Children’s demonstration of their competences and agency in research participation

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Outline of symposium

- Why involve children in research?
- Transformation in research designs, methodologies and methods
- Ethical considerations
- Creating conditions that empower children in research
- Unintended consequences – inadvertently creating conditions that disempower children in research
- Lessons learned & discussion
Why involve children in research?

“Why study children?...To find it out. And to keep finding it out, because if we do not find it out, someone will make it up. In fact, someone probably has already made it up, and what they make up affects children’s lives; it affects how children are viewed and what decisions are made about them. Finding it out challenges dominant images. Making it up maintains them.”

(Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. xvi)
Why involve children in research?

- Shift from research on to with children (Christensen & Prout, 2002)
- Recognition of children‘s agency, competences and rights (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002)
Transformation in research designs, methodologies and methods

- Child-friendly vs. participant-friendly methods
- Ethical symmetry principle (Christensen & James, 2002)
- Methodological and ethical decisions build a union
- Participatory methods reflect a theoretical frame based on children’s rights and agency (Holland, Reynold, Ross, & Hillman, 2010)
Study 1: Children‘s perspectives of play

A qualitative study exploring what children’s own understandings of play are, contributing to an adult-dominated field; and in what ways they participate in such research, how they make choices about their participation, consent and dissent.
Study 2: Children‘s representations of their mathematical experiences and understandings

A qualitative study conducted with children transitioning to primary school, exploring how children can represent their mathematical experiences and understandings, and how these developed and changed during the children’s first year at school.
Ethical considerations

- Benefits/ risk of harm
- Payment/ compensation
- Access/ relationship
- Consent/ assent
- Confidentiality/ anonymity/ privacy
- Recognition/ feedback
- Ownership
- Social responsibility
Access/ relationships

- Other gatekeepers (principals, educators, parents/caregivers) to seek consent first in order to get access
- Time to get to know each other
- Creating mutual trust
- Roles of researcher: support teacher; play partner
Consent/assent – appropriate procedures

• Active agreement & personal choice (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998)
• Being informed: information is communicated in ways that children can understand and make sense of their participation without simplifying and losing sight of the competent child (Alderson, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2007)
Consent/assent – the right to being unsure

• Formal procedures (signed consent, verbal assent) & children’s nonverbal assent (Cullen, Hedges, & Bone, 2009; Harwood, 2010)

• ‘Provisional‘, flexible assent possibilities with ongoing re-negotiability (Dockett et al., 2013; Flewitt, 2005; Gallagher, 2015)
## Children’s consent strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strategy</th>
<th>example</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal consent</td>
<td>“You can share all of the videos”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal - nodding</td>
<td>I: “Hudson, do you want to tell us a bit more?” Hudson nods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional consent</td>
<td>“I wanna share this video with you today.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating as consent</td>
<td>“Can we have another chat?”</td>
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</table>
## Children’s dissent strategies

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal dissent</td>
<td>“Done with our chat.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal – shaking head</td>
<td>I: “Is that ok that Olinda and Mary are here?” Elsa shakes her head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing</td>
<td>Scarlett runs towards Sophia and they start a chasing game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring researcher question</td>
<td>I: “Are there different kinds of play you play inside?” Sophia: “What are these buttons for?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not elaborating issue</td>
<td>I: “What happened here in the end?” Ethan: “Stink”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singalling end of chat</td>
<td>Chloe: “Let’s close the computer now.”</td>
</tr>
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Confidentiality/ anonymity/ privacy

- Decisions about choosing pseudonyms (Dockett et al., 2011)
- Importance of their own names for children (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009)
- Presence of others during data generation
Recognition/ feedback

- Co-constructing meaning
- Listening back to recorded conversations
- Involving children in data generation & analysis
Ownership

Children have the right to see the data collected and to have the work returned to them at the end of the data collection process.
Social responsibility

- Respect for each child as having a unique and valued experience of the world
- Acknowledging children as social actors with understandings that we can learn from
- Analysing data in ways that honour children’s knowledge
Creating conditions that empower children in research
Demonstrating agency

Children demonstrated their agency through representing views through a range of expressive forms/child-initiated participation processes:

- verbally explaining play processes
- body performance
- playing
- constructing/performing for audience or through taking ownership of data
- requesting to listen to recorded conversations
Children influencing and taking ownership of conversation

- Managing the conversation and video-control; whose turn is it to play the video?
- Seeking information about data generating procedures and conduct
- Playing as participation: making participation enjoyable
- Being able to have choices: leave chat, continue
- Requesting to watch the ‘chat‘-video
Children’s representations of their mathematical experiences

„Finding it out“ – not assuming what children recorded on a photograph, why children took these photographs, and what mathematical concepts they aimed to capture

Instead:
Letting children explain!
Unintended consequences – inadvertently creating conditions that disempower children
Disempowering children in research

- Management behaviour - overseeing opportunities to engage with children or to follow up on their comments
- Communication with stakeholders (parents, educators)
Peer presence disempowers

No, I’m telling.

Everyone stop touching the screen.

Don’t laugh.

Be quiet.

Stop being so bossy.

Don’t laugh.
Educator presence disempowers

Are you supposed to be here?

That is a bit sad that you go outside.

You have to miss out next time.

Move away.

Could you girls pack up.

Carmen wants to go home.
Parent presence disempowers

Dad told me to delete it.

Mum wanted me to take a picture of the recipe... She might have thought you wanted to make it.

Mum took it... Because it was nice.

That's not maths.
Lessons learned

- My research agenda vs. children‘s participation agenda
- Right to participation includes right to non-participation – options to opt out anytime (even physically)
- Being in the moment with the children
- Being open to uncertainty, aware of ambiguity, sensitive to children‘s expressive means
Lessons learned

• Children are capable and competent participants in research processes – and they have powerful experiences and understandings to share

BUT -

• Issues of representation, interpretation, and power affect the ways data is viewed and used
“Finding it out is labour-intensive… One must go out and look and listen and soak and poke and then do it all again… Truly finding it out requires researchers to look in avoided places and in unfamiliar ways… Doing research with young children is as complex, rewarding, and messy, as living and working with them. It takes a keen eye to their needs… It requires attention to the special circumstances that allow children to show us their worlds.”

(Graue & Walsh, 1998, pp. xiv-13)
References


References (cont.)


Contact details

Any questions?
Feedback is welcomed.

Thank you for your attention.

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