Reflexively Engaging in Studying Childhood Ethics and Agency: Implications for Conducting Participatory Research

Engagement réflexif dans l'étude de l'éthique et de l'agentivité de l'enfance : Implications pour la conduite de la recherche participative

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Abstract

Researcher reflexivity in studying ethics and agency in participatory research with children is gaining recognition as a critical area of inquiry. Despite an appreciation of children's voices, agency, right to participation, socio-emotional well-being, and welfare, our understanding of how these rights are upheld and enhanced in research remains understudied. Although under-explored, Arts-based participatory research shows promise in valuing children's perspectives and well-being. This study focuses on how, as researchers, we can ethically engage with children's agency, balancing their development with safeguarding their socio-emotional well-being and respecting their cultural heritage and dignity. As an educator and reflexive researcher, I employed various reflexive tools such as jotting notes, field notes, and diary entries to investigate ethical challenges concerning children's agency in arts-based participatory research. This inquiry was conducted in collaboration with the "Wellbeing" project within a temporary shelter for marginalized migrants, 'Global Haven' - a fictional name - in Montreal, Quebec. The whole process of the research saw me writing jottings and field notes based on a series of workshop events at Global Haven and as part of my involvement in the research team. In the thesis, I draw on and interpret these field notes, focusing on critical moments in the fieldwork. I conclude that researchers would do well to focus on ethics in research with refugees, especially refugee children. I suggest that working in the field as a reflexive observer is an excellent place to start. This study seeks to contribute to our understandings of ethically engaging in research with children, while reflexively valuing their agency, dignity, well-being, and cultural heritage.

Résumé

La réflexivité des chercheurs dans l'étude de l'éthique et de l'agentivité dans la recherche participative avec les enfants gagne en reconnaissance en tant que domaine critique d'investigation. Malgré une appréciation des voix des enfants, de leur agentivité, de leur droit à la participation, de leur bien-être socio-émotionnel et de leur protection, notre compréhension de la manière dont ces droits sont respectés et renforcés dans la recherche reste peu étudiée. Bien qu'elle soit encore peu explorée, la recherche participative basée sur les arts est prometteuse pour ce qui est de valoriser les perspectives et le bien-être des enfants. Cette étude se concentre sur la manière dont, en tant que chercheurs, nous pouvons nous engager éthiquement avec l'agentivité des enfants, trouvant un équilibre entre leur développement, la protection de leur bien-être socio-émotionnel et le respect de leur patrimoine culturel et de leur dignité. En tant que profesionnelle de l'éducation et chercheuse réflexive, j'ai utilisé divers outils réflexifs tels que des notes de terrain et des entrées de journal pour enquêter sur les défis éthiques liés à l'agentivité des enfants dans la recherche participative basée sur les arts. Cette enquête a été menée en collaboration avec le projet "Bien-être" au sein d'une résidence temporaire pour migrants marginalisés à Global Haven à Montréal, Québec. Sur une période de deux ans, j'ai rédigé des notes réflexives et des notes de terrain sur une série d'ateliers. Dans la thèse, je m'appuie sur les notes de terrain et les interprète, en me concentrant sur les moments critiques du travail sur le terrain. Je conclus que les chercheurs auraient tout intérêt à se concentrer sur l'éthique dans la recherche avec les réfugiés, en particulier les enfants réfugiés, et je suggère que le travail de terrain est un excellent point de départ. Cette étude vise à contribuer à la compréhension de la manière de s'engager éthiquement dans la recherche avec les enfants tout en valorisant de manière réflexive leur agentivité, leur dignité, leur bien-être et leur patrimoine culturel.

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For

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My four muses whose unwavering love and support paved the way— and for all professors, mentors and friends whose inspiration and encouragement continue to guide this journey.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Positionality Statement

My name is Azam Dashti Khavidaki. The second part of my last name, i.e. Khavidaki, represents my homeland – a venerable village in the province of Yazd with a rich history spanning over a thousand years. The province is home to Zoroastrians, ancient fire temples, and iconic windcatchers.

Coming from the Middle East, I am acquainted on a profound and palpable level with the ways in which war, political turmoil, sanctions and social crises dislocate people from their land. Our neighboring countries, including Syria and Afghanistan, have severely suffered from war and various kinds of apartheid, threatening for a long time the well-being of millions of children and forcing them to dislocate and seek life in other countries as refugees.

My country, Iran, is overall a prominent destination for numerous Afghan immigrants and refugees, affording me valuable insights into their life stories and the challenges they encounter on their journeys to other countries. Unfortunately, in Iran, the well-being of refugee children, including Afghans, continues to be overlooked for various reasons, exacerbated by the fact that it is a host country for a substantial number of Afghan immigrant and refugee families with children. The large number of refugees, on top of constrained resources in education and healthcare systems, sanctions, and a limited presence of international humanitarian organizations and NGOs, most directly and bluntly threaten the well-being of children and women.

My initial experience working with refugee children dates back to twenty years ago in my hometown, Yazd, and my ancestral village, Khavidak, where some of the most vulnerable Afghan refugee families would often come to work on farms. As a rule, since these families typically lack documents or legal status, they face barriers to accessible education, health systems and other governmental resources. Some were more sociable and established friendly relationships with the natives, receiving better support. In contrast, others resided on farms and had a reduced chance of integrating into the local community.

