

Ethical Issues Facing Researchers Working with Children in International Contexts

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As international research collaborations increase, the ethics of doing research involving children and their families has emerged as a significant and challenging aspect of the process. Potential issues include procedures around gaining consent, assumptions about children and their families, and the use of qualitative and participatory-based research methods. This paper poses some of the difficulties faced by scholars working in international contexts, describes what these issues look like within four current approaches to research with children, and offers recommendations for researching in diverse contexts.

Keywords: ethics, international, children, research

Inherent in globalization and internationalization is the increasing presence of researchers from the West working in non-Western contexts. Those conducting research with children in such contexts invariably take with them Western conceptions of children, families, and research. Much of this research is rooted in initiatives and interventions that aim to “fix” children (and families), employ a scientific or positivistic research paradigm, and are sponsored by funders that demand measurable accountability. The emergence of children’s right “to be properly researched” (Ennew, Abebe, Bangyani, Karapituck, Kjørholt, & Noonsup, 2009), the development of qualitative and participatory-based paradigms of research with children, and the proliferation of ethical approval procedures are current reference points for planning and conducting research with children, not only in Euro-Western countries, but, by default, in the Global South. This paper problematizes expectations of a seamless transfer of current

assumptions about and procedures of research with children in the Global South.

While recognizing the common challenge to all researchers as one of ethically and respectfully engaging participants in protective and beneficial ways, we argue that other issues are largely unaddressed. These include recognizing the need to work within the local ethos, viewing the ultimate aim of research of the world’s most vulnerable children as empowerment, and reconsidering the role of the researcher in such advocacy. In this paper, we discuss the intentions and concerns of major approaches to researching young children—and the limits of these approaches. We argue against imposing Western norms and standards or seeking universalist principles of ethical research, and promote recognizing the particularities and situatedness of research ethics. We reflect on our own experiences as Canadian, white, middle-class researchers working in the Global South in early literacy projects as the locus for understanding our own research processes with an emphasis on developing a situational ethics approach for research in the Global South.

Over the past two decades, the movement to rights-based participatory research with children has propelled ethical matters to the forefront (Childwatch International Research Network, n.d.; Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, & Fitzgerald, 2013; Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor, & Graham, 2012). Spurred by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (UNICEF, 2014), rights-protecting procedures have been instituted in many countries. As well, the emergence of the sociology of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 2002) has engendered development of a wide array of participatory methods to enable children’s voices, agency, and investment in the research process. However, from an international standpoint, the wide use of rights-based, participatory approaches

to research and the ensuing knowledge from this research are norms of questionable validity given that, as Pence and Nsamenang (2008) argue, “only a little more than 10% of the world’s children live in the developed countries of Europe, North America and other European outposts ... yet the research [underlying this perspective] is heavily concentrated on children from these places” (p. 14).

In Euro-Western countries, critical discussions of rights-based and participatory approaches to research with children are underway (Alderson, 2012, 2013; Dalli & Te One, 2012; Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2010; Palaiologou, 2014; Skelton, 2008). Parallel discussions are emerging among researchers of children in Indigenous communities (Anderson & Morrison, 2011; Smith, 2012; van der Woerd & Cox, 2006) and in communities of the Global South (Abebe, 2009; Abebe & Bessell, 2014; Clacherty & Donald, 2007; Ebrahim, 2010; Morrow, 2009; Powell et al., 2012; Tekola, Griffin, & Camfield, 2009; Vakaoti, 2009). This paper links these separate discussions, describes research tensions encountered by the authors from the lenses of four current approaches to researching young children, and argues for a universally endorsed contextualized ethical praxis of research.

Background: Shifting Concepts, Principles, and Methodologies

Ethical issues of research with children are embedded in diverse and shifting paradigms of children, childhood, and research that are embodied in theory, policy, and research discourses. In the Euro-Western world, cognitive and social developmental theories have informed early childhood curriculum (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009) and a scientific approach to studying children’s development has shaped research discourse (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Recent participatory discourses of research *with* children position the child as key informant about matters of childhood. Instead of viewing children as becoming adults through key stages, the sociology of childhood positions children as already competent beings and as “beings rather than becomings” (Qvortrup, 1994) and as “social agents, beings in their own right and experts in their own lives, whose ‘voices’ are nonetheless routinely ignored or misrepresented by adults” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 24). Educational policy/curriculum aligned with this view typically stresses the inquiring and expressive needs of the child.

