclusions that matched my own beliefs and preconceptions. I therefore left the term 'sameness' in my conversations with all ages and allowed my participants to discuss whatever the word meant to them. Ultimately, the invisibility of sameness, although acknowledged, made it difficult for the participants to be confident in developing their opinions on the subject. This could account for the

fact that the participants were far more confident when talking about difference because ‘difference’ is obvious and visible, whereas ‘sameness’, due to its internal nature, presents a problem, and not just for children. Even adults with some experience of the world would find it difficult to determine someone else’s values, beliefs, hopes and dreams without engaging with that person. The participants made a salient point when they recognised ‘*it’s inside you.*’ Nevertheless, Lela from the Nkyinkyim group did offer an interesting response:

‘... even if we’re different we still have something that’s common that also makes us special. We find out what we have in common.’

There was a growing recognition, even with the eight-year-old children, that we do share things in common with others, and they can be celebrated. However, the children’s comments were more tentative than those made on questions of difference probably because, as stated above, of the more abstract quality of sameness.

5d) Culture

The term ‘culture’ was not incorporated into my conversation prompts with my participants. This was deliberate and the decision made was to avoid feeding the participants specific ideas or concepts that may have influenced them unduly. This meant that, if the word ‘culture’ was used in any of the responses, it would be because the participants chose to use that word, rather than because they had heard it from me, and then used the word in turn for their responses.

In looking at the findings, it can be seen that four of my participants used the word culture; two of whom used it when asked why difference is important and the other two during the conversations on celebration:

- *Ned feels that you can learn from people who are different – you can learn about different cultures.*
- *Sam feels that it means people are being accepted for their culture and they’re allowed to speak out*
- *Alex thinks, ‘I would like to celebrate my culture and my history and having a personality.’*
- *Selma thinks we can celebrate our opinions, our cultures, our backgrounds, our colour, voices, hair, family...*

Despite the literature review highlighting that the concept of ‘culture’ is complex, when used by my

participants there was an assumption that their fellow participants understood the term and none of the children asked for an explanation. Full understanding of the term, however, cannot be assumed, although it was generally used in context correctly. Other participants alluded to the concept without actually using the word ‘culture.’ For example, Jo, Sara and Mary said that they would like to celebrate their country, among other things, and Lela said she would like to celebrate her traditions and food. None of the children from Sankofa class used the term ‘culture’ or offered a response that was in any way connected to the concept.

In considering reasons why the participants did not make use of the word ‘culture’ in our conversations, it could be as simple as the fact that the word was not commonly used in the school by the teachers or by the children themselves as there was no reason to use it. Although we were all from different countries, the term ‘culture’ was not part of the day-to-day general discourse. While the teachers could be heard talking informally about their respective countries, or talking to the children about their home countries or the countries that they had visited on holiday, the term ‘culture’ was not used and was not, perhaps, part of the children’s lexis. The fact that the children were unconcerned about the differences between themselves and their playmates, due to the fact that they regarded difference as normal and a good thing, would have led them, I believe, to also be unconcerned about the ‘culture’ of their playmates. Differences regarding food eaten at home, music played, clothes worn, and other cultural artefacts or accessories, would have been regarded merely as personal preferences rather than being ascribed to a specific cultural attribute or cultural behaviour. Consequently, when living in an environment where everyone is different from you, and the environment itself is different from what everyone is used to, then that difference is accepted as a common condition and thus regarded as normal – a shared normality which, over time, becomes unremarkable. Indeed, the culture of the school may have overridden the individual cultures of the families.

In addition, when looking at why the term ‘culture’ was not widely used, it may have been difficult for many of the expatriate children to apply the concept to their home culture, when they had not lived within it for a significant period of time. As stated, for many of the children, the school where the research was undertaken was the only school they had attended and therefore they would not necessarily have identified with their ‘native’ cultures. Consequently, any attempt at discussing the expatriate children’s home country cultures might have presented a challenge. The Ghanaian children may have more easily identified with the own culture through their parents, but while they were at school they lived in a ‘protective bubble’ that surrounded the compound and were therefore not engaging with the local culture in any way.

As noted in the literature review, Ramsey (1998: 69) suggests that '*most children are not consciously aware of their own or others' cultures...*' While I can entirely agree with this notion, I would not necessarily agree with Ramsey's contention that it is because the concept of culture is too abstract. This may indeed have been so for the youngest participants, but some of the older children demonstrated their ability to understand and articulate quite complex ideas so would have some understanding of the concept of 'culture.' Therefore, I would suggest that the lack of awareness of '*their own or others' cultures*' may be due to the fact that it was simply not relevant to children; it was not so much the abstract nature of the idea, but its irrelevance to children who readily accepted that everyone was different, not because of their culture, but because of the simple fact that being different was regarded as normal.

What appeared to be more important to the children was their identification with each other as friends, being part of their small community, and engaging with the school where they derived their shared histories and '*stories of self.*' Mary, one of the older participants expressed this well when she said, '*... instead of being the same or different why don't you just be together?*' Selma reinforced this idea when she commented, '*... we should celebrate ... that we're together or that ... we're just as one. Whether we're the same or different, we're all as one, whether we hate each other or love each other.*' Maalouf (2000: 101/2) observed that he had '*more in common with a random passerby in Prague or Seoul ... than with my own great-grandfather*' so perhaps my participants had more in common with each other, whether they were from Ghana, Chile, South Africa, UK or Australia, than they did with their own grandparents or with someone from their own country who had never travelled beyond that country's borders.