I formed intimate relationships with a number of these families, with the women and children, especially Afghan girls, in my hometown. I recall a story of one child and her mom about twenty years ago. That event was eye-opening and moving, changing my perspective on those I saw as *Others* before. I happened to meet an eight-year-old child with her young mom who did not have access to the education system. I helped her read and write simple words. In a few days of teaching, I found her to be bright, creative, and profoundly perceptive. Her real-

life experience endowed her mind with vision. In her turn, she taught me how people with real-life experiences could be, in fact, the agents of change if they were provided with needed resources; she and her mom taught me to use small changes to promote a goal, to build hope when apparently there was none, and to be grateful for small joys. Those eyes and faces had a lot to reveal.

Later, through my literary studies and learning about otherness, marginalization, voice, and responsibility toward others, I realized I had a responsibility toward that child. In reading Levinas (1961), I learned that responsibility begins in the face-to-face encounter; he believes responsibility toward the other is not based on reciprocity or contractual obligations but arises spontaneously in the encounter. Twenty years have passed, and I have no information or updates on that girl and her young mom, but they changed something in me forever. The trigger was the thought of how we could amplify the voice of marginalized children, the chances that the child could be my child or me, and the thought of how we can help children irrespective of their nationality, race, ethnicity, and contractual obligations. Children are the real victims of wars, social turmoil, economic constraints, and sanctions, the main reasons for refugee dislocations around the world; every child deserves to enjoy equality and equal chances for education and peace.

Coming to McGill and receiving an education here strengthened my personal belief that children and youth with experience – if valued, respected, and given a chance to voice their minds – could be powerful sources of real-life knowledge as well as future leaders and change-makers, promoting hope, sustainable development, and peace globally.

Here, in Montreal, I was so thrilled to discover the possibility of engaging with the overall well-being of immigrant and refugee children. While working as a volunteer and research assistant, I had the privilege of meeting and working with children of marginalized migrants in the temporary shelter Global Haven[1]. In the project, I increasingly came to learn that supporting these children with the experience of dislocation is a crucial factor in empowering them to become future changemakers and contributors to international peacemaking efforts.

[1]-To ensure the highest ethical consideration and protect participants' safety, anonymity, and privacy, all names in this thesis, including those of the participants, researchers, and the shelter, are pseudonyms.

Understanding the appropriate approaches and methods for working with and researching vulnerable children is paramount in navigating this journey. Respecting their dignity, valuing their resilience, and amplifying their voices are essential to creating social justice, peace, and sustainable development.

Participatory Research, Ethics and Agency

In my research, I always seek ways to address and bridge the gaps between theory and practice in communicating with ordinary people. I believe real-life knowledge is to be found among people with experience, and I always look for a way to promote dialogical participatory development. Initially, I thought knowledge mobilization was the key; I wondered what knowledge usage would be if it did not change people's lives and how we educators could facilitate knowledge mobilization in everyday life.

During my time at the Participatory Cultures Lab and under the guidance of Professor Claudia Mitchell, I had the opportunity to connect with researchers who champion participatory research through cellphilming, photo voice, and other visual methodological approaches closely aligned with the dynamics found on social media. I found this method interactive and empowering; it regards people with experience as co-researchers and has great potential to connect people from various walks of life inside and outside Canada. It inspires dialogue and creates bonds among people who would otherwise not communicate. In that sense, it is really decentralizing and deconstructing.

The essence of participatory research lies in engaging with real people, which overlaps with what social media does. Cellphilm and photo voice are similar in many ways to what happens on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other online platforms. In my research and observations, I came to acknowledge that social media is a powerful tool for connecting vast numbers of individuals from around the country and the world, particularly in oppressive contexts, which makes it invaluable for disseminating information. Yet the downside to social media is the influence of algorithmic games and the weaponization of information in the hands of propaganda and other political forces, which can distort knowledge and should be approached cautiously since "each time an algorithm favours misleading content, it breaches our right to information" (UNESCO, 2023).

It is also important to note that participatory research uses photovoice, cellphilming, and drawings as an intervention to engage participants in producing content based on issues that matter to them. At the same time, it endeavors to empower them to foster dialogue and critical thinking for sustainable change. It is not mass media produced for mass consumption. Rather, it is to amplify marginalized voices. Within this context, children rank in this group,

specifically those from marginalized backgrounds whose voices are being systematically silenced. Social media moves people but does not create trust in a real sense; it is not face-to-face, whereas participatory research focusing on ethics is about responsibility toward others.

Participatory research using art-based and visual methods is particularly relevant to education and reaching out to people in need. Researchers use it as an intervention to focus on specific groups. It has the capacity to not only reach policymakers but, more significantly, directly empower participants to become agents of change. Additionally, it serves as a bridge across diverse cultures, ethnicities, and languages, fostering connections among community members, bringing ordinary people to the research table, and actively engaging them as co-researchers.

I was introduced to a project involving refugee children by a co-researcher at the Participatory Cultures Lab. During a cohort session there, I introduced myself in a team circle and spoke about my aspirations as an academic fellow and how renowned universities like McGill can support youth in the streets marching for their rights and contribute to the social capital needed for change, peace, and sustainable development. Following this, Dr. Prudence Caldairou-Bessett, a researcher based at UQAM University and a co-researcher at Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL) at McGill approached me to say that she found my speech moving and, after a brief conversation about my interests, offer me a volunteer job at the temporary shelter, Global Haven, and a potential opportunity to work as a research assistant in her project. Later, she introduced me to the research project called "Art-based Wellbeing Research with Children for Social Justice in Pandemic Times."

