



Sherlock Holmes & the Search for the child's voice

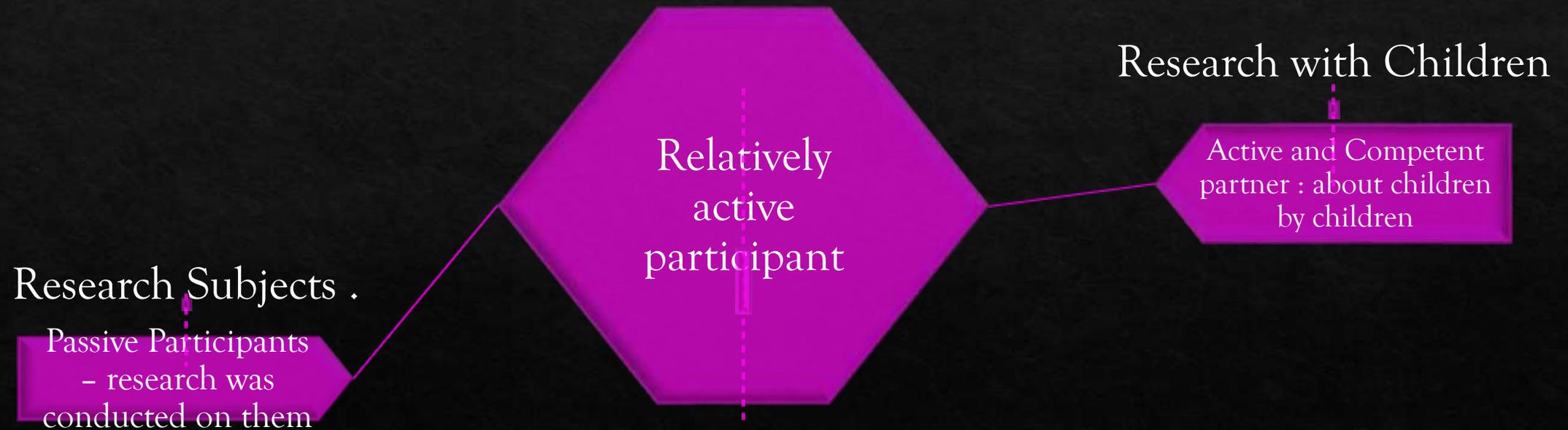
Researching with Children: Some considerations

Dr Mercy Karuniah Jesuvadian

May 2021

Children as Research Partners?

Research on Children – child as informant .



New Sociology of Childhood

◇ Childhood

- ◇ State of Becoming
- ◇ Passive
- ◇ Protected
- ◇ Surveillance

◇ New Sociology of Childhood

- ◇ A state of Being
- ◇ Social actors
- ◇ Competence
- ◇ agency

Recent movements in research with children

- ◇ The power differential remains : Context dependent
- ◇ Viligiant gatekeeping – adult/parent (stringent IRB conditions/policy control by agencies – EDCA & MOE)
 - ◇ Children are seen as marginalized, vulnerable group and can be protected - meaning it is even more difficult to access authentic voices of children by researchers
- ◇ Gaining access to children can be more difficult – very structured lives in urban settings
 - ◇ Even with permissions granted by the relevant authorities

Key considerations when designing a study with children as partners

- ◆ The overall purpose of the study as guide – child-friendly methods, age appropriateness and conversational style interviewing
- ◆ The need to design safe spaces and practices to generate data with children as key contributors
- ◆ To effectively manage the need for authentic information and genuine protection of the child participant



Happy & Sad Faces

A methodology sharing

Research Focus: Child wellbeing

- ◇ In this exercise, researchers sat down with each individual case study child and asked them to draw happy and sad faces. These drawings were then used to prompt the child to share the things that make them feel happy and sad both in school and at home. The medium of drawing was selected as it is one which children are familiar and comfortable with (Merriman & Guerin, 2006). Additionally, this research technique accords children agency as competent social actors who are able to speak for themselves and relate their life experiences, therefore affirming them as valid sources of data (Langsted, 1994).

