What if You Talked to Me? I Could Be Interesting!
Ethical Research Considerations in Engaging with Bilingual / Multilingual Child Participants in Human Inquiry

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Abstract: The increase in child-centered, participatory research activities with children poses new challenges and responsibilities to policy makers and researchers. This reflective piece is a call for Canadian policy makers and researchers to look more critically at their epistemological and ethical assumptions about their views of children, their competence and decision making in research activities. I draw on sociocultural (VYGOTSKY) and dialogic theories (BAKHTIN) to encourage conversation and dialogue about ethical issues in engaging child participants in human inquiry with particular attention to children who learn and live in diverse, multiple language and cultural contexts.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Re-searching with Children

The purpose of this reflective piece is a modest one—to contribute to the ongoing debate about research involving children's participation in research and to encourage conversation about ethical issues in engaging bilingual/multilingual child participants in research activities. I argue that Canadian policy makers and researchers need to engage in self-reflexivity about their own discursive policies for and practices in research involving children in general and children learning and living in multiple language contexts in particular. [1]

The rapid rise in child-centered, participatory research activities with children in many countries (ALDERSON, 2002; JAMES, 2001) poses new challenges and

responsibilities to policy makers and researchers interested in human research ethics in general. The increase in linguistic diversity in urban cities in many parts of the world has resulted in situations where trilingualism and multilingualism is a reality, resource, and necessity. Indeed, multilingualism in Canada's large urban centers is no longer the exception but an ever-increasing reality and norm. While policy makers and researchers around the world face the challenges of how schools, communities and families can promote knowledge of multiple languages and help children acquire additional languages, there is little in Canadian ethical policy documents that explicitly addresses ethical issues in engaging as participants in human inquiry children who learn and live in multiple language contexts. This is surprising given Canada's long standing internationally recognized contributions to research in bilingual language education in international scientific communities such as language education and applied linguistics. It is even more surprising given the political recognition of multiculturalism as a resource in public policy documents and legislation such as the 1972 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1988 Multicultural Act over the last three decades and the more recent Canadian Heritage Act and Canadian Action Plan for languages in Canada (THE NEW ACT, 2002). [2]

I start from the premise that children's utterances and texts in any language are always dialogic because they are answerable to others' word (BAKHTIN, 1986). HICKS states that "dialogue as depicted by BAKHTIN, entails a form of answerability that is morally responsive to unique others and particular relationships" (HICKS, 1996, p.227). BAKHTIN's (1990) theory of how language socially positions speakers complements sociocultural theories of learning that assume children's control of any symbolic system such as language simultaneously occurs with their participation in cultural dialogues with significant others. Dominant mainstream theories of children's language acquisition do not explicitly acknowledge the mutually constitutive relationships among children's language development, social interactions, and the socioculturally embedded nature of their accomplishments and potential, *especially from the perspectives of children themselves*. I begin with four excerpts from interviews with bilingual children I or research assistants have conducted over the last decade. The interviews and excerpts continue to make me reflect about the importance of *re-searching* with children who learn and live in more than one language context and the need for understanding their participation, *respecting* their roles, and *recognizing* their voices in research activities.

Excerpt 1: Resisting participation in the researcher's agenda

MAGUIRE: What do you like best about story writing?

Tom: Nothing, I can't talk.

MAGUIRE: You can't talk?

Tom: No, I don't speak English (in English) and my lips don't want to move today.

Excerpt 2: Challenging the researcher

Interviewer: What would you do if you were in charge of making a good bilingual program?

Child: Give kids choice.

Interviewer: Give kids choice. Tell me a little more about ...

Child: For example, last week my teacher told us we had to write a story about how bunnies live. Quite frankly, I don't know how bunnies live. Do you now how bunnies lives? And do you really care?

Excerpt 3: Negotiating rapport

Interviewer: Es-ce que tu veux répondre en français?

Interviewer: Es-ce que tu veux répondre en français?

Élève: No.

Interviewer: Non? Pourquoi?

Élève: Parce que.

Interviewer: Parce que quoi?

Élève: Parce que moi, je n'aime pas parler en français.

Interviewer: Mais tu parles bien français.

Élève: Comment tu le sais?[1]

Excerpt 4: Reading the situation

Celia: What's happening?

Sam: You're taping me, I guess. I have to say something, and you have to tape me?

Frances: Tell the tape your name, so we can identify you?

Sam: My name is Sam.

