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*Research with children: Voice, agency, and transparency*

*INTRODUCTION*

Children have been the focus of studies dating back to the start of the twentieth century (Hendrick, 2003), but they have largely been positioned as objects of inquiry (Christensen & James, 2008; Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009; Wyness, 2006). A scientific approach to research which positions humans as objects is dehumanising, and has not only occurred for children but unfortunately many marginalised groups, with historical examples of extremely abhorrent ethical violations. An example of ethical violation against children is the Willowbrook State School (New York) Hepatitis experiments on intellectually impaired children conducted by Dr Krugman (see [http://science.education.nih.gov/supplements/nih9/bioethics/guide/pdf/Master\\_5-4.pdf](http://science.education.nih.gov/supplements/nih9/bioethics/guide/pdf/Master_5-4.pdf)). Such violation was permitted from a premise that the children being studied were seen as objects of inquiry, not humans with rights to transparent information of the purpose of the study with participation choices through informed consent. Such research rights have been regulated for studies involving adults since the establishment of regulations for ethical human research, which were first issued in Australia in 1966 (NHMRC, 2011). Only since 1999 has Australia had national guidelines on ethical conduct in human research that has provided specified regulation on ethical conduct of research with children and young people. Various professional and social research bodies in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America, have also established similar guidelines (Farrell, 2005). However, as Farrell acknowledges, the basis of these guidelines are to protect children in response to “escalating moral panic to the adverse state of society and the attendant risk to children is seen to justify robust measures to heighten protective governance of children and their lives” (p. 3). Research with children has come to be commonly understood as cautious territory in Australia as children and young people are classified as a special group with specific ethical considerations in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), demanding careful attention to their protection rather than attention to their participation in research.

A protectionist view of children as innocent and therefore vulnerable has been shaped by conceptions of children as angelic, uncorrupted by the world, and naturally good, as espoused by Rousseau (1762/2007). On the basis of this understanding, adults “generate a desire to protect children from the

corrupt surrounding world” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 45). Adults maintain the natural goodness of children by protecting them from violence and corruption through surveillance, limitation and regulation. This construct of children has privileged the position of adult to withhold knowledge in the name of protection and reinforces a notion of the child as ignorant or immanent, in turn creating children who feel vulnerable and disempowered (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; MacNaughton & Davis, 2001; Silin, 1995, 2000; Soto, 2005; Walkerdine, 1984). Adults play an important role as gatekeepers, protecting children from information considered too difficult for them to handle emotionally and cognitively (Marshall, 1997). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) claimed that by protecting children from the world in which they exist, adults do not respect the rights and capabilities of children to seriously engage in the world, such as participation in research. Instead discourses of protection place emphasis on protection rights in claims for children’s rights (Archard, 1993; James, Curtis, & Birch, 2008).

Widely held views of children and childhood throughout the twentieth century positioned children in oppositional terms to adults (Wyness, 2006). For example, children were seen (and in many contexts continue to be seen) as simple, and adults as complex, such binary views are framed by developmentalist discourses. In research, Wyness claims that this has then meant that children have been seen as simple less complicated beings to work with, justifying a tendency to experiment on children in laboratory settings. For example, the laboratory nursery schools established in accordance with Granville Stanley Hall’s child study methods, in which those studying children would observe children from glassed viewing platforms (Bloch, 1991). At such sites consent was not sought from the children. From a view of children as developing, children are understood as not yet capable of understanding the complexities of research. Instead, research practices are explained to the child’s parent who provides consent on the child’s behalf. A view of children as developing produces research ‘on’ children that seeks to know how children will fit into society as adults, that is, how do they develop to be complex beings? A view of children as developing masks the extent to which they are capable and assume responsibility in their lives, because children are seen to be in preparation for future participation, not as present social actors. Adults are positioned as competent and capable beings who understand, translate and interpret children’s comments and actions (Waksler, 1991). This view of children is based on a deficit model, which positions children as needing guidance.

Recent sociological theories view children as competent and capable social actors enabling a shift from research being done ‘on’ children to research ‘with’ children (Mayall, 2002; Wyness, 2006). Emphasis is on participation as opposed to protection. Participation rights are advocated through the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), and provided a new catalyst for rights respecting child research, because signatory nations are required to regularly report on progress towards achieving the human rights of children, thus leading to assessment of appropriate research methods (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew, & Waterson, 2009). Beazley *et al.* identify four articles of the UNCRC that are particularly pertinent to a notion of children's right to be properly researched:

Article 3.3 – the right to the highest possible standards being used in work with children;

Article 12 – the right to express their views freely;

Article 13 – the right to seek, receive and impart information through a medium of children's own choice; and

Article 36 – the right to protection from forms of exploitation not addressed in other articles.

