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Child as Researcher: Within and Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract: This article was authored by a university educator and a twelve year-old child. The first author was a visiting teacher to a small, rural, state primary school in Queensland Australia. She spent one day per week for nineteen weeks fostering an inquiry-based stance to teaching and learning. The second author is a student within the researched school. Because research generated and co-authored by a child is a largely unprecedented approach to articles published in scholarly journals, the topics of this inquiry are both the within-school research and the complexity of researching and writing about it. The research uses the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) elements of an educational experience as the framework for data analysis. The goal of this article is to inspire teachers and teacher educators to creatively empower child research. The article offers process implications for teachers and teacher educators seeking to support children as researchers within and beyond the school.

Introduction

The resounding theme of contemporary educational theory is a pedagogical shift from a dissemination model to teaching for active learning through an inquiry-based stance (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Jacobsen & Lock, 2004; Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2003; Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2006; Kane, 2004). An inquiry-based stance modifies the traditional roles of teachers and learners. Teachers are now called to facilitate, support, and inspire the students to actively research and generate knowledge.

The call for authentic child-focused research is beginning to emerge as a significant topic, due to identification of paucity in the education literature (Darbyshire, Schiller, MacDougall, 2005; Smith, Duncan, Marshall, 2005). Smith, Duncan, &

¹ The first author's current affiliation is Bond University. The author was a Visiting Academic to University of Southern Queensland when the research was conducted.

² Madison Hoffman is a 12 year-old primary school student. Her parents have signed informed consent for her actual name to appear in this article. Safety and security issues are assured through non-disclosure of the school and other identifying information. Readers who doubt the authenticity of Madison's contribution should note that in this year's standardised national test, Madison scored above the top ranking in both reading comprehension and writing composition.

Marshall argued, “children’s voice has been conspicuously missing” (p. 474). They described the paradigm shift in the child/adult researcher relational stance as: acknowledgement of children as competent, informed knowers; insight into the importance of listening; refinement of processes to facilitate telling, and; phenomenological commitment to grounding conversation in lived experience. The most renowned translation of child agency theory into practice is found in Edwards, Gandini, and Forman’s (1998) text, *The hundred languages of children*. Notably, even this text which many believe inspired a child agency revolution, does not acknowledge children as authors by including their names in by-lines.

Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed multiple case studies of teachers supporting children to engage in school-based research. Brady (2003) defined pedagogical case as “a real account of a problematic experience in a school or classroom that is written or recorded to facilitate teaching/learning” (p. 2). She explained that efficacious cases are situated, or in other words, are *about something*, building from lived experience. The case studies reviewed below were selected on the basis of three criteria: 1) publication years are post 2000 and are therefore relatively current; 2) the authors explicitly and/or implicitly expressed commitment to child collaboration within school contexts, and; 3) the featured schools and classes emphasized transformation and/or promising pedagogical practices.

Burnett, Dickinson, and Myers (2006) situated their inquiry in the domain of information technology and classroom literacy. The authors supported the children and teachers in the use of communication technologies and inquired into the process and outcomes for two digitally corresponding primary schools in the North of England. The research methods included ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews of children in small groups. Within the body of the articles, the university educator authors presented the children’s input through including direct quotations with the children’s choice of actual names or their self-created digital usernames, and segments of interview transcripts recorded verbatim. The children were treated as research participants or discussants, while the adults were acknowledged as authors.

Meehan, Holmes, and Tangney (2001) inquired into peer tutoring between year five and six female primary students in Ireland. The students learned and taught one another two software programs. The authors explored five themes in the domain of child agency as students and as researchers. 1) Learning through technology creates empowering conditions encouraging critical thinking. 2) Children find the teaching role compelling and emancipating. 3) Blurring the roles between teacher and student facilitates a significant learning dynamic. 4) If hegemonic forces are lifted, children can play an important role beyond knowledge *consumption* to *generation*. 5) It is vital to listen to and share multiple roles and voices. With respect to this final theme, the authors shared verbatim narrative from academics, teachers, and primary school students. Notably, the academics and teachers were acknowledged as authors while the children were not.

Ruttle (2004) profiled three children struggling to improve their composition, and her process journey of supporting them. Her analysis of children's ways of knowing emphasised the importance of facilitating construction of understanding through conversation. She wrote, "during the time that I have been reflecting about children as learners and writers in my own classroom, I have come to believe that the process of dialogic talk underpins all their learning" (p. 77). She provided examples of talk about the stories the children were authoring and about the processes and strategies they used in composition. However, she did not extend her analysis to the hermeneutic conversation about the research and her own writing for publication.