In contrast, Indigenous children in Canada learn through “good walks and good talks” with those with more wisdom than the child (Hare, 2005) rather than through direct explanation. School curriculum for Indigenous children has moved from colonial models to approaches grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.). Similarly, research with Indigenous children utilizes traditional Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, ecological approaches, and ceremonial teachings (Indigenous Child Well-being Research Network, 2013).

The idea of childhood as a state of innocence and a unique stage of life marked with intellectual, emotional, moral, social, and physical indicators is largely a Western one. Across history and cultures, children have been situated as an economic resource, immature adults, burdens, gifts, and evidence of social status. As socially constructed and contextually specific concepts, King (2007) notes,

there is no definitive or universal account of what childhood is or what children should be. All is relative and depends upon particular constructions of childhood of different societies or of the same society at different times and the expectations associated with children (and adults) resulting from these constructions. (p. 186)

Tied closely to these concepts of children are patterns of adult-child relationships which include child as passively subservient and adult as authority, and child as independent being and adult as friendly guide.

As with the contrasts in discourses between Euro-Western and Indigenous peoples, differences are especially marked between minority and majority world countries and thus the collisions and conundrums that arise in international research. As Pain (2008) observes, understandings and practices of ethics are “socioculturally and contextually specific so may not be shared by researcher and researched” (p. 105). Different views of ethics, privileging of different research paradigms, and varying concepts of childhood produce a complex interwoven terrain of often unexamined assumptions, values, and beliefs shaping research involving children.

The following section presents four approaches to researching children derived from a review of the literature on ethical matters of research involving children: (a) adultist/scientific; (b) child rights-based / protectionist; (c) children’s movement; and (d) critical reflexivity. The approaches relate to views of children broadly and are reflected or enacted within the research process, methodological frameworks, and research methods. The first approach is historically rooted in medical views of research and basically seeks to identify conditions most beneficial to children’s development; the second and third essentially reflect white, middle-class, and Eurocentric perspectives of

children for the purpose of gaining in-depth knowledge about children in those groups; and the fourth is emerging from viewing the purpose of research as social change and the need for critical awareness of the local ethos to gain full trust of highly vulnerable children. Each approach is undergirded by socially and culturally held views of children, childhood, and adult-child relationships.

Approaches to Researching Children: On, About, With, For, and By Children

Contemporary principles of ethical research with children evolved from the Nuremberg Code (1947) which spelled out the need for benefits and protection from harm for research participants. Directed to medical research at first, these principles were slowly included in the social sciences for all people and specifically for vulnerable groups and children. The UNCRC (UNICEF, 2014) and the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) are landmark proclamations that established principles and protocols for institutional review boards (IRBs) for the protection of all children.

Adultist/scientific: Research on and about children

Historically rooted in the transfer of medical research standards to the social sciences, the adultist approach aligns with the positivist or scientific research paradigm. Most typically used in medical and psychological domains, research is *on* children. The child is positioned as subject and the adult as authority. Interventions, treatments, tests, and observation are primary research methods. Research sites are often laboratories and decontextualized learning settings rather than home, school, and community. Children are not informed or only minimally informed about benefits the research could contribute to their lives, and they do not participate in any direct way in any part of the research process. Examples include pre- and post-test instructional or program interventions, ethnographic studies of children's play or cross-cultural play in which data is limited to observation, and studies of child nutrition in which parents are the sole informants, often through questionnaires. For example, in Arojjo and Nyonyintono's (2009) review of 83 studies involving African children, they distinguish research *on* and *about* children in terms of data collection methods. They conclude that "in research on children, children are researched as objects with little agency (27/83 of studies) . . . Research about children involves the exploration of children's issues with adults speaking on behalf of the children (24/83 of the studies)" (p. 36).

