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Research with disabled children: how useful is child-centred ethics?

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Summary

The title of a collection on 'ethics and methodology of research with children' implies that research with children necessarily raises unique questions about ethics and methods. Our paper questions whether this is so, what the unique questions might be, and how they arise. We consider that any extra complications in research with children are common to research with other 'minority' groups. The main complications do not arise from children's inabilities or misperceptions, but from the positions ascribed to children in late twentieth century Western societies. Clarity about the social origins of any complications in research with children is crucial if these complications are to be addressed. Ethics, methods, theories, data and policy conclusions are inextricably interwoven, and it is important to acknowledge how initial theories inevitably shape policies. Reasons are given for preferring rights-based to child-centred ethics.

Introduction

This paper is based on current research about the views of children and adults involved with mainstream and segregated education for children with physical, emotional and learning difficulties. The term 'children' includes teenagers up to 18, to denote anyone who might be treated as a dependent child or pupil. We have observed daily activities in 22 schools and interviewed 45 children aged from 7 to 17, their parents, and also teachers and class room assistants, governors, councillors and LEA staff. One purpose of the research is to investigate children's views and experiences about 'what kind of school is best for me?'

The research is conducted in two contrasting local education authorities (LEAs). In East City, most disabled children attend mixed-ability-range classes in mainstream coeducational, multi-racial, comprehensive schools; only two of the original eight special schools remain open and they are in a transitional stage. The integration process, though sometimes challenged by the special sector, has gone through without any perceptible protest and indeed with some approval from the parents of 'normal' children. In West County, there are 13 LEA special schools and units, besides further special schools run by voluntary organisations; the mainstream secondary schools are grammar or high (secondary modern) schools, almost entirely white, single sex schools, and there are many private schools in the area.

East City, unlike most 'inner city' areas, entirely lacks middle class housing pockets, and there is no clear consensus that some schools are better than others. In contrast, in West County, school uniforms symbolise sharp and wide divisions between pupils, as statements of class, income and officially assessed ability.

In this paper, we discuss questions about ethics and methods raised mainly about two kinds of access: physical access in order to meet the children we interviewed and observed, and social access in 'the meeting of minds' during our efforts to understand their experiences. The two LEAs provide strongly contrasting contexts. One of us researched in East City and the other in West County. We each describe in turn our access in one LEA, then we jointly consider the ethical questions raised.

Access methods in East City (CG)

The way of life in an urban working-class area with inclusive mainstream schools

makes research access considerably easier in East City than in West County. Protocols are more lax/relaxed. My experience of local voluntary organisations gave me a direct route to some parents, some of whom passed me on to others. I sought the help of headteachers, classroom teachers and heads or members of the 'special' learning support services in mainstream schools. They usually spoke to the parent first to establish permission and then gave me the home telephone number. In two of these cases I was simply told that there was bound to be no problem, given the parent's address, and told to go and knock on their door without any preliminaries.

At first I was nervous about the prospect of interviewing children, particularly about scheduling questions and following up or prompting a response. I had been closely involved with young children on Portage home teaching programmes and in family research (Goodey 1991), but had never talked to them in formal research interviews. Yet during my earlier research, for example, I had been in Teheran interviewing Islamic militants on workplace committees at the height of the Khomeini revolution, when Iran was at the top of the Home Office's off-limits list for Britons travelling abroad. What I found was not nerve-wracking: I talked to people who were proud of themselves, who were being funny or suspicious, or who wanted to show the world what they were worth, people who were trying to be clever or awkward, people who knew exactly what was happening to them and to others, people like myself, whom I liked or disliked, and who actively wanted to teach me something I did not know. Why should my young interviewees, drawn from the same local culture in which I myself grew up, seem any more threatening, any more alien, any less likely to exhibit these familiar characteristics?

The general malaise could be reduced to: are they going to talk to me? This anxiety is acknowledged often enough by researchers, but something extra exaggerated and compounded it. It was as if children were a different, possibly dangerous species. The philosopher Wittgenstein raised a summary question about whether we should define the human species by its psychologically determined essence or by its unified culture: 'If a lion could talk, could we understand him?' (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 223b). Such scepticism lies equally behind our ethical social constructions of the child and our research methods. If speaking to a child is like speaking to a lion, this is surely one of the reasons why we worry about how to design protocols in the hope of obtaining answers, and dispute their veracity and their interpretation. It can become a vicious circle of perceiving, constructing and reporting children as a different species. In respect of children who are also humans, inexperienced and experienced researchers alike should perhaps rephrase the question. 'If children speak, do we want to understand them?'