Finally, Vasconcelos (2006) situated her inquiry in an early childhood school in Portugal. She shared verbatim children's conversations about birds and the wind. She interpreted these conversations using theoretical notions such as scaffolding. She reflected on the ethic of care and pedagogy as relationship. She wrote, "pedagogical action becomes an endless attention to the Other, a network of obligation, a locus of profound meaning and fulfilment in an educator's life" (p. 180). Just as Vasconcelos articulated the pedagogical relationship as a shared process of constructing and deriving meaning, so too is the research relationship with children a journey of negotiating understandings and exploring what it means to know together.

While these case studies emphasised and practiced the importance of children's collaboration and personal construction of knowledge within classroom contexts, the authors did not extend these principles and processes beyond the classroom to the research plan, interpretation, or manuscript production. In other words, if we believe that learning is actualised through inquiry, then we should no longer be confining the research practices of children to projects within traditional student roles and school boundaries. Children should be respected as legitimate thinkers and generators of knowledge. The goal of our manuscript is to take the vital acknowledgement of children as "active agents and key informants" (Darbyshire, Schiller & MacDougall, 2005, p. 467) to the next level and demonstrate how to create empowering conditions such that children are invited into the research process as full and authentic partners. This article builds on the existing literature by recording the research process, reflections, and relationship between a primary school child and a visiting teacher from the university. Both partners are acknowledged as full authors. The derived model of authentic child research contributes process implications to teachers and teacher educators.

Case Study

In 2008, the first author was a visiting teacher from a university to a primary state school. She spent one day per week for nineteen weeks as a participant researcher. The context of inquiry was a small, rural, Queensland school. There were two multi-age classes with a total of thirty-two students from five through twelve year-olds. The research goal was to infuse educational technology in the pursuit of an inquiry-based stance to teaching and learning, grounded in the work of Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen (2003), and Jardine, Friesen, and Clifford (2006). Aims for the students of the school were to: 1) inform their identity as members of their local community; 2) scaffold their sense of self-efficacy and help them find and adapt tools to manage their own learning,

and; 3) help them discover multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression through educational technologies (Rose & Meyer, 2006; Rose & Meyer, 2002; Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2005).

This initiative sought to catalyse inquiry-based student work. The students visualised their own projects thereby affording the work perceived value. Because the students were active, reflective participants throughout the process, they were able to articulate their own goals, objectives, and learning outcomes. The process invited in the community, and wrestled with research questions that mattered to that community. For example, one of the groups queried the impact of water patterns of drought and flood on the community's domestic and wild animals. The final products were varied and unique to each learner and learning group. These included: a Website, slideshow, digital movie, podcast, and mountain sculptures. The digital delivery of most of the final projects ensured that the students' work was widely distributed and shared with the community and beyond. In addition, the students hosted a final screening celebration, whereby they shared and celebrated their learning.

Method

The methodology of this research is based on the hermeneutic phenomenological approach of van Manen (2002, 1997). Phenomenology is a methodological approach that affords validity to people's day-to-day experience and the meaning that they perceive in this experience (Moustakas, 1994). The research method of hermeneutics is named for Hermes, a mythological Roman figure who translated messages from the gods into words that mortals could comprehend. Hermeneutics is a deep interpretation of the meaning of human experience (Gadamer, 1999). The combining of hermeneutics and phenomenology in our school-based research meant that we recorded, deeply reflected, and conversed about our day-to-day experiences as a visiting teacher (first author) and student (second author) in a school and then composed our interpretation of what matters about these experiences in the domains of schooling, research, and adult-child shared experience.

We were participant researchers in the school context. As a visiting teacher from the university, the first author engaged in the research process one day per week, withdrawing into other environments and pursuits 80% of her career time. As student in the school research site, the second author was a deeply integrated and embedded participant researcher. Schön (1983) described the interweaving of adult research and practice through becoming reflective practitioners. The second author of this article made a unique contribution to research methodology through extending these principles to children. She lived an enlightened role as student through reflexively researching the meaning of her day-to-day school-based experience. Interpreted through the lens of ethnography (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), this child author achieved the research ideal in that she enacted authentic membership in her research context, but through hermeneutic interpretation for her less-integrated co-author, she managed to step outside of her own immediate experience and reflect upon the significance.

Our research process progressed through four stages. The first stage was the research the children engaged in at school. As participant researchers, we were part of

this process. During the school-based research in stage one, we collected school artefacts such as the children's research plans, scripts, and final research products. Throughout the process, we recorded our field notes and reflections in journals. We interviewed and were interviewed.

