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Researching Children's Experience Hermeneutically and Holistically

This article is about the possibilities of conducting research with children productively. Children may need suitable prompts, occasions, or media for their expression. The discussion begins with an overview of the challenges or dynamics researchers can experience with any participants in qualitative research in the constructivist paradigm. It draws on key ideas from hermeneutics to clarify the importance of working holistically, attending to whole-part relationships, and having an increased sensitivity to language. Finally, two approaches are described and suggested as being helpful in research with children: the use of pre-interview activities and narrative approaches.

Cet article porte sur les possibilités de mener des recherches productives avec les enfants. Il se peut que les enfants aient besoin de questions incitatives, d'occasions ou de médias pour s'exprimer. La discussion débute par un survol des défis qui peuvent se présenter aux chercheurs par rapport aux participants à une recherche qualitative entreprise selon le paradigme constructiviste. Notre approche s'appuie sur les idées clés de l'herméneutique pour souligner l'importance de travailler dans une perspective holistique en se penchant sur le rapport entre le tout et les parties qui le composent et en portant une attention particulière à la langue. Enfin, nous décrivons et recommandons deux approches utiles en recherche impliquant les enfants : l'emploi d'activités avant les entrevues et le recours à la méthode narrative.

I begin this work with a recognition that children are social actors in their own right rather than pre-adult becomings. They have agency and they draw on the social and physical resources available to them actively to create culture (Cosco & Moore, 2002; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Although adults' perspectives are needed to analyze the conditions that limit or enable children's experience, it is children's own sense-making and ways of proceeding that ought to inform adults' understanding of the significance of the conditions in which children live (Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

In this article, I discuss some possibilities and promising approaches for undertaking research with children and youth. Through field research, teaching qualitative research courses, thesis supervision, and work with preservice teachers doing teacher research in their practica, I have come to appreciate both challenges and helpful strategies for research with children. In this article, I discuss the use of what I call *pre-interview activities* and *narrative approaches* in research with children and youth. To ground these discussions, the first section maps some key ideas and dynamics associated with qualitative research with any participants. As an important conceptual frame of reference for thinking

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about inquiry, the second section highlights some guiding ideas from hermeneutics.

The problem that this article perhaps most addresses is the predisposition researchers can have to focus on the topic of interest to them and to wonder how to have children join them in enthusiastic discussions of that topic. As a researcher who is keenly interested in learning certain things from a child, one can fantasize about saying to the child, "Tell me whether and how this activity is important, difficult, helpful, motivating, or discouraging for you." But then, of course, after the child said that the activity of interest was okay, fun or not liked, one would still be left wondering how to spur the child to talk more about the topic. The desire to ask such go-for-the-throat questions arises from a failure to respect the difference between one's research question and the question that guides data-collection, for want of a more seemly term. Whereas the research question might be "Can the activity of interest be helpful in a particular way to the children in my study?" the question guiding data collection would simply be "How do these children experience this activity?" or "What happens when these children participate in this activity?" It can take considerable self-restraint and confidence in a process to stand back from one's topic of interest and to begin with a genuine and more global interest in the children themselves. As I hope is clarified in what follows, what children may or may not say about one's topic of interest will only make sense in the light of a fuller appreciation of who the children are as people, what their lives are like, and where one's research topic fits in the child's larger scheme of things.

Some Thoughts about the Project of Qualitative Research in General

To be interested in children's experience and sense-making situates one in the constructivist paradigm with a commitment to hermeneutical and/or narrative approaches to research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In elaborating philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer (1989) has clarified that knowledge is the product of human activity, and meaning or knowledge is created rather than found. Being hermeneutical entails awareness that each person has a standpoint, horizon, perspective, forestructure, or prejudice and that dialectical engagement is needed to support a "fusion of horizons" with others (Smith, 1991). Such research is often not straightforward because the onus is on the researcher to approach the participant or situation of interest in a way that respects how it can show itself. As Smith (2002) writes, "It is impossible to establish 'correct method' in advance of an encounter with what is being investigated. This is because what is being investigated holds at least part of the answer to how it should be investigated" (p. 190).

In many instances, research participants can best reveal their sense-making and experience narratively. Sarbin (1986) suggests that narrative is the most useful and coherent root metaphor of experience. Carr (1986) argues that people can relate their experience only through narratives and that the stories people tell themselves about their lives and the world are the realities with which they live. Mishler (1986) argues that in interviews, participants will offer responses in the form of narratives if allowed the space and that in analyses of interview transcripts, narratives should be the unit of analysis rather than key phrases or ideas of interest for coding.