In research terms they advocate that these articles translate into: “children being participants in research; using methods that make it easy for them to express their opinions, views and experiences; being protected from harm that might result from taking part in research conducted by researchers who use quality, scientific methods and analysis” (p. 370).

This epistemological shift positions children in research as active subjects, not objects of inquiry (Christensen & James, 2008). Research with children is framed on a view that children have subjective worlds worth researching, so inquiries seek to know children's situation in the here and now as children (Wyness, 2006). A view of children as competent and capable social actors welcomes greater scope for the inclusion of children's active participation in research. Ethical practices of research with children then endeavour to honour children's right to express their views (MacNaughton & Smith, 2005; Roberts, 2008). According to James and Prout (1995), by viewing “children as competent social actors – we can learn more about the ways in which ‘society’ and ‘social structure’ shape social experiences and are themselves refashioned through the social action of members” (p. 78). On the basis of this understanding, sociological theories enable the impact of society and social structures to be examined in research with children.

The acknowledgement of children as competent and capable social actors has grown to have a stronger presence in social policy, education and research (see e.g., Christensen & James, 2008; Prout, 2002; Smith, 2007). There is an attractive quality to this concept from an ethical position as it presents as providing greater scope for children's participation. However, this is not easily enabled in research. The influence of different ideological and discursive positions can intercept participatory research intentions

and infer greater power to adult researchers simply on the basis of their adulthood. Social science researcher, Kulynych (2001), who examined the political subjectivity of children, claimed that talk of children's participatory rights (or agency) is often used to exaggerate children's status, thus obscuring the actuality of children's experiences of authorship. Other critiques of the rhetoric of children's participation rights in research such as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008), have also suggested that recent sociological research that proclaims to acknowledge children's agency might actually risk disregarding children's agency and autonomy. This may occur through adherence to methods that are determined by adults to offer agency for children (e.g., drawing, storytelling and story writing) yet are blind to ways children choose to act. These critiques provide caution to exaggerated and romanticised claims of children's agency and will be discussed further later on in this chapter. First, I will discuss core principles of research with children informed from a participatory perspective. Second, research method possibilities will be explored that enable children to share their subjective worlds with agency. Critical questions of voice, agency, transparency and power balance will then be raised for consideration and reflection in research practices with children.

#### PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

With a view of children as competent and capable social actors, ethical research principles applied to adults apply to children. The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) frames principles of ethical human research on values of respect, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence. Respect towards research participants is a core value, seeing the capacity of participants to make decisions being encouraged and welcomed. The research must have merit and the researcher have integrity otherwise the research involving humans cannot be ethically justifiable. Justice is enacted in ethical research through fair equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens, and fair treatment in the selection of participants. Beneficence is addressed through attention to risks and benefits for participants, with sensitivity to their welfare and social and cultural implications of the research. In respect for children's rights, these same principles must be honoured in research involving children.

Ethical practices in research with children then include: attention to informed consent, choice of participation, choice of identity and identity disclosure, and listening to research queries, concerns, comments and ideas communicated via any mode the child chooses. The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) states that

“The child or young person’s particular level of maturity has implications for whether his or her consent is necessary and/or sufficient to authorise participation” (p. 55). This has translated into a common safeguarded practice of foregrounding seeking consent from the child research participant’s parent or guardian over the child participant herself. It appears that seeking consent from the child participant is overlooked on the premise that children are viewed as developing so not yet capable of understanding the complexities of research and that they are innocent so they need to be protected by their guardians from potential research violations.

With such practice, researchers are positioning parents/guardians as gatekeepers who consent to their child’s participation and the child assents (or acquiesces) to involvement (see e.g., Connors & Stalker, 2003). Enactment of relevant articles of the UNCRC, would see parents fulfill their parental rights and duties ‘to provide direction to the child ... in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child’ (Articles 14 and 5); and give due respect for consent and refusal to prevent discrimination against disadvantaged groups (Article 2), risk of abuse and exploitation (Articles 19, 32, 36 and 37), and unlawful interference with privacy and attacks on the child’s honour and reputation (Article 17) by deciding for infants and toddlers and guiding and supporting older children (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). By seeing children as competent and capable social actors, informed consent is actively sought and assent is understood as having potential to be misused to gloss over children’s refusal.