Frances: Now we know exactly who we're dealing with here. [3]

Children have good social radar for assessing the situations and contexts in which they find themselves. Thus, children's perspectives and voices are important signifiers of their conceptualizations of the situatedness of their learning, their interests, needs, and perceptions. Gaining and negotiating access to bilingual children's perspectives over the last two decades has forced me not only to reflect on the importance of re-searching *with* children but also to view ethics as a dialogic, evolving, and iterative process. Ethics involving children in

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1   In Canada, French is one of the official languages. The following is a translation of the interview excerpt.

Interviewer: Do you want to respond in French?

Student: No.

Interviewer: No? Why not?

Student: Because.

Interviewer: Because?

Student: Because I, I don't like to talk in French.

Interviewer: But you speak French very well.

general is a complex, ideological, and political process—a factor that may be frequently ignored by research ethics boards, guided by national policies on human research ethics that adhere to a "one size fits all model" of ethical approval (VAN HOONARD et al., 2004). Ethical decisions and methodological choices in working *with* children are embedded in ontological perspectives and epistemological assumptions about how policy makers and researchers understand child development or any other phenomenon related to children, their well-being, and childhood. This includes how they conceptualize children, their communicative and decision-making competence and human potential, and how this can and should be respected and represented. I argued elsewhere that (a) much Canadian research in second language education more often than not ignores children's voice, (b) fails to consider children's perspectives in inquiries, and (c) frequently falls short in respecting their decisional capacity in the decision-making process for their participation in such inquiries (MAGUIRE, 1999). [4]

2. Recognizing Children's Competence: Making Children Visible

2.1 Seeing children as social actors

I still recall when I was a "newcomer" to the educational research communities of practices (WENGER, 1998) in the early eighties, how eight-year-old participants in a study about bilingual story writing made me revise my interview "protocols" and focus on conversations *with* them. After several decades conversing *with* young bilingual children, I am convinced that they can be competent and valuable "informants"; they have the capacity to express in various ways what is important to them and frequently have different interests and views of situations than adults who have power over them. Being an ethnographer and a long time advocate of children's participation in research and the documentation of their perspectives (MAGUIRE, 1987), I take a strong epistemological stance with regard to the importance of listening to their voices and making a commitment to understand their perspectives and social worlds as they do. Like many ethnographers of children and childhood (JAMES, 2001), I aim to see them engaged as social actors, to value their opinions and insights, and acknowledge their own capacity for self-reflexivity, although this is easier said than done (MAGUIRE, 1999). One must be ready for the unexpected conversational turns that can easily present an ethical and/or methodological dilemma as the previous excerpts from interviews with children illustrate. That children can comply, assent or dissent in research activities, or even challenge researchers' agendas is rarely documented in mainstream educational research which focuses on or about children or first and second language acquisition inquiries that have tended to largely focus on children's fluency and proficiency, or issues of program type, evaluation and assessment of their language performance and acquisition of specific linguistic features of a particular language. [5]

However, there is a recent growing interest among ethnographic and qualitative researchers (CHRISTENSEN & JAMES, 2000) in working *with* children as agents and participants rather than as faceless objects and voiceless vulnerable victims

of research, in listening to and respecting children's rights, and in ensuring their dignity. This is indeed reassuring. JAMES argues,

> "it is the use of ethnography as a research methodology that has enabled children to be recognized as people who can be studied in their own right within the social sciences ... has enabled children to become seen as research participants ... and made possible a view of children as competent interpreters of their social worlds ... has steered researchers to doing work with rather than on children." (JAMES, 2001, p.246) [6]

As an ethnographer, I agree with JAMES's view but acknowledge there are many unresolved issues involving children's participation in research especially when only viewed from the perspectives of adults be they—researchers, parents or guardians, teachers or third party advocates, or policy makers. With this new view of children as social actors and focus on their agency come new responsibilities and issues for Canadian policy makers and researchers working with young children, especially those who live and learn in more than one language context. Despite the pervasive public discourse and rhetoric about Canada being a multicultural mosaic, the voices of multilingual children in particular are strikingly absent from mainstream policy documents and research involving children's participation in research. [7]

2.2 Changing expectations of children's agency and competence

Expectations about children's agency, competence and participation in research are slow to change. Recently, the UNITED NATIONS (1989) adopted the *Convention on the Rights of The Child* (CRC). This document includes 54 articles addressing children's rights to protection, to the provision of basic needs and to participation in their societies and decision-making in matters that affect their lives. Strong support for children's involvement and participation and rights is explicitly stated in sections of Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the CRC:

> Article 12. 1) *State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own view the right to express those views freely in all matter affecting the child; the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. 2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*
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> Article 13. *The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.*
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> Article 14. *State Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*
>
> Article 15. *States parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.* (UNITED NATIONS, 1989) [8]