In general in qualitative research, the researcher's purpose is to learn the thinking and feeling behind people's actions and in so doing to come to see how their thoughts and behavior are reasonable and coherent (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Packer & Addison, 1989). Such research often necessitates as much attention to the past as to the present. For example, in researching a teacher's practice, one would probably wish to learn how the teacher came to know about and believe in certain ways of teaching. Learning the larger story in this way could help one to see how the teacher's current practice makes sense.

Qualitative research typically makes considerable use of interviewing as a way to learn people's thoughts and experiences. To create openings for a research participant's expression of genuinely salient ideas and related experiences, Seidman (1991) suggests beginning with a few "grand-tour" questions and then following up on topics, ideas, or stories brought forward by the participant in response to these initial general questions. One might prepare a long list of questions in preparation for an interview, but these should mainly serve to orient oneself to the topic and its many dimensions. The object of an interview is not simply to get answers to questions, but to learn what the topic of the research is about for the participant.

The approach of beginning with a few grand-tour questions and then following the topics raised by the participant seems more feasible for a seasoned researcher who is comfortable with both the participant and the research topic. Thinking on one's feet and manifesting a relaxed, confident, and inviting manner can otherwise be more difficult. In this case, it may be advisable to prepare and use a number of interview questions, not as questions that are intended to cover all the bases, but rather as a number of possible prompts that may help the participant recall salient ideas and experiences. The research would not depend on getting answers to all these questions, but on some of these questions working well to invite significant memories and reflections.

One of the challenges in interviewing is to create conditions that enable a participant to recall significant experiences, analyze them, and reflect on their meaning. Without a good opportunity for such recollection and reflection, participants are likely simply to draw on available discourses to say something that comes to mind readily and sounds sensible. For example, asking a preservice teacher how a practicum changed his or her understandings about teaching will probably elicit a response, but not as rich or multifaceted a response as one supported by a strong opportunity for recollection, analysis, and reflection. To address this problematic, one can have regular interviews with a person over the duration of the experience. Thus one can learn the stories as they are happening and invite both immediate and later reflection on their significance. When this is not feasible, one can ask the participant to complete a pre-interview activity that facilitates his or her recollection and reflection. Having a research participant make a timeline of significant events related to the topic would be an example of such a pre-interview activity.

Researchers typically wish to know how people have felt about their experiences. Everyday words can often fall short of communicating strong or complex feelings or perspectives. Sometimes inviting participants to make drawings or pictures related to their experience can enable them to express or

depict feelings and perspectives. Although the researcher need not attempt to render a formal interpretation of the drawings or pictures, as artifacts these can provide direction to conversation in an interview and enable the researcher to hear the participant's words differently.

When undertaking research, it is helpful to keep in view or always to be anticipating the purpose and nature of analysis and interpretation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that in the constructivist paradigm, the goal of research is to achieve a more informed and sophisticated understanding than that held at the outset. Although it is expected that researchers will comprehensively and systematically consider and examine all their transcripts, field notes, and so forth, the project of analysis and interpretation is not simply to summarize or synthesize all these materials. Neither is the identification of themes or patterns necessarily evidence of adequate analysis and interpretation. Rather, the object of research is to develop insight or new learning that transforms the researcher's understanding such that he or she can think more richly and act more usefully in relation to the problem or question studied (Packer & Addison, 1989). All this means that interviews, observation, or other research activities must effectively get at something important.

Getting at something important is not always a straightforward matter. In most cases, participants cannot simply tell us the answer to our research questions. Instead, researchers usually have to discern the significance of what participants say in relation to the research question. For example, in Boostrom's (1994) research in a grade 2 classroom, he wished to learn how school contributes to children's moral development. He could observe the children and teacher and talk with them about their activities, but they could not simply tell him the answer to his big question.

Getting at something important is also challenging when researchers are interested in preoccupations, assumptions, or taken-for-granted beliefs and values that are not held at a conscious level or perhaps are not in the participant's ability to articulate. This can be the case particularly when a researcher is interested in the meaning or significance of something for the participants. Finlay and Faith (1987) observe that preoccupations and assumptions often slip out sideways in the effort to do something seemingly unrelated. In Boostrom's (1994) study, he became fascinated with the significance of rules in the grade 2 classroom, wondering if they were coercive, unkind, or friendly and musing about what it meant when some students self-consciously and intentionally broke them. He finally made great progress with his inquiry when he asked the grade 2 children to write letters to the grade 1 children to give them an orientation to what lay ahead in grade 2. He was struck by the children's emphasis on relating the rules of the grade 2 classroom, and through these letters he developed his insight that the rules gave order, structure, and in fact meaning itself to the grade 2 experience for the children.