To enact research ethically with respect for children’s rights, the purpose and scope of much child research can be explained in language accessible to children from when they develop communicative language, so they can make informed decisions as to their participation. The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) states that:

When children and young people are not of sufficient maturity to consent to participation in research, it is justifiable to involve them only when: (a) it is likely to advance knowledge about the health or welfare of, or other matters relevant to, children and young people; or (b) children’s or young people’s participation is indispensable to the conduct of the research. (p. 56)

Once the purpose and scope of research has been explained, children can communicate their choice to participate or not via a communication means (e.g., verbal, graphic symbols, written text) in which they are familiar with. A revisit of explanations of the study and confirmation of consent should be sought at each meeting with child participants, as circumstances change.

To honour Articles 12 and 13 of UNCRC and conduct ethical research with respect, how child participants are identified in reports and publications of studies needs to be informed by the children themselves. If

pseudonyms are required for confidentiality then invite children to choose a pseudonym of their choice, so they then have ownership of their identity as it enters the public sphere. If research content is not of a sensitive nature then with careful explanations as to the extent of public exposure their first name may have through the sharing of findings of the research, children can make decisions over the use of their first name or a self- chosen pseudonym. The same applies with visually identifying imagery. Children have a right to determine the visual representation of themselves in the public arena. Consent to gather visual data is sought at the commencement of data collection, however circumstances can change, so consent of selected images needs to be revisited at time of publication. In respect for children's dignity select images that reflect the research claim with great care to avoid stereotypes, sentimentality or degradation (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). If consent has not been provided, a practice that is often recommended is to blur or block out the child's face in photographic and videographic evidence (see e.g., Flewitt, 2005). In disturbing comparison, such editing practices are commonly applied to conceal the identity of suspected criminals. Aligning children with suspected criminals perpetuates notions of the invisibility of children in society. If consent to publish the photographic or videographic evidence has not been provided, then respect the participant by not publishing image. Recognition of an alignment in how suspected criminals are portrayed in the public sphere seems indicative of an ethical violation of (mis)representation of children in research findings. As Alderson and Morrow confer "much remains to be achieved with children and young people, who are routinely denigrated in public, in ways that would be unthinkable for other minority groups" (p. 137).

To further support children's freedom of expression (Article 12) and the right to seek, receive and impart information through a medium of children's own choice (Article 13), take care to listen to children's questions, concerns, comments and ideas throughout the research processes, as "listening to children is central to recognizing and respecting their worth as human beings" (Roberts, 2008, p. 264). Respond to children's questions, concerns, comments and ideas, and act with authenticity and sensitivity to include and address these in the study. Young children can communicate through many modes (e.g., oral, gestural/ kinaesthetic, visual, auditory, spatial, and linguistic). To build rapport with young children in research, familiarity and skills in playing with children can assist to recognise and read children's ways of communicating, such as gesture, symbols, songs, stories, and dance. Careful listening can notice silences and provoke inquiries with the child as to why they may be silent. Though take care to avoid assumptions of children's feelings and meaning-making; cross-check with the children using open- ended phrasing avoids the manipulation of data. Many authors (e.g., Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Grover, 2004;

Sargeant & Harcourt, 2012) on ethical research with children advocate that researchers invite and listen to children's comments on the initial design, choice of research tools, deciding what research data can be shared, with whom and how, identification of what was most significant, and sharing findings with others.

The UNCRC and national ethical conduct in human research guidelines provide foundational guidance on ethical practice in research with children. The above discussion provides some further reflections and suggestions that may be applicable to some studies with children, though how you enact ethically in research with children will depend entirely on your research question and what is being asked of the children. Each circumstance needs to be considered with respect for the dignity and well being of each child participant.