Stage two commenced at the conclusion of the in-school research. The first author's time-limited visits from the university to the school drew to an end. The second author continued in the school, living a heightened awareness as student. As collaborative adult and child researchers, we collected data separately apart and collaboratively together. We compiled, highlighted, cut, pasted, and wrote margin notes. We read one another passages of fiction and non-fiction and engaged in dialogic conversation about resonance to our work.

The third stage consisted of shaping our raw data into research results. Like a metaphoric patchwork quilt, sometimes we wrote separately, sewing patches onto the conversational fabric and mailing the incomplete quilt to one another. We replaced numerous patches that no longer matched. We spent long afternoons metaphorically sewing side-by-side on our machines/computers, and then took turns stitching/typing while the other spoke.

The derived results are presented in the format of a cohesive, cross-sectional, linear interview, even though the research process was iterative, longitudinal and multi-faceted. We have formatted our results this way so that readers have immediate access to our unfiltered phenomenological voices in the tradition of feminist theorists such as Haraway (1998), without imposing the burden of sifting through a tome of raw data. The conversation has been compiled and abbreviated from numerous dialogic moments. The final presentation of our results is a synchronous, unified conversation of a rich, complex, multi-situated research process.

The fourth stage consisted of identifying a framework that would enable articulation of the research implications. We modelled our interpretation of the research results on the reflexive analytic process of Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000). We examined and conversed about our research results through the lenses of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory and discourse analysis. The first author recalled prior study of Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) framework of educational experience, and presented this framework to her co-author. Both agreed that this framework resonated with the experience of all stages of this research.

Results

Code:
UR = University Researcher
CR = Child Researcher

The In-School Research

The Beginnings of the In-School Research

UR - Do you recall how this research initiative got started?

CR - I think it started to happen when you came over here from Canada, and you really wanted to know about us and our small school. We showed you a few things, and then I think the project actually started because we realised that we actually didn't know much about our community, and how our town came to be.

Metaphor of the In-School Research

UR - Early on, when we began reflecting together on what was happening at your school, we shared a passion for the frog-in-the-well story. I will try to retell that story here so that our readers can share it with us too. Li Cunxin (2003) wrote his compelling life story in his book, *Mao's last dancer*. When he was close to your age, Li Cunxin lived as a peasant in China, with his mum, dad, and six brothers. Cunxin was selected to train as a ballet dancer. He was sent to a boarding school far from his home and family. He suffered terrible home-sickness. Over many years, and great personal exertion, he grew to love ballet and became very talented. At eighteen, he defected to the United States, and later moved to Australia with his ballerina wife and three children. When still a young child, before his ballet adventure began, his father told him the fable -

The Frog in the Well

Once upon a time, a frog lived in a well that was deep, but with a small diameter. He loved the well. One day he spoke with another frog who peeked down at him from outside the well. The well-frog said, "You should join me down here in the well. We have everything that a frog could desire. There is cool water for swimming and there are currents. During the day, I see blue sky and fluffy white clouds. At night, I see the stars in the sky." The frog above was surprised. He said, "But you only see a very little bit of what there is in the world. There are millions of stars in the sky, and there are so many things you've never even seen." The well-frog did not believe that other frog and became angry at him. Very upset, he turned to his father and asked if it was all true. The well-frog's father replied that it was true. The well-frog asked why he had never been told. His father said that knowing does not help because there is no chance of ever leaving the well. The well is too deep and the sides too slippery. The well-frog was

miserable for the rest of his life, spending every moment trying to escape the well.

Do you recall why we were so taken with this story? What does this metaphor mean to you?

CR - This project is different because it's nothing that any of us have ever experienced. It gives us the opportunity to do things that have never been written down ever before. It's never been recorded. We've experienced a different format and a different medium. I think it's like when it went from slates to textbooks. One of the changes for us is from textbooks to internet. We are like the frog in the well. We had only seen so much of what we can do. With the help of everyone who has done so much within this project, we can get out of our well and see the bigger picture. As someone who needs challenges to excel, I need something different, something to excite me, something to help me be open to learning and everything that comes with it. I feel like that little well-frog, only I found a way out through this project.

UR - You are close to finishing Year Seven, so you are soon off to another adventure in a new school. What if your new teachers and your new school try to *push you back down the well*?

CR - I'm not going to let them. I guess we're just going to have to teach them.

UR - I understand that the metaphor of the frog-in-the-well has taken on some new meanings for you lately because you've participated in a very special writer's workshop, found another book called *The Frog in the Well*, and that you've initiated correspondence with Li Cunxin. Please tell me about all of this.