Within that context, my thesis explores the role of ethics, agency, and development in participatory research with children, beyond a harm reduction mindset, toward empowering children and developing their skills. I have grounded my research in an autoethnographic mode, “a style of autobiographical writing and qualitative research that explores an individual’s unique experiences in relationship to social and cultural institutions” (Custer, 2014 in Baker, 2020, p.28)

My field notes comprise firsthand observations from participatory workshops. While on-site, I recorded jotting notes to capture immediate impressions. Upon returning home, I engaged in reflexive analysis, particularly focusing on children’s agency and ethics. These notes encompass detailed records of events, children’s dialogues, and parental contributions. Collected over a year, they capture a variety of incidents. Jotting notes are enriched by reflections and interpretations, intertwining with related events to provide a comprehensive view of participants, their engagement, agency, and development. Given their origin being

from my perspective, they are influenced by my positionality and epistemology regarding ethical considerations.

In response to the question of what constitutes ethics in participatory research and whether the design and method of the research have a role in ethical research, I reflexively analyze children's agency and ethics in the project "Art-based Wellbeing Research with Children for Social Justice in Pandemic Times," funded by SSHRC with the central question of "How can we ethically research mental health and well-being for all children?" (Caldairou-Bessette, 2022). For the whole length of the research, I engaged with this project in a variety of ways – doing literature reviews and conducting and contributing to art-based workshops, including cellphilming, singing workshops, song and dancing, painting and drawing, and field trips.

In complementing the main Wellbeing project and contributing to enhancing our understanding of ethics, agency, and socio-emotional well-being concerning children's empowerment in participatory research, I approach this research through the lens of reflective social theories.

The main project employs participatory research as an intervention, aiming to directly enhance the well-being of children and contribute to the development of ethical research methods that include all children. This initiative recognizes that the mental health and overall well-being of children from marginalized migrant communities face restricted access to service, especially during challenging periods like the pandemic, leading them to endure a form of "systematic injustice" (Caldairou-Bessette, 2022). The participant population in this project comprises young children aged 3-12 residing in a temporary shelter (Global Haven) for marginalized migrants, with approximately 10 to 12 in each workshop session. The primary focus of these workshops is to amplify children's voices and attend to their needs. Participatory art workshops serve as essential communication tools for engaging with them.

Research Ethics Boards Versus Ongoing Ethical Dilemmas

To carry out Art-based participatory research and any other research endeavours involving human beings, it is incumbent upon us as researchers to diligently adhere to the prevailing ethical principles outlined by Canada's three federal research agencies – the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Council (SSHRC). In their commitment to the people of Canada, these agencies promote Ethical research involving humans, obliging all researchers to follow certain principles (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, December 2018.).

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) is a joint policy informed, in part, by leading international ethics norms, all of which may help, in some measure, to guide Canadian researchers in Canada and abroad in conducting research involving humans. TCPS highlights that “ethical principles and guidelines play an important role in advancing the pursuit of knowledge while protecting and respecting research participants to try to prevent needless physical, psychological, individual or social harm” (TCPS, 2018, p.5). The Research Ethical Board of each institute often disseminates and monitors the implementation of these principles. As the principles outline, “these codes protect individuals' rights, respect participants' dignity, and ensure that the research is conducted ethically to build public confidence and trust” (TCPS, 2018, p.5).

Despite all these measures, dilemmas arise while conducting the actual research, particularly with vulnerable groups, including children that are relational in nature. This research is hereby a response to ethical dilemmas in participatory research involving children. Such research aims to bring children to the research table as co-researchers. In other words, this is the ethical shift to research ‘with’ children instead of ‘on’ children (Caldairou-Bessette, 2022). It, thereby, emphasizes children’s agency as an important criterion in fostering research with children and not on them. Many scholars with experience in conducting participatory research believe that, despite it enjoying many advantages over other methods such as questionnaires and interviews, the method brings many full of is ethical dilemmas, including moments of power imbalance which undermine children’s agency. This highlights that research involving children is underrepresented and needs more attention. The fact is that the ethics guidelines are usually limited to Research Ethics Boards (REBs), which are often insufficient. One reason is that ethical issues arising while doing research with children are more complicated to categorize in REB protocols. At the same time, some of the institutional and cultural regulations in research involving children, such as “the use of image,” are so complicated that they often force researchers to obscure part of the data to the point that it becomes meaningless (Agbenyega 2014, p.154).

Highlighting the value of research on early childhood, this study also recognizes that while early childhood receives substantial attention and investment, it is still underrepresented in educational research at the academic level in Canada. The main reason is the challenging nature of such research; ethical regulations regarding research on and with children are more complicated than those with other age groups, and research with children entails multidimensional considerations (e.g., Parents’ consent along with children’s assent). In response to this challenge, participatory research offers a more ethics-friendly shift in context

and discourse concerning children's dignity and voices in matters that affect them. The latter aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989, Article 12); all children have the right to participate and express themselves on matters that concern them (Lundy et al., 2011).

Moreover, conducting research with children entails consideration of age and language barriers in the face of ethics, consent and agency. While agency is understood as the expansion of choice and the power to influence and lead their environment from where children are, observing how age and language affect that agency, especially regarding marginalized immigrant children, is crucial.