Gadamer (1989) explains that perception is interpretation. Thus even apparently descriptive research is in effect interpretive. Research that is self-consciously interpretive—intended to generate important insights and transform the researcher's understanding—is a demanding undertaking with any participants. When the participants are children or youth, researchers may wish to consider a wide range of possibilities for how to enable the children to help the

researcher learn about their experience and its significance. Adult participants may have a concept of research and of interviewing, feel a more equal power relationship with the researcher, and enjoy and be skilled at talking at length, spontaneously volunteering tangential explanatory stories and reminiscences. With children, on the other hand, particular attunement to them may needed to identify or develop suitable and comfortable prompts, occasions, and activities or media for their expression.

In what follows, I discuss pre-interview activities and narrative approaches that can be helpful in research with children and youth. As a backdrop to these discussions, I first highlight some ideas from hermeneutics that inform my thinking about these approaches.

Some Key Ideas from Hermeneutics

Smith (1991, 2002) explains that three key ideas or themes have been central in hermeneutics since Schleiermacher's work in 1819. These are: the inherently creative character of interpretation; the importance of part-whole, micro-macro relationships; and the key role of language and history. In brief, these ideas alert us to the need to work holistically to ascertain meaning, to examine part-whole relationships to clarify significance, and to appreciate how interpretations—the researcher's and the participant's—arise from the language and history of a person's community.

Interpretation as a Creative Activity

The purpose of interpretation is to discern the intent or meaning behind another's expression. To do this one uses everything one knows to inform interpretation. So, for example, as a teacher tries to make sense of a student's question, he or she uses all his or her knowledge of the student and context to inform her interpretation of the meaning of the student's question. Researchers, on the other hand, often do not share daily life with participants. Thus it is helpful to engage in getting-to-know-you activities to develop a backdrop that can inform interpretation of what the participant says about the research topic itself.

To use everything one knows to inform interpretation means that the researcher is working holistically rather than using a categories-first approach that can reduce the complexity of a participant's experience to a few predetermined variables. So although related literature or theories may offer taxonomies or classification systems for interpreting participants' experiences, a researcher proceeds with awareness of these, but refrains from imposing them reductively. To be committed to learning what the participant means by his or her expression is to be committed to learning about the wholeness and complexity of his or her experience.

The interpreter—the one hearing or perceiving—actively constructs the meaning of what someone else says and does so by drawing on everything else he or she has heard or observed. Thus it is not enough for a researcher simply to report quotations of what participants have said about the research topic and to presume that they have passed on the participants' meanings unaltered. There is no meaning until it is constructed by the one hearing or perceiving. A distant reader of a research report can have too little background knowledge of the participant to interpret confidently the meaning of particular quotes. It is

the researcher's work to make sense of what the participant says or shows in the light of everything else the participant has said or shown. And in the interpretive accounts researchers write, they draw on all they have heard or observed to show illustratively the coherence of their interpretations (Packer & Addison, 1989). To include so much background information in an interpretive account, it is often helpful to pull together all that one knows about a participant, or a participant's experience with an activity or phenomenon of interest, in the form of a narrative. Polkinghorne (1995) explains the use of both narrative analysis and analysis of narratives.

The Importance of Part-Whole, Micro-Macro Relationships

Attention to part-whole and micro-macro relationships is fundamental to interpretation. To understand the whole, one must understand the parts; to understand a part, one must understand its role in relationship to the other parts and to the whole. The back-and-forth movement between the part and the whole, a movement that has no natural starting point or end point, has been conceptualized as "the 'hermeneutic' circle at work in all human understanding" (Smith, 1991, p. 190).

Part-whole relationships are important whether one is trying to figure out something concrete and visible like a broken machine or an athletic performance that does not work well, or whether one is trying to understand how a child experiences a particular activity in school. Consider, for example, research on new math stations that a teacher has introduced in the classroom. The math stations are a part of the child's larger experience of mathematics, math is a part of the child's larger experience of school, and school is a part of the child's experience of his or her whole life. It can be difficult to appreciate the significance of how the child experiences the math stations—or to interpret confidently what the child says about the math stations—without some sense of the whole of the child's experience of math, school, and life generally. Similarly, if one were researching a grade 3 teacher's experience of using multimedia units in science, it would be helpful to have a sense of what the teacher believes is usually important, desirable, or challenging in general when teaching science to grade 3 students.