It is only 'more complicated' to speak to children if one assumes in them a certain degree of taxonomic remoteness from ourselves. However, for complication in the subjects, read fear in the researchers. Equally perhaps there is a worry that one will be coercive and oppressive to child respondents, despite one's best efforts. For example, if I were grateful simply for anything they said, I could always lazily bring 'interpretation' to bear on an inconsequential response. None of these feelings can be dissociated from assumptions of inequality. My complicated and complication-inducing nervousness exists in the face of what I feel to be alien and threatening, and is increased by the extent to which I cannot consider children to be on an equal footing with myself.

The solution which I find imposing itself on me is not one of masterfully overcoming fear, but of listening (if only because children give me no other choice) to the way in which they set agendas and determine directions, just as anthropologists ought to involve adults. Children themselves dictate large amounts of the process. I am both interviewer and a subject among subjects, whatever my subsequent opportunities for exercising control over the writing up; I am pushed around by the circumstances of the interview and particularly by what I feel to be some kind of insistence from the children. And the present tense seems the least one can do to reflect and illustrate the 'immediacy' of that relationship. Immediacy is not a word that springs to mind about interactions between adults, but does this quality make the interviewer's interaction with a child more or less human, more or less alien? The answer to this question is certainly something to do with our chosen social roles, and to the ethical character given to interactions by the active participation of the child.

The simplest interaction displays this - making introductions, for example. I stand in the playground at break-time in a mainstream primary school, feeling rather at a loss. Joanne (names have been changed), an eleven-year-old with no speech and labelled autistic, spots my new face from across the playground, comes straight over pulling an unlabelled friend, and takes hold of both my hands and smiles at me, then pumps both my hands up and down. Instead of speaking she carries on smiling, from behind a spectacular pair of mauve shades. Contrary to the psychologist's judgement that she 'withdraws from reality' into an 'empty fortress' or strange world (Bettelheim, 1967), she simply points out the salient features denoting the one world, which are her fellow-creatures. Earl, a very large and mobile boy of the same age and with the same label in another primary school, wants to see the newcomer; he runs up to me with a classroom assistant behind his shoulder, and takes both my hands making loud noises and jumping up and down (a greeting). It is unlikely that he would greet the arrival of, say, a new computer in the same way. Nobody looks up, as ordinary school life goes on around him. If people with unusual behaviour do not live in another world, neither does their presence in 'our world' make it a 'new' world for all of us, but just the world.

Patrick, a 'bright' and socially mature boy of seven, does the same thing. We are sitting in a small circle of slightly older children (including Patrick's deaf brother) in another mainstream primary which has a deaf cohort. Actually I am waiting for a teacher with British Sign Language, although Patrick does not realise this. He breaks the silence: 'I do signs so that my brother will understand'. This does not mean, in socialised adult fashion, 'that's the reason why I'm here now'. Patrick takes command of a situation in which I may not seem to be clear about who I am, so that we can all get on with it; it is a demand for realism and honesty (even if it appears innocent of the fact that avoidance and dishonesty are common) that will focus on who we are, why we are here and how we are going to relate to each other.

There was similar easy access into the children's homes. When I went to interview Lauren's parents, having previously met Lauren, who has severe learning difficulties (SLD) at her comprehensive, I walked to the council house opposite the school and found Lauren chatting with women of all ages on the street next to her front door. As I said hello I rang the bell, to be told that it had never worked and that I should walk in through the open French window, straight into the living room. Other people, including someone selling dresses, drifted in from the pavement during the interview.

As well as the introductions, the child interviewees create challenges, refusals, inversions, and ironic survival strategies, all of which re-set the ethical framework of our encounters. David, who is nine and has spinal muscular atrophy, talks at length about what was bad about being in a segregated school and what is good about his present mainstream primary. Although the questions give clear prompts, he is following themes in our project quite freely. When asked for concrete examples of these benefits he chooses not himself but a girl with severe learning difficulties who has learned to speak through the social presence and help of her new classmates, thus contradicting his mother (sitting beside him) who several times has expressed reservations about integration for other than physically disabled children of normal intelligence. I also want to know about the value to him of extra services, and so I ask about physiotherapy with a slightly oblique question. 'Why?' asks David, intending: 'why have you asked this question?' He wants to know where it is leading, and thinks it is going to be a morbid question about his disability. This fundamental turn in the interaction - 'well, what are you *really* interested in and what are your *motives*?' - is not merely a defensive assertion on David's part, a maturity born of experience, but the expression of his ethical being or 'competence'.