However, even in this forward looking document, which has been widely acknowledged by governments and has impacted on the ways that we understand children, there is little or no explicit mention of children's language rights and choices nor in other major policy documents. [9]

Since 1989, other organizations have emerged—such as *Child Watch International*, the MOST program of UNESCO and *Save the Children Alliance UK* (2003)—that are committed to supporting collaborative international research on the implementation of children's rights, well-being, and participation. However, even those who are advocates of child participation tend to view this participation as linear and sequential. For example, HART's (1992) proposed ladder of participation has been challenged because of its very sequential nature, which is unhelpful and hierarchical (REDDY & RATNA, 2002; WOODHEAD & MONTGOMERY, 2001). It does not reflect sociocultural theories of human development and children's individual learning trajectories. Although a recent highly influential report on the *State of the World's Children* adopted child participation as its theme (UNICEF, 2003), there is little or no explicit mention of children's rights when it comes to self determination and personal expression in diverse languages in either majority or minority language contexts, particularly with children who speak non mainstream languages. Although respect for children is highlighted in international guidelines such as those published by the CRC, much educational research at least in the Canadian context is still carried out *on* and *about* children and seldom *with* them. Western notions of child development and essentialist views of children and language learners in particular dominate research in language education. The role played by adults in these research contexts is normally one of power and authority over children typically mediated, manifested, and negotiated through signed parental or guardian informed consent forms in one or both of Canada's majority languages (English and French). [10]

Ironically, Canadian policy documents, such as the *Tri-Policy Council Statement* (1998), which claims to be subject-centered, do not reflect the advances of the United Nations CRC, other non-governmental agencies nor the contributions of qualitative and ethnographic researchers in recognizing children as persons, their competence and visibility. These new advances acknowledge children's competence in decision-making and advocate listening to their voices and nurturing their capacity to participate in research (ALDERSON, 1995; BOYDEN, (1997), JAMES, 2001; MONTGOMERY, BURR, & WOODHEAD, 2003). However, what it really means in practice to engage children's perspectives and views necessitates policy makers and researchers to face the challenges of entering children's worlds and discovering appropriate child-centered ways of interpreting their competence and perspectives. This is especially challenging with children who do not speak one of the mainstream languages, children who are marginalized or displaced, children who are living in conflictual or violent situations, and children who are just "hard to reach" (CURTIS et al., 2004). At the ethical core of researching with children then are issues of equity, inclusion and exclusion and who gets to speak after all and whose voices are heard, recognized, or silenced—notwithstanding in what language. From a Canadian

perspective, the lack of policy making and research that recognizes children's capacity to participate and promotes children's participation in research practice in a deliberate manner is even more puzzling again given Canadian legislation such as the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Multicultural Act*. In addition, the issue of children's language is noticeably absent from the long explicit list of research areas and topics related to children's well-being on the Canadian Institute of Child Health web site and 1997 reprint Report on Research Involving Children published by the National Council on Bioethics in Human Research. [11]

3. Entering into Children's Worlds: The Ethics of Interpreting Competence

While participatory methods and languages aim to make research a dialogic process with an emphasis on empowering participants, in reality, children obviously have less power than adults in the research process, a fact that confounds the inherent power relations when a researcher sets out to do research with them and adopt a child-centered approach even with the best of intentions. Take Heddi, a child participant in one of my own studies as a case in point who challenged her exclusion from an inquiry into trilingual children's identity and positioning in home and school contexts (MAGUIRE, 1999). While increasing concern around the world about young children's participation in research focuses on issues of assent, consent and dissent, no policy, code or research methods text could have prepared me and research assistants for Heddie's question and assertion during a routine observation in her classroom a number of years ago: "What if you talked to me? I could be interesting!" (MAGUIRE, 1999). Her sense of her own agency as a trilingual child motivates the title of this article. Although we had parental consent to observe all the children in Heddie's classroom, she was not one of the eight children for various reasons initially selected for interviewing and home visitation. But children do talk with one another both inside and outside the classroom! Heddie had heard about our home visits in a conversation with one of her best friends who lived in the same apartment complex. Through her own assertiveness, Heddie became a participant in this inquiry. Over a four-year period, as a child participant, she taught me many lessons on listening to, observing and understanding young children and childhood (MAGUIRE, 1999). She also taught me about the subtle slides of meaning that can occur and reoccur when engaging with child participants and provoke researcher self-reflexivity about ethical decision-making. Indeed, she confronted me with the equity of selection of child research participants. She provoked my thinking about the ethics and politics of including and excluding young children in human inquiry especially with respect to research in children's multiple languages, literacies and experiences in multilingual contexts. [12]

A commonly accepted view of inquiry is that a study becomes "scientific" by adopting methods appropriate to the particular issues or problems under investigation (LAKATOS & MUSGROVE, 1970). Traditional approaches to children's second language development and biliteracy tend to assume they think in monolithic, one-dimensional, static terms (MAGUIRE & GRAVES, 2001).