The hermeneutic circle also invites researchers to recognize the stories uncovered in their research as microcosms of larger macro stories. So, for example, research revealing a teacher's anxiety about making presentations about his or her classroom program to parents can be read in the larger story of consumer culture, polished packaging, instant results, money-back guarantees, and the customer always being right. Similarly, discovery of a school culture that celebrates athletic success and gives little public recognition to academic accomplishments can be read as a reflection of an on-the-surface egalitarian society that glamorizes and promotes a star system in competitive sports. Without reading individual stories in the larger stories of which they are a part, researchers are not likely to interpret critically the conditions contributing to the individual stories they have uncovered.

The Key Role of Language and History

Hermeneutics underscores the relationship between language and interpretation. Language both enables and limits interpretation. We are born into lan-

guage; it comes to us from history, tradition, and community. As our language changes, the interpretations we are able to make also change. The interpretations offered by a researcher or any person reflect a time and place in history and the influence of community. At the same time, research that significantly advances understanding of a problem often does so by transcending the language that was previously used for conceptualizing it (Rorty, 1982).

Because language is such a significant element in the construction of understanding, it is important for researchers to give careful attention to the language used by themselves and by participants in their research. The language used by participants provides a window into the discourses of communities in which participants live and from which they derive meaning. Often the researcher may need to spend time in the everyday life of the participant's communities to grasp more fully what serves as a backdrop of meaning for the participant. When this is not feasible, researchers may need to exercise considerable care to avoid introducing language that may easily be appropriated by participants, but that may not reflect their most salient ideas or most common forms of everyday sense-making. This is one of the many good reasons for the use of open-ended questions in interviews. Open-ended questions identify a topic for discussion, but do not provide any direction for the discussion. For example, in research with preservice teachers completing practica, one might wish to ask, "What is important to you when you think about lesson planning?" rather than "Do you think 'checking for understanding' is important in lesson planning?"

It is important for researchers to refrain from assuming that there is shared meaning for words or concepts that are central to their research questions. Whatever the construct of interest, for example, *hope, child-centered, mentorship*, and so forth, it can be helpful for a researcher to ask the participant for stories that are likely to be related to the construct and to then work together with the participant to mine the stories for meaning. For example, in researching young children's experience of violence on television, one might need to ask children to keep a log of all television programs viewed over the course of a week and then learn their responses to those programs. One ought not to assume that violence on television means the same thing among children or for children and the researcher.

Researchers need to have a heightened self-consciousness about the language they use when writing interpretive accounts. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state, in qualitative research, the writing is the interpretation. Choosing words well to convey one's intended meaning and refraining from using words that connote inappropriate discourses or conceptual frameworks for the spirit of one's meaning can be a demanding undertaking in research related to education. As highlighted by Davis (2004), so many of the commonly used words about teaching and learning imply large, complex sets of assumptions about the nature of these. One can easily use words about teaching and learning that suggest contradictory conceptual commitments. Finally, the struggle to articulate an insight one has achieved in one's research—to show how what one is saying is different from other existing views—can entail reaching beyond the words or concepts typically used to discuss the problem of interest.

Pre-Interview Activities

This section offers examples of pre-interview activities that can be used for a variety of purposes. As shown in Table 1, such activities can support getting-to-know-you conversations with a child, enable the child to teach the researcher about the context of interest, provide the child with the opportunity to recall and select memories to share, and so forth. It is always good to offer a choice of pre-interview activities even if it means that those offered would serve varying purposes. There does not need to be one correct sequence to the conversation that transpires over the course of interviews. The main idea is that the researcher would offer the child a selection of four or five pre-interview activities and ask the child to choose one to complete and bring to the interview.

The above two sections discuss the importance of researching children's experience holistically. Although the researcher may be focused on one component or dimension of a child's experience, she or he needs to have a sense of the wholeness and complexity of the child's life in order to interpret the significance of what the child says or shows regarding the research topic itself. Similarly, the researcher needs to learn about the context of the child's experience so that this too can inform interpretation of the child's stories and point of view. There is much that the researcher may wish to learn from a child. To accomplish so much learning through a long list of information-seeking questions would make an interview feel like an interrogation. Using pre-interview activities can facilitate such learning through friendly, comfortable, conversational occasions.