Lauren's interview takes place at her mainstream comprehensive. After I have observed the class, it is suggested that I take her next door for a quiet interview. A teacher passes us in the corridor without acknowledging us. Lauren shouts out enthusiastically, 'Sir, this is Chris!' He has already gone by, but he turns his head and smiles at me. Our smiles mean something: Yes, we know Lauren is unusual, and we wouldn't normally be introduced in this way. But it's not an embarrassed smile either; the introduction between two adults is unusual but better.

Lauren has the key and takes me in the empty room, locks the door, realises she has made a mistake and unlocks it, but doesn't leave it open. I feel I ought to allow her to make these decisions. The interview itself eventually becomes a tug of war: she is more interested in asking me questions than in answering mine. Have I got children of my own? Will they have to wear school uniform? Are they going to cry when they leave their old school? The same three questions keep returning in circular fashion to punctuate my own scheduled ones and steer the interview towards a different direction and, as a result, a different kind of analysis. A development-based assessment, especially in a segregated environment surrounded only by other Laurens, would emphasise the limited rationality of her repetitiveness. In the inclusive environment it is easier to perceive the few questions that Lauren does ask as being secondary to her interest in and concern for other people (clearly observed in her classroom and family interactions as well as in the interview). This is hardly a compensation for supposedly more important things, but her own creation of a more broadly human environment, not simply by her presence but by her active contribution.

In the social interaction, are these children more or less competent than the interviewer? Is a disability, particularly a learning difficulty, a bar to this competence? It seems an inadequate response to these questions simply to try to look at the situation from the child's point of view. Defining, let alone assessing, competence or disability involves fundamental decisions about how we live our lives, and about what we want and choose to be competent 'at'. In the above situations the children are choosing helpfully to construct and keep reconstructing an ethical arena in which we can both operate. The child interviewees are often more clear than the adults are about the

ethical arena; (this is a mere statement about frequency among our interviewees, not an attempt to describe the general nature of childhood. The inclusive East City schools provide a clear context for seeing that the children's own ethical arena is not demarcated by the exclusivity of 'rational being' (that is, a being with language, intelligence, competence, autonomy, maturity: the basis on which most professional judgements about children and certain adults are made), but rather on a broader cultural inclusivity. They improvise this at interviews and observations, as an on-the-spot practical method responding creatively to the researcher's own preconceptions or lack of directness or momentum, as a necessary act of inclusion for all those present: that, they assume, is what we are here for, isn't it?

Access methods in West County (PA)

Originally, I planned to approach young interviewees through informal networks, to talk with them at their homes and later, if they agreed, to visit their schools. My aims were, as far as possible, to see the schools initially through the students' views, and to avoid their identifying me as part of the school system. When I approached the parents, through people I knew who worked with riding for the disabled and a 'handicapped holiday playscheme', all the nine families seemed keen to talk to me. An example is Lucy's father who said: 'Oh you're a mate of [playscheme organiser]? Come round this evening if you like,' and they talked until after 11.00 pm. I promised to take care to make any quotes in our reports anonymous, and not to mention anything about the home interviews to the school staff. No one objected to my plan to visit their school later.

However, I needed more contacts with specific ages and difficulties than the informal routes could offer, so I resorted to spending days in special schools and then trying to arrange home interviews with selected students who were very willing to talk to me and for me to contact their parents. They ranged from students who spontaneously started talking freely to me, to those who were initially cautious and slowly became more open; some of them enjoyed school life, and others appeared not to.

Access to schools varied from quick and easy, especially if I already knew one of the staff, to slow and frustrating. Some teachers were very welcoming and helpful, some were resigned, a few appeared to be angry that the headteacher's permission had imposed me on them while I observed one or two whole days with their class. Most teachers introduced me to the class or suggested that I introduce myself. A few simply started the lesson when the class arrived. I felt very awkward, especially in one class where no one could even see that I was there, and I would interrupt to ask for permission to introduce myself very briefly to them.

Before visiting schools and most homes I sent folded coloured leaflets, written for eight-year-olds upwards, explaining who we are and how to contact us, the research aims, purpose, main questions and methods, respect for privacy, and freedom to refuse or opt out. One school made braille copies of the leaflet. I also talked with interviewees, especially about the three final points, but could not apply these three standards when observing in schools, except when headteachers restricted my access. I relied on headteachers to hand leaflets onto staff and pupils, and I gave out more copies during the visits, as well as talking about our work to anyone who was interested.