CR - The writer's workshop let me and two other students experience a lot about the written word and the authors of modern day books. The writer's workshop gave the frog-in-the-well analogy new meaning because these lectures were about understanding stories and metaphors as ways for children to start their own books and adventures. Li Cunxin was one of the guest authors and the frog-in-the-well story was one of the highlighted features of the workshop. It wasn't as new of a learning curve for me as for my friends because I've already started to look at my life in this new way and to write about it. I always yearn to know more and the writer's workshop added to my new way of looking at what I can do.

The Frog In The Well by Tresselt (1958) carried the original analogy like the book by Li Cunxin (2003), but in Tresselt's story, the frog didn't want to change. The little frog is cosy and warm and does not think of the outside world until the loss of water in his well forces him up, up, up into the wide world above. He eventually finds his real home amongst the lily-pads and his kin. To me this means that sometimes we need a reason to leave our comfort zone. We need to be forced. Also, it reminds me that where learning truly takes place is with family and with those friends and teachers who truly love and care about us.

My original e-mail with Li Cunxin was just a general comment about the book and how much I enjoyed it. The reason I contacted him was because I liked the book a lot. Prior to the research we did at our school, I might have had the confidence to contact him, but I would not have been introduced to his book, or really thought about what the frog-in-the-well metaphor means. I think that this research has opened my mind to new ideas and to new books and authors. What amazed me was that Mr. Li wrote back. The way his message was worded made me think it was okay to contact him again to ask if

there was any way I could attend his session at the writer's festival even though it was sold out. He tried, but couldn't get me in. I'm not surprised he was all booked out. It's no wonder he is so popular.

Changing Pedagogy

UR - What is different from what we did together in our school-based research from what you usually experience at school?

CR - We were asked to design and create our research questions ourselves. When you came in and explained that we would be able to ask what we think that we need to know in order to complete and excel in this project, at first we were stumped. What was there to ask? We weren't used to this step in the process. We had always been given the topic and information. It was always as simple as that. If we were given a choice, then it was something like, "We're going to study animals. You choose which one. Then tell us about the animal's size, predators, food, etc." You asked us to be open to wonder. What did we wonder about? Then we actually started to come up with questions. In the end, even the boys were genuinely excited about the Friday to come. Our group decided to research stories about our school and community. For awhile, one of the boys didn't seem very interested. One of the teachers asked him what kind of stories might interest him. He thought and then said that he was interested in what past students are doing now, and whether any of the students had become famous.

When students are asked to come up with their own questions, and then their own plan for researching, it will never be the same. It can't be the same. The outcome will be different depending on who is in the student group, who their parents are, and who the teachers are. Even if our same group would work together again, it wouldn't be the same every time we did it. It will always be different whatever way we choose. It's making everyone and all of our work unique. How we used to do our work, we had a topic and everyone produced the same thing. Now it will be separate, unique, and different.

Epoch

UR - As a researcher, sometimes I learn most about what really went on through a concept called epoch. It basically means *surprise*. Did anything surprise you about our school-based research?

CR - I actually thought that it was going to be all writing down work. I didn't think it was going to be any excursions or anything. It was just going to be all from the internet and all from the library, and we were not going to be able to do anything else. We actually got to do a lot of hands-on activities, going places, noting, writing stories, and listening to stories, watching videos, recreating historical journeys, creating our own Website and something that we wanted to do, and other people *did see*.

Managing the project wasn't the easiest of tasks. Although it took time it was worth it to see the finished product and our plans in action. A few weeks on, I started to realise that we weren't following the schedule set before us, even though we ourselves had designed it. I wondered what was going to happen. That following afternoon I asked

one of my teachers and she told me that sometimes things don't go to plan. I finally took it on, and ever since, this unplanned plan of ours worked brilliantly.

Best Features and Challenges

UR - What were the best features of this work? What are you most proud of? What will you remember? What were some of your favourite moments? What were some of the challenges? Frustrations? Difficult times?

CR - There are positives and negatives to every situation. On this occasion the positives were something that meant a lot to me. One of them was that I became a leader in my group. Some of the group members began to treat me like the teacher or a person with authority, which shocked me. Although it had its ups, it had its downs too. Many of my group thought that I had to supervise their work and keep them in control, as well as be their helper. As a result, sometimes I got hardly any of my work done while everyone else's was completed on time. I think that in time everyone will learn to cooperate together and I won't have to aid as much as I have in the past.

