Research with children: methodological and ethical challenges

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Methodological and ethical challenges that researchers face when they conduct research with children are the focus of this article. The discussion is based on a study conducted with 2–6-year-old children in Iceland, where the purpose was to shed light on children's perspectives on their early childhood settings. The study is built on the conviction that children, just like adults, are citizens who hold their own views and perspectives, they have competencies and the right to be heard, and they are able to speak for themselves if the appropriate methods are used. The article reflects on methodological dilemmas and challenges as well as ethical issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, protection and interactions.

Les défis méthodologiques et moraux qui confrontent les chercheurs quand ils conduisent des recherches avec des enfants sont considérés dans cet article. La discussion est basée sur une étude entreprise avec des enfants de 2-6 ans en Islande où le but était de jeter la lumière sur les perspectives des enfants à l'égard des services de la petite enfance dans lesquels ils se trouvaient. L'étude est établie sur la conviction que les enfants, juste comme des adultes, sont des citoyens qui possèdent leurs propres vus et perspectifs. Ils ont des compétences et le droit d'être entendu, et ils peuvent parler pour eux-mêmes si des méthodes appropriées sont employées. L'auteur réfléchit sur les dilemmes et les défis méthodologiques soulevés par la recherche qui engage les enfants, comme sur les questions morales liées au consentement informé, à la confidentialité, à la protection et aux interactions.

Die methodologischen und ethischen Herausforderungen, denen Forscher gegenüberstehen, wenn sie Forschung mit Kindern durchführen, stehen im Mittelpunkt dieser Abhandlung. Die Diskussion baut auf einer Studie die mit 2-6 jährigen Kindern in Island durchgeführt wurde, mit dem Ziel die Perspektive der Kinder zu ihrer Umwelt in den frühen Kinderjahren zu erleuchten. Ausgangspunkt dieser Studie ist die Überzeugung, dass Kinder, wie Erwachsene, Bürger mit eigenen Meinungen und Perspektiven sind, die gewisse Kompetenzen haben, Recht darauf haben angehört zu werden und die für sich selbst sprechen können wenn geeignete Methoden verwendet werden. In dieser Abhandlung wird reflektiert über methodologische Probleme und Herausförderungen, sowie ethische Fragen, die sich auf informierte Zusage, Vertraulichkeit, Schutz und Interaktion beziehen.

El foco de este artículo son los desafíos metodológicos y éticos enfrentados por los investigadores que realizan estudios con niños. La discusión se basa en un estudio con niños de 2 a 6 anos de edad

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en Islandia, cuyo propósito era iluminar la perspectiva de los niños en sus contextos parvularios. El estudio parte de la convicción que los niños, al igual que los adultos, son ciudadanos con perspectivas y opiniones propias, que tienen competencias y el derecho de ser escuchados, y que son capaces de hablar por si mismo si se usan métodos apropiados. El articulo reflexiona acerca de tanto dilemas y desafíos metodológicos como de asuntos éticos relacionados con el permiso informado, confidencialidad, protección e interacciones.

Introduction

Research where children are involved and recognised as important participants is relatively recent. Previously research tended to be conducted on children by researchers who observed and tested their development and competences. Now, conversely, researchers talk about doing research with children, where children's opinions and views are sought (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mayall, 2000; O'Kane, 2000). This article focuses on critical issues in doing research with young children. Methodological dilemmas and challenges as well as ethical issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, protection and interactions will be recapitulated. The article builds on a study conducted with playschool children in Iceland where diverse methods were used to study their views and opinions of their playschool life.

The study

The purpose of the study that this article is built on was to shed light on children's perspectives on their early childhood settings, finding out their views on why they attend playschool, what they do and learn in playschool, what the adults do there, what they enjoy and what they don't like, and what they can or cannot decide in playschool. A group of forty-nine children aged from 2 to 6 years old in one playschool in Reykjavík participated in the study, together with twelve playschool teachers who were seen as co-researchers and gathered some of the data. The study was conducted over a period of three years; the first year was a preparation period that involved reading, discussion and piloting methods to use with the children to find out their views on the playschool; the second year was a data-gathering period; and the last year was the analysis period, when interpretation and reflections on the findings took place (Einarsdóttir, 2005a,b,c).

The study was conducted under the influence of postmodern views of children and childhood, the sociology of childhood, and the children's rights movement. From a sociological perspective, childhood is viewed as a social construction and children are viewed as social actors instead of being in the process of becoming such. Childhood and children are therefore seen as worthy of investigation in their own right, separate from their parents or caregivers (James & Prout, 1990; Qvortrup, 1994, 2004; Corsaro, 1997; Christensen & James, 2000; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; O'Kane, 2000). From the postmodern perspective, children are looked upon as knowledgeable,

competent, strong and powerful members of society (Bruner, 1996; Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999). Hence, children are seen as strong, capable, and knowledgeable experts on their own lives, possessing knowledge, perspective and interest that is best gained from the children themselves (Langsted, 1994; Dahl, 1995; Mayall, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2001).

The contemporary children's rights movement emphasises taking children and their right to express their own beliefs seriously (Freeman, 1998). The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* drawn up by the United Nations in 1989 recognises children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives and communicate their own views. Article 12 of the convention states that state parties should ensure that a child who is capable of forming his or her own view should have the right to express these views freely on all matters affecting the child, and that those views should be given weight in accordance with age and maturity (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989).

Children's competence to participate in research and express their opinions was doubted for a long time. But qualitative research methodology and diverse methods in gathering data have opened researchers' eyes to the possibility of seeking children's perspectives. Research using diverse methods has revealed that young children are reliable informants and give valuable and useful information (see, for instance, Evans & Fuller, 1996; Clark & Moss, 2001; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Wiltz & Klein, 2001; Einarsdóttir, 2003, 2005c; Warming, 2005). These studies were built on the conviction that children, just like adults, hold their own views and perspectives, have the right to be heard, and are able to speak for themselves if the right methods are used.

Methods

The project was based on the belief that children are different from adults and to gain understanding of their lives and views it is important to use different methods that suit their competence, knowledge, interest and context. The study used varied research methods to discover children's perceptions and opinions, such as interviews, children's photographs, children's pictures, questionnaires, the gathering of artifacts and the categorising of pictures.

Interviews

Interviews in one form or another are, together with observations, the most common method used in research with children. Interviews with children are considerably different from interviews with adults. Children do not have the experience that adults have and may not know what an interview is or what is expected of them. Their knowledge is also in many cases implicit—that is, they are not aware of what they know, and therefore indirect methods are preferable (Graue & Walsh, 1998). In addition, it has been pointed out that children have vivid imaginations and the researcher has to be able to separate what is based on experience and what is fantasy without

dismissing or downgrading what the child is saying (Keats, 2000; Greene & Hill, 2005). Gollop (2000) has suggested that it is more helpful to think of interviews with children as conversation—that is, listening to the children as opposed to interviewing them, and providing them with the opportunity to be heard.

Two common approaches exist for interviewing young children: group interviews and individual interviews (Clark, 2005a). Some researchers have recommended having children engaged in doing something during the interviews (Parkinson, 2001; Cappello, 2005) or using props, like toys, paper and crayons, sand, clay, pictures, photographs, dolls and puppets (Brooker, 2001; Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson, 2003). In this study, individual interviews were conducted with the youngest children and group interviews with the older children.

Group interviews.   The oldest children were interviewed in pairs or groups of three as recommended by several authors (e.g. Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Mayall, 2000). Interviews with children in groups are built on circumstances with which the children are familiar. Playschool children are used to being together in a group, and through interaction with other children, they learn and form their views regarding their environment. Group interviews are based on interactions, so the children discuss the questions, help each other with the answers, remind each other about details, and keep the answers truthful. In the group interview, children can also ask questions and themselves serve as interviewers in that way. Children are also more powerful when they are together, and they are also more relaxed when with a friend than when alone with an adult (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Mayall, 2000; Parkinson, 2001; Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Einarsdóttir, 2003).