Although the review data cited above pertains to research done in Africa, the scientific approach is prevalent in other regions. Current Western literacy policies such as *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) reinforce this approach. Also, well-funded large-scale responses to the millennium development goals concerning early education and literacy (e.g., Literacy Boost) are imbued with data collection *on* children in the programs. Ethical review processes for educational research are often not required in countries of the Global South. Review boards primarily serve researchers in biomedical and public health sciences. We encountered this quandary when we were part of an Ethiopian-based research team for various literacy initiatives. When we questioned the lack of consent and assent procedures as part of the data collection team, the program director of an Ethiopian NGO explained that it is acceptable by the government to collect data, including photographs of children, without any formal review process if it is for educational purposes (Alemu Abebe, personal communication, February 2014).

Rights-based/protectionist: Research with children

The rights-based or protectionist approach also has roots in human rights and medical principles of research rights of children as grounded in the internationally endorsed UNCRC, specifically in Articles 5, 12, 13, and 17. Together, these articles recognize children's vulnerability and lack of power in matters pertaining to their own lives as well as their entitlement to express opinions in all matters of their lives, which, in turn "helps children bring about the realization of all their rights and prepares them for an active role in society" (UNICEF, 2014, n.p.). Ethical issues discussed in the rights-based literature are informed consent, protection from harm, anonymity and confidentiality, and payments and gifts.

To instantiate children's right to express opinions in research, researchers employ theories and methods that authorize children to actively represent their perceptions of issues in their lives. A qualitative, constructivist research paradigm facilitates this goal. Flowing from these cornerstone concepts of child rights and the child as a competent being is a shift in research methods from testing and observation to a wide range of child-friendly participatory methods. These include drawing, writing, dramatizing, story writing, talking, taking photographs, and making things. Children also have a voice in how these artefacts are interpreted. Integral to the successful application of these concepts and methods is the changed role of the researcher from authority to friendly adult.

One of our projects focused on young children's perceptions of the uses and forms of reading and writing in two countries (Canada and Ethiopia). The project was led by researchers and their graduate students from major universities in each country, using the same research questions and methods. The introduction of participatory methods—in this case, children's photography and narrations about their photos—was a novelty for the Ethiopian researchers. Digital cameras were provided to the research team in Ethiopia. Lively discussions between the research teams (on the ground in Ethiopia) about the benefits of these methods, followed by some informal piloting with the researchers' children, convinced the Ethiopian researchers to conduct the study in the same way as the Canadian team. Some of the differences in conducting the studies were that the Ethiopian children had never used a digital camera, but they quickly caught on. There were also differences with the ethical review process between the institutions. The Canadian team went through the stringent approval process required by the Canadian IRB. While the Canadian participants were guided to take photos that did not include people, this was not a concern in the Ethiopian study. For example, the Ethiopian children took photos of their friends reading and writing. When we asked the lead Ethiopian researcher about the approval process in the university, he explained that as dean he vetted all research applications. It was difficult to get clear answers about any requirements for consent and assent, and it was often mentioned in these conversations that many people are not literate and that oral consent is a common method. However, we never were able to ascertain the particulars of the approval process for this project. This became a problem when the teams planned coauthored conference presentations, papers, and manuscripts. The Canadian IRB advised us that as long as the Ethiopian data collection had met the Ethiopian institution's approval process, it was acceptable to coauthor using both sets of data. We have acted on this instruction but remain uncomfortable using the Ethiopian photos with people, including children, in them. Thus, although the UNCRC is touted as an international document, and although "basic" participatory methods of research could be presumed to be universal, our experience with this project challenged these premises.

Children's movement: Research with, for, and by children

The line between rights-based/protectionist research and the children's movement blurs around the purpose of participatory methods and the position of the child within the research context. In the rights-based/protectionist school, children are primarily viewed as vulnerable and needing protection. In contrast, the children's movement focuses on the child's agency and competence in contributing to all stages of the research process for the purpose of becoming empowered through research. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) explain that "researchers should be attentive to the peculiarities and specificities of individual childhoods as geographically, historically and socially situated" (p. 501). In this way, it is not sufficient to carry out research *on* or *about* childhood; childhood researchers must research *for* and *with* children (e.g., Cairns, 2001; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Mayall, 2002). In the children's movement, "participation has become both an *aim* and a *tool* in an ethical quest towards 'empowering' children" (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, pp. 500–501, emphasis in original).