Does it matter if culture is not relevant, or even important, to children at this age? From what my participants were telling me it did not appear to be. Van Oord (2008: 144), cited in the literature review, discusses the need for the separation of 'difference' and 'cultural difference' when he tells us that:

'By focusing on culture and intercultural understanding in our educational programmes, we 'prime' students to develop schemata that will direct their experiences of differences towards the culture concept. Culture will be on their mind, and every experience of human difference will be understood as a cultural difference and therefore as a somehow fundamental difference.'

If simple, human difference, as observed by my participants, is regarded as cultural difference, then it imbues the difference with unnecessary significance. Phillips (2009: 50/51) declares that we should stop the '*exoticisation of other cultures*' as it makes people believe that others are more

different than they are. My participants accepted that everyone was different but they did not categorise their differences as cultural differences, as can be seen from a reading of their responses. In fact, no-one at the school was suggesting that any of their differences were cultural. Van Oord & Corn (2013: 23) promote the idea of *'fostering students' cultural liberty'* which would allow individuals to *'embrace or defy his/her own tradition,'* much like Sen's (2006: 116) promotion of *'cultural freedom'* and Keba's (2008: 70) *'cultural dissidents.'* However, my participants were not deliberately *'defying'* their traditions or cultures by paying no attention to them but, instead, they simply did not recognise them due to their irrelevance to their lives at that moment in time.

As mentioned above, my participants seemed very comfortable in their own skins and with who they thought themselves to be. In this regard, Appiah (2005: 117) raises the idea of our identities being more relevant than our culture when he says *'the diversity that preoccupies us is really a matter not so much of cultures as of identities.'* This idea is developed by van Oord & Corn (2013: 23):

'Helping students discover their multiple group allegiances and how pluralistic and permeable identities can be ... will prove to be a more fertile breeding ground for genuine human understanding and engagement than will be a deterministic focus on reductive impositions of culture.'

Maybe this is what Mary and Selma were alluding to when they talked about *'togetherness'* and being *'all as one'*, not trying to create difference through the categorisation of behaviour as cultural, but just by being different together and accepting it as normal.

5e) Let's celebrate ...

As my research focused on children's attitudes towards the practice of celebrating difference, I felt that the act of celebration needed to be represented in some way within the themes. While the participants' responses did not show consensus, they did produce a number of interesting opinions with regards to the celebration of difference and what alternatives could be celebrated. Indeed, the fact that there were so many disparate ideas among my participants made celebration itself a worthwhile theme, and I felt it was important to understand why these alternatives may have been put forward.

During the initial conversation on the celebration of difference, Sankofa children found it difficult to separate the term *'celebration'* from birthdays, or other celebratory events, so many of their responses revolved around food, clothes and parties. This was despite Will, Flo and May stating

that they had heard the phrase ‘*we celebrate our differences,*’ although they admitted they were not sure of its meaning. However, due to the young age of this group, the responses were unsurprising. In the youngest class, birthdays were often celebrated at the school with a special cake and the singing of the ‘Happy Birthday’ song, so it was understandable that ‘celebration’ was so strongly linked in this way.

In the third cycle interview, the Sankofa group were better able to respond to the question ‘*what other things should be celebrated besides difference?*’ as they linked the question to classroom activities. As stated earlier, the Sankofa class teacher, Miss Yvonne, had a significant influence on the children and had been telling stories and organising learning opportunities based on being kind (in response to a young boy who had been mean to his friends.) These activities were reflected in the young participants’ responses, for example, ‘*We could celebrate a Happy Day ...*’ (Nina), ‘*We can have a Kindness Day ...*’ (Will), ‘*... our school could celebrate how good we are ... how special we are.*’ (Flo) and ‘*... I think our school could celebrate being happy!*’ (Nial). The youngest participants enjoyed coming up with these ideas and their suggestions, as mentioned in the ‘Payback for Participation’ section, could certainly be considered as a ‘celebration day’ at some point during the school year.

The older two groups took a broader view on what differences should be celebrated but tended to list things that were personal favourites, for example, ‘*food, games, sports, subjects,*’ along with individual preferences such as, ‘*my clothes, my hairstyle, my friends, my history, our opinions, religion, skin colour, where I come from, what I’m good at, our colour, voices, hair and family.*’ These lists reflect that the children’s worlds, as expected for their age and environment, revolved exclusively around themselves, their friends, their families and their school experience. With regards to what could be celebrated other than difference, the responses offered by some of the older children tended towards altruistic ideas such as ‘*our school could celebrate helping others because helping others is really important*’ (Geena), ‘*instead of being the same or different why don’t you just be together?*’ (Mary) and ‘*we would teach others about our differences and similarities and what makes us unique*’ (Lela). This altruism is likely to be a reflection of the school’s ethos and its strong Community Service programme which sees the Student Council raise funds for local disadvantaged schools on a regular basis. Amongst these responses was a wry comment from Selma, who suggested, ‘*... we could celebrate that we aren’t making a war on our similarities and differences ...!*’ As a researcher, it was gratifying to see that my older participants were able to play with the abstract ideas under discussion to the point where jokes could be made about them.

While the responses to the questions based on what could be celebrated were not overly surprising, some of the responses to the question ‘*who decides what to celebrate?*’ proved to be less predictable.