### POSSIBLE METHODS FOR RESEARCHING WITH CHILDREN

To enable children's agency and voice in research, it is recommended that methods familiar to children's ways of being are selected. Mayall (2008) claims that when children are operating in ways that they are familiar with, they are more likely to feel comfortable to steer the direction and pace. To explain and explore some possible methods for researching with children, some methods employed in a study that inquired into possibilities for young children's active citizenship through a practice of social justice storytelling with a class of children aged five to six years (Phillips, 2010) will be discussed. The study involved weekly one-and-half-hour storytelling workshops spread across thirteen weeks. The workshops each commenced with a performative telling of a social justice story, and were followed by a whole class critical discussion and small group activities (drawing, sculpting/ building, dancing and social actions) inviting further responses to the stories. Ten stories were told that covered a range of genres and were not selected at the onset of the study, but instead were chosen as counternarratives to predominant thoughts and feelings on injustice expressed by the children to the preceding story. The stories were employed as a pedagogical tool to open dialogue on children's emerging understandings of injustice. The storytelling workshops were audio and video-recorded. Researcher reflections of the workshops were noted when viewing the video recording later that day. Two to three days after each storytelling workshop further dialogue regarding the content of the told story was offered through a follow-up conversation with a group of five to six self-nominated children. These conversations were audio-recorded. Multiple and diverse data sources worked to diminish the possibility of one perspective shaping the direction of the study and to portray "the complexities and richness of people's lived experiences" (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 156). The following discusses the methods of group discussions, conversations, play activities and

storytelling that were selected in the research design as they were familiar practices to the child participants and offered scope for meaningful responses on social justice issues (e.g., fairness, cruelty, equity).

### *Group Discussions*

Critical discussions, based on a community of inquiry approach (Lipman, 1988) in which children and adults dialogue to search out the problematic borders of puzzling concepts, were facilitated by the class teacher and storyteller/researcher in the study to seek children's responses to told social justice stories. These group discussions took place with the whole class (21 children) seated in an inward facing circle. The circle formation enabled all participants to see and communicate to each other's faces, cultivating a community culture where each person's comments and questions were listened to and considered. Such practice is a fairly commonly employed pedagogical practice in early years classrooms, though it was purposefully employed in this study as a research method to provide a forum to hear the children's proposals for social actions in response to hearing of injustices in told stories as part of the investigation of what young children's active citizenship might be as provoked through social justice storytelling.

The whole group discussion did provide useful data of children's emotive and thoughtful responses to the stories, with many suggestions of social actions to redress the injustices, though after a few weeks it was noted by the teacher and researcher that it was the same six children who contributed to these discussions that lasted for ten minutes on average. The teacher then suggested that it be insisted that all children contribute to the discussion either verbally or through gesture. Each child was then given an object (e.g., a block, stone, or stick – symbolically connected to the story) to place in the centre of the circle as a symbolic marker of her/his contribution to the discussion.

*Storyteller/researcher: Put up your hand if you'd like to say something about the story – what you are thinking about or your feelings or even might even want to show us with your body – your feelings about the story.*

Fergie<sup>1</sup> who had not been vocal in the group discussions before was the first to contribute by placing her block in the circle then sitting with a downward gaze. Other children were then invited to interpret her expression. Ella replied "sad", to which the researcher sought further information with "at what point in the story were you sad?" Many children chose to offer a gestural response to the story creating greater interactivity between all class members through the cross-checking of meaning making, between gestural and oral literacy (according to a multiliteracies framework see The New London Group, 1996).



Interestingly, many children interpreted other children's gestural responses far more readily and accurately than the teacher and researcher. These children who accurately interpreted the child's intended meaning from their gestures then had a research role of translating to the researcher.

There can be concerns with insisting that every child contribute to a group discussion. Sometimes a child might not have anything to say, or might feel uncomfortable expressing herself verbally or non-verbally in a large group setting. Insistence that everyone express an opinion could also be experienced as an infringement of the liberty to choose when and where opinions are expressed. Although the intention was to provide space for all children to contribute to the discussion, this strategy could be read as being shaped by universalism, where the same rules apply to all. Universalism does not recognise diverse needs. However, a case could be argued for prompting the quieter children to express an opinion, as their contributions increased in complexity. For example, in the first week that we asked Mat (a boy of Bangladeshi heritage who commenced the school five months earlier with no English) to contribute to the discussion, he chose not to participate by shaking his head. Yet after experiencing two discussions in which all children were encouraged to contribute, Mat presented a dramatic response (stood looking downwards arms firmly by his side) to the story told and provided verbal justifications for his non-verbal expression ("every time they made the sound it made you feel a bit sad"). Asking all children to contribute to the discussions of the stories did enable children who had not been heard previously to express their opinions.