Compared to the child-rights-based approach that positions children as an oppressed minority, the children's movement privileges children as experts on their own lives. Furthermore, researchers "involve children in meaningful ways such as formulating the research questions, planning the methodology, collecting and/or analyzing data, drafting recommendations and disseminating findings" (Coad & Evans, 2008, p. 43). Within this approach, Lundy and McEvoy (2012) draw on the UNCRC to emphasize researchers' responsibilities of ensuring that

in appropriate circumstances, children are given information (Articles 13, 17) and adult guidance (Article 5) while their views are in formation, in order to be assisted in determining and expressing what will then be both a formed and informed view (Article 12). (p. 140)

Marsh (2012) proposes that children's critical role in the research process go beyond that of active participants to "knowledge brokers." In this way, participatory research with children is not just about child-centred data collection and interpretation, but ultimately is a means of agency and empowerment for children. In both the child rights and children's movement approaches, adults take on roles as atypical adult, incompetent adult, adult-child model, and familiar adult (Corsaro, 2005) to gain trust and establish rapport.

Neither rights-based nor children's movement approaches is without criticism (Coad & Evans, 2008; Dockett et al, 2009; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). First, it is argued that these approaches are not directly grounded in the UNCRC because the Convention does not explicitly address the right to be researched. Second, and more concerning, is the underlying naive relationship between researcher and child, including that of equals, child as privileged information holder, and researcher as benevolent portal of the child's need for voice to be released. There is a growing argument that complex understandings about children, families, and ethics, along with profound responsibilities of the researcher, must be more forthrightly acknowledged by those taking such research perspectives with children. As Alderson (2012) comments on a previously published editorial about rights-based research,

[we] support young participants' agency, but they [the researchers being critiqued] present a one-sided theme of beneficent expert researchers providing children with opportunities to take part in research, instead of examining deeper historical concerns. These concerns include how to define, respect and promote the rights and informed autonomy of participants at every stage of research through to the potential influence on policy and practice and on professional and public opinion, which affect children's daily lives. (p. 238)

In our own experiences with research and young children in East Africa, we never encountered anything like the children's movement. We speculate that this is primarily due to the local ethos where children are seen more as subjects rather than co-researchers in exploring research questions. Children are regarded as neither engaged with nor impacted directly by the research rather than being recognized that they may have something important to inform the research processes and outcomes.

Critical reflexivity: Research for children

The approaches to researching with children described above have been applied primarily in Euro-Western contexts and assume particular conceptions of children and families. An emerging movement in international research with children from non-Western cultures is being led by postmodern and poststructural social geographers. Their work primarily consists of sociological and epidemiological studies conducted with highly vulnerable groups. Research methods used in the multipronged Young Lives project provide robust examples of critical reflexivity as an essential feature of qualitative research. This long-term study of children of poverty in four developing countries has inaugurated extensive and in-depth examinations of and guidelines for ethical issues raised in this type of research (e.g., Morrow, 2009). Researchers have documented and reflected on the challenges of deeply and respectfully understanding children's lives and the necessity for critical reflexivity in such contexts (Abebe, 2009; Skovdale & Abebe, 2012; Tekola et al., 2009).

Reflexivity involves multiple dimensions of research and includes trust, consent, privacy and confidentiality, parents' fears, power differentials, reciprocity, long-term relationships, and archiving (Morrow, 2009). Powell et al. (2012) explain that "reflexivity is a means of managing the gap between adult researchers and child participants by encouraging self-awareness on the part of the researcher regarding assumptions about childhood and how this may influence the research process" (p. 4). All participatory research with children must be reflexive and not undertaken as status quo. Involving children in participatory research in the Global South while adhering to Global North standards is problematic in unanticipated ways. Abebe's (2009) reflection on his fieldwork in Ethiopia with young children, as part of the Young Lives project, resonates with ours in that the research "entails a moral consideration grounded in respect for local, gendered and socio-spatial constructions of childhood and the need to go beyond acknowledging such complexities to ask how moral and ethical spaces are (re-)produced and who they actually serve" (p. 463). Letters of consent required by IRBs—essentially concerned with risk management and therefore legalities—are likely incomprehensible to many participants. While in a legal sense researchers act ethically, they could be engaging in highly unethical practice. Lund (2007) shows through case studies of children in non-Western contexts how "participation methods may be embedded in external structural forces related to globalisation and geopolitics ... through their participation, [children] may be exposed to direct violation and fear" (p. 131). In this view, all aspects of participation must be acknowledged and acted on before participation can begin to address the UNCRC's rationale for the rights of children to improve their own lives.