Based on prior responses to other questions which indicated that the children's worlds revolved around school, friends and families, I was expecting my participants to suggest people who were very much part of this world, and this was exactly what a number of the children did when they offered, for example, *the Principal, our teacher, Student Council, the students, 'us', you should choose for yourself...* and so on. However, four children, across the age range, offered 'God' or 'the President' as a response. The fact that these ideas were expressed by children from across the three age ranges suggested that it was not age related. These responses made me briefly consider whether these particular children had a clear understanding of the concept of celebrating difference in a school context. However, after careful consideration, the 'God' element became clear when looking at the question, *'who chooses the differences?'* from a child's perspective, particularly where that child is a practising Christian – it is the 'Creator' who chooses our differences and makes us who we are, therefore God should be involved in the choosing of differences. With regards to the suggestion of 'President', the idea that the leader of a country would choose what differences to celebrate could simply be that these particular participants believed the choices should be made by someone very important.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

As I complete my discussion, I need to establish whether my participants responded adequately to my research focus. I had listened at length to their opinions, read their views, and analysed their responses in an attempt to understand what led the children to say what they did within the context of difference, identity and culture, and also within the context of the school they were attending and the community in which they lived. Now I needed to link what I had learned from my participants back to the sub-questions that supported my research investigation to see if they had satisfied my enquiry.

My overarching research focus was:

An investigation into children's thoughts on difference in the context of the 'celebration of difference' in an international school

To address my conclusion, I will take each sub-question in turn and see whether my participants offered an appropriate response.

a) To what extent are my participant aware of their own or others' differences?

This question was resoundingly answered as the children not only recognised their own difference from each other, but also their difference from everyone else 'in the world.' Indeed, my preconception that children may not 'realise that they themselves are regarded as significantly different' was quickly rejected by my participants in the first cycle interviews. Ethically, this was good news as it meant that I did not have to deal with what Kirk (2007: 1253/4) mentioned earlier regarding the distress which may be caused by the research process to some participants. Furthermore, the confidence the participants displayed in their own difference was shared across all ages, genders and nationalities. The participants displayed consistency in their views over time and the same view of 'being different' was sustained throughout the first, second and third cycle interviews. As the children were convinced of the importance and positivity of their differences, they were steadfast in upholding the fact that they were different and, as some of the participants stated, they always would be. The participants engaged with difference on a daily basis so accepted it as a normal part of life. This is not to say that they were 'colour-blind' and did not notice each other's differences but that, although clearly visible, these differences were irrelevant to their

friendships. In fact, it was the differences which made the friendships more interesting and some participants regarded it as an opportunity to learn from each other.

b) To what extent are my participants aware of their own or others' cultural differences?

To a large extent, this question was answered by the responses to the first sub-question. The children were conscious of their differences, and proudly so, but they did not appear to regard their differences as cultural, which supports Ramsey's (1998: 69) view that *'most children are not consciously aware of their own or others' cultures... they probably do not see their family's behaviours or those of other people as 'cultural.'*' As mentioned above, the term 'culture' was deliberately avoided in the prompts to avoid influencing participants' responses. By introducing the term 'culture' into our conversations, which would have been difficult enough in view of the lack of a clear definition of the concept, I felt the children may have used the term to 'please the teacher,' rather than independently choosing the word to articulate their opinions; I did not want to 'put words in their mouths.' As it turned out, only a small number of children mentioned the word 'culture' although a few children talked about attributes or accessories of culture.

On the issue of celebrating difference in the context of its original meaning of celebrating cultural differences, some ambiguity was displayed by the participants. While very few children had heard the phrase 'we celebrate our differences' (only three children had heard it in a school context), the older participants were able to explain what they thought the term meant with regards to celebrating specific things, which can be linked to the concept of culture; two participants actually used the word 'culture' in this conversation. However, when asked what differences should be celebrated, the participants mentioned a variety of things which were unconnected to culture. These responses were interspersed with items that could be categorized under 'culture' but, on balance, the participants were listing things that were personal characteristics or individual abilities. There was no indication that the participants were recognising any specific cultural differences as none were mentioned in our conversations and none of the participants sought to elaborate on what was meant by culture. Therefore, although some of the older participants appeared to understand what the celebration of difference represented, when given the choice, they were not necessarily choosing aspects of culture for celebration. The differences listed for celebration were those that were meaningful in the world of my participants, rather than in the abstract world beyond the compound boundaries.

Van Oord (2008: 144) makes an argument which has relevance to what my participants were saying when he promotes the idea of separating the terms 'difference' and 'cultural difference.' He suggests that in some educational programmes children are '*primed*' to regard normal difference as cultural

difference, which he believes is misguided as it leads children to believe that cultural differences are somehow distinctive and thus unchangeable. Having not been ‘*primed*’ by their teachers or curriculum, my participants appeared to recognise difference only in its more simple and unambiguous aspects.

It is important to note that these children were not eschewing their cultural backgrounds by their lack of acknowledgment but merely behaving as Ramsey (1998) above mentions – they were just not consciously aware that they had national cultures; they were neither ‘*asserting their freedom*’ nor ‘*defying traditions*’ but only accepting everyone as different. What was important to the participants was that they were unique, and what was important in their lives was having good friends and playmates regardless of where they were from.

c) To what extent are my participants aware of human commonalities (sameness) and what are their thoughts on the celebration of 'sameness'?