In the first week that we were let free to do whatever we wanted, with free reign, some people misinterpreted the meaning of it, and thought this was an excuse not to work, not to do anything. Some of the children, mostly a group of boys, played games and acted silly instead of working. I think everyone needs to make a mistake in order to realise what is going to work and what isn't. Even if you do make another mistake, it's still alright. This is how we learn and gradually take responsibility for ourselves. Some children are motivated to make the project work, and others are not (especially when there are multi-aged groups). There's a difference between children who are self-motivated and children who think they need to be externally motivated. They feel like they need to have it (rewards and punishments) done, not that they can do it (control themselves). They stress. Like one of our group leaders said, whether you give authority to an older student like me, or a younger student for that matter, it's still the same as the teacher using that authority. It's just another person telling them what to do.

One of the things that matters most about our project is that we became more connected to the community and the people around us. We ran afternoons where people came in and we got to know one another. We had a *Tea and Talk* on a Friday, and about twenty people came in from the community to tell us stories. Some of the people were grandparents of the students, and had been at the school many, many years ago. A lot of people who have information who hadn't ever shared it before came along. We got to know them. Some of us, including our principal and teachers, had the chance to meet some old people who we/they hadn't met for a long time. No one has ever done this here before. It's us writing our own chapter about people before us who have never had this chance. The grandparents would never have dreamed of school like this. It's just amazing!

The Tuesday after our *Tea and Talk*, our teacher organised us into our four groups in four different parts of the school. She asked us to "do a review." Usually when we are asked to do a review, we are all unhappy because it's usually not very exciting. But this was totally different. It was exciting because we were in a group, and we supported one another. The review was about people learning information that they haven't been able to tell everyone before. This was real writing about real experience. Our guests didn't have

to write it down. When they visited with us, they said it in their own words. It didn't matter that it was all over the place. For example, we had one visitor who told us everything before we even asked a question. Through our review it became our job to record the stories and we were honoured by this privilege.

At the start of the group review-writing session, everyone was working really hard without a teacher even being there. I organised them. I put their names on the board and organised them into writing pairs with one older student and one younger student. They were writing up really important information. Two boys were working together really well. The teacher came along and separated them, because she wanted to help the younger boy. The older boy started fooling around and being inappropriate. Then he treated me like a teacher. It was obvious that he wanted me to give him consequences for his behaviour. I found myself doing this, because I knew that if I didn't we wouldn't be allowed to work independently anymore. He started to draw on the blackboard over what I had written. I asked him to sit quietly. I asked him three times, and told him that if he didn't, I'd let the teacher know. The teacher aide sorted them out and we had to go back up to the classroom. We were no longer trusted to work independently that day, and it took a long time to earn their trust to work independently later on.

I think that you need to teach the children again what it's like to be given that responsibility. If I were to start this project again, I'd suggest that the organisers would let go more and more on a gradual basis. For example, the teacher would start out by giving structured tasks and a short time without teacher supervision. Eventually, the teacher will not need to come in at all. The group can be responsible to go and get a teacher if and when they need help.

When the first week arrived to start working by ourselves, some of the people around me thought that this wasn't going to work at all. Well I did. I believed that we could be responsible for our own learning. I and the people in our group were working up in the library. We had one and a half hours to get some thorough work done and we basically had written down 20 names of past students in an hour! One of our teachers came in and started to take control of our group and telling us what to do. Two of the boys started to run around the room like they had nothing better to do while three of the younger students were wasting the whiteboard markers scribbling on the whiteboard. I was at the end of my rope and about to give up when another teacher walked through the door and started to turn our group into a team of researchers. Although we didn't get any written accomplishments done that day I took away the fact that all that our group needed in order to succeed, was a little cooperation and some understanding. She trusted us and believed that we could do it, which helped us believe in ourselves.

Impact Analysis

UR - Has this research work changed you? Changed the other students? Your teachers? Your school?

CR - Our principal has learned something different, outside of and beyond the textbooks. I think it will give him a wider window of opportunity that we wouldn't have been able to be taught by in our usual process. When we had the Friday *Tea and Talk* day, our principal let us do the whole thing. Even though he was with us in the room, it was as if he almost wasn't there; we knew what we needed to do and we did it. I see the

school starting to change beyond the project Fridays. Our teachers are looser and give us more freedom. They seem to trust us more. I think it really is great that we've had this change. Even though, as Year Seven students who are leaving the school next year, we're not going to get the whole benefits, our younger brothers and sisters will. They'll reap the benefits. They'll get a kind of education that no one else in the world has had before. I don't have a clue what will happen next year, but I think that with the influence of my principal, teachers, and the others who have had the experience of this different way of being, we will try to bring something forth like this again.