A few examples illustrate the complex challenges of deeply and reflexively contextualizing research. Tekola, Griffin, and Camfield (2009) describe the difficulties of gaining trust and consent and using task-based participatory methods in fieldwork in Ethiopia:

A number of people came to beg me to put their children's name on my 'list' thinking that they might get money or free health care for their children. Additionally, almost all the children found it difficult to express themselves through task-based activities particularly drawings and time lines ... as part of an 'oral culture' the children are not accustomed to communicating by pictures or timelines. (p. 13)

Abebe (2009) relates his own experiences of finding public spaces more conducive to meaningful talk with participants rather than the children's one-room homes. Heated debates about paying vulnerable children, especially the beggars and very poor, are unresolved and arguments for and against are equally persuasive. Alderson and Morrow (2011) describe the dilemma of explaining the need for archiving data to participants in countries where government access to such data could endanger them and their families. Gatekeepers at all levels must be consulted and their approval granted. Knowing the inner workings and cultural nuances of these institutional, community, and family gatekeepers is particularly challenging for those from outside as well as for those inside the larger culture (Abebe, 2009; Jirata, 2013).

Our own experiences with a family literacy project of an Ethiopian NGO in which we played significant roles designing the research components spoke loudly to the complexities beyond recognizing the implications for research from the UNCRC. As Western “experts” visiting the project sites in rural areas of the country, we were caught in hierarchies of relationships and power, including the families of the participating children, the community and governing body in which the projects took place, the local facilitators of the program, the NGO program director, and, on one visit, the NGO director. In these circumstances, above and beyond the obvious language barrier, we withdrew from any data collection activities and took a quiet backseat observer role. We recognized that we were not the purveyors of this research as we would be normally in our research work. This became an awakening that as traditional Western researchers, we were facing a new research process. This heightened our awareness of the issues of ethics and forced us to acknowledge that these are just some of the common matters that are less considered by Euro-Western researchers when engaged in the new internationalism of researching children.

Discussion

As argued by Graham et al. (2013), new directions for the ethics of research involving children need to go further than those currently “circumscribed by concerns about conduct and guided by compliance-focused exercises” (p. 11). Similarly, Powell et al. (2012) recommend “the potential use of the UNCRC in progressing ethical research with children and fostering dialogue regarding research ethics in Majority and Minority world contexts” (p. 5). In research involving children, we can look within our own national borders to encounter diverse perspectives and practices about children and research. In 1999, most African countries endorsed the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNICEF, n.d.). The Charter “was created partly to complement the CRC, but also because African countries were under-represented in the drafting process of the CRC, and many felt another treaty was needed to address the specific realities of children in Africa” (UNICEF, n.d.) Moving toward inclusive and respectful ethical research that encompasses scholars from and contexts of majority world countries as well as Canada’s Indigenous and culturally diverse peoples requires rethinking roles and responsibilities as researchers. The examples above show the challenges facing privileged Euro-Western assumptions and practices about research and epistemology.