Noteworthy is that the work of researchers in fields like anthropology (HEATH, 1983) and sociology (CORSARO, 1985) has highlighted the diversity of children's language and learning trajectories and socialization in different communities (VYGTOSKY, 1978). This diversity invites dialogue and creation of intellectual ethical spaces in conversations about and with self and others in human inquiry with bilingual multilingual children and determining who has epistemic and linguistic privilege in a particular research context? Whose voices are heard and recognized and in what language/s? [13]

Knowing begins in a perceived landscape. French phenomenologist Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY argues that there is

> "no moment at which (we) could grasp, in a pure state, (a child's way) of perceiving, completing apart from the social conditioning that influences him. ... It is as though there is in the child a sort of elasticity that sometimes makes him react to the influences of his surroundings by finding his own solutions to the problems they pose. ... It is never simply the outside which molds him; it is he who takes a position in the face of external conditions." (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1964, p.108) [14]

SMITH and TAYLOR (2003, p.213) argue that the issue of children of any age expressing their views is, "not so much one of the child's ability to provide information, as it is of the adult's competence to elicit (or observe) it in the context of a trusting, supportive and reciprocal relationship." While some researchers (EBDON, 2000; WOODHEAD & MONTGOMERY, 2001) illustrate that in many part of the world, children even assume major economic and social responsibilities and pro active behaviors and argue that participatory projects must include equal respect for children of all ages, abilities, ethnicity, social class and economic status, there is little or no mention of children's language rights and choices. [15]

Sociocultural and dialogic theories provide useful frames to challenge existing epistemological assumptions and ethical practices concerning children's competence and participation in research and ensuring their voices are listened to, heard, appreciated and understood. Taken together, these theories can lead to voice-centered relational approaches to ethics and ontology that view children as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations beyond the immediate research context and a "sympathetic co experiencing" between adults and children in a particular research activity (BAKHTIN, 1986; VYGOTSKY, 1978). Indeed, language is a key-mediating factor in this process (BOURDIEU, 1990). Two questions emerge: Who do policy makers and researchers regard as children? and What epistemological beliefs about children and their roles in research activities and in particular children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are reflected in policy documents and researchers' methodologies and methods? [16]

4. Rethinking an Epistemology of Childhood and Children: Nested Contexts of Research of Child Participants and Institutional Review Boards

There is much current ethical debate focusing on the decision-making capacity of children's participation in research in the Canadian health sector. For example, BAYLIS, DOWNIE and KENNY argue that

> "respectful involvement in decision-making about research participation requires at the very least, an assessment of (1) what the child knows; (2) what the child can understand (3) what the child's decision-making capacity is; and, (4) what the child needs to know in order to exercise her decision- making capacity." (1999, p.7) [17]

In turn, this requires a decision-making process involving children that is both interactive and iterative. It also calls for a rethinking of a new epistemology of childhood and children and more positive view of children's agency and capacities. Indeed statements such as the following in the NCBHR Report on Research Involving Children are not encouraging: "The large majority of children lacks the ability to understand and therefore to make a rational decision about whether to consent to therapy or to participate in research" (NCBHR Report 1997, p.17). Such statements trickle down to institutional ethics review boards and researchers who may resort to legal arguments about children's competence to participate in research let alone give their assent or dissent. However, from a socio-legal perspective, SMITH and TAYLOR (2003, p.1) provide compelling evidence that supports the view that "young children value being informed and having the opportunity to express their views" and have the competence and resilience to talk about sensitive issues such as parental separation. [18]

Indeed, I embrace their arguments. Nonetheless, language is never mentioned nor explicitly addressed in the policy documents or by researchers who are advocates of child participation. This lack of attention to language then begs the question: How can multilingual children's well-being and dignity be respected and protected in educational inquiries that largely occur for the most part in Canada's majority languages and when language is or multiple languages are not factored into the ethical dimensions of respect for human dignity in research involving children? [19]