How - to

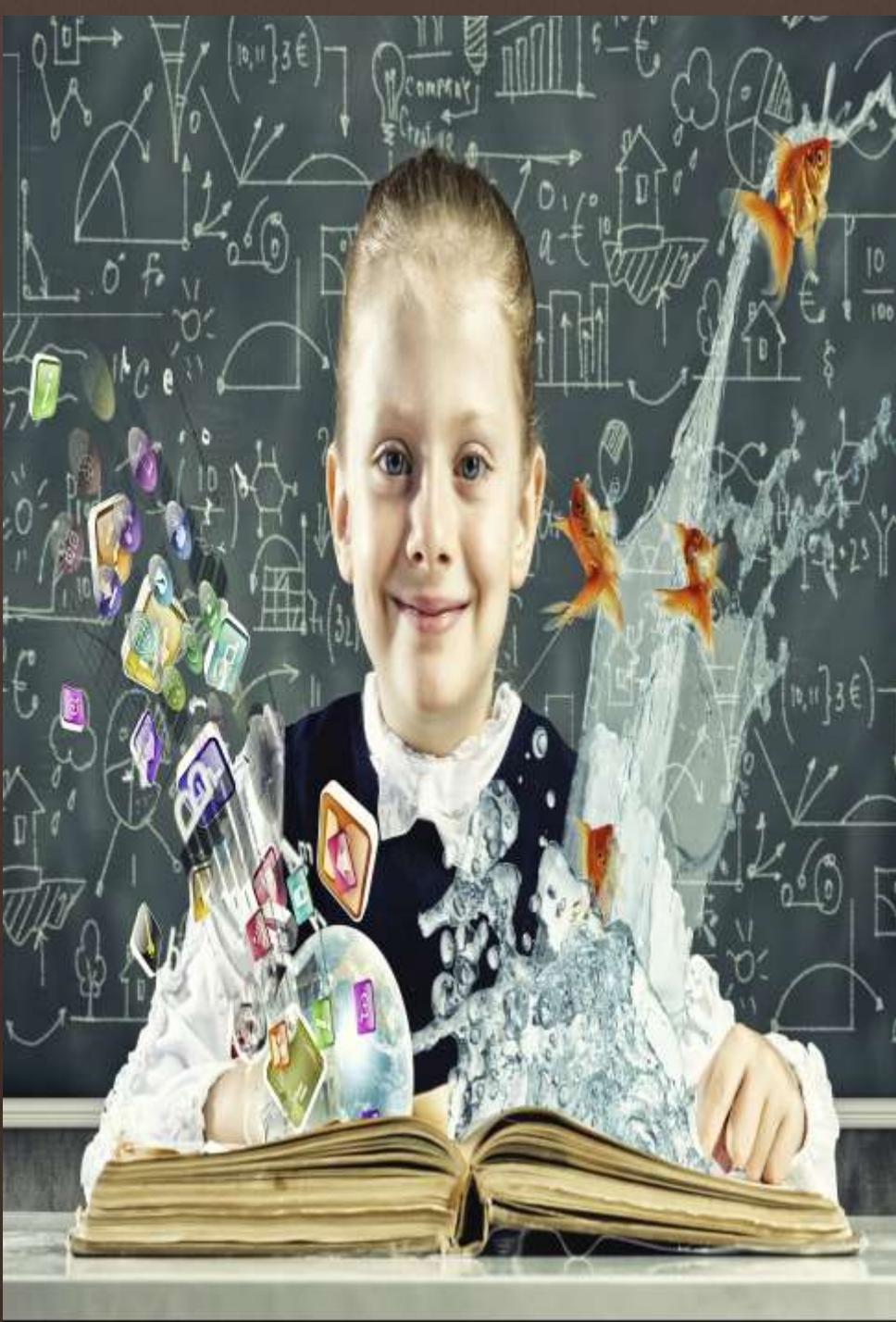
Researcher sat across the child. Child was provided paper and markers/crayons

Focused on explaining the task and what I wanted to find out - conversational style.

Ask the child to draw sad or happy face in response to a prompt like - what do you like about school/home

Then when the child has completed the image - we ask the child to 'deconstruct' the picture that she has drawn

The child explains the picture she has drawn



- Get the child assent either by asking the child to put the sticker to the right box or color or mark the right box
- Ask the child permission to record and explain that you would like to remember what we are talking about
- Have papers and markers ready and tell the child that we are drawing together, and I would like you to draw me a happy face and sad face. For example: Think about how you look like when you are happy, and when you are sad.
- Then when ready, you can point the happy face and ask the child that what makes him/her happy? What are the things make him happy at school/home. Who are the people who make him/her happy at school/home. Then we can also ask if there's anything that he/she remembers that have recently made him/her very happy.
- Then the same with the sad face. What makes him/her sad, is there something that has recently made her/him sad, what does he/she do when sad, who comforts, are there some people who make her/him (often) sad (not sure we want to ask this?).
- After finishing we thank the child, and ask if he/she wants to keep the drawings or is it ok that we keep them as a memory of him/her



Plus

- ◇ There is increased scope for the child to draw her thoughts. Much space and time is presented for her to share her own thoughts about the picture /s she has drawn.
- ◇ Child leads the discussion – selects the information she wants to share, has autonomy and the opportunity to explore her thoughts –
 - ◇ I noted that the deconstruction was fluid – it was centered in the picture but fanned out to her experiences and memories.
- ◇ It gave the researcher an inside look at the child's well-being.