Debates between protectionist and participation discourses pervade the literature on the merits and “rightness” of approaches to research involving young children. However, Graham et al. (2013, p. 4) propose that conventions of ethical research such as internal research boards requirements, matters directly pertaining to the UNCRC, and the worldly/social position of child participants are not in and of themselves the determinants of the participants’ inclusion or exclusion in any research. Rather, they are points of information. A growing position is that the heart of research ethics is continuous critical reflection on the multiple relationships at all points of the research, hence “the important role of dialogue, collaboration and critically reflective practice in navigating the uncertainty that often arises in ethical decision-making” (Graham et al., 2013, p. 4). This is particularly urgent for researchers working in the majority world, where potential for unanticipated problems arising from unique social, cultural, political, and religious contexts are magnified. Abebe (2009) reflects on his relationships with acutely vulnerable children of poverty in Ethiopia:

I became compelled not to detach myself from their circumstances ... reciprocal relationships have nurtured the research space in many fruitful ways ... reciprocity ... reflects how ethical spatiality is the product of interrelationships ... and that dominant ethical principles are actually lived in, reproduced and experienced by research participants through interactions. (p. 461)

Alderson (2013) puts aside the need for protectionist-participation debate and argues that “critical analysis of current contradictory theories in childhood studies, to map new areas between the extremes of relativist social constructionism and naive positivism, is needed in order to develop new approaches to rights-respecting research with children” (p. 238). Palaiologou (2014) goes further by presenting the need for a Freirean notion of ethical praxis characterized as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2007, p. 8). Thus Palaiologou (2014) contends that

although participation is a vitally important element in researching young children, the discourse of children’s participation should be focused additionally on ethical praxis of the research [thus] ... all methods become relevant to research with children when ethical praxis characterises the nature of the project. (p. 689)

Such perspectives align with discussions about researchers taking a transformative stance to enable research as a way of contributing to the enhancement of human rights and social change (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2008).

Our work in rural Ethiopia included multiple data collection methods consisting of familiar participatory methods as well as pre- and

post-project assessments of early literacy. We were committed to developing culturally and linguistically relevant tasks, not simply buying into the predominantly used Western-based measures such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). The development process was cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary, with a few Western early literacy “experts” introducing some alternatives to the standard assessments. In conversation with local Ethiopians, we encouraged them to further adapt the items and larger processes of the project framed by us (the Western “literacy experts”) to account for such factors as the particular social contexts in which the program and assessments would be carried out, the normative structures of oral mother-tongue texts, and how oral culture and literature might be most authentically captured in the process of formatting children’s reading material for the program. This international and intercultural process was intended to deconstruct Western assumptions about early literacy indicators (rather than blithely imposing them), analyze and construct valid local indicators (both in content and administration), and build respectful and meaningful tasks for further literacy research. Much negotiation took place because the Ethiopian favouring of Western norms of literacy had to be respectfully discussed. In Ethiopia, where the pressure from the government is on all organizations and institutions to support the national goal of joining the global economy, following Western norms of practice was obviously a more likely route to children’s literacy than inventing practices more aligned with the local ethos. Additionally, this particular project was funded by a prominent Western philanthropic organization that held extensive workshops for the local leaders and enforced continuous monitoring of the impact of the program, all of which stressed project promotion and empirical evidence of impact.

There is growing consensus that universality of ethical codes and mechanical procedures is untenable and that what is needed is recognition of how local contextual frameworks could be employed. Graham et al. (2013) argue for a flexible framework of “internationally agreed ethical guidelines and principles that can be applied across multiple contexts” (p. 13). Skelton (2008) outlined the profound social and cultural differences in family and household formation in the Caribbean that challenged her Western university’s institutional ethical requirements and assumptions, particularly around the consent process. She questions whether ethical frameworks developed in Western universities can be valid for research in other cultures, and notes that “ethical research guidelines could be yet another Western construct that create a global discourse of ‘our way’ is the ‘right way’ to do things” (p. 29).

Skovdale and Abebe (2012) argue that doing ethical research with children should not be based solely on dominant and decontextualized understandings of ethics, knowledge, and social relations, but should be negotiated reflexively and through dialogue with participants, including the children, their guardians, and local community members—all with the aim of doing good and avoiding harm in the research process. The basic principles of respect for autonomy, beneficence, and justice provide a universal framework and underpin ethical issues; however, the ethical and moral dilemmas that arise during the research process are shaped by the specific contexts in which the research is conducted, which includes views of children and adult-child relationships among broader social, economic, political, and religious contexts.