This concept was difficult for the very youngest participants as they used the term to simply mean ‘exactly the same.’ Nevertheless, it was these youngest participants who, having had time to consider the idea over the course of our three interviews, shared ideas with regards to alternative celebrations which included ‘Happy Day’ and ‘Kindness Day.’ While there was, predictably, no mention of ‘common humanity’ in their suggestions, the children recognised that, in sharing our lives with others, we have to treat people decently. These ideas represented, perhaps, a growing awareness of the shared needs between people which were identified by the Nkyinkyim group participants. Being a little older, the Nkyinkyim group children were able to apply ‘sameness’ to the common needs in people and understood that, although we are happy to be different, there are some things that people share. This was articulated well by Lela and Ann, in the Nkyinkyim group, who talked about having things in common, which I felt was edging towards the idea of at least acknowledging, if not celebrating, the idea of common humanity. While the children did not use the term, they had a sense of its meaning. Mary, in the Gye Nyame group, synthesized the idea of being different but the same when she said, ‘*we should celebrate being different together.*’ The participants’ main problem with celebrating ‘sameness’ was that it was not visible and we could not celebrate something that we could not see, which constitutes a reasonable, age-appropriate argument. Despite these seeds of comprehension, my participants did not regard the celebration of ‘sameness,’ as they understood the term, as a worthwhile undertaking.

Through responding to the sub-questions, I believe the participants had also addressed the main research focus. In determining that my participants, while confidently acknowledging their

differences, did not appear to recognise these differences as specifically cultural, and did not regard their 'normal' differences as relevant to their lives, they could not consciously celebrate them, so the question is therefore moot. The children would be happy to celebrate some of their differences, but not in the cultural sense and not necessarily in the sense that the phrase '*we celebrate our differences*' was originally intended. Understandably, the younger students were less able to formulate and articulate responses to some of the abstract ideas, but even some of these younger students were making efforts to think about the issues under discussion with May, Nial and Will, in particular, demonstrating a significant degree of insight for their age. Needless to say, some children were more talkative than others and had a lot more to contribute to our conversations but this had more to do with personality than gender, nationality or age.

At the beginning of this thesis I cited Maalouf's (2000: 103) suggestion that '*each day that goes by reduces our differences and increases our likenesses a little bit more*' and expressed a curiosity regarding whether or not my participants would agree. However, from what they told me during our conversations, I can see that my participants did not agree with Maalouf as they were happy with their differences and were not yet convinced of the importance of 'sameness.' However, I can also see that this view was coming from the context of a unique childhood, where differences were lauded as a means to gaining more knowledge, where sameness was judged to be too difficult to see due to its internal nature, and where national cultures appeared to have little relevance. I would therefore suggest an alternative view point from van Oord and Corn (2013: 28) which my participants may prefer:

'Our contention is that people differ, and that people differ differently, but that there is enough commonality to be found between any two human beings to get a genuine conversation going.'

Chapter 7

Research implications for international educators

My research enquiry set out to investigate the extent to which Primary school-aged children in a small international school considered it important to celebrate their own, or others', cultural differences. This was prompted by the ubiquity of the phrase '*We celebrate our difference*' and personal concerns regarding the way in which differences continue to be highlighted despite my belief that difference is now the 'new normal.' An overall finding of the enquiry was that the participants in my study, while being aware of everyone's difference and, as some stated, there was nobody like them '*in the world,*' did not appear to regard their differences as specifically cultural differences. My participants appeared unconcerned where their playmates came from as any differences were eclipsed by their friendships. Although I had some prior notion that children saw each other's differences as irrelevant, due to observations made in another small school, I was not aware of the extent to which the children in my study positively accepted difference as the absolute norm in their lives.

At the outset of my enquiry, I considered potential unanticipated outcomes to the '*celebration of difference*' to be connected with 'othering', stereotyping and identity assignment, all of which might undermine children's sense of self. While this was not evident in my participants' experiences, the discovery that the children closely aligned with Ramsey's (1998) belief that children do not regard their, or their friends', behaviour as cultural has, I believe, a greater impact as an unanticipated outcome. If children are being taught that differences, which they regard as normal, are culture-based, then these children may be misled into believing that all differences perceived in their friends are cultural, when this is clearly not true. If this is the case then, as van Oord (2008) has suggested, teachers are '*priming*' their students to see differences as cultural rather than as 'normal' and, thus, the idea that we are more different than we actually are is being perpetuated.

The outcome of this study therefore raises what I believe are far-reaching implications that need serious consideration by teachers in international schools who work with diverse Primary school-aged children. If children do not recognise their differences as cultural, then how does this finding impact on the promotion of intercultural learning in international Primary schools and the '*celebration of difference*' where cultural differences are highlighted and celebrated? As stated earlier, Appiah (2005: 117) suggests '*the diversity that preoccupies us is really a matter not so much of cultures as of identities,*' so perhaps we should be celebrating who we are rather than what we do (Keba, 2008.) This idea would suggest that, where the idea of celebration was regarded by an international school as important, then children should take on the role of decision-makers and have

the freedom to choose which aspects of their lives they wish to celebrate. I believe that my research enquiry has demonstrated how well even the youngest children can handle complex ideas and concepts and how valid and worthwhile their ideas and opinions are.

In addition, I believe there should be a better balance between acknowledging our differences and recognising we also share a common humanity. Indeed, international Primary schools are well-positioned to introduce ideas of a shared common humanity through their assemblies, PSHE curricula and general school ethos. In the hands of experienced teachers, such as Ms Yvonne, I believe the outcomes would prove to be far more valuable than the celebration of difference alone.