When an adult is interviewing a child, extra sensitivity about power relationships is required. Outside of formal research activities when an adult interacts with a child, it can simply feel conversational to ask whether he or she has siblings, pets, favorite books, or whatever. In a formal interview, however, the same seemingly innocuous questions can position the child as having to serve up personal information to the adult who is in charge. The child can also feel that his or her answers are being judged in some way. The pre-interview activities—particularly when a selection of them is offered for the child to choose from—provide space for a child to choose what to share, how, and when. And sometimes a child might choose to not do any of them at all, but at the conclusion of the first interview might then say that he or she would now draw you a picture.

The products resulting from the sample pre-interview activities in Table 1 are highly varied, including, for example, schedules, activity logs, lists of key words, maps, timelines showing significant events, magazine picture collages, photographs, pictures, diagrams, and visual metaphors or abstract drawings. It can be especially valuable to include the opportunity for children to draw pictures in pre-interview activities. Malchiodi (1998) argues that the completion of drawings or other art forms can enable children to relate their personal life experiences with expression of personality and emotions. Similarly, Chandler and Johnson (1991) and Silver (2001) report that through drawing, children are able to express feelings and perceptions that are difficult to verbalize. Important for research, children's drawings have the potential to evoke narrative accounts both through what is present in the image and the child's

Table 1
Examples of Pre-Interview Activities

Getting-to-know-you activities

Both the child and the interviewer make "all about me" posters to bring to the first interview. These will include pictures of each of you engaging in your favorite activities and will show or name some of your favourite things, pets, people, and places.

The child is asked to make a drawing, map or diagram showing the important, favourite or most used places in his/her life.

Key word activity: The child is asked to make a list of 20 important words and then to divide the words into two groups.

The adolescent is asked to use pictures and words cut out from magazines to make a collage or poster about how he or she sees the world, or to show what is important to him/her in life.

Activities to Learn About Context

The child is asked to bring a schedule or log showing the parts of a program or time period of interest, e.g., a timetable from school, a log of how time is spent in everyday life over the course of a week.

The child is asked to draw a map, draw a diagram, or take photographs of the place where the activity of interest occurs, e.g., the playground, the computer lab for the on-line distance education course.

The child is provided with a diagram of the context of interest and asked to mark all the favourite and least favourite places in it, e.g., a diagram of the school.

Creating a Meaningful Starting Point for Conversation about the Topic of Interest

The child is asked to draw a picture of herself/himself engaging in the activity of interest or engaging in a favourite part of the activity.

Facilitating Recall, Analysis, and Reflection

Draw two pictures: one of a good day and the other of a bad day in the activity of interest.

Draw two pictures: one showing what it was like for you before the event of interest happened, and one showing what it was like after.

Draw three pictures showing what it was like for you at the beginning, middle, and end of the experience of interest.

Make a timeline listing significant events in your experience of the topic of interest.

If someone were to make a movie about your experience of the topic of interest, make a list of key segments or scenes that ought to be included.

Expressing One's Understanding or Personal Experience of the Topic of Interest

Make a poster showing your ideas about the topic of interest (use drawings or pictures and words cut out from magazines).

Using pictures cut out from magazines, make a poster with two sides: one side showing examples of the concept of interest and the other side showing non-examples of the topic of interest.

Visual Metaphors or Symbolic Representations of Experience

Draw a diagram or pictures showing an important aspect of your experience, e.g., where your sources of support come from, where your hope comes from.

Use three colours to make a diagram or abstract drawing that shows the way you experience the topic of interest, e.g., religion/an athletic competition/running/reading/cultural identity/etc.

response to what is in the image (Cummings, 1986). Children's stories about their drawings can be useful as early as age 7 or 8. Stone and Lemanek (1990) find that at this age, children typically have well-established language and communication skills, are able to convey their thoughts and emotions, can understand the perspectives of others, and are able to describe *why* others act as they do.

When discussing children's drawings with them, Malchiodi (1998) suggests that researchers refrain from asking children *why* they drew images as they did. Instead, it can be more helpful simply to describe what one sees or to think aloud as a way to prompt children to speak about the content of their drawings. For example, one can observe a drawing and offer a comment such as "I see children lining up to play on a slide" or "This drawing uses bright colors but this one only uses black and gray." Children will then often describe what is happening in the picture, especially if the researcher has missed an important or obvious feature. Any comments or questions that reflect not knowing are likely to prompt children's explanations. It is helpful to keep one's comments more descriptive than interpretive so as to avoid introducing language that the child might too easily appropriate. For example, it is preferable to say "I see that you have drawn a dark cloud over your head," rather than "You look frustrated." One can also ask questions about what is happening outside the paper-edge boundaries of the picture, for example, "Are there any other people there and what are they doing?"