Clacherty and Donald (2007) consider unequivocally that the key ethical principles in research are universal. However, they assert that “the interpretation and application of ethical principles with different groups of children in different social contexts must take varying factors into account. This requires flexibility and often complex decision-making” (p. 147). In sum, the literature reveals the impracticality of universal ethical codes and calls instead for “situational ethics” (Ebrahim, 2010). In the critical reflexivity perspective of research with children, such matters of consent, protection from harm, confidentiality, payment, power disparities, and authenticity in representation of children’s views are critiqued and negotiated so that ethics are used to “promote exploration and examination of dilemmas, rather than purely as a basis for rules of research conduct” (Powell et al., 2012, p. 1).

However, such flexible and contextualized frameworks may run into problems when applied. In many majority world countries, research *with* children participating (rather than research *on* children) is relatively new. There is a lack of regulatory mechanisms and monitoring of research projects (Leach, 2006) and a greater need to ensure that children are protected and respected (Vakaoti, 2009). Thus another perspective from the flexible, contextualized one arises from the lack of regulatory mechanisms in some majority world contexts, which places the onus on researchers and the institutions to which they belong (Leach, 2006). Leach (2006) argues that it is important for national authorities and research sponsors to put clear ethical codes in place along with transparent and rigorous systems of approving research proposals in order to meet research challenges. Here once again, privilege and power are assigned to such official discourses, removing opportunity to build local frameworks for collaborative negotiation. Canada’s *TriCouncil Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) addresses the ethical review challenges facing Canadian researchers with projects “involving multiple institutions and/or multiple REBs, researchers and REBs ... [they] should select the most appropriate research ethics review model from among those authorized by their institution” (Section 8.2).

The current “children in crises” focus influencing many non-Western researchers often arises because they assume that African (or other

majority world) children and families are not doing what those of us in the West think is “natural,” “proper,” and “the right way.” What is needed is a shift to “understanding the unique and rich sociocultural milieu in which African children are raised and how that makes them the people they are and are capable of becoming” (Shung-King, September, Okatcha, & Cardoso, 2008, p. 27). Possibilities for research with this asset focus are tied to funding sources. The major funders of research involving African children are international aid organizations, NGOs, and global sources such as the World Bank and UNESCO—all of which have common agendas tied to the millennium development goals and its crisis packaging. Thus another challenge to the type of scholarly research involving children in Africa advocated by Shung-King et al. (2008) is competing with well-established large funders.

A contemporary view of ethics shifts from codified practices to new skills in becoming aware of latent or unasked problems and questions and dealing with conflict, disagreement, and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it (Alderson, 2005; Powell et al., 2012). Ethical dilemmas are going to exist and are situational, requiring the ability to respond to unanticipated events. Given this stance, countries in both the Global North and the Global South are exploring new approaches to research with children, engaging in critical discussions about the conceptual and ethical assumptions and implications of these approaches, and developing guidelines and resources addressing dilemmas arising from the new ethical terrain of research with children.

Although originally bounded by borders between the geographical Global North and South, activities and conversations about ethical research with children are moving toward a central vision (Abebe & Bessell, 2014). This article traced the state of research with children in separate worlds and in so doing indicated their commonalities and priorities of ensuring maximally ethical research with children in terms of both process and benefit. Such informal comparative perspectives of research with children is the contribution of a historical and cultural framework for understanding North and South research but more importantly for explicating concepts and practices held in developed and developing countries that affect the actual enactment of notions of a global knowledge community. These in turn give rise to ethical and procedural questions that pervade the entire research process, requiring researchers and their collaborators to recognize the importance of considering ideas such as the few with which we end our discussion.

Recommendations

While various approaches to researching young children are practiced, there is no singular “best” approach, especially when applied to international contexts. As always, methods fall out of the research questions, the values and positions of the researcher, and consideration of the application of methods to particular contexts. Diverse and complex contexts are to be found in both the Global North and the Global South, which necessitates researchers in all contexts to anticipate them reflexively and think of ways to address them in the field. In all cultural contexts of researching young children, researchers need to examine ways in which Western ethical review policies and processes can provide for cross-cultural research with children in culturally diverse Euro-Western contexts and internationally. The following recommendations provide a start to this examination.