I think some of the students really took to it and others resented it because it's different. It's just; they're not comfortable with what they think the outcome will be. They're not willing to risk and change. I think that for some people, it wouldn't have really mattered. They would have just continued. They wouldn't have asked or wanted anything different. They like things just the same. They want to be almost exactly the same as everyone else. For the kids who won't accept that they're a frog in the well, they don't know what they're missing out on. If it's always going to be the same as it was before then they haven't really learned much at all.

Meta-Research Conversation (Research Beyond the School)

Child Vulnerability and Consent

UR – In order to come into your school to conduct research, I had to apply for written permission from my university and from the school authority. I also had to have everyone involved in the research, like your teachers and principal, sign that they understood what they were getting themselves into and still agreed to proceed. We created a plain-language version of the research description to ensure that you and each of the other students understood, and then had you sign your consent. Because you are minors, and your parents are therefore responsible for your well-being, we also had your parents sign their consent. Your parents also signed consent that they agree to you having your real name as author on this article.

Nevertheless, as I introduced the idea of this article to my university colleagues, several of them commented that they didn't think that you should be named as author. They said that because you would be identified by name, this would make you vulnerable to harm. My question, following from this long preamble, is do you feel vulnerable with your real name identified through this article once it is published?

CR – The subject of exposure and vulnerability is relevant although I feel that taking the next step to stop my name from being published has gone too far. My name is already published as being in this project from day one along with my other 31 counter-parts. We have been the soul of this project, because I believe that it was always about proving that children should be equal partners in research.

I don't feel vulnerable physically or mentally through being named as author, and both of my parents agreed to it, so I don't feel vulnerable on levels of exposure either. I do understand what your university colleagues are trying to say but personally, it should be mine and your decision to add or remove my name as author on these papers. I don't see how I'm any more vulnerable than you are for having your name identified as author. Someone can Google your name and find out all kinds of information about you too. I have the added advantage of having parents to protect me.

Representation and Exclusion

UR - There were 32 children participating in the school-based component of this research. Yet, there are not 32 child authors of this manuscript. You and I made a connection and decided to engage in the writing of this research together. This raises a number of questions. Does researching your school set you apart from the other children? Have you experienced social problems because of your *special* role? How does it feel to be the only one fulfilling this role? When you write about your experience, do you feel that you are representing the perspectives of your peers or speaking only for yourself?

CR - I think that sometimes people make a connection and work well together and sometimes they don't. I have two sisters and a brother at the school as well. You interviewed them just like you interviewed others at the school. I know that you get along with them well enough and that you like them and they like you. Yet, it was you and I who decided to write together. It wasn't just me either. I also noticed that you worked closely with a year four boy too. No one seemed to get jealous that some of us had bigger roles because there were exciting parts of the whole project for each and every one of us. A few people said before-hand that I had a way with words and I think that accounts for some of the answer as to why you chose me. My peers were very excited for me and they said that they were excited for themselves as well because I was both writing for myself and speaking for them as well. It matters to all of us that children are better represented. With the whole social dilemma that you asked about, nothing has really changed with my friends as a result of my writing with you. I mean of course we talked about the project a lot more, but the whole outcome was positive.

Aims and Goals

UR - My goal for this paper is to raise primary and university teachers' awareness of child voice and to respect children as researchers. I am hoping that some of the people who read this article will decide to research and write with children. But this is my goal. Do you think that it is important for children to be researchers? What is your goal? Why did you decide to put the work into researching, writing and editing this article?

CR - Yes, it's really important for children to be researchers and for people to read their research, especially for rural children. A lot of kids that are from small schools don't get noticed. It's all about the big city. We're just out there and no one really notices us until something really big happens. This project is so good for us, and is also really good for the school. In fact, it's probably good for all small, rural Australian schools to read about what we can accomplish.

No one in the entire history of our community has ever recorded or noted or even written down some of the most interesting and admirable stories I have ever known. That is what this project is about, not taking the answers from teachers and basically copying it down on a sheet of paper, but getting the community involved and restoring those old stories and legends that were here not that long ago.

My goal is to change the way that many teachers and schools do their work. I think it is important for us to do research at school. I want people to understand that, when they read this article. As an outsider, you can't really know what the project is like and is about until you've come to the school and met our teachers and students. This

project wasn't created by someone else and handed to us. It was something different and exciting; it was about our school coming together and wondering. We wanted to find out about our ancestral history and the colourful and wonderful heritage on which our school has come to gain with all the years of knowledge and experience. You need to live in the school to see why our school is so great. Who would be better to research our school and our community? We are in it. We live it every day.