Access to homes through the schools presented the greatest barriers. I wanted to

observe high research standards and to use opt-in methods. Teachers arranged for the pupils I had selected to take home our leaflet with a personal letter from me to their parents; I did not know their addresses and did not send reminders. At a boarding school for visually impaired students and at a private boys school all the parents consented to interviews. However, at three schools, no reply was made to the 14 letters sent out, although my earlier informal approach to families at these schools had worked well. At a boarding school for girls with emotional and moderate learning difficulties (MLD), a 16-year-old gained her headteachers' and father's permission for one interview, but they refused permission for the second interview she was keen to do, saying she had given me enough information. I taped interviews with a few 16-year-olds at school without asking their parents, or arranged contact with their parents through them.

During the home interviews, some parents and children spoke to me separately, others together. Some families enriched one another's accounts, such as when Richard and his mother jointly described their reactions when he became blind at the age of eight; some parents were constraining, as when one boy whispered to me while his father hovered in the next room. A few parents talked about their own views and then seemed surprised when I asked to see their son or daughter; other parents were out, or stayed in another room leaving their child to talk to me. As long as the child was included for at least part of the time, I left children and parents to decide who would be present. Their choices suggested much about their relationships, and I wanted to appear like an ordinary visitor, not someone who had any right to dictate to them, which could be counter-productive and inhibiting.

The formal barriers - raising funds for the research, gaining teachers', parents' and children's consent, finding my way around unfamiliar school buildings and on long journeys to boarders' homes - were like a series of solid doors to be unlocked using the correct keys and maps. After that, the actual interviews and observations involved informal barriers, like flimsy barely visible curtains. I had to move round them, if they were not to confuse and mislead me, as far as I was aware of them and able to get past them, whilst knowing that inevitably, for all researchers, there are many other mental barriers that limit our understanding and which we are partly unaware of. These mental barriers include:

- * words, and the effort to find appropriate words for each respondent (short and clear for some, sophisticated for others) and to explore the meanings they invest in the words they use;
- * my prejudice and ignorance about various disabilities which the research challenged;
- * common assumptions about childhood 'development', ignorance and incapacities, which the young interviewees repeatedly refuted;
- * theories about appropriate ways to educate disabled children, which need to be questioned rather than assumed;
- * respondents' caution or mistrust and their fear of giving 'wrong' answers, which inhibit their responses;
- * differences between people's reports, our perceptions of these, and their actual feelings, behaviours and experiences.

During group family interviews, I looked mainly towards the children and started topics with questions directed at them. All the children, except Matthew, responded

fluently. I sensed or imagined that some parents were rather affronted by this approach, but that gradually they became more interested; some were surprised and impressed by their child's accounts. Katie's father remarked on how much her memory had improved. George, (aged 14 and attending an SLD school) gave an intense two hour interview. He covered many topics that his parents had raised in an earlier session, checked that the tape recorder was working correctly, sang from Joseph and the Technicolour Dream Coat and, after we had exchanged thanks, he fell asleep. It felt like interviewing a charismatic, slightly eccentric star. His parents said they were impressed by the range and depth of his responses.

Families praised some teachers and criticised others: 'he talks to me as if I'm something you'd scrape off your shoe', said Lucy's mother. While mainly addressing children, and breaking the convention of (usually unconsciously) addressing and deferring to the most powerful people present, I also wanted to show that I respected the parents, especially those who had felt denigrated by teachers. Eye contact, nods and murmurs of agreement, open questions and following up topics introduced by families encouraged them to develop their own themes.

Each interview was different. Lucy played with her hamster and Terry with his dog. Matthew (aged 15 from an SLD school) and his mother took me for a walk through woods with their dogs. Katie (aged 14) knitted and vigorously beat up her puppet for swearing. Richard (aged 10) performed expertly on his drum kit, and showed me his large lego model of the Albert Hall based on his parents' descriptions. Since becoming blind he has changed his ambition to be a theatre lighting engineer into being a sound engineer. Nicholas (aged 10 from an SLD school) showed me photos of him camping and working with heavy horses. Linda (aged 9) talked enthusiastically about her many friends, and showed me her second bridesmaid dress with matching bows for her crutches. In contrast, Jane (aged 11) who also uses crutches spoke sadly about her loneliness. Aisser (aged 15) greeted me with: 'I must talk to you first about the Kurds, I can't wait any longer to discuss this, I feel so strongly about it'; he wants to be a politician. Alex (aged 16) criticised my questions: 'You have to understand integration on two levels: the ideal, and the reality or the practical level which the resources allow you to achieve'. He used philosophical arguments because, he said, it is a useful form of discussion and in order to show 'that people of my age can be rational and logical'. All these varied responses helped to increase our mutual understanding and to bridge gaps between words and meaning, reports and experiences. They vividly illustrated the interviewees' daily life at home and school, their hopes and achievements, fears and disappointments.