Although the intent of the strategy was to support greater agency in the group discussion for all children, it was adult directed. The children had some choice but it was adult-controlled. This was the caution expressed by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) to those who research with children that adult-devised ways to acknowledge children's agency can risk disregarding their agency, through making assumptions of what methods to support children's agency as opposed to noticing children's choices of how they wish to express and participate. The teacher and storyteller/ researcher had intended to provide equal access for all the children to express an opinion, yet their diverse ways of responding to the story were controlled or limited. Some children may have preferred to express their opinions in a personal reflective space (e.g., their story journals), with a small group with whom they had rapport, or with a family member or friend. Others may not have wanted to say anything at all. To acknowledge children's agency in research methods, diverse forms of participation and responsiveness should be welcomed by responding to children's personal preferences, concerns, or anxieties.

The right to privacy is another ethical consideration in research with children. In the practice of

insisting all children speak in the group discussion, some children may not have wanted to say anything at all, and that to make them contribute was an infringement on their right to privacy. The right to privacy is attended to in negotiations with adult research participants (Freeman & Mathison, 2009), but rarely with children in research or most other contexts, as identified by Cheeseman and Robertson (2006) and Lindgren (2012) in early childhood practices of pedagogical documentation. Concern for children's right to privacy signals a need for further consideration of children's personal spaces and choice of mode of participation in research. Group discussions can welcome children's general opinions, questions, decision-making, and initiated ideas. Though there was potential that some of the shared stories may have stirred thoughts and feelings of personal experiences of injustice that the children did not feel comfortable to share in a large group context. To honour children's rights requires researchers to notice children who are silent in group discussions and endeavour to provide another mode that the child wishes to express through or respect their wish to be silent.

### *Conversations*

Follow-up conversations were conducted with five to six self-nominated children, one to three days after each storytelling workshop in the study of social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship. Often more than six children wanted to participate, so records were kept of the interviewees to ensure equitable participation among the class members so that all children participated in these conversations a few times across the duration of the study. These conversations were facilitated to acknowledge that children have the right to engage, and are capable of engaging in conversations with adults, as advocated by authors on children's rights (e.g., Archard, 1993; Franklin, 1995; Freeman, 1996). A conversational approach was used based on consideration of the issues of how children are conceptualised in research, adult to child power relations, and reflexivity in research with children (Christensen & James, 2008). Through a conversation format, children can take control of the pace and direction of the conversation (Mayall, 2008). In addition, Mayall found conversations particularly suitable when interviewing young children, as children responded to this context positively, listening and supporting the contributions of each other. A conversation format was applied in this study to nurture positive and comfortable relationships with the children and to encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings on the stories.

These follow-up conversations provided an open space for the children to comment further on the story told earlier that week in a way that was meaningful to them. The following were some of the

questions that were used to start the conversation:

1. Tell me what you remember about the story.
2. What concerned you most about the story?
3. Did the story make you think about anything or remind you of something?
4. Is there something that you want to do after hearing the story?
5. Have you talked to anyone about the story? What did you tell them? What did they say?

Once children were talking about the story, the content of their comments was responded to by seeking further clarification or explanation of their thinking. This responsive approach to conversing created space to follow children's tangential and diverse ways of meaning-making with regard to the stories.

The children were more familiar with each other than they were with the storyteller/researcher, so they would often further explain each other's comments. As Mayall (2008) found, children can help with the social presentation of their peers by explaining to the researcher reasons why a child may have difficulty participating. For this reason, Mayall claimed that group conversations with children provide space for children to showcase their collectivity. A group of children can work to reduce adult control and cultivate a climate of research with children rather than on children. Thus the data recorded from these conversations documented children's evolving ideas about social justice as they responded to the comments of others. The evolving nature of the conversations as different children built on each other's ideas was an advantage of a group conversation as opposed to individual ones. Efforts were also made to provide space for each child to contribute to the interview by directing questions to individual children.

By seeing the children as capable of contributing to research conversations, these follow-up conversations provided an opportunity for the children to share further thoughts on the story told that week in a conversational manner. The group conversational approach enabled rapport to be built and the children's thoughts on the stories to accumulate and be elaborated. This produced useful data on learning possibilities for young children's active citizenship.