A Friday at school used to be like any other day. Now, we realise how much more there is to grasp, how much more there is to reach towards. On the project, it makes me feel like there's something else to do. It's always going to be exciting and different. Every Friday was always different. It feels like I can go a lot further. About halfway through the project it wasn't just Fridays anymore. Our school seemed small, but now everything feels so much bigger. In a way, I feel bigger. I've never felt this way before. It makes me feel important. It makes me feel equal with the teachers. We're all still different in our own way. We have our separate ways of thinking, and we can express this with our project.

Interpretation

Three themes emerged throughout the analysis of the within-school and beyond-school research results. In order to be a genuine, meaningful educational and inquiry experience, the processes required the interaction of social, cognitive, and teacher/researcher presence. These findings resonate with Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) "elements of an educational experience" (Figure 1).

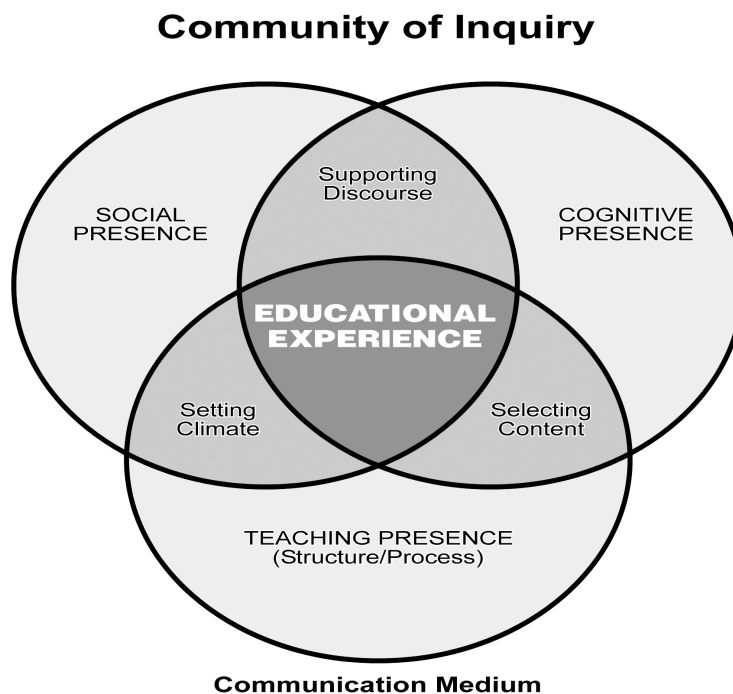


Figure 1: Elements of Educational Experience

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) used their framework to depict the necessary pedagogical elements of online learning in higher education. However, their framework is entirely applicable to face-to-face experience within and beyond primary school. In order to research with children in and beyond the school context, social presence is necessary. Neither learning nor research are solitary pursuits. The results of the school-based case study provided multiple examples of social presence as a fundamental element of inquiry. The children learned together in multi-aged groups. Ms. Hoffman wrote about the value of writing “reviews” collaboratively rather than as individual reports. Multiple times throughout the results section, Ms. Hoffman celebrated the social value of inviting senior community members to share their stories with the children. The basis of the children’s research was the social history of their community.

Likewise, the collaborative research between child and university educator worked largely because of social presence. The first and second authors were present for one another instrumentally and psychologically. Sometimes we wrote together. When we wrote apart we came together through digital means such as email. We gave of ourselves and allowed one another access into our innermost thoughts and reflections. Our ideas and words emerged through a shared space. We observed, questioned, probed and challenged one another’s thinking. We wrote and revised iteratively until we were both satisfied with our shared production.

The second necessary element of an educative and/or epistemological experience is cognitive presence. Ms. Hoffman’s comparison of what she describes as typical school activities such as writing a teacher-assigned categorical report and the research project described in this case study can be summarised in the distinction between work for which children are and are not cognitively present. Ms. Hoffman serves as a spokesperson for children when she states that she wants to be challenged and inspired. She explains that much of school activity can be deadening. The curiosity and wonder with which children primordially greet the world can be extinguished in the routine curriculum and tasks of being schooled. We initiated this children’s research by asking the children to reconnect with their wonder, and we sought to keep this curiosity alive throughout our inquiry.

Cognitive engagement is both a necessary element and rationale for conducting research with children. Meta-reflection is an element of higher order thinking. Ms. Hoffman not only engaged in the school-based research depicted in the case study, but she reflected on and wrote about what matters in this experience. Deep cognitive presence is called upon to produce scholarly inquiry. Through cognitive engagement, Ms. Hoffman built life-skills of critical thinking, spoken and written communications, and analysis. Ms. Hoffman was introduced to scholarly models and articulate literature. Ms. Hoffman reinforced confidence in her own intellectual abilities, preparing her for inquiry in secondary school and beyond.