In every research project, there may be moments of power inequality, the positionality of participants, their ground, language barriers and age; in the case of marginalized migrant families, their status and lack of legal documents put them in an even more vulnerable situation. They may feel obliged to collaborate in an activity they may not like, thereby threatening the position of consent in the research. More importantly, there is the question of their dignity; respect for human dignity requires that research involving humans be conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration they are due. In this latter light, respect is translated into three main categories: respect for the person, concern for welfare and justice. (TCPS, 2018)

In that sense, this research method advocates for attention to their welfare, including respect and justice, which brings to mind Pierre Bourdieu's argument regarding ethics in research. He believes that research that respects human dignity should also contribute to the development of participants; in other words, researchers should “critically consider the contribution that the research would make to the participants’ overall development” (Agbenyega, 2014, p.155), hinting at the concern for welfare and promoting it for the participants. This is where ethical research with children aims to promote their agency in participatory research, being inherently more ethical than other modes. Within this context, this research investigates two main questions of agency and ethical concerns in participatory research with children.

Artworks such as drawings, paintings, photos, and videos have the power to reach policymakers to communicate children’s needs and voice their ideas while empowering them. Thus, art-based participatory activities promote their welfare while respecting their dignity. Children often have difficulty communicating things that matter to them verbally because of limited language (Burnard 2002). In the case of marginalized migrant children, this turns out to be far worse; they usually struggle with a significant language barrier, often arriving in

Canada without acquiring the host country's language – English and French. More importantly, their age and power inequality make it even more difficult for them to express themselves, whereas artwork, including drawing, photovoice and cellphilming, offers the means to express themselves on matters that concern them, the latter being in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989, Article 12); all children have the right to participate and express themselves on matters that concern them (Lundy et al., 2011). Concurrently, art-based research promotes children's well-being as they find an outlet in a safe environment to communicate their needs. They learn how to deal with challenges while working in a team, creating bonds with their teammates, and connecting to new mates from different backgrounds.

Alongside hoping to directly impact the lives of temporary shelter participants, this research aims to amplify children's voices and enhance their emotional well-being. Often overshadowed by the hectic lives of their parents and Global Haven staff, children's voices are sometimes lost, suppressed, and systematically silenced. Living in such shelters with many other families with different cultures, languages, and ethnicities, inherently demands a high level of adaptability, conflict management, and other social skills. equipped to address the pressing challenges faced by these children and their families. Age-related language barriers and the general language barrier of the new land often compound the difficulties faced by children and their parents, who are frequently single parents. Art-based workshops empower children and parents to express themselves, allowing researchers to mobilize their produced artwork as a reflection of their concerns to the authorities at Global Haven and ultimately contribute to enhancing their overall well-being.

Research Objectives and Questions

While working with children in a temporary shelter for marginalized refugees, I grew sensitive to issues of power and agency, becoming aware that the ethics protocols suggested by the ethics boards, although eye-opening, are not sufficient for conducting the research with children and that new ethical dilemmas arise in nearly every workshop. Moreover, through my literature review, I realized that, to be ethical, we need to go beyond a harm-reduction mind-set.

My objective in this research is to develop a more effective holistic approach to ethics in participatory research and introduce ways to prioritize children's right to participation, interests and agency, contributing to their empowerment and development. I argue that age and language barriers challenge researchers' autonomy of participation, ethics and agency when working with children and their families. To pursue this objective, my research questions are

based on my experience working with refugee children and my position as a new immigrant arriving in Canada with a child.

Research question 1 (RQ1): What are the ethical and agency considerations for children in participatory research beyond just focusing on harm reduction strategies?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do reflexivity approaches inform our understanding of children's ethics and agency in participatory research?

Overview of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I have broadly mapped out a holistic overview of my thesis. Commencing with a concise statement on my positionality, I presented a snapshot of my thesis and its connection to my background, research interest, and the Wellbeing project. Subsequently, I contextualized my argument about the primary objective and research questions.

Chapter two offers a literature review and focuses on justifying the advantages (and challenges) of participatory research compared to other data collection methods in research with children. This chapter is structured into three main sections: Ethics in Research with Children, Ethics in Participatory Research with Children, and Ethics Regarding Children's Agency. Furthermore, I present arguments and literature on the ethical dilemmas researchers need to address while doing research with children and on ethical research needing to respect REB protocols and move far beyond a harm reduction mindset toward empowering children and developing their skills as world citizens and social beings.

In the third chapter, I elucidate the rationale behind autoethnographic research and offer a picture of the theories underpinning positionality and epistemology within the context of autoethnographic research. Subsequently, I explore the practical application of jotting notes, field notes, and a diary in ethnographical research, detailing how these tools were instrumental to my method and reflection on the project and research.

In the fourth chapter, I focus on over fifteen jotting notes derived from field notes entries reflecting my direct involvement with the Global Haven and Wellbeing project over the past year. I explore the implications of participatory art-based workshops, social capital, and children's agency in children's well-being. I contextualize this theoretical framework by examining various jottings that provide context, interpretation, and discussion for each episode in the Wellbeing project. Additionally, I address ethical dilemmas and my responses and positionality to pressing challenges encountered during the research process. I critically

analyze these ethical dilemmas and engage in reflective analysis of the complexities of conducting participatory research with children in the Global Haven.

Chapter five concludes the thesis by reflecting on the process of reflexive writing, , e and discussing the limitations of the thesis. Here I also make final comments on the implications of these findings for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter offers a snapshot of previous research on ethical considerations and thinking about the protection of children when doing research on and with them. It presents an introduction, provides a background on children's ethics, and proceeds to three main sections: 1- an examination of literature pertaining to children's ethics, their rights, welfare, and protection when involved in research; 2- a discussion on participatory research methodologies and the ethical issues they entail; and 3- an exploration of the interconnectedness between ethics and children's agency, elucidating how ethical considerations and discussions on protecting children influence children's agency.