As stated above, when inviting children's drawings, the expectation is not that the researcher would endeavor to offer a formal interpretation of a drawing. Instead, there are other purposes or possible benefits in having children bring pre-interview activity drawings to the interview. First, the drawings can express personality, emotions, or perspectives that are difficult for the child to verbalize, and awareness of these can enable the researcher to understand the child's words and stories differently. Second, the drawings can serve as a base for stories the child might share, and stories are the main vehicle for communicating one's experience to others. Third, the drawings provide a concrete referent for language and can thereby help the child and the researcher to find shared meaning for the language they use together. Fourth, interacting with a child about his or her drawing provides a natural and comprehensible way to express genuine interest in what the child has to say and the quality of the interview relationship will depend on the child's perception of the researcher's genuine interest in him or her.

Some of the sample pre-interview activities ask the child to recall experiences and to list or draw them. This is a respectful way to do research with children or any participants. Each person has the right to preserve the integrity of the personality. When asking for a collection of significant events or when specifically asking for examples of negative experiences, giving people time to reflect on which stories they will choose to share is a thoughtful way to proceed. A child is also likely to anticipate an interview more comfortably knowing that it will begin with a discussion of his or her diagram, drawing, list, or whatever.

Thus the pre-interview activities can make many contributions to interviews with children. Researchers can learn a great deal about the children's

experiences and contexts without exhausting them with decontextualized questions. Children can express perspectives, values, assumptions, and emotions that are either difficult to articulate or not consciously held. Importantly, a conversational relationship can be established through discussions of the pre-interview activity products, thus building rapport for remaining parts of the interview. The next section discusses the use of narrative approaches for further questions that might be helpful in interviews.

Narrative Approaches

In this section, I present a process for undertaking narrative inquiry with a child or youth in order to craft a narrative portrait. I then discuss adaptations of this process to extend interviews that would otherwise be focused on the research topic, which is often a single component of a child's experience. The researcher's interest may be in a part of a child's experience, but more holistic understanding of the child is needed to appreciate the significance of the part or to interpret more confidently what the child has to say about this part.

This presentation about a narrative inquiry approach includes a list of sample questions that can be used in an interview with a child or youth, some ideas about the conduct of the interview, and a process for working with the transcript to craft a narrative portrait. It also includes a list of sample questions that can be used in a supplementary interview with the child's parents. Interviews with parents can supplement those conducted with the child to provide a sense of the child's everyday life. The intention of the narrative inquiry process described is to gain an appreciation of the child in terms of what is important to him or her—values, motivations, likes, dislikes, interests, pastimes, preoccupations, fears, hopes, aspirations, significant others—and how he or she makes sense of his or her own and others' experience.

The interview questions, shown in Table 2, are largely intended to serve as prompts for stories or points of view that might easily come to mind and be enjoyable for the child to relate. Although on a surface reading some questions appear to require extensive reflection, for example, "What's the most difficult thing you have had to do?" children seem to experience such a question as though it were worded "Tell me a story about something that was difficult to do." I used the questions in interviews with 15 10-year-old children in my own work, and since then many undergraduate and graduate students I have worked with have used them with children and youth aged 7 to 18.

To start the interview, attention to the details is always important. Even after formal consent, ask the child if he or she still feels like doing the interview. Use a quiet undisturbed place that both of you have visited together before. Ask again if audio-recording is agreeable. Let the child practice turning the audio-recording machine on and off and playing it back. Put it in his or her reach and remind him or her that he or she can turn it off at any time. Explain that you hope the interview can help you get to know him or her and what it is like to be his or her age. Explain that you have many questions and that some of them might work well to help him or her think of things to tell you about, and some might not, and that this is okay. Have all the questions on separate file cards held together by two rings to make the process transparent and to enable you to focus on the child without losing your place in the schedule. This