The children were asked questions regarding why they attended playschool, what they were doing and learning in playschool, and what the educational personnel were doing and should be doing. They were asked what kinds of things they could decide for themselves in playschool and what they were not able to decide. They were also asked how they were feeling in school, what they liked best and what they did not like, what they found difficult, and what they did not find difficult. The interview questions were semi-structured and in many instances they resembled conversations more than interviews. With the permission of the children, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Individual interviews.   With the younger children, group interviews did not work very well; therefore, an approach using pictures of individual children as a motivation in the interviews was used. The playschool teachers took pictures of an individual child, with a digital camera, during the course of the school day. By the end of the day the pictures were printed out and looked at and discussed with the child. This approach worked well with the youngest children. They did not take much notice of the photographing during the day, but they were enthusiastic in looking at the pictures by the end of the day. Then they had opportunity to recollect and reflect. This method revealed the events of the child's playschool day and highlighted what he/she enjoyed

doing in playschool. The learning process and the children's activities were recorded and the method encouraged the child to express themselves and explain in words their thinking and actions.

Children's drawings

Children's drawings have been used for discovering young children's views and experiences (Clark, 2005b). 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. Most children are also familiar with the activity of drawing, they can change and add to the drawings as they choose, and drawings often take time so that a quick response is not demanded (Parkinson, 2001; Punch, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2005). Drawings are visual data that can give insight into how children view things. Several disadvantages of drawing as a data-gathering method have, however, been pointed out, such as that the children might imitate the drawings of others and that some children do not like to draw.

In connection with the group interviews, the children who participated in the study were asked to draw pictures of what they liked and what they disliked in the playschool. After the interview, the children received pieces of paper divided into two parts and felt-tip pens. The children were then asked to draw on one side what they liked most in playschool and on the other side what they did not like in playschool. The interviewers asked them what they were drawing and wrote down on the back of the paper what they said. This approach became an important contribution and addition to other methods. Placing an emphasis on listening to children while they drew, instead of trying to analyse their drawings, is important, as the children's narratives and interpretations of their drawings can give a better picture than the adults' interpretations of the drawings (Punch, 2002; Clark, 2005a; Veale, 2005).

Children's photographs

During the last decade, several authors have recommended using photographs taken by children as a data-gathering method (Schratz & Steiner-Löffler, 1998; Rasmussen, 1999; Clark & Moss, 2001; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2001, 2002; Cook & Hess, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Hurworth, 2003). The children are given cameras, and they take pictures which they discuss with the researcher. In this study, children's pictures were used as a data-gathering method, using different methods and different types of cameras (Einarsdóttir, 2005b).

Digital cameras. A combination of tours (Clark & Moss, 2001) or walking interviews (Langsted, 1994) was used with the photography. After giving each child a digital camera, I as the researcher asked them to take pictures while they gave me a guided tour around the playschool. The children led the tours and were in charge, telling me what they did in playschool, what they found important, what

they liked best in playschool and what they did not like, where in the playschool they felt good and where they did not. At the same time, they took pictures of what they were showing me. In this way, the data gathering was in part in the hands of the children; they made the choices about what to photograph and were able to pick out things that were of importance for them. After I had printed out the pictures, in a day or two, I met with individual children and we discussed the pictures, what was in them, and why they took the photographs. These interviews differed from more traditional interviews in that because the photos directed the interview, the child's perspective became the subject. The conversations were tape-recorded and transcribed. An extra set of photographs was made for the children to take home.

Disposable cameras.   Each child was given a camera of their own and taught how to use it. They were told that they could take pictures of what they wanted and what they found important in the playschool. The children could keep their cameras until they had finished taking all the pictures. How enthusiastic and engaged they were in taking pictures varied among the children. Some were very excited about getting the camera, whereas others did not seem to be interested in the camera and only took a few pictures and then put the camera away until they were reminded of it. How the children approached taking the pictures also varied. Some thought much about what to take pictures of and handled it in a systematic way by going around in the playschool and taking pictures of different play areas and playthings, whereas others took all the pictures at the same time of the people and events that were taking place at that moment. Some of the children took the pictures by themselves while other children took photographs together. For those children, the photographing was a collective activity where they influenced each other. After the pictures were developed, the playschool teachers sat down with the children individually and interviewed them about what was on the pictures and why they had been taken. Then the children chose pictures to put in their personal photo albums that they could take home with them. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed (Einarsdóttir, 2005b).

These two approaches using cameras are in many ways different and give different views of the life in playschool. When the children were showing me around and taking pictures, they were presenting the playschool as they wanted to show it to a guest. They took pictures of important spaces and people in the playschool, their own artwork, and other children. The use of the disposable cameras, however, had a different meaning for the children. Then they took pictures of what they wanted, but not for others. For many of the children the disposable camera was a new plaything. They played with the camera, taking pictures of marginal things in places where they were unsupervised. Most of the pictures the children took with the disposable cameras were, however, pictures of people (children and adults) doing what they regularly do in the playschool, playing with different things, having breakfast, and so on (Einarsdóttir, 2005b).

Using children's photographs as a data-gathering method has many advantages, for it increases children's power because the data gathering is in part in their hands as they decide what they photograph. Following the photography sessions there were interviews which were different from other interviews because the pictures directed the interviews. The children were not asked direct questions from the adult's perspective; instead, the photos, which represented the child's perspective, directed the interviews. In this way the children were active in reconstructing knowledge. Furthermore, photographing gave the children the opportunity to express their views in different ways, by inviting them to combine visual and verbal language, which is particularly beneficial when working with young children or children with poor written or verbal language skills. Other benefits of using children's photographs as a data-gathering method are that most children are interested and like taking pictures, taking the pictures does not take a long time so the children do not lose interest, and the photography provides a concrete product that the children can take pride in and that can be revisited later for further discussion and analysis. Nevertheless, photographs by themselves give limited information. The interviews and the discussion with the children and their interpretations of the pictures and explanations proved to be essential. Using children's photographs as a data-gathering method has many advantages (Schratz & Steiner-Löffler, 1998; Rasmussen, 1999; Clark & Moss, 2001; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2001, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003; Cook & Hess, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Fasoli, 2003; Hurworth, 2003; Clark, 2004; Fraser *et al.*, 2004; Einarsdóttir, 2005b).

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are not a common method to use with young children. In the present study, a questionnaire in the form of a game was used. A cardboard game that had earlier been designed by the playschool teachers was adopted so that it also included questions that reflected the children's views and opinions. The game was made of small pieces of cardboard in different shapes and colours. On the back of the pieces there were questions and problems about different types of things, like 'Where do you live?' or 'Pinch your nose and count to five'. For the purpose of the project, questions about children's likes and dislikes and their views and opinions on things in the playschool were added to the game. The questions connected to the study were about what the children liked and disliked in playschool, the best and worst locations in the playschool, what they could decide and not decide in the playschool, what they thought about and learned in playschool, what the grown-ups did in playschool and what the children could or could not do in playschool. The children played the game with other children, and an adult assisted them in reading the questions. The game was available for the children to play during choice time and when they did, the playschool teachers observed and recorded their answers on a prepared form. By using this game for data gathering, the children were actively doing something that they liked and chose themselves, and instead of being collected in a contrived context, data were collected during children's daily activities.

Challenges and critical issues

In studies focusing on the lives and views of children, researchers can face a number of critical issues and challenges. Ethical matters, including informed consent, access, relationships, confidentiality and protection, are fundamental in all research, but in research with children these take on an extra substance.

Relations and interactions

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is the close and often long-term relationship between the participants and the researcher. When children are involved, these relationships can become complicated. Children are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships with the adult researcher than other groups. Unequal power can exist in terms of age, status, competency and experience. Some children are not accustomed to adults who are interested in their views and who ask for their opinion. They may perceive the adult as an authority figure, and consequently may try to please him or her for fear of the reaction if they don't (Coyne, 1998; Balen *et al.*, 2000/2001; Punch, 2002; Robinson & Kellett, 2004; Flewitt, 2005; Hill, 2005).

It can be difficult to remove or even reduce the unequal power relations between an adult researcher and a child, and several methods have been used for that (Mauthner, 1997; Davis, 1998; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Gollop, 2000; Brooker, 2001; Punch, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003; Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Mandell's (1984) least-adult role is an interesting effort, as well as Corsaro's (1985) approaches. Others have pointed out that power inequalities between children and adult researchers are inevitable and therefore we must seek children's assistance in helping us to understand childhood and their perspectives (Mayall, 2000).

This study attempted to empower the children and minimise the power differential by using child-friendly methods and techniques which built on children's competencies and interests and made sure that the children had support from each other if they so wished (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Mauthner, 1997; Brooker, 2001; Punch, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003; Eder & Fingerson, 2003). The study was also conducted in the context of the playschool, an environment which they knew well and in which they felt comfortable, and under circumstances that were convenient for them. Adults that the children knew and trusted participated in the data gathering, but when the researcher was an outsider she introduced herself as a learner, who didn't know and who was looking for information from the children because they were the experts and had the knowledge (Davis, 1998; Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Informed consent

Informed consent means that participants enter the research project voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the danger and obligations that are involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). When children are asked to give informed

consent, they must be given enough information in a language understandable to them to allow them to make an informed decision about participation. It is important that they comprehend the purpose of the research, what the research involves, what is going to happen and for how long. Also, they should understand what will be expected of them, the consequences and possible risks of taking part, what will happen to the data and how the results will be used. The children must also be able to understand that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time (Davis, 1998; Balen *et al.*, 2000/2001; MacNaughton *et al.*, 2001; Parson & Stephenson, 2003).

With young children these issues might become problematic for several reasons, the most important of which is the power inequality between the adult and the child that can result in the children finding it difficult to tell an adult researcher if they do not want to participate or if they want to withdraw from the study. When children agree to participate in a study that evolves over a period of time, their consent should be treated as an ongoing process and open for review during the course of the study (Alderson, 2000; Flewitt, 2005; Connors & Stalker, 2007).

Studies conducted with children are also distinctive in regard to the informed consent of a third person, in most cases an adult, who decides if the children are given the choice to decide if they want to participate or not. When research is conducted with schoolchildren the gatekeepers include parents, teachers, principals, and the school authorities. For this study, the children's parents, the playschool director, and the playschool authorities gave informed consent. The children didn't give their consent through formal means at the onset of the study; rather, they were asked each time they began activities connected to the study if they wanted to participate. The reason for this procedure was that the researchers believed this to be the best way. In other words, since the participating children were very young, it would be easier for them to decide each time if they wanted to participate. If the children were to give consent only in the beginning, they might not have understood what it meant, and they could also have forgotten it later. In retrospect, I have been wondering if this was the most appropriate method and if I shouldn't have introduced the study for the children in the beginning. If one does not introduce a study as a whole to the participants there is a danger that they feel they have been tricked into participating. However, with children so young, one has to consider very carefully how an introduction to the study could be approached in a constructive and useful way so it would have meaning for the children. Alderson (2004) has, for instance, suggested that informational leaflets with pictures could be made for the researcher and the children to go through, and in a similar manner Stalker (2006) has used picture leaflets when seeking consent from children with disabilities.

The challenge a researcher always faces when seeking children's consent is to ensure that it is a real informed consent. The researcher has to be aware that although the children have given their consent, nonverbal actions and gestures can indicate their real view (Alderson, 2004; Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). Here the researcher faces a dilemma, because she wants to keep the participants in the study and can face a methodological problem if too many participants withdraw or decline to participate.

At the same time she has the ethical duty to give the participants opportunities to withdraw from the study and ensure that they get information concerning their right to do so.

Protection of confidentiality

Confidentiality in research means that unless otherwise agreed to, the participants' identities should be protected so that the information collected does not embarrass or in other ways harm them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). There is a universal agreement that researchers should ensure that the participants are not at risk of becoming hurt, and confidentiality of all data is a fundamental part of respecting and protecting the participant in any study. The situation is certainly the same when children are involved.

Confidentiality in research with children concerns ensuring that the participants cannot be recognised in reports or presentations of the project, and it also means that the researcher does not betray a child's confidence with parents or teachers (Hill, 2005). Nevertheless, researchers working with children have cautioned that researchers should be careful of explicitly promising confidentiality, as this may not always be possible. They must be prepared to face the difficult task of evaluating if they need to pass information to authorities if, for instance, they discover child abuse and need to pass on information to others (Balen *et al.*, 2000/2001; Cree *et al.*, 2002; Flewitt, 2005). According to the Icelandic child protection act, an individual has a duty to notify the authorities if she has reason to believe that a child is living in unacceptable circumstances or is subject to harassment or violence. The duty of notification takes precedence over provision in law or codes of ethics on confidentiality within professions.

It has been pointed out that a reasonable process in such circumstances is to consult with the children regarding what way they prefer. The researcher can also let children know that if a person's life or health is at stake, the researcher has a duty to report it despite an agreement of confidentiality (Coady, 2001; Hill, 2005). If, however, there is not a case of violence, but the researcher finds out something that she thinks is important that parents or teachers should know, the matter takes on other substance. Matters of opinion as such can put the researcher in an ethical predicament. On one hand, she has to make sure that the interest and safety of the child is at the forefront; on the other hand, she has the ethical obligation not to let the participants down or betray confidentiality.

Closing comments

Methodological and ethical challenges that researchers face when they conduct research with children have been the focus of this article. The discussion is based on a study conducted with 2–6-year-old children in Iceland. The results from the study indicate that although some material and spaces in the playschool were more popular than others and the children agreed on many things, they also disagreed and had

different and sometimes contradictory perspectives on their environment and the playschool curriculum. The outdoor area was, for instance, most popular with most of the children although some children did not like it at all. Similarly, some of the children liked playing without adults in small rooms while other children did not like that. These different wishes and perspectives do not come as a surprise since children are not a homogenous group of people, as Christensen and Prout (2002) have pointed out. Therefore, a variety of children's voices should be identified and listened to (James & Prout, 1990). Researchers who conduct research with children have to be creative and use methods that fit the circumstances and the children they are working with each time. Since there is not one single method that fits all children and all circumstances it is important to master a variety of methods for gaining insight into children's perspectives. Different methods can shed light on different aspects and give a new breadth of understanding. Different children also have different ways of communicating, and therefore they prefer different methods to express their views. Children at different ages also prefer different methods.

The results also show that different methods used by the same child often showed different results. For instance, when the children took photographs using different methods, they were in both cases able to make choices about what to photograph and were able to pick out things that they wanted to capture in a picture, but the results show that they focused on different things when they were alone taking pictures than when they had an adult by their side. A child could also say in an interview that she/he did not like a particular activity, but observations indicated that she/he often chose this activity. This raises questions about what the child's perspective really was, since one child could have potentially contradictory perspectives. Like adults, children's perspectives can change during time, according to context, in reference to the methods used, and in terms of the ways questions are posed. To understand the knowledge and views of children one has to look into the social and cultural context in which they live. Children's voices reflect the environment of which they are a part. Other voices could be heard at other times in other social and cultural contexts. When we listen to children, therefore, we have to examine critically the social conditions that adults create for them (Jipson & Jipson, 2005; Kjörholt, 2005; Kjörholt *et al.*, 2005).

Ethical challenges, including informed consent, relationships, confidentiality and protection, are evident in research with children. The power difference caused by the different positions, competencies and experiences of the child and the adult researcher is an important issue and a constant challenge in all stages of the study. The research is the adult's initiative, and it is the adult who chooses the research topic; rarely do children have an opportunity to contribute to the research plan or the research process. When children's consent is sought and data is gathered with children, it is important to seek ways to empower the children, so their real perspectives come to view. Interpretation of research results is also in the hands of the adult, and therefore it is important that researchers ask themselves whether they can be sure that their understanding reflects the children's ideas, actions and experiences. Those who conduct research with children must constantly consider the ethical dimensions of their work; they should question what they are doing and search for the limitations of

their methods and interpretations in an attempt to accurately present what the children are doing and saying.

Confidentiality and children's privacy became an issue when I and the playschool teachers sat together and looked at the pictures the children had taken with the disposable cameras and realised how private many of them were. This realisation was troublesome, and I felt that I was invading their privacy, because the children were not aware of us having a meeting discussing their pictures. Ethical issues concerning children's privacy and protection and the validity of the results also became an issue when I was working on analysing and interpreting the data in the study. I became painfully aware that, while the children had interjected their perspective by taking the pictures, much of the interpretation of the pictures was done through my own adult perspective.

The aims of research with children are to contribute to their welfare, either directly or indirectly, in both the short and the long term. If these aims are accomplished, then research with children in which children's perspectives are sought can give valuable information and contribute to future research, policy, individual situations and the education system. However, this is a delicate matter that raises many methodological and ethical questions. Balance between protection and participation are, for instance, dilemmas that one faces when doing research with young children. Broström (2005) has probed ethical questions that arise when adult researchers study children closely and asks if it is in children's best interest if adults uncover details of their life and secret spaces. He suggested that perhaps we should create a greater distance between ourselves and the children instead of trying to enter their world, since children's right to privacy and protection are more important that exciting new data and new insights about teaching. These are words of warning that are well worth considering.

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