Background

The evolving landscape of ethics in research has opened up new avenues for engaging children as active participants in research endeavours. Similarly, questioning conventional assumptions about ethics in research involving children enables researchers to foster more dynamic, inclusive, and child-friendly research practices.

Ethics originates from the Greek word 'ethos,' meaning character, nature, or disposition. The concept of ethics has been in play since the time of the Hippocratic school (Smith 1996). In the 18th century, the German philosopher Kant discussed ethics or moral laws as categorical imperatives, a principle of behaviour that is universally binding and does not rely on any personal desires or objectives for its justification (Kant 1995; 2003). Moving into the 19th century, figures like Thomas Percival began translating ethical imperatives into codes of conduct, particularly in the realm of medical practice (Percival 1997; Newsom 1990). Subsequently, in the mid-20th century, ethics evolved into a distinct field, extending beyond medical practice and scientific experimentation (Farrell, 2005).

The modern field of ethics emerged after World War II, largely prompted by global condemnation of wartime atrocities in experimentation. In 1949, the Nuremberg Military Tribunal established ten fundamental principles for ethical research involving humans, emphasizing the importance of voluntary consent and avoiding coercion or deception. These principles mandate that research serves societal good and minimizes unnecessary physical or mental harm to participants. Afterwards, the World Medical Association introduced its Principles for Those in Research and Experimentation in 1954, later formalized as the Declaration of Helsinki in 1964. Concurrently, the British Medical Research Association issued Responsibility in Investigations on Human Subjects in 1964, providing a code of ethical

conduct for research supervisors, professional associations, and scholarly journals (Farrell, 2005).

During the 1970s, the American Academy of Pediatrics published "The Ethics of Drugs Research," offering ethical guidelines for conducting biomedical research involving children. Subsequent decades saw revisions to the Helsinki Declaration by the World Medical Assemblies. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) also collaborated on the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects, first published in 1982 and revised in 2002. These guidelines emphasized scientific validity, risk assessment, consent, individual and community interests, and ethical review. McNeill observed in 1993 that many countries had implemented ethical review systems, where research ethics committees assessed whether proposals adhered to national and international ethical standards. Compliance with these standards often determines eligibility for funding and publication. Consequently, ethics review boards were established in various countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Denmark, Australia, and New Zealand (see McNeill 1993; Babbie 1998; Milburn 2001; Miller 2003; Tschudin 2003; Farrell, 2005).

The ethical principles governing medical research were a foundation for developing ethical standards in social research. For instance, in 1977, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) released guidelines outlining ethical practices in social research. Similarly, in 1989, Norway established its National Committee for Social Science and Humanities, further underscoring the importance of ethical considerations in social research. Over time, Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council expanded its guidelines from medical research to encompass social and behavioural research in 1999. In 2004, it published specific guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, reflecting a commitment to addressing cultural and social considerations in research ethics (Farrell, 2005).

Part One: Ethics in Research with Children

Within this context, ethics, or in an alternative terminology, child protection discourse, comprises the issue of children’s well-being and ethical considerations. This discourse is geared toward examining and resolving issues related to children’s rights, welfare, and responsibilities in protecting children from potential risks and dangers in research. Child protection discourse often includes considerations of legal frameworks, ethical considerations,

and the development of supportive environments to promote children's safety and healthy development.

From the Tri-Council Policy Statement point of view, all research involving human beings needs ethics reviews and approval by REB before the research starts (TCPS, 2018). Given the fundamental importance of research and human participation in research, it is crucial to ensure that the research is carried out ethically. This is essential for public confidence and trust. Advocating and guiding the ethical practices in human-involved research, the regulations protect participants from potential risks and enhance public confidence in research (TCPS, 2018).

Honouring human dignity necessitates conducting research involving humans in a manner that recognizes the inherent value of every individual and the consideration they deserve. This policy conveys the essence of respecting human dignity through three fundamental policies: “respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice.” Being central to every research involving humans, including children, these principles are interconnected and mutually dependent (TCP, 2018, p.6).

In research with children, upholding their dignity and valuing their autonomy, welfare, and rights to justice given their vulnerability is clearly quite challenging; dealing reflexively with this challenge is crucial for research with children. With respect to children’s autonomy, the Tri-Council recognizes that certain individuals, including children, might be unable to independently make decisions due to factors like their age and cognitive development. Therefore, in such situations, the policy recommends that researchers obtain consent from a legally authorized person. This individual is entrusted with responsibility based on their understanding of the children and their known preferences or, in the absence of such preferences, consideration of their well-being. Voluntary, informed, and continual consent criteria are paramount in these situations. This principle also underlines that with respect to children, researchers should include individuals in decision-making whenever it is feasible. As such, researchers should consider participants’ sentiments regarding participation and seek their agreement (TCPS, 2018).