Respectful involvement of children in decision-making about research participation first requires at the policy level a more positive view of children themselves in their diverse socio-cultural-linguistic contexts than is currently presented in the Canadian Tri-policy Statement Article 2.6). For example, as the authors of the Giving Voice to the Spectrum Report of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee (van HOONAARD et al., 2004), argue: 4.3.3: "*Referring to children as 'incompetent individuals' (such as Article 2. 6) does not afford the dignity and respect for uniqueness that each child brings to the domain of new, innovative and creative research*." Despite the authors' bold call for a view of ethics as situated practices, there is little even in this foreword-looking 2004 document that addresses issues of the language of

consent, assent and dissent among participants in general, notwithstanding multilingual children who are increasingly the school populations in urban centers. Little explores the ideological, political, social and linguistic discourses that inform and influence children's worlds and schooling or reaches out to marginalized children living in non-mainstream contexts. Absent is the ethics of language use among researchers themselves in for example negotiating even the basics in research activities such as access to children, rapport and informed consent. [20]

A common working assumption among members of research ethic boards (REBs) and funding agencies has been that when research proceeds, it is appropriately respectful of children especially when dealing with issues of assent, dissent and consent, risk and benefit. After more than a decade of reviewing ethical applications for research with, on or about children (4 years as a member of our faculty ethics committee and 6 years as chair of the Ethics Review Board), I am still surprised by the lack of meaningful attention given to children's assent, dissent and voice in educational research and especially with respect to language of choice. In reviewing grant applications and applications for ethical acceptability over the last six years, in retrospect I saw few studies that explicitly articulated and still see few that address how they would deal with the substantive issues of obtaining consent from children such as what the child wants or needs to know and some of the procedural issues (e.g. how the communication should take place), notwithstanding their assent and dissent and voice in more than one language. The lack of explicit reference to language is surprising given the view from studies drawing on sociocultural and situated learning that language is a powerful mediating tool in children's development (VYGOTSKY, 1978) and Canadian legislation that values two official languages and embraces the concept of linguistic and cultural diversity as a national resource in contributing to "Canada's heritage." [21]

This lack of attention to bilingual or multilingual children's voices is even more surprising given that in the seventies, many cross-cultural studies of young children's socialization and language development emerged that resulted in changing conceptualizations of children from passive subjects to active social actors (see ATKINSON et al., 2001; SMITH, 2002). For example, WALLAT and PIAZZA (1988) listed four language-related disciplines within which such studies of communicative competence were undertaken—anthropology, ethnography of communication, child language/psycholinguistics, social psychology and sociology: child as persuader, child as adapter, child as spontaneous apprentice, child as craftsman, child as social participant, child as practical reasoner, child as style shifter, child as ethnographer, child as problem solver and child as attention holder. In 1989, I added to the metaphors by using the metaphor of "child as speaking personality" based on BAKHTIN'S (1986) dialogic theory of self and other. [22]

From a dialogic perspective, BAKHTIN's notion of the speaking personality conceptualizes language learning as socioculturally mediated activities that are always embedded in the language of others from previous contexts. Voice then used in BAKHTIN's sense of dialogism is the speaking, personality recognized,

heard, or valued in an utterance or text in a particular context. It resists the plethora of deficit labels researchers use to categorize children such as incompetent, deficient, language delayed, limited English proficiency, and so on. In addition to the problem of conceptualizing children and their roles in research activities, studying children presents other ethical dilemmas that need to be addressed. In the next section, I present an agenda for discussion in considering three basic issues in ethical research activities involving children's participation that need to be addressed. The list is not exhaustive but an opening move to continued conversations about engaging children in research. [23]

5. Agenda for Discussion in Re-searching with Children

5.1 Power relations between adult and child

In his classic study, CORSARO (1985) highlights the ethical and methodological dilemmas arising from his attempts to understand and gain entry into the children's worlds by virtue of his sheer physical adult size. In addition to issues of power, authority and control, he illustrates the researcher's problem of finding acceptance within children's worlds, *from their perspectives*, and the ethical dilemma of not engaging in any kind of deception. For example, a group of 2-4-year old nursery children would not let "big Bill" observe their playing because he was just "too big." Clearly, children can become powerless and less visible by virtue of their "smallness" in relation to authoritative adults. They can also become diminished and less visible because of their "age" which automatically and legally slots them into a category of participants called *children or minors*. These categories further situate them within ethical policy and guideline documents on human research ethics among the vulnerable populations who must be protected to a greater or less degree depending on their age—birth—7 years of age, 7-10 years of age, 10-14 years of age, 14- to the age of majority (NCHER, 1997, p.10). Notwithstanding that children can find themselves in vulnerable or conflictual situations, they are not an homogeneous group nor are their lived contexts and situations—an assumption that is embedded in a "one size fits all" model of research involving children (TRI-COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT, 1998). [24]