Table 2
Sample Narrative Inquiry Interview Questions for the Child

1. If you had to go to school only three days a week, what are some of the things you'd like to do with the extra time?
2. Have you ever done anything that other people were surprised you could do?
3. What's the most difficult thing you've ever had to do or, is there something you've done that was really hard to do but you really wanted to do it?
4. Some people really believe in the power of wishing. Do you think you do? … [The ellipsis indicates a follow-up to a response.] Has it ever worked?
5. Do you ever get other people to go along with your ideas or what you want to do? What about in activities with friends or activities or routines at home?
6. Sometimes we like to day-dream about things we'd like to do, or things we'd like to try, or things we'd like to become. Can you remember anything you've ever daydreamed about?
7. Have you ever done anything really different from what most people your age have done, made something, read up on something, planned something, tried something?
8. Some people believe that willpower can take them a long way. Do you think that you've ever used willpower?
9. I'm going to ask you some different kinds of questions now, questions about how you see things. For example, who do you think makes the biggest difference to what happens in the classroom, the principal, the teacher, or the students?
10. When people disagree over something, why do you think that usually is?
11. What things would you say are most important in life to most people? … What do you think will be most important in life to you?
12. In all of the things you're interested in or you've thought about a lot, what has puzzled you the most?
13. What's the best thing about being your age? … What's the hardest thing about being your age?
14. What would you like to be really good at doing?
15. If you could pick one thing that you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be? … What would be the next thing?
16. In the world of nature or in the world of things or in the world of people, what is it that surprises you the most, or that you find the most fascinating?
17. Some people really believe in the power of prayer. Do you think that you do?
18. Some people always have lots of ideas at their fingertips. You know, they always have lots of ideas about what to get someone for a present, or they find it really easy to think of things to say in a story they have to write or a letter. Other people have to work really hard to come up with ideas, or they just seem to come more slowly. Which kind of person sounds more like you? … Can you think of an example of when you had lots of ideas or when you had trouble thinking of ideas?
19. Can you remember any time when you've run into a difficulty when you were trying to do something or make something or something you needed was missing, something got in the way or slowed things down? … What did you do?
20. Can you think of anything that's a constant nuisance or that always annoys you? … What are some of the things you've tried to do about it?
21. What do you do when you need a really good idea?
22. If you could spend two weeks with someone who does a special kind of work, what kind of person would that be?
23. In the year ahead, what are some of the things you'd like to accomplish or try for the first time?
24. Is there anyone you see as a kind of hero or heroine, someone you look up to and would like to be like?
25. Do you spend very much time writing or drawing? … Have you ever been in a play?
26. Is there something that you've always wanted to do but you haven't had the chance yet? … What stopped you, no time, or materials, or resources?
27. If you were going to write a book, what do think the title of the book would be?

also prevents the child from being distracted by trying to read your list of questions upside-down.

When you begin with the questions, show interest in the responses but do not gush or say "That's good!" or the child may think that he or she must please you with his or her responses. When the vocabulary in a question is difficult for the child, give examples from your own life to explain meaning rather than just substituting a simpler word that may have a different meaning. The search for shared meaning helps to create solidarity. If you cannot think up natural-sounding, comfortable follow-up questions to the child's responses, do not worry. Too many follow-up questions may make the child think that what he or she gave you was not good enough. Anticipate a place in the interview schedule to stop in case you need to divide the questions over two sessions. At the conclusion of the interview, thank the child and ask if he or she has any questions to ask you.

The process of crafting the narrative portrait has a number of steps or stages.

1. Begin by identifying everything that was topical in the child's responses, for example, friends, family, sports, school, a favorite grandparent, and so forth. Cluster the child's responses according to the topics. If parents have been interviewed using the questions in Table 3, draw from both transcripts to cluster responses.
2. Examine the responses in each cluster, and ask what all the stories for that topic are about. For example, in sports-related stories, ask what sports are about for this child. Are they about winning, self-improvement, being with friends, or having the company or attention of a key family member? In other words, the child's stories may suggest that sports are important in his or her life, but the hermeneutic task of narrative inquiry is to discern the significance or meaning of sports in the child's life.
3. Search across topic clusters for any common preoccupations or motivations. These may be themes or dominant motifs that show the coherence of the child's various experiences.
4. The following questions may also be useful to ask of the child's responses. Who are the significant others in the stories and how does the child position himself or herself in relation to them? Does the child use a particular interpretive metaphor for making sense of his or her own or others' experiences? Do the child's responses relate to the past, present, and future or to only one or two of these? Does the child relate stories that occurred in just one or two places or in a number of places? Are any topics surprisingly absent in the child's stories?
5. In writing the narrative portrait, try to begin by writing one paragraph that highlights key or dominant dimensions of the child as a person. Use the rest of the portrait to flesh out or elaborate each of these key aspects of the child. Include your wonderings about what was absent, contradictions, ambiguities, or any ambivalence expressed by the child.