Recognizing the inherent worth of individuals and acknowledging the respect and consideration they deserve, the principle of respect for persons encompasses the dual moral responsibility of honouring autonomy and safeguarding those with developing, impaired or diminished autonomy. In the realm of research involving children and their developing autonomy, reflexivity in addressing such challenges is of utmost importance (Goldie, 2008; Mastandrea, S., 2010; Melchionne, 2017; TCPS2, 2018). This concept is closely tied to the

notion of research serving as an intervention (Chase & Rousseau, 2018; D'Amico et al., 2016; MacEntee, 2015; Petraglia, 2007).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989, Article 12) is an important turning point in ethics relevant to children. It underscores the right to participation as being equally important as the right to protection, stressing that every child is entitled to voicing their opinions and participating in matters that affect them (Lundy et al., 2011). This forms the basis for transitioning from research on children to research with children, which is a significant ethical shift. Given convention, numerous scholars have underscored children's ability to engage in research and to act as significant catalysts for societal transformation, especially in contexts where vulnerability necessitates change (Bouma et al., 2018; Carnevale, 2020; Cassidy et al., 2019; Cheney, 2012; Powell & Smith, 2009). Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) affirmed that children should be able to participate through various mediums such as writing, art, or any other medium of their choice. This provision has fostered the advancement of visual and arts-based research methods (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Coad, 2007; Kramer-Roy, 2015; Lindberg et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2011). Many other scholars have emphasized the use of art in research with children and highlighted its possible function as a method of research (Chamberlain, 2018; Hickey-Moody, A. C., 2017; Kossak, 2012; McNiff, 2008), noting that art can promote well-being (Beauregard et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, there are challenges in conducting research with children. For instance, balancing the principles of protection against exploitation with the rights to autonomy and participation poses a fundamental challenge, often resulting in the exclusion of vulnerable individuals from research, which in itself is unjust, particularly for children who lack the capacity to decide independently and require parental consent. Ethical concerns also find expression in ensuring participants' freedom to engage in research without negative repercussions and understanding the potential impact of their involvement. Scholars advocate for reciprocity, trust-building, and community engagement over time to address these challenges and promote positive transformation (Bélanger-Dumontier et al., 2017; Hugman et al., 2011; Trainor & Bouchard, 2013).

Vulnerability is another of the most important ethical concerns in research with children. Researching the topic of vulnerability among children raises significant ethical considerations, particularly in transitioning from exclusion to active participation.

Vulnerability is manifested in various forms, such as legal status, economic instability, health conditions, age, and autonomy, giving rise to complex ethical dilemmas in research (Akesson et al., 2014; Gillon, 2003; Holland, 2007; Leaning, 2001; Macklin, 2003; Zion et al., 2010). These dilemmas are compounded when multiple vulnerabilities intersect, as seen in forcibly displaced children (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Meloni et al., 2015; Vervliet et al., 2015) often subjected to traumatic experiences (Gervais et al., 2021; Rousseau et al., 2012; Rousseau & Miconi, 2019).

Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC)

Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC), first launched in 2013, is a component of a global initiative which provides resources regarding ethics in research involving children. This website was funded by UNICEF's Office of Research, Innocenti. The primary goal of ERIC is to support researchers in developing and refining research methods that prioritize children's rights, dignity, and well-being. Unlike a view that sees ethics as a set of rules for safe research, ERIC acknowledges that ethical considerations involve the intersection of researchers' knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences. This approach emphasizes critical reflection, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, context-specific solutions, and global collaboration, guided by the core ethical principles of respect, benefit, and justice (Graham et al., 2013).

Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) is organized into four key areas that give rise to ethical dilemmas: (a) Harm and benefits, (b) Privacy and confidentiality, (c) Informed consent, and (d) Payment compensation. These are "underpinned by the ERIC's framework of three Rs: rights, relationships and reflexivity" (Powell et al., 2016). The first R is Children's *rights*, emphasizing the central role of ethical research and promoting the appropriate involvement of children. The second R, or right, is *relationship*, which acknowledges that the practice of research ethics is shaped through negotiations within relationships. The third R is *reflexivity,* highlighting the capacity of researchers to critically reflect on the impact of their research on participants, communities, themselves, and the body of knowledge under investigation (Graham et al., 2013).

Among these four main elements, the primary consideration in conducting research with children is to assess if the research is truly needed, whether children's participation is crucial, and how they will be involved (Graham et al., 2013). In evaluating potential harms and benefits, various stakeholders, including researchers, institutions, and funding bodies, should first consider the necessity of research with children, determining whether including children

is essential and simultaneously avoiding favouring adults speaking on behalf of children. The second consideration should be whether there are compelling reasons for excluding a group of children. The third addresses the researchers' responsibilities to ensure that they possess the necessary competence, resources, and capacity to conduct research involving children. The last consideration underpins the benefits involved and the evaluation of how the research will contribute to the well-being of individual child participants and benefit children as a broader social group (Graham et al., 2013).

As noted by Graham et al. on the ERIC website, the key concerns have to do with privacy and confidentiality in research with children, emphasizing the need to consider various aspects. Firstly, respecting children's autonomy entails giving them control over the information they disclose and to whom. Secondly, confidentiality should be discussed with children delicately, addressing limits (e.g., safety concerns) without inducing unnecessary worries. Thirdly, ensuring privacy in data collection and storage is vital, as well as maintaining confidentiality among all parties involved. Lastly, safeguarding children's anonymity or recognition is imperative in publishing and disseminating research findings (Graham et al., 2013).

ERIC emphasizes the ethical principle of non-maleficence, guiding researchers to prevent any harm or compromise to participants when disseminating research findings. Preventing harm involves ensuring participants and their communities remain unidentifiable in research reports, presentations, and other dissemination methods. Common strategies for maintaining anonymity include removing identifying details, altering community names, omitting participant names, and using pseudonyms. In certain research sectors, identifying children, families, and communities may pose significant harm, either within the community or to influential entities like government departments. While anonymity is the standard, it is crucial to recognize that children may desire identification in the research in some cases, provided that it poses no threat and acknowledges their involvement. This logic is based on the two important articles from the United Nations Convention on Rights of Children (UNCRC) on privacy and confidentiality; Article 16 emphasizes children's right to privacy, and Article 3 underscores the primary consideration of children's best interest (Graham et al., 2013).