7a) Limitations of the research enquiry

While the ‘thick description’ evidence derived from my participants supports the findings within the context of my research enquiry, it must be clearly acknowledged that the distinct nature of the school cannot be underestimated with regards to the effect this may have had on the outcomes of the study. As can be seen from the description of the school and its community, in *Section 3e) i. School Context and Factors Influencing Participants*, my young participants represented an exceptionally unique group of children who were learning in a highly unusual environment. Living in a closed residential compound in a remote location, staying at the school for a number of years and so developing close personal relationships, having little experience of other schools and attending an exceptionally small school would have had an immeasurable effect on the children’s outlook. In addition, the school culture, as discussed in *section 2d) iii. The influence of school culture on children*, would also have had a pervasive influence on the children’s viewpoints.

The school in the research enquiry had a strong culture of caring, of embracing diversity and of open-mindedness, which were clearly expressed in the school’s vision, mission and guiding statements, and to which the children were exposed on a regular basis. The message that the school culture communicated to everyone at the school, both staff and students alike, would, no doubt, have had a significant influence on the children’s attitudes and outlooks. In addition, the school was an international school where it was understood that differences were the norm and the expectation was that children would be coming from different countries around the world. The children who were participants in the research therefore represented a unique cultural group who were likely to have been pre-disposed, through the effects of the school culture, to have a distinctly positive view on difference. As stated earlier in this thesis, ‘*Without difference, therefore, life would be incredibly dull; in the minds of my participants, homogeneity appeared to equal monotony.*’

Despite the uniqueness of the participants in this research enquiry, comparable outcomes could, I believe, be reproduced in similar small schools, such as the one in Siberia which is mentioned earlier, where a small group of highly diverse children found themselves learning together in an international school in a foreign location. However, children in larger international schools with differing diversities and in less unique locations, may hold alternative views.

7b) Future research

While I believe my findings make a valuable contribution to the field of international education, with specific regard to children's views on difference, it is clear that further research in this area is called for, particularly research which engages children in the process. As stated above, children in larger schools with different demographics and locations may well hold alternative views, and research in such schools on the identification and recognition of cultural behaviours would be extremely worthwhile.

One area in particular which I believe calls for further research is establishing when children's attitudes towards difference change from being something that is wholly desirable and valued to something that is less so. While I deliberately chose to limit my enquiry to Primary school-aged children, there were times when I was tempted to undertake a further cycle in my research and extend it into the senior class at my school where the children were aged from twelve to fourteen years. However, I judged this to be beyond the scope of this particular study, but conversations with this age group could be an interesting extension of the research carried out thus far to explore whether age, maturity or adolescence have an influence, either positive or negative, on attitudes towards difference.

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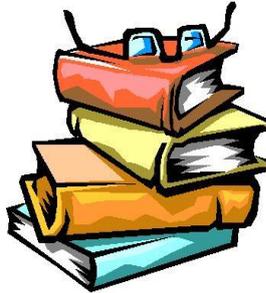
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Appendices

Appendix I

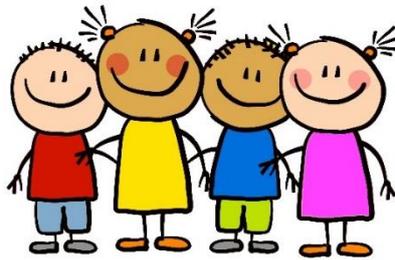
Children's Information Sheet on the Research Enquiry – see next page

Mrs Deveney's Research Project



Every July I attend Summer School at the University of Bath in England. I don't take exams, but I have to do a really big research project and share it with the University when it's finished. For my research project, I have been thinking about some questions that have been on my mind, but I need your help to find the answers.

I would like to talk with you about my questions so that you can tell me what you think. In fact, your opinions and ideas are what my research is all about! To help you decide if you want to join me in my research, I have put some questions and answers in this leaflet to help you understand what will happen and how it will work.



Tell me what you think!

My main research questions are:

- How do Primary School-aged children feel about the 'celebration of difference?'
- Should we be celebrating our differences? Why and how?
- Should we be celebrating the things we have in common instead? Why and how?
- Is there anything else that we should be celebrating instead? What and how?

(These are not the only questions, but they are the main ones.)



Questions and Answers about the research:

When do you want to talk with me?

I will use my lesson times for our discussions so my research will be during the school day. I will ask your teachers if I can take some time from their lessons too.

Where will you talk with me?

We will talk in your classroom, or in the Library.



How long will it take?

My research will continue over a few weeks (or months), but I will only spend a few hours with each class. I may need to meet with you more than once or twice.

Will we just be talking?

Some of the time we will be talking, but at other times I will read you stories, do role-play in drama and do some simple writing.



Will I be on my own when we talk?

No, I want to talk to you when you are with your classmates—I want us to share our conversations with each other.

What will happen when you have done your research?

I will give it to the University and they will read it and ask me to come and talk about it. You can read it too if you want to, but it will be very long!

Will the university know who we are?

No, because I will not use your real names (you can make a up!) There is something called 'Ethics' which says I must protect your identity, even if you don't mind people knowing who you are.



How will you remember what we say?

I will record (audio) what we say and then write everything that has been said on my laptop—this is called ‘transcribing.’ I will then put the important bits of what we said into my essay (or thesis). When we do role-play, I might video record what we do, or just use the voice recorder.



What if I don't want to join in your research?

You don't have to join in if you don't want to. And if you do join in at the beginning, you can change your mind and stop joining in at any time. This is your choice and you can change your mind if you want to.