From a legal perspective, at least in Quebec, Article 21 of the civil code, children neither have the power to nor are they allowed to provide informed consent although there is some vague reference to their power to assent or dissent in a research activity. Again children's competence and language rears its head. From an ethical policy perspective, Article 2.7 of the TRI-COUNCIL POLICY (1998) alludes to giving children "with the capacity to understand the natural consequences of research" an absolute right to dissent for participating in research, even though their parents and guardians may have given consent. I wonder how many studies actually provide for this option and how many researchers understand and use the label *assent-competent children* and how this is determined for children who live in more than one language context. Embedded in this label is the poststructuralist idea that there exists a counter example of children who are *assent-incompetent children*. So where does this

leave children who do not speak mainstream languages, who are marginalized, or immigrant and refugee children who are displaced or find themselves in reverse power relations as linguistic and cultural brokers for either their parents, guardians, or researchers during the research process? The voices and opinions of these children tend to be the ones that are seldom heard or solicited in traditional research methodologies as for example in standard control and treatment studies in which consent is given by adults who have power over children and more often than not speak the two mainstream languages in Canada. [25]

From a dialogic perspective, researchers do not learn how to interview children by interviewing adults nor be pretending to be children participating in their activities. They learn to interview and understand children by actually engaging them in meaningful conversations that assume trusting relationships in the languages that children feel most comfortable using. However trusting the relationships, still unresolved are the extent and limits of parental consent, adult roles in child research and niggling questions about decision-making by surrogate decision-making adults such as parents, guardians, or professionals and child advocates or representatives. Ethicists distinguish between consequentialist and deontological approaches in moral reasoning. Whatever the tensions between consequentialist approaches (in which actions are declared right or wrong by assessing the consequences of doing them), and deontological approaches (in which the actions are judged right or wrong on the basis of the action and where the focus is on children's rights), researchers must respect the contextualized situatedness of children in research activities. The niggling questions with which policy makers and researchers need to wrestle are: By what criteria do we judge claims made about data collection on young children and the ethical process of how it was elicited? Whose perspectives are being recognized or comprised? How is "the position of the child" defined by the role of the researcher and vice versa. How do the researchers' and children's identities (e.g. gender, language, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, class, ideology) influence conceptualizations of children's competence, participation in research activities and shape interpretations of "data" at the site of inquiry? The design of qualitative and ethnographic inquiries then necessitates not only the establishment of rapport, trustworthy relationships with child participants but also a reconceptualization of their roles as human beings and as real engaged participants in inquiries, especially in linguistically and culturally diverse or conflicted contexts. A host of other ethical issues are raised by children with particular vulnerabilities such as disability, family dysfunction, poverty, war and complex multiple language contexts that because of space are not the focus of this article. In these latter situations, children are often deemed incompetent to voice their opinions and an ethical rhetoric of protection supercedes a dialogic approach or view of children's agency that can lead to exclusion from participation in projects or their real understanding of the relevance, risks and benefits of participation and their well-being. [26]

5.2 Risks and benefits equation

A reasonable and basic assumption in research involving children is that before embarking on research with children, researchers have the responsibility to ensure that no harm will befall children as a result of their participation in the research process. In education, some additional caveats need to be recognized. How do researchers ensure that children do not participate in trivial research, that children's involvement is as inclusive as possible, or that a research project that embraces a particular theory of child or language development for example prevents children access to resources that can contribute to their learning potential and well being? For example, typical mainstream treatment-and-control studies in child second language acquisition or educational psychology can raise issues of equity and inclusiveness when one group of children may have access to resources beneficial to their development that another group would not. [27]

In a climate of globalization and uncertainty post 9/11 and changing demographics, concepts of benefit, safety and risk must be contextualized and will continue to pose challenges to the current "one size fits all model" of ethical practices as outlined in the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement (VAN HOONARD et al., 2004). Policy makers need to consider the ethical problems in proposing the use of a "one size model" of institutional and organizational codes of ethics regulating the risk and benefits equation as presently articulated in Canadian policy statements and guidelines. This challenge to existing policy statements signals the importance of researchers working directly with participants, not only those researching sensitive topics such as HIV, or working in complex communities or working in conflict situations, but also those working with participants in multiple language contexts. Researchers need to consider the social, political, legal and economic complications that might occur from having children participate in research activities but they must also consider and respect children's language rights and choices. Obviously, there will be developmental differences in children's understanding of the research process and I do not mean to convey an idealized romantic view of children that leaves all responsibilities to them. However, the debate must move beyond western notions of child development to consider the rights of children in conflictual situations such as child soldiers in the current Uganda situation, children combating child labor, or marginalized children in school settings to name a few examples. In these situations, language can be a critical mediating factor in children's participation and understanding of their participation, especially with respect to the risks and benefits of their involvement. [28]