Happy at Home

Positive relationship with mother - e.g. express love for mother, recall happy memories with mother (11)

Positive relationship with father - e.g. express love for father, recall happy memories with father (7)

Positive relationships with siblings - e.g. playing with / taking care of siblings (12)

Mention of family activities at home - e.g. reading together, playing together, family dinners (9)

Mention of family outings - e.g. playground, pool, mall, hair salon (10)

Sad at Home

Getting scolded by parents (5)

Physically hit by parents (6)

Conflict with siblings (4)



Some challenges

Making links

- ◇ Sense making of the narrative as the child was speaking was a challenge
 - ◇ Experiences are described in short phrases and these memories that the child shares can be from the recent past or further
 - ◇ There is a need for sensitive probing
 - ◇ We also need to gently get the child back to the point she was initially discussing
 - ◇ The picture itself is not a integrated whole – because the prompt was a happy or sad face – so the child uses parts of the paper to draw memories, as opposed to say a drawing like ‘my home’ or ‘my family’



Open vs targeted questions

- ◇ In this research approach – I found that open ended questions were more difficult to draw.
 - ◇ For example, when you ask ‘what makes you happy in school’ some children are startled by that question. It takes them a while to conceptualize and present a drawing
 - ◇ By contrast a pointed question – like ‘draw me a picture of a lesson that made you happy in school? Or even ‘is there anything that makes you sad when you are at school?’
 - ◇ I think the focus allows for a response that does not overwhelm the children.

Data Sources



We need to cross reference the images and narratives to the other **data** sources - demographic interview, parent interviews, classroom observations and teacher interviews.



It can be tedious and long drawn out



When the sources are corroborated, we are basically filling in the understanding. This requires time.



As researchers we want to find direct answers - but working with children requires us to be a little bit like Sherlock Holmes - we piece the puzzle bit by bit.



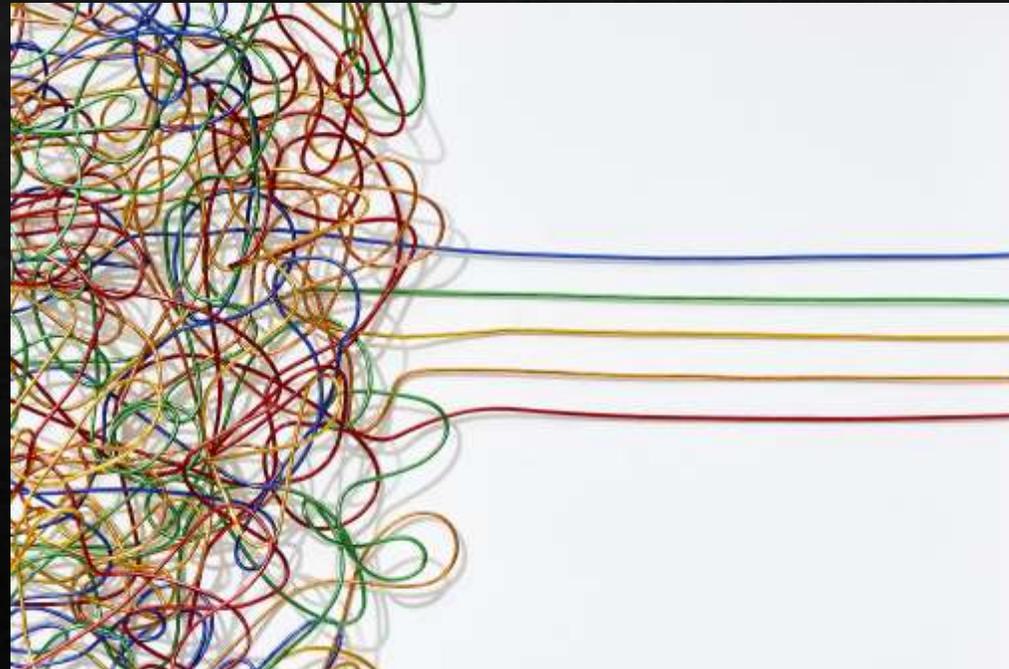
The cross -referencing is very key - which has implications for how you store your data.

Concluding Thoughts

Researching with children prefaces the need for researchers to value the child's innate competencies over her own life experiences and foreground her voice.

Yet, we need to balance this with the actual affordances of the child's context- her significant others are gate keepers.

- ◆ Building rapport and being accessible to both the children and the adults is key to really delving deep into the lived experiences of research participants.
- ◆ We ask a lot from them and so we also need to leave a little bit of ourselves with them.



Mercy Karuniah Jesuvadian

mercy.michael@nie.edu.sg

Lecturer

Psychology, Human and Child Development

National Institute of Education

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