The final type of presence that is a necessary condition of educational and knowledge experience is teacher/researcher presence. Within the school-based research, Ms. Hoffman shares multiple anecdotes about the role of the teacher. Ms. Hoffman shares two recommendations for teachers of an inquiry-based stance. First, remain present and available for the learners in both a cognitive and disciplinary sense. Students require guidance as to appropriate questions and research methodologies. Children require some external guidance as to how to conduct themselves appropriately and stay on task in groups. Ms. Hoffman interpreted her experience as demonstrating that if an adult teacher

is not available to maintain group discipline, then the children will pull disciplinary behaviour from a substitute, even if that person is a student colleague. Second, fade physical presence gradually and intentionally. Ms. Hoffman believes that children require extensive supervision in the early stages of student-centered research. The children require the comfort of some external controls given the disequilibrium of ambiguous cognitive pursuits. Ms. Hoffman urges the teacher to be intentional and explicit about the process, directly explaining to the children that she is gradually giving them more control and responsibility. While teacher presence is always going to be necessary in a quality educative experience, the time and control of that presence should be flexible and negotiable.

Likewise, the authors of this manuscript agree that the text emerged through collaborative presence. Ms. Hoffman would not have been inspired to write this article on her own. She would not have known how. She would not have weathered the storms of rethinking and revision. The first author served as a mentor to the second author. We explicitly addressed the who, what, where, when, how, and why of research and authorship. Notably, just as the child researcher needed the adult researcher, the adult researcher needed the child. The first author is a visitor to the school and to children's epistemologies. Ms. Hoffman is a rightful member of the school context and allowed her co-author access to her thinking. In summary, it is through collaboration, or in other words, social presence, including the presence of teachers/researchers, in a rich cognitive context, that meaningful research takes place within and beyond the school.

Conclusion

Child Researcher - This research project is a bright green and orange Australian banner being waved around the world and saying, "Look out, because kids can do anything!" This project has given more insight into how a howling classroom full of regular kids can become real-life phenomenologists and researchers. This project has given more teachers more understanding into the world of how children think. This project gave our school the benefit of notification to the world outside our little community. Our research results are being taken around Australia in an attempt to help other frogs/schools stuck in their own little wells. This project has given us a change of mind from our belief in the single-minded ways of thinking and composing research projects. We have learned that in order for research to make a difference in schools and communities, children and adults must learn together, each teaching the other, and that the adults must trust the children to think and inspire them to really challenge themselves intellectually. This project is the beginning of a new era in educating the young versions of tomorrow.

Implications for Primary School Teachers

1. We advocate the collaborative construction of plain language proposals and plans. The proposal should be accessible and usable by the children whose learning is impacted.

2. The children must be invited into the entire process, including reflection and revising. As Ms. Hoffman's writing evidences, children are capable of profound thinking and complex problem-solving. We only need trust, and convey this trust through invitation.
3. School activity need not be insular. Our experience demonstrated that the community was happy to be invited. Their contribution was profound.
4. We are motivated by that which makes us wonder. People's curiosity is ignited by different experiences and diverse questions. Just as adult researchers dedicate themselves to inquiries that personally compel, children as learners (i.e. student researchers) should be supported in pursuing questions and research of personal and contextual relevance.
5. We re-learned our life lessons about planning processes; human beings require some structure to vision, and then the flexibility and freedom to allow those dreams to take form.
6. Children require teachers to be physically and psychologically present. Provide more intensive disciplinary guidance in the initial stages when the children are experiencing cognitive disequilibrium, and then fade these supports allowing the children to build higher levels of self-management.
7. The children's work was real, valuable, and wonderful, and we treated it as such by catalyzing an authentic community audience.

Implications for Teacher Educators

1. Inspire pre- and in-service teachers with case studies of school-based research.
2. Model the use of metaphor as a research and meta-research tool.
3. Consider authentic research partners beyond academic colleagues. Consider researching and writing with children, students, teachers, and other school-based personnel.
4. Social presence is a necessary element of the research experience. Engage in dialogic conversation and examine research through situated lenses.
5. Meaningful research requires cognitive presence. Manuscripts that have an impact on new knowledge are those that are written in the context of compelling questions and higher order thinking.
6. Experienced researchers are necessary mentors for emerging researchers. The junior partner brings fresh insights, whereas the experienced researcher is able to lead and model the process.

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