The narrative portrait that results is not a life story, not a chronological account of the child's experiences, and not an inventory of everything the child does or does not do. Instead, it offers a sense of who the child is right now in terms of how he or she experiences himself or herself and others. It alerts one to

Table 3
Sample Narrative Inquiry Questions for the Child's Parents

1. As _____ has gotten older, would you say he (or she) has changed a lot or stayed the same?
2. How would you say that _____ is different from brothers or sisters, or from friends?
3. What does _____ do when he can't figure something out right away?
4. Does _____ ever find unusual ways to do things?
5. Would you say that _____ is a child who always has lots to say, lots of ideas, questions, or suggestions?
6. What does _____ usually do when he gets stumped or blocked when he's working on something, trying to make something, get something, go somewhere?
7. What does _____ do when things try his patience, like the usual rules or routines or constant sources of annoyance?
8. Some children believe strongly in the power of wishing, do you think _____ does?
9. Would you say that _____ is very good at getting his way? You know, is he pretty good at tapping any "soft spots"? Is _____ ever the initiator of family activities or new ways of doing things around the home?
10. Is _____ ever the one to initiate activities with friends?
11. Has _____ ever surprised you with his capabilities, or initiative, or staying power?
12. Has _____ ever done anything else that was extremely difficult or complicated or that required endurance.
13. Does _____ have any unusual or interesting aspirations, plans or dreams?
14. Do you think _____ is aware of the idea of willpower or that he ever uses it?
15. Sometimes children surprise us with their depth of understanding or how much they know about things. Does _____ ever make comments or ask questions that surprise you in that way?
16. Would you say that _____ has good analytic ability? Can you think of any examples of where you noticed it?
17. Would you say that _____ is particularly perceptive, or sensitive or thoughtful?
18. What is _____ most curious about or fascinated with?
19. What kinds of things does _____ find easy to do or hard to do?
20. Some children believe in the power of prayer. Do you think that _____ does?
21. What would you say are _____'s strongest interests? How long has he held them, how does he pursue them, and what related projects does he engage in?
22. Whenever _____ is really excited to tell you about something, what is it usually about?
23. What does _____ usually do when someone else is trying to do something or fix something?
24. Are there any older children or adults _____ likes to spend time with? What do they do or talk about together?

salient aspects of the child's experience—salient from the child's perspective—and helps one to appreciate what is meaningful to the child and some of his or her forms of sense-making. Having this more holistic sense of the child can help the researcher better understand what the child may say about the research topic of interest in a subsequent interview. The relationship developed in the narrative inquiry interview can also enhance the child's comfort or confidence in these subsequent interviews.

For any of a number of reasons, a researcher may wish to begin addressing the research topic in a first interview rather than dedicating it to a getting-to-

know-you session. In this case, one might have some questions like those in Table 2, as well as other questions specifically about the research topic. One would explain to the child that some questions are simply getting-to-know-you questions and others will pertain to the specific topic of the research. Similarly, the interview with parents can be a combination of some questions from Table 3 together with other questions focused on the research topic.

In both sets of questions, it is helpful to try to aim for the kind of open-endedness modeled in most questions in Table 2. If one wishes to learn a number of specific things or obtain reports on negative experiences, it might be best to use pre-interview activities for these purposes. A child's responses to open-ended questions about the research topic should help to reveal what is salient for the child about the topic and what his or her frames of reference for thinking about that topic are. Open-ended questions are also likely to invite stories or points of view that are meaningful, comfortable, and interesting for the child to relate. By hearing what the child more spontaneously chooses to say about the research topic, the researcher can begin to appreciate how the way the child thinks about this topic is the same as or different from how the researcher thinks about it. By studying the child's comments and stories about the research topic to better discern the child's perspective, the researcher can plan appropriate questions for a subsequent interview. The child's responses to the getting-to-know-you questions may also help the researcher appreciate why the child makes sense of the research topic as he or she does.

Conclusion

If researchers wish to move beyond their current understandings of problems or questions pertaining to children's experience, they have to be hoping for surprises or uncoverings in their research (Packer & Addison, 1989). To allow space for surprises to emerge in research with children, researchers may need to entertain a wide range of possibilities for children's expression of their experience, assumptions, perspectives, sense-making, and ways of proceeding. Researchers need to communicate both by their manner and their processes that whatever children spontaneously bring forward in response to open-ended opportunities for expression is appropriate, relevant, and of interest. It is the researchers' work to discern the implications of children's perspectives for the research question of interest. In this article, I invite consideration of pre-interview activities and narrative approaches in interviews as two processes that may be helpful for learning children's perspectives in a friendly and respectful way. The ongoing challenge and responsibility for researchers is to learn how the nature and significance of children's experience may be different from what was anticipated.

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