1. *Approach international research collaborations as opportunities for dialogues about ethical requirements, protocols, and monitoring.* Do not assume that your institution’s requirements for obtaining ethical approval of a study provide ethical access to children who will be recruited for participation. The same applies to ethical approval from a collaborator’s institution (which may have different standards). In many communities, children are protected as much by political and cultural/social gatekeepers as they are by their parents. You will need to gain their trust and consent even if it is informal. Canadians should refer to section 8 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) for specific direction.
2. *Uphold the prevalent place of ethics throughout the design, conduct, and dissemination of research.* Ethics is not a separate part of the research, nor does it take place at a certain time in the designing. Ethical codes need to be iterative and responsive, which does not fit the standard format of knowing in advance what will happen and how it will be managed, as is generally required by ethics committees. It is essential to consider ethical issues at the outset and throughout the research process, from conceptualization to post-dissemination (Graham et al., 2013, p. 3).
3. *Apply ethical codes as continuous problem solving.* Protocols for all phases of a critically reflexive approach to research with young children have been developed. For example, see the protocol for the Young Lives project (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). The aim was to provide an international handbook on research ethics that not only spelled out the planning, data collecting, and interpreting/writing stages, but more importantly expanded traditional rigid and narrow guidelines with questions about what

researchers can learn from reflecting on their own moral feelings and relationships during research, how the broader social context affects research with children, how research affects all children beyond gaining and applying ethical principles, and how the researcher, on their own in actual situations, acts with high degrees of self-awareness of varying factors and flexible and complex decision-making abilities.

4. *Be mindful of the multiple relational aspects of research ethics.* If research positions children as social actors, knowledge brokers, voices, and agents of their lives, the child-adult/researcher relationship shifts dramatically. The approach advocated by *Ethical Research Involving Children* (Graham et al, 2013) is underpinned by the core principles of respect, benefit, and justice. Dockett et al. (2009) explain that both data generation and interpretation are the result of intercultural collaboration (p. 290). Following from this, Christiansen and Prout (2002) argue for ethical symmetry in new models of critically reflexive participatory research in which “dialogue is required on two levels: between researchers as a means of collectively sharing experience; and between researchers and children as participants in the ongoing research process” (p. 477). Abebe (2009) learned to value genuine reciprocity between himself as researcher and children of poverty. More broadly viewed, Graham et al. (2013) posit the necessity of tending to the broad spectrum of relationships affecting the research, thus stressing the importance of maintaining cross-cultural, intersectoral, and cross-disciplinary dialogue.
5. *Privilege an asset-based purpose for researching with children and ensure that assets are defined in local contexts.* There is as much risk in homogenizing children and childhoods in the new championing of children’s voices in research as there is in the adultist/scientific approach. Instead, new understandings of childhoods and diversity provide rich potential for research approaches to researching with children. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to uphold not only diversity but, especially for children of the Global South, “understanding the unique and rich sociocultural milieu in which African children are raised and how that makes them the people they are and are capable of becoming” (Shung-King et al., 2008, p. 27).
6. *Consider models of Indigenous research and build local research capacity.* Smith (2012) and others present ways of decolonizing social science research by reformulating culture and tradition in research. The University of Victoria’s Indigenous Child Well-being Research Network (2013) states: “We believe Indigenous communities have within themselves the culturally appropriate tools for responding to Indigenous needs. We believe that research should come from within our communities to benefit those participating” (n.p). Of utmost importance is that Indigenous Peoples and peoples from the Global South take ownership of their own research, including identifying their own questions and issues, codeveloping ethics and values for working together, utilizing traditional ways of knowing, and sharing. Such ethical guidelines for working with Canada’s Indigenous peoples are spelled out in chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Countries of the Global South may work with Western researchers to develop a protocol for consent that IRBs would approve in contexts of oral cultures.
7. *Keep a critically reflective and reflexive researcher journal.* The journal should focus on how various factors influence research, such as personal assumptions about childhood and adult-child relationships, researcher roles, academic paradigms, and life experiences. Critically reflect on how these factors are shaping each aspect of the research process and the effect on participants.

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