Will you be asking all the questions?

No, if you have any interesting questions that are connected to my research then I will be very happy for you to ask them.

Will you be working with every class in the school?

I will work with Sankofa, Nkyinkyim and Gye Nyame as these are our Primary School classes. I will not work with Nyansapo as my research only covers Primary School-aged children.



Can we talk about our conversations with other teachers?

You can talk about our conversations with your friends, your teachers and with mum and dad and other family members if you want to.

What if I don't like what we are talking about?

If you feel uncomfortable, you can just tell me and we will stop talking straight away. You can also share how you feel with me, your other teachers or your mum and dad whenever you



If you have any questions that haven't been answered in this leaflet, then please do come and speak to me. I will ask you if you understand what we are doing when we start our conversations, so you can ask more questions then, too.



If you would like to help me with my research, and have read and understood what we will be doing, then please write your name below. Please get Mum or Dad to sign too, so I know that they have read this leaflet.

Name: Mum/Dad

Date:

Appendix II

Example of full interview transcription

Interview 2 – Nkyinkyim Class 17th May 2017

Jo, Ann, Lela, Nancy, Sara and Alex - Reading questions from cards

- BD*: Read it out and we'll start talking about it around the table, right?
- Jo: *(Reading from card)* 'Do you understand what the word 'celebrate' means?'
- BD: Do you understand the word 'celebrate?' What does it mean to you, Ann?
- Ann: Celebration is either ... there's different types of celebrations like you have funerals ... when you celebrate someone's life, and weddings as you celebrate a couple and different celebrations happen every time. Like we have the festival, different festivals, like Christmas is a celebration, Easter is a celebration. Mothers' Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day...
- BD: Ok, so you have got a very clear idea of what celebration means. Lela, have you got anything to add, did you understand what Ann said?
- Lela: Yeah, I did.
- BD: And you have got a very clear idea?
- Lela: Yes.
- BD: Nancy?
- Nancy: There's nothing else to say.
- BD: Nothing else to say, she gave such a good explanation ...
- Lela: I've got one.
- BD: Yes, Lela?
- Lela: To celebrate something means to have a little party... or to gather around to do something, like together ... to celebrate something.
- BD: Yes. That's a really good definition. Alex, have you got anything to add, do you know the word?
- Alex: Yes.
- BD: What do you celebrate? What kind of things do you normally celebrate?
- Alex: We celebrate Christmas, Valentine's Day...
- BD: What do we all celebrate on a certain day of the year when mummy goes 'Aahhh' *(hums Happy Birthday tune)*
- All: Birthdays!
- BD: Why do we celebrate your birthdays? Because that's the day you were born, so is it worth celebrating?
- All: Yes.
- BD: Yes, it's well worth celebrating *(chit chat about being born)*
So Sara have you anything else to add? Ann and Lela said everything... yes, they said everything?
- BD: So Sara, do you want to read out the next one please.
- Sara: *(Reading from card)* 'Have you ever heard the saying 'we celebrate our differences?''
- BD: Have you ever heard that saying, 'we celebrate our differences?'
- Lela: Yes, I have.
- BD: And what ... where did you hear that Lela?
- Lela: I don't really remember.
- BD: You don't remember? That's fine. Ann?
- Ann: No, I don't think I've really heard it before.
- BD: You've never heard anyone say it at school...
- Sara: My mother said it to my brother at Accra.

**BD denotes researcher's initials*

Appendix III

Example of transcript showing one participant's grouped responses and narrative

Peta, Sankofa Class

- BD*: What happened to the ugly duckling? Peta?
- Peta: He turned into a swan.
- BD: He got rejected ... (*question by someone 'what's rejected?'*) Rejected means nobody wanted him. Why did he get rejected?
- Peta: Because he looked ugly.
- BD: So why did they say he was so different? Peta?
- Peta: Because they thought he was ugly.
- BD: Can you tell me why, why were they being mean to him? They didn't know that he was going to turn into ... so were his siblings wrong to be mean to him? (*Whole class 'Yes' response.*) Why were they wrong, Peta?
- Peta: It doesn't matter what colour you are, actually, and one thing, they were very, very rude.
- BD: Ok ... you said that they weren't kind to him because he was different.... (*'Yes' response.*) But if someone walked in the classroom today and they were different because they didn't look like you, they might speak another language, perhaps like Jo did when he first came, how would you feel about that person coming in? How would you feel about that, because they'd be different wouldn't they?
- Peta: I'd help him to be nice.
- BD: You've all said that if someone came into this room who was different you'd be nice to them, you'd help them, you'd show them things, so why were those ducklings not being kind? Peta?
- Peta: Because they didn't know it doesn't matter to be different.
- BD: So what do you think the other ducklings should have done before they rejected their brother? Are they going to look at him and go, '*you don't look like me, so I'm not going to play with you?*' What should they have done, Peta?
- Peta: They should play with him because he could turn out yellow maybe?
- BD: But is it important that he looks like them?
- Peta: Nooooo! (*With emphasis.*)
- BD: It does doesn't it, because you all look completely different ... you've all got different colour eyes, you've got different coloured skin, different coloured hair...
- Peta: The skin can sometimes be the same.
- BD: Yeah. Because this is where we're going back to difference and the same again... you agreed we should celebrate our differences so we should all be different - you're happy to be different, so... but you should treat people the same because why? What are we a like on the inside? Peta?
- Peta: We all have a nice friendly inside.
- BD: We celebrate our outside when we celebrate our difference, but if we think we're the same on the inside how can we celebrate that?
- Peta: ...hmmm.
- BD: Should we celebrate it or just ignore it?
- Peta: Celebrate it....
- BD: How could we do that?
- Peta: We'll tell everybody we're lucky to be the same inside...