Thus, sociocultural perspectives of children's learning and contexts that draw from VYGOTSKY's theory development of child development and BAKHTIN's dialogic theory of language offer more promising alternative theoretical conceptualizations of children, their learning and language development and competence in decision making in research. Such a view offers potential to seeing children and adults jointly constructing knowledge and understanding through participation in meaningful activities and quality interactions with self and others in particular contexts. From a sociocultural perspective then both children

and adults act as resource for each other and assume varying roles and responsibilities in decision making. Again, from a dialogic perspective, this then necessitates researchers' well-established communicative and linguistic competence, commitment to respecting children's rights and care in nurturing their well-being. Most importantly this necessitates researchers' emotional, linguistic, and intellectual effort to enter children's worlds so that no child is left out, ignored, comprised, or at risk or uniformed about what it means to participate in research activities. Since from a VYGOTSKian perspective, language is a tool in the development of higher mental functioning, research activities involving children must consider language in the research context/s and research activities as highly influencing factor in weighing the benefits and risks to children, their consent, assent and dissent in research activities. [29]

5.3 Informed consent and confidentiality

"Informed consent" is a given and major aspect of research with children and gaining access to them. From a legal perspective, because children cannot provide informed consent, participation as I mentioned earlier in this article, is usually negotiated with those who exercise power over them. Children have the right to know what they will be asked to do in any research inquiry and to be informed about the anticipated positive or negative consequences of any activity (MORROW & RICHARDS, 1996; PIPER, 2002; SABO, 2001). How can this be ethically ensured in studies where children are randomly or otherwise assigned to control or treatment groups? How can respect for minority children's dignity and rights be ensured when consent is not only negotiated by adults who have power over them but in mainstream languages that may not be the ones in which children may feel most comfortable or competent? I am not aware of any studies of groups of children that report on children's dissent in the research activity and how if it does occur it gets dealt with. Sheer peer pressure may prevent children from feeling they can actually resist a researcher's agenda and say, "NO, I don't want to." [30]

Researchers need to spend the time understanding children's contexts and explaining their aims and methods in clear language or through other mediational means such as symbols, diagrams or pictures. However, such mediational means are not neutral and must be not only age appropriate but culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate. To gain access to children, it is common practice for researchers to state in their applications for ethical approval that they will inform parents about the aims and purposes of their inquiries either through written consent forms or public information meetings. With respect to children from diverse backgrounds, such mainstream approaches risk excluding some children whose home languages are not the majority, whose parents do not speak the majority languages, or for children who live in contexts in which written consent is not culturally or politically appropriate. In addition to considering the range of children's situations such as culture, poverty, working parents, single parent families and children's roles in their families, children's informed understanding of what an inquiry is about is essential. However, this also must be communicated in a transparent manner and language that accords with children's competence and

in languages that children can demonstrate their competence and understanding of what they are being asked to do in any research activity. [31]

Indeed, the lack of Canadian national policies and guidelines that facilitate children's authentic and meaningful participation and engagement in research activities and limited government financial support or recognition for child-led initiatives, their agency and perspectives is both puzzling and unsettling. With respect to children from linguistically and diverse cultural backgrounds it is even more disconcerting. Therein lie Canadian policy makers' and researchers' most urgent challenges to ethical principles, values, decisions and actions regarding children's participation in research activities and ensuring their dignity and well-being and not withstanding the impact of research on improving the lives of Canadian children in majority and minority language contexts. These issues extend to even participatory action-research conducted by teachers in their own classrooms and poses challenges to their establishing trusting relationships and avoidance of coercion. The borders between participation in research activities and day-to-day classroom activities can easily become blurred in informal classroom settings and can lead to deception of children or their genuine understanding of what they are being asked to do or feeling comprised in fulfilling adult expectations. [32]

6. Implications for Increasing Awareness, Commitment and Understanding

I return to my title *What if You Talked to Me? I Could be Interesting!* that was motivated by an eight-year-old child Heddle, a child participant in one of my inquiries. I discuss implications for increasing awareness, commitment, and understanding about ethical research considerations in engaging in human inquiry with child participants in general and bilingual and multilingual child participants in particular. I hope Heddie's question invites further dialogue about the ethical dimensions of re-searching with children who learn in more than one language context. [33]