The mixture of conversation and observation was also useful in schools in integrating reports with experiences. Sharing lessons, break times, meals, sports and music sessions with the classes offered vivid insights. Noel (aged 9) in the autistic unit played a long game with me, building a lego house and talking in a squeaky or gruff voice for a harassed chicken and a hungry fox, with imagination and empathy that denied his label. Terry (aged 15) and his peers in an MLD school showed how easily they could disrupt classes and exploit teachers' weaknesses. The special schools raised questions about how far children are disabled by their disability, or by their schooling.

Ethics and access

Our informal methods of gaining access to children's views, through open questions

and respondent-led interviews could be criticised as unscientific and *therefore* unethical. Yet standardised questions can be unscientific, in being far too restrictive, screening out the complex variety in each child's unique life. Numerous studies in psychology, education or social work confine the questions to the researcher's own discipline, such as when psychologists assess anxiety, depression and behavioral disorders in disabled children, but ignore, for example, family finances, types of schooling (integrated or segregated) or friendships. This kind of research tends to locate problems within the person, instead of seeing how disability is also created or reduced through the social context (Oliver, 1990). When macro-social issues are reduced into micro-psychological disorders, there is a risk of victim-blaming, and of implying that disability is a major concern to the children concerned, whereas they might be far more interested in other matters omitted from the research. If research over-emphasises the practitioner-researchers' concerns, it can serve their interests. For example, if questions concentrate on psychological disturbance, the resulting replies can be used to support a conclusion that children would benefit from more psychological services (Ludman et al, 1994, is one of numerous examples).

Access raises ethical dilemmas. Should we respect adults' non-response or refusal, and so collude in silencing children? Are adults' decisions always an essential protection for vulnerable children against potentially abusive research? Should we accept agreed 'high standards' of research, such as opt-in approaches, contacting parents indirectly through schools and LEAs? (NFER, 1992). Direct, personal, informal approaches elicited enthusiastic responses from parents and children, in contrast to low responses to formal impersonal approaches through the schools for emotional and learning difficulties. Should these schools be allowed to control research access to families?

There are double standards regarding the consent of headteachers versus other staff, of teachers versus pupils, of people who are formally interviewed versus those who are observed or who talk informally; is this just? In our qualitative research, every detail could be relevant. Did people realise that we were noting their informal relations as well as their formal replies? Having said that we were looking at many aspects of the school, had we warned them sufficiently, or were we unwittingly slipping between overt and covert research? We reversed the usual standards, by respecting hints of reluctance in potential child or parent interviewees as refusal, but ignored the seeming irritation of a few teachers at being observed. Sociologists are advised:

In some cases, where the public interest dictates otherwise, and particularly where power is being abused, obligations of trust and protection may weigh less heavily. Nevertheless, these obligations should not be discarded lightly (BSA, 1992).

How does one decide the 'public interest' and researchers' obligations to adults and children, especially if their interest conflict?

Formal ethics debates about research standards and consent tend to assume liberal concepts of justice based on rational competence and protection of 'incompetents' (Beauchamp and Childress, 1989; Stanley and Sieber, 1992). These assumptions are challenged by the growing study of childhood literature on children's social and moral competence (James and Prout, 1990; Alderson, 1993; Mayall, 1994). The ethics of research with children inevitably involves questions about adults' power over children, questions also raised by feminism and anti-racism about the control of other groups.

Those in control tend to believe that the status quo benefits everyone, especially the controlled group (Baker Miller, 1976). Adult researchers and practitioners first have to recognise their own position, and how their interests are served, when they ignore how adults construct and colonise the supposed worlds of childhood and disability. There are crucial benefits for children in adults' care and protection, but there are also dangers in over-protection. These dangers can be most potent when adults are most convinced of their own disinterested beneficence and of children's dependence.