Narrative - Peta says that the ducklings rejected the ugly duckling because they thought he looked ugly. She thinks they were wrong to be mean to him because it doesn't matter what colour you are and they were very, very rude. If someone who was different walked into the classroom who was different because they didn't look like you or they spoke a different language, Peta says she would help him be nice because they didn't know it doesn't matter to be different. Peta doesn't think it was important for the ugly duckling to look like his siblings; she thinks we all have a nice friendly inside. She also thinks we could have a 'we're lucky to be different' celebration. *BD denotes researcher's initials

Appendix IV

Example of grouped narratives for one participant Mary, Gye Nyame Class

Mary, Narrative 1

Mary articulates her ideas well and has clear opinions in areas where she is confident. She can define the words different and same/similar in specific relation to people telling me that difference means we do not all have the same qualities and same/similar meaning that we all think the same way and we all do the same things and we can have the same ideas. Mary thinks that people are different from her, for example, by religion, and doesn't think she knows any people who are the same as her. Mary thinks that her friends are different from her because they don't have to like the same things and don't always want to do the same things. Mary feels excited about people who are different from her because she can find out what they know and how they live their lives. Mary thinks being different is important because if everyone in this world were not different then what would be the purpose - we need to be different to learn more things.

Mary, Narrative 2

Mary understands the word celebrate but has never heard the phrase 'we celebrate our differences.' She thinks we celebrate difference so we celebrate that we are all different and we have our different ideas of things. Mary feels it's good to celebrate difference because we get to learn about each other and the different things that other people do. Mary thinks we can't decide what differences to celebrate because we just celebrate differences and we just have different things that we think about; the differences we celebrate are our opinions, our religion, our skin colour and our country. Mary believes we know who is different because they think differently, they have their own opinions, they look different and they talk different. Mary thinks no-one decides who is different because it just appears and if you just look at people you can see they are different from you. She doesn't think anyone should decide what we celebrate because we can celebrate what we want to celebrate although if we put our celebration out there some people would think that celebration was not good. Mary feels that although we are the same sometimes, there's always a part of us that is different; celebrating sameness is OK but there's always going to be a part of us that is different. It is difficult to celebrate sameness because you can't just look at people and see if they are the same as you because you don't know much about them and you haven't met them yet. Mary suggests that instead of celebrating difference or sameness, we could just celebrate togetherness; she says instead of being the same or different why don't we just be together?

Mary, Narrative 3

Mary thinks the story is about difference and we shouldn't judge people. She thinks the children play with the little blue boy because he gives them chocolate. Nogoman finds out that the blue boy is just like them so they can play with him even if he is blue. Mary believes the little blue boy asks all the questions because he is trying to show that everyone is different. When the children see the little boy is blue they think he is different from all of them and he is not a normal person. Mary thinks the reason why he asks those questions is because he wants them to know that everyone is different, and like Sam said, there's a colour that they're used to but it's not the colour that everyone should have, some people have different colours from what they have. Mary thinks I chose the story because there's some bits of difference and it shows that some people are different, and it doesn't matter about your skin tone or what colour you are. She believes that we shouldn't celebrate difference because we're already different but in the old days they thought it was unusual but we are in 'now' so it is not necessary; it's normal so you don't need to celebrate it. Mary thinks that we should celebrate being different together. Instead of you celebrating you are different in one way, we can all celebrate that we're together and we're happy that we're different. Mary believes difference and sameness are connected in some ways but it can be bad and it can be good; sometimes sameness can be bad but it can be good - we can find we can be all be together and have fun.

Appendix V

Examples of Sentence Completion Exercise

(Question written in italics and response written in underlined, non-italic font)

Flo – Sankofa Class

I think it would be good to celebrate being different because you could be special.

I think I would NOT like to celebrate being the same as my friends or else you'd be twins.

If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my specials, friends, my power.

If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate how good we are. How special we are.

Nial – Sankofa Class

I think it would be good to celebrate being different because there's only one of me.

I think I would NOT like to celebrate being the same as my friends because I'm me.

If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are parties because parties are meant to be celebrated.

If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate being happy!

Lela – Nkyinkyim Class

I think it would be good to celebrate being different because we get to share and learn about cultures around the world.

I think I would like to celebrate being the same as my friends because we get to know that we are not all that different.

If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are my traditions and food.

If I could celebrate being the same as others, I think the things I would like to celebrate are our favourite ice-cream flavours and our favourite books.

If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate being the same and being different because we would teach others about our difference and similarities and what makes us unique.

Mary – Gye Nyame Class

I think it would be good to celebrate being different because we are different and we can't always be the same so we can think our own ideas etc.