From sociocultural VYGOTSKian and dialogic BAKHTINian perspectives, languages reflect and refract speakers' evaluative orientations and mediate their social relationships and sympathetic co experiencing and understanding with self and others in the world. Children's engagement with the world and significant others in their lives involves negotiating multiple discourses of value and intertwined significance in the contexts in which they find themselves. Participation in research activities is one such context in which children may find themselves—a context more often than not defined and negotiated by adults who have power over children and who may or may not have the same interests and needs, let alone speak the same language/s. Indeed, one well-funded Canadian research context in which there is much debate is bilingual and second education. However, there is little research that focuses on the perspectives of bilingual and multilingual children themselves. CUMMINS (1999, p.1) raises ethical issues "about the way in which research evidence has been infused into the public discourse on bilingual education in North America." He argues,

> "there will always be differences in the interpretation of academic research. Scientific progress is made possible by means of dialogue, discussion, and further research designed to resolve differences. This process of dialogue has not happened in the area of bilingual education." (p.6) [34]

The interesting question arises WHY NOT?—especially in a climate of increasing globalization, changing demographics and multilingualism. Why this has not happened from a policy perspective in the Canadian context is even more surprising given as mentioned earlier the amount of Canadian legislation and public discourse about language and long the well established tradition of research in first and second language education. [35]

Entering children's space/s is a recursive process similar to the work of ethnographers who find themselves entering into on-going conversations that are interwoven locally and globally. A dialogic perspective on children's competence and agency views their knowledge not as the age, grade or levels of children's knowing or language proficiency but rather as the authentic, meaningful, social intellectual space for the emergence of children's voices and participation in the activities of knowing—activities mediated by language or multiple languages in particular contexts. Taken together these perspectives within educational research call for a reformulation of how learning takes place, how children make meaning, what counts as knowledge. At a policy and macrolevel and with respect to ethical considerations in children's participation and involvements in research, policy makers and researchers must look more critically at their epistemological and ethical assumptions about their views of children, their competence and decision-making in research activities and whose knowledge and voices are recognized, valued and given epistemic and linguistic privilege. [36]

The key issues are: How to convince policy makers, heads of funding agencies, and researchers of the ecological validity of data generated by children—especially ethnographic data and data in more than one language and non-mainstream languages? How can researchers understand how children, perceive, remember and express their experiences, needs, opinions and values and of the different ways they can and do choose from the array of mediational means accessible to them in particular research contexts—and this includes language. MERLEAU-POINTY (1964) considers the language acquisition process as an open system capable of expressing an indeterminate number of ideas to come. Canadian national policies and guidelines governing children's participation and involvement in research activities must ensure that children's well-being and dignity are protected and democratic principles of inclusion are respected. It requires a new epistemology of childhood and positive view of children as social actors who have a sense of agency to choose and decide rather than incompetent view of children who need to be protected. This is critical if issues of informed consent, children's assent and dissent, and trust, appropriate conditions of listening and indeed possibilities of selfhood are to be seriously addressed, nurtured and treated respectfully. This also requires policy makers and researchers increased awareness of children's capacity, commitment to and understanding of children's worlds and perspectives. [37]

LANSDOWN (2003) argues that children's participation may enable children to develop and strengthen their expressive ability, their competencies, their self-confidence and self-esteem and ability to challenge and question. If, as VYGOTSKY suggests, children are socialized into the intellectual spaces of those around them, then adults who have power over them must consider then the linguistically and culturally diverse contexts in which children live, learn and dwell. The concept of children's voices implies a sociocultural, political, ideological stance towards children as participants in research and raises issues for policy makers' and researchers' self-reflexivity about who is doing the speaking in what contexts, for whom and for what purposes. As ROTH argues in the coda of his February 2004 editorial

> "the time has come for us to reflect on the ethical issues arising from our engagement with participants in the research we conduct. Given the global nature of our community, it will be of particular interest how different ethical issues are dealt with and evolve." (ROTH, 2004 [7]) [38]

Ethical research *with* children offers rich opportunities for changing the situations of all children in the world (SMITH, TAYLOR, & GOLLOP, 2000). As Chair of our Faculty of Education Ethical Review Board, I see that ethical codes, guidelines and policies although helpful in increasing awareness about the importance of involving children in research, do not provide all the answers to researchers who make the commitment to and face the challenges in working *with* children. Engaging in a dialogue about the issues *from the perspective of children* themselves can help us all ask more appropriate and sensible questions. As an eleven-year-old child participant taught me decades ago when I first embarked on a research program focusing on children who live in more than one language context, the key words are—"You must be willing!" [39]

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