An honest ethical review would start by acknowledging how adult researchers initially assume that adults are superior, beneficent and rightly in charge of knowledge and resources. This blinds us to children's own wisdom, and to conflicts between adults' and children's interests. So what position can researchers justifiably take on conflicts of interests between generations? The final section considers child-centred ethics.

Child-centred ethics?

A concept of child-centred ethics has several weaknesses. The only human incapable of the concept would be, by definition, a child. One has to be something 'other' than a child in order to be able to posit it. For a child to hold a child-centred ethical position would be a contradiction in terms, unless 'ethics' meant something not belonging to humans in general but a separate child-specific type of ethics. 'Child-centred ethics' would simply be a form of the psychopathological egotism often attributed to young children by Piagetian schools of thought. Further, if children feel trapped in adult-constructed, child-centred contexts, their protests can appear ungrateful or insubordinate instead of reasonable (Henriques et al, 1984).

By contrast, there may be a child-created or child-authored contribution to a human-centred ethics in which everyone could consider living and working. The truisms raised by this article - the duty to listen to children, the need to listen to one's own prejudices, anxiety about 'will they talk to me?', the interconnectedness between theory and practice, the idea of a human-centred ethics itself - all look a little less obvious if one assumes that children are capable of such creativeness. If we reject the Piagetian view of children as not yet competent or fully functional moral beings, then we should be aware of an equally questionable implication, that children constitute a separate species for ethical purposes. It is a short step from saying that children think or act in a characteristically non-adult way, to 'treating' them characteristically, as stereotypes of childhood or of disability, with one ethics for adults and another for children.

Competence is not something which lies within individuals, to be assessed in terms of their psychological rationality, so that their ethical status can only be predicated upon this. That approach sets an agenda about control, and an equality that belongs to rational beings and excludes non-rational ones; children then have to struggle to make this grade. However, children can rearrange the agenda. The rearrangements are neither anarchic nor egotistical in a 'child-centred' sense. They seem to stem from a profound difference, which nevertheless does not belong in biological or psychological (developmental) nature and indeed seems to refute such concepts. The difference lies not 'within' the child or 'between' some adult world and themselves, but in the philosophical positions of all of us. For the researcher thinking about ethics then, the duty is, in addition to questioning the power of our own agenda-setting through our behaviour and conduct of the interviews, to inhabit this other realm which is not 'the

world of the child' but it is an alternative philosophical position. This involves checking what each experience feels like, and to adjust and react to it, perhaps to endorse or adopt it.

The degree of segregation in West County and of inclusion in East City highlights the social construction of disability. The 'disabled' appellation in our title is shorthand for the possession of a legal statement of special educational need. The statement, devised in the 1981 Education Act as a legal protection from neglect from those in power, can also be a device for creating arbitrary categories which can be used to abuse power. The relationship between children's acknowledged difficulty and socialised assumptions about their appropriate education were at times unclear. For example, children like David who had difficulties only with mobility and were fully integrated into their schools did not seem to see any relevance in our questions relating to their 'special needs'. Children with learning difficulties were equally capable, seen within an adequate contextual understanding, of questioning the purpose of schools through their gestures and words, not just through their presence in mixed-ability classes. In integrated schools, children at the far end of the autistic spectrum, without speech and with communication disorders, or children severely lacking cognitive skills - far from being the most 'different' one could imagine - came to be seen as a paradigm for the way we perceive and approach all children. They are at the boundary which tells us how all children may be treated as ethical beings and (in this sense) as equals in the research process, since children generally tend to be seen as having limited communication. To some extent everyone shares these limitations. Children help to create the ethical framework of the research, and the risks of misinterpreting them are no greater than with adult subjects.

The inclusive context in East City, we suggest, encourages people to be more receptive to anyone, including researchers, and more confident about managing the agenda and fending off exploitation, at least during encounters - all the access questions are coloured by how we eventually report the data, though there is not space here to discuss this. In segregated West County, adults tended to be more wary, protective and excluding. We could appear to be arguing for lower ethical standards to regulate access for the more working class people. However, prescribed ethics sometimes conflicts with a way of life, and methodology is preceded by values and context. A glance through academic journals reveals, despite many excellent reports, how inadequately any current ethics regulations prevent disparagement of child research subjects and disregard for their views. The first step in creating ethical research standards which respect children's worth and dignity is to consider questions of power, stereotyping and children's status. This prepares for the second step: agreeing on research standards which enshrine children's rights to be informed and listened to in all matters affecting them (UN, 1989).

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