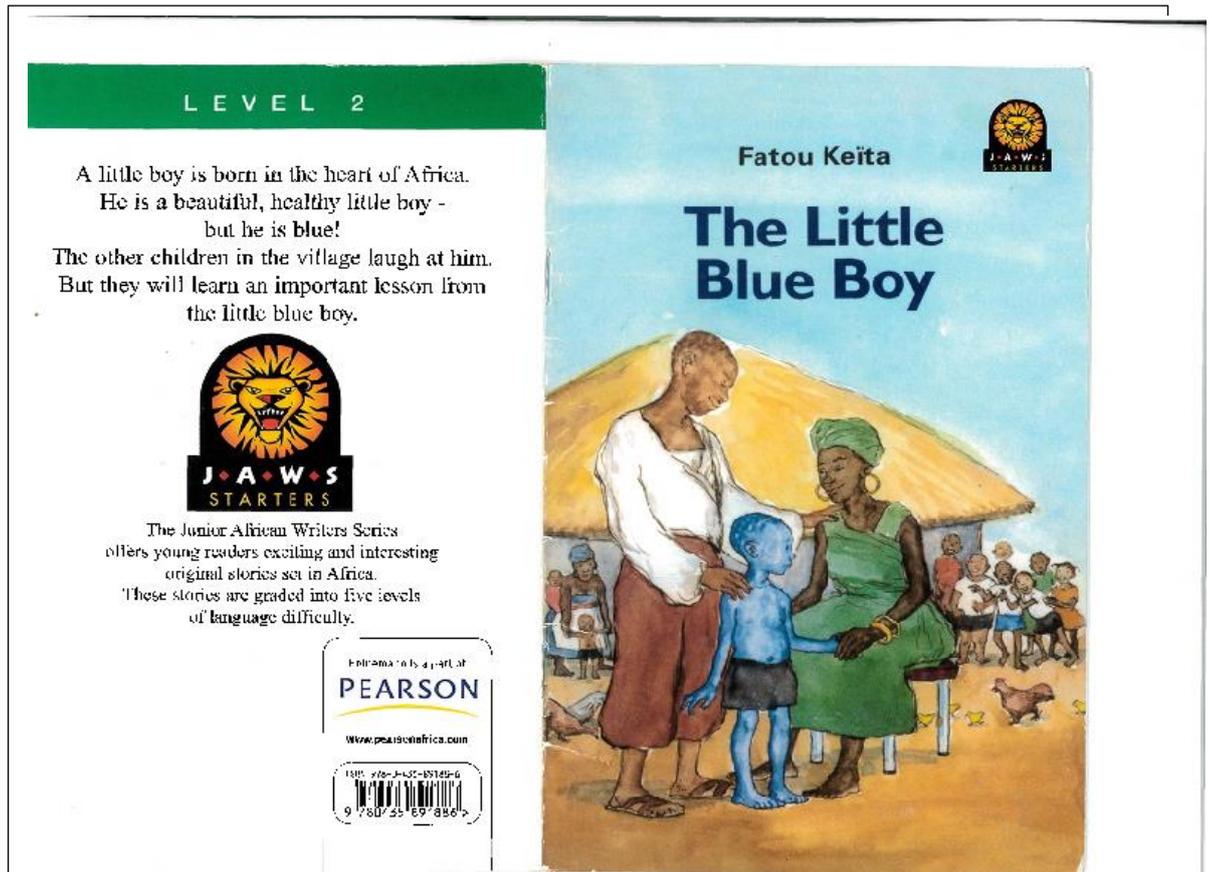
I think I would NOT like to celebrate being the same as my friends because just because we are the same doesn't mean we need to celebrate, being the same doesn't help us come up with ideas etc.

If I could celebrate being different from others, I think the things about me I would like to celebrate are: I would like to celebrate how I do things and what I like to do.

If our school could celebrate anything about the children here, I think our school could celebrate I would like to celebrate togetherness because we need to be together and we need to cooperate.

Appendix VI

Front and back cover of 'The Little Blue Boy' by Fatou Keita, the book used as a conversation prompt with Gye Nyame Class in their third cycle interview.



Appendix VII

The words of a song sung in Sankofa class and in whole-school assemblies promoting uniqueness

The Body Song

I've got fingers on my hands,
I've got toes on my feet,
I've got skin on my bones
And it keeps me neat.
I've got hair on my head
And a bottom for a seat
You'll never find another one who's just like me!

I've got freckles on my face,
I've got colour in my cheeks,
I've got ears to listen
And a mouth to speak.
I've got eyes in my head
And a smiling set of teeth,
You'll never find another one who's just like me!

I've got muscles in my arms,
I've got bumps on my knees,
I've got blood in my body
And my lungs to breath.
I've a brain in my head
And I'm totally unique,
You'll never find another one who's just like me,
You'll never find another one who's just – like – me!

Johnson H. & Johnson M. (2002) *Out of the Ark Ltd.*, Middlesex TW12 2HD

Appendix VIII

Adinkra Symbols and their Meaning

	Sankofa 'Go back and pick it up'	Learn from your mistakes by using past experiences to build the future
	Nkyinkyim 'Twisting zigzag'	Initiative, toughness, adaptability and resoluteness
	Gye Nyame '...except God'	No-one is perfect ... except God. (Applies to whichever god you believe in)
	Nyansapo (Senior Class) 'Wisdom Knot'	Wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence and patience <i>'Being wise implies broad knowledge, learning and experience, and the ability to apply such faculties to practical ends.'</i>

<http://ghanaculturepolitics.com/adinkra-symbols-and-their-meaning-english-and-twi/>

The names of the classes at the school in which this research takes place are taken from Adinkra symbols. These symbols express local proverbs and concepts which are often used by Ghanaians, and can be seen on artwork, fabric and buildings all over Ghana.

Primary School Classes:

Sankofa Class: Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
 Nkyinkyim Class: Year 3 and Year 4
 Gye Nyame Class: Year 5 and Year 6

Senior School Class:

Nyansapo Class: Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9