Informed consent is another important matter in research involving children. It involves participants being fully informed and fully understanding the research, comprising two key components: an informing part and a consenting part (Mayne et al., 2016).

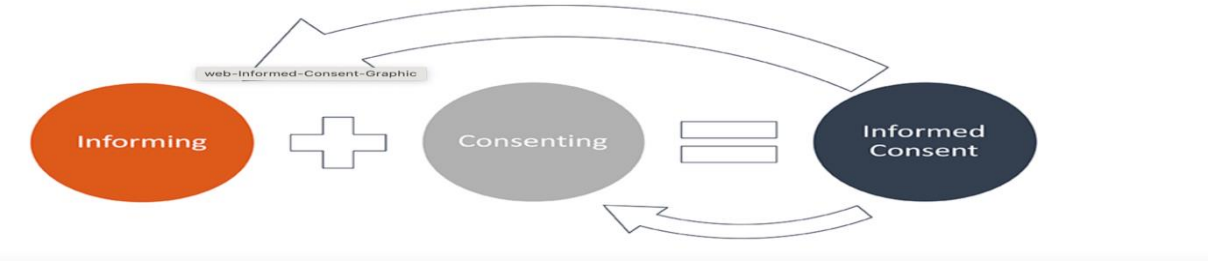

Figure. 1. The diagram below is adapted from the ERIC website (Child Ethics, n.d.).

Research participation consent aligns with children's right to express their views on matters affecting them and is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC article 12). Children can provide initial consent through various means, such as signature, fingerprint, circling and 'emoji,' adding a sticker, or ticking a box, tailored to their communication abilities and the study's methods. Consideration should be given to environmental and relational influences on children's decisions, whether in schools, families, or communities. Children must also be informed of the right to dissent, with ongoing support for voicing dissent in research, and researchers should stay attentive to non-verbal cues (Bourke et al., 2014).

The last important facet in children's participation, after harms and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, and informed consent, is the question of payment and compensation for the time and effort children and/or parents put into the research, which can take various forms. These include (a) reimbursement when children and/or parents are compensated for direct expenses such as time, effort, and lost income tied to their participation; (b) compensation payments when participants receive recompense for their time, work, effort, and any inconvenience caused by involvement in the research; and (c) appreciation payments which could be bonuses or tokens given to children after participation as a gesture of gratitude, often disclosed during recruitment to minimize coercion; (d) and incentive payments to encourage children's participation in research (Graham et al., 2013).

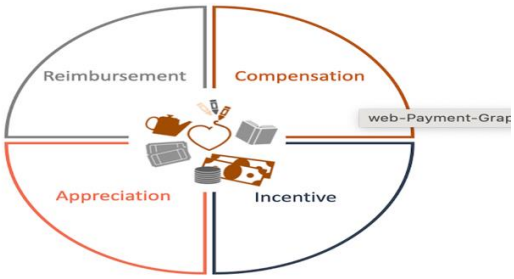

Figure 2. The diagram is sourced from the ERIC website (Child Ethics, n.d.)

As such, within this ethical context, research participants should receive suitable reimbursement for expenses, compensation for time, effort, or lost income, and acknowledgment for their contribution. However, payment should be avoided if it has the potential to pressure, coerce, bribe, persuade, control, or result in economic or social disadvantage (Graham et al., 2013).

The question of when participants should receive information about payment is an important and pressing issue. The timing of both revealing the intention to provide and carrying out the actual disbursement requires careful consideration. Researchers may opt to refrain from forewarning participants about an appreciation payment and instead provide it at the conclusion of data collection. This strategy aims to prevent the payment from being used to entice children and families to participate, potentially impacting their freely given consent. Furthermore, delaying the disclosure of payment details can decrease instances of children attempting to please the researcher by offering responses they believe would meet the researcher's expectations rather than sharing their genuine experiences or feelings (Graham et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, not informing participants about reimbursement and compensation payments prior to the commencement of the research may have adverse effects on recruitment, as participants may choose not to participate due to financial considerations. This is especially significant in situations where children and/or families rely on the income earned by the child (Graham et al., 2013).

The Role of Ethics in Research with Refugee Children

In the ethical shift from research on children to research with children, particularly in the case of refugee children, respect is an important feature. The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) emphasizes the importance of respect in its national research guidelines, asserting that respect is central among values like research merit, integrity, justice, and beneficence (NHMRC, 2007). This focus aligns with other national and international regulatory bodies. For instance, the Belmont Report highlights that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and those with diminished autonomy deserve protection (US National Institute of Health, 1979). Similarly, the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) also underscores this principle, which is particularly relevant for research involving refugee youth (CIOMS, 1993).

We apply these dual forms of respect to the specific conditions of young refugees. The universal form of respect acknowledges their inherent value and basic human rights, while the protective form ensures they are safeguarded from further harm or abuse. Additionally, we

introduce a beneficial or compensatory form of respect, aiming for research that positively impacts their experiences. Given the possibility of both positive and negative outcomes, researchers must be particularly attentive to avoiding exploitation through neglect or over-protectionism. We thus advocate respect as the guiding principle for ethically appropriate research involving young refugees (Lawrence et al., 2013).