### *Play-based Activities*

Further interaction with the social justice stories told in the study occurred in small group activities where the children explored the told stories by drawing, painting, sculpting, building, and dancing. After the whole group discussion, the children could choose a play-based activity to participate in. These involved open-ended play spaces for children to engage in self-directed exploration and play (e.g., wooden blocks on shelves and open floor space for building). Such play-based activities were included, as they were

understood to be an accessible means for pre-literate children to contribute data (Hart, 1997). These activities also provided space for aesthetic engagement through arts media to process affective responses (Greene, 1995) to the stories told.

According to Davies (2003) and Gilbert (1994), the open-ended and self-initiated qualities of play are also understood to provide a space in which children act out what they desire. A context of play can provide space for the children to portray a world of great flux and anarchy (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Emphasis on play in children's development, according to Sutton-Smith has tended to ignore the ways in which children use play for power, construct meaning, devise and adopt multiple roles and identities. He recognised that play can provide a space where children can express their resentment at being a captive population through stories that portray a world of great flux, anarchy and disaster. An example of such from the study, was a collective block-building by Liam, Scott and Juliet that represented a human blending machine to blend the cruel employers of child labour (for further discussion see Phillips, 2012b). Such a response to the telling of Iqbal Masih's (a Pakistani debt-enslaved loom worker and child labour activist) story portrayed the children's perception of the cruelty of some employers of child labour as vehemently unforgiveable warranting obliteration. The capacity of a play context for children to act out desires, flux and anarchy offer great potential in research to provide understandings of children's subjective worlds.

Though play is widely recognised to be a way that children operate, the commitment to play in early childhood education draws from western ideologies, yet assumes universalism across the globe (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). The free-choice factor of a play-based approach has also been identified as not benefiting all children (Brooker, 2002) with discourses of gender practices identified as restricting choices for play (Ryan, 2005). These critiques of play and its automatic association with young children suggest that play-based methods are not selected simply because the study engages with young participants, but instead to be employed for specific purposes, such as those suggested by Sutton-Smith (1997), Davies (2003) and Gilbert (1994) to provide space for children to explore and express desires, flux and anarchy.

### *Storytelling*

Storytelling can also be a highly suitable research method with children. Many researchers (e.g., Lancaster & Broadbent, 2003; Leonard & Davey, 2001; Leonard, 2004; Morrow, 1999; Veale, 2005; (Phillips, 2012a, 2012b) have employed and advocate for storytelling as a research method for its capacity to offer an alternative mode for children to express ideas, thoughts and feelings to research topics. Story

and storytelling have a well-established theoretical position as possessing capacity to capture and reflect humanity and to cultivate multiplicity of meaning-making (see e.g., Arendt, 1958/1998, 1970; Benjamin, 1955/1999). The nature of story and storytelling allows listeners to form multiple possible meanings. Fisher (1987) claimed that there is no story that is not embedded in other stories and the meaning and merit of a story is determined through its positioning against other stories. Story provides a way for humans to frame their understanding of the world, giving shape and order to it (Fisher). Dyson and Genishi (1994) acknowledge that young children in particular possess a disposition to explain and explore both their inner and outer worlds through story. These understandings of story and storytelling provide a theoretical base for selection of storytelling as a research method with children when insight into children's subjective understandings of humanity is sought. The multiplicity of meaning-making welcomes children's interpretations and scope as co-researchers, as well as the creation of rich and deeper understandings of data through multiple perspectives.

In week 13 of the study the storyteller/researcher asked the question, "What story do you want to tell me?" This was a conscious decision to provide space for reciprocal story-making/storytelling. The children had listened to stories told by the storyteller/researcher for many weeks, so workshop 13 was designed to provide space for each child to present a story in reply. At the workshop, a range of materials was available for the children to select props for their stories, including pieces of fabric, stones, sticks, small blocks, animal figures, finger puppets of families that represented differing cultural backgrounds, Guatemalan worry dolls, and small carpets. The intention was to invite stories that were responses to the stories told by the storyteller/researcher not re-enactments of these stories. The children individually selected materials then found a space in the room to play with the materials and create their stories. When each child, pair or group of three indicated that they were ready to tell, the storyteller/researcher video-recorded their storytelling.

The stories told by the children were shaped in three different ways. Some stories seemed to be shaped by the props that the children selected. A second group of stories were recalls of the stories told. A third group of stories played with themes and/or characters from stories, yet took a new direction, a different context, or combined multiple characters and themes in a different way. In the stories of this third group considerable insight was gained to the investigation of what young children's active citizenship might be as provoked through social justice storytelling, as children's position on injustices were relayed through their storytelling of themes such as resistance to injustice and persistent pursuit of freedom of choice and expression (for further discussion see Phillips, 2012b). Like the play-based activities,

storytelling provided opportunity for some children to explore and express their meaning-making of the world.

### PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT VOICE, AGENCY, TRANSPARENCY AND POWER BALANCE

The above methods can provide greater scope for children's self-determined expression in research, to enable greater agency in the research processes. However, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) argue that the selection of methods that are recognised to enable children to exercise agency may not be necessary to provide greater scope for child agency, as they found from their own research experiences that children can independently shape and organise the world around them at their will without adult assistance. In their research experiences some of the most intriguing insights were noted from "children acting in unexpected ways: appropriating, resisting or manipulating our research techniques for their own purposes" (p. 508). This argument alerts to awareness that ethical research with children is not simply a matter of predetermining methods that are considered more participatory, but perhaps rather to have methods emerge as children choose ways in which they wish to express. This requires careful attention to what and how children say, act and express; being attentive to the cues each child expresses about participation in the study, which may even be smashing the camera provided for data collection. To engage in such research with children thus involves openness, experimentation and innovation.

Beyond methods that offer greater scope for children's active participation, some researchers (e.g., Mandell, 1991; Thorne, 1993) actively attempt to understand children's worlds from the inside, by identifying and endeavouring to stop their adult behaviours (e.g., helping and mothering behaviours). Others (e.g., Corsaro & Molinari, 2008) use their foreignness to equate to incompetent adult so children then explain how things are to the researcher. However, no matter what an adult researcher may try, their adulthood cannot be denied, and with this comes different experiences and ways of interpreting the world. Many children are astutely alert to unauthentic adult behaviours. Respectful research requires honest and transparent practices. Take care to explain and discuss the research with children throughout the entire research process. For example in the social justice storytelling study, video footage of the children's storytelling was reviewed with the tellers, so that collective interpretations could be shared and explanation and permission sought to share the footage at a conference, so that the child participants could determine how they were presented in research findings. As Grover (2004) argues, unless children are welcomed as active participants in the research process they will continue to be susceptible to

representations that are imposed on them.

The shift from research on children, to research with children as an act of recognising and addressing the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant (David, Tonkin, Powell, & Anderson, 2005; Grover, 2004) does not mean that this is easily shifted. Power typically remains mostly with the researcher, as it is the researcher who holds a professional role with responsibilities and accountabilities. The influence and power held by researcher cannot be denied. The researcher is the conduit for the research, making final decisions about research directions and determining which story of the research will be told. To honour children's rights, care needs to be taken by researchers when sharing findings to declare their position, their potential to have influence on the data, and negate false claims that the research is pure unadulterated children's voice. For example, in the study of social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship discussed, the storytelling practice was an explicit act of research intervention, so the influence of the storytelling practice needed to be declared. In addition, the way the storyteller/researcher saw the world shaped how the children's comments were heard. Though well-established social structures places greater power and control with the researcher, from a Foucauldian position power is not fixed and will shift as affected by actions (see Foucault, 1989). What is required then is awareness of power and how it plays out in research with children, making it transparent to all involved, voicing and questioning its movement and workings.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored possibilities and considerations for ethical research with children with respect for children's rights. Children are members of society and deserve the right to be engaged with in research as active contributors. To honour respectful practice, researchers involved in research with children need to enact processes for children's informed consent, choice of participation, choice of identity and identity disclosure; and listen to children's research queries, concerns, comments and ideas communicated in whatever way the child chooses. The possibilities for methods discussed are simply possibilities. They are provided as ideas to conceptualise what is possible. Methods need to be determined with the children: they should not be prescribed or predetermined. Research with children requires deep listening and attention to how agency and power are performed between children and adults, with constant critical reflection of practice to seek authenticity, transparency and respect.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How do you view children? How might this impact on the way you engage with children in research?
2. What core principles will guide your ethical practices in research with children?
3. How might you enable children's voice and agency throughout each stage of the research process?

### NOTE

- 1 All children's names mentioned are self-selected pseudonyms.

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