In line with the third criterion of the role of respect, a beneficial or compensatory form of respect which aims to design research that can positively contribute to the experiences of young refugees, refugee children should be offered the right to feel empowered and express their opinion about things that matter to them. Although not everyone agrees, there is strong evidence that children and young people can communicate effectively even in sensitive situations (e.g., Morrow & Richards, 1996; Parkinson & Cashmore, 2008; Thompson, 1990). Very young children can express their needs and describe their lives positively and negatively (Lawrence et al., 2013). Lawrence et al. believe young people's ability to express their concerns greatly depends on the researcher's willingness and capability to facilitate their genuine input. This can be challenging when other interests interfere. Even in Western contexts like the US, proposals to give young people a voice can conflict with parental wishes and rights. The US, one of the two countries that have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, faces significant lobbying for parental rights over children's rights (Hicks & Lawrence, 2004). Providing a voice to young people from hierarchical cultures requires special insight and diplomacy (Lawrence et al., 2013).

To boost children's self-esteem and confidence in voicing their opinions while in the field, researchers should prioritize upholding their dignity and honouring their perspectives in the research field. Balen et al. emphasize respect as a critical ethical feature in research with refugee children. Acknowledging respect in children's participation shifts the focus away from negativity and prohibitions toward proactive steps in proposing and reviewing research interactions. Respect not only facilitates researchers' access to children but also establishes a framework for fostering positive and productive interactions. He adds that this approach aids researchers in designing and conducting studies involving young refugees in a manner that prioritizes the child's best interests (2006).

Part Two: Ethics in Participatory Research

Participatory research with children is a well-established tradition with sound methodological underpinnings. It is ethically robust, extensively used, and has tried and tested key concepts and methods. Despite this methodological maturity, reflexivity remains predominantly

neglected (Richards et al., 2023). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (UNCRC) has been instrumental in championing this approach as a robust method for promoting the rights of young people. However, significant challenges endure in elucidating and defining concepts like children's autonomy, competency, and agency in the three decades since the convention's adoption. These challenges span issues of tokenism and minimal influence in decision-making when children do participate in the sustainability of these engagement activities (McMellon, 2023).

Participatory methods emerge as a means to empower participants and integrate ethical considerations into research practices (Ellis et al., 2007; Salamon, 2015). Nonetheless, numerous ethical questions persist in the application of participatory approaches (Aldridge, 2015d; Caldairou-Bessette et al., 2018; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Spyrou, 2011; Waller & Bitou, 2011). These encompass degree of participation, power, consent, balance between risks and benefits, confidentiality and anonymity, compensation, and empowerment and ownership (Cullen & Walsh, 2020). A body of literature advocates for the utilization of participatory techniques that involve children in all phases of the research, occasionally to the point of involving children as co-researchers (Alderson, 2008; Aldridge, 2015c; Camponovo et al., 2020; Due et al., 2014, Lundy et al., 2011; Warren, 2000;).

The fundamental element of participatory and narrative approaches involves power dynamics concerning one's positionality (Mitchell, 2011; White, 2007). Practitioners of narrative approaches refer to this as "situating ourselves" (Freedman & Combs, 1996a). This entails adopting a transparent and reflexive stance, where we are conscious of our roles in relationships and identities, particularly acknowledging aspects of privilege relevant to the process of decolonization. This awareness of positionality is particularly crucial when engaging with children (Gaywood et al., 2020; Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Indeed, reflecting on our role as adult researchers when interacting with child participants is paramount.

In their article "Children and Young People's Participation Rights: Looking Backwards and Moving Forwards," reviewing 56 papers over the span of 30 years, Christina McMellon and E. Key M. Tisdall (2023) express astonishment at the enduring narrative regarding the potential for children and young people's participation rights and bitter revelation of the persistent shortcomings in implementing children's participation rights. While this observation holds empirical truth, it underscores the necessity for a fresh narrative, a novel set of challenges, and innovative conceptual and practical approaches in the next three decades (McMellon & Tisdall, 2023).

The above argument reminds us of the same story of the gap between theory and practice. Although the United Nations Convention acknowledged children and young people's right to participate in matters that concern them thirty years ago, their right after three decades is still more or less a matter of tokenism and minimal effect. In their article "International Perspectives and Empirical Findings on Child Participation," Gal et al. point out that "adults' attitudes and systems more generally do not always include and adapt to children and young people, with the children and young people's views being excluded or not given due weight" (Gal and Duramy, 2015; McMellon et al., 2023). From the above argument, it can be concluded that although children and young people's participation within the context of children's rights is a well-entrenched tradition with many advocates, they too often encounter considerable challenges in recognizing their participation rights (McMellon, 2023). As such, based on the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights, not realizing their rights to participation is a significant breach of children's rights and the ethics of participatory activity and research.

In the same vein, a significant ethical quandary in participatory research involving children arises when adults exploit children's involvement to advance their personal agendas (Invernizzi and Milne, 2002; LaFrancois, 2008; McMellon et al., 2023; Taylor and Percy-Smith, 2008). This occurs within a context where numerous authors advocate for a nuanced understanding of participation that challenges prevailing power structures with the goal of instigating change. However, the actual implementation of participation often devolves into tokenism – superficial and ornamental – failing to rise above mere consultation (Wyness, 2001; Gallagher, 2008; McMellon et al., 2023; Struthers, 2016). Consequently, adult attitudes, power dynamics between adults and children, and existing systems can curtail opportunities for the meaningful participation of children and young people (McMellon, 2023).

Despite the above factors in place and the fear of power imbalance among children and adults, many researchers emphasize the participation of children and adults together in research and foster intergenerational participatory activities. In their study, "Fostering Dialogue between Global South and Global North," Collins et al. (2021) claim that Latin American authors tend to frame participation as both relational and intergenerational collective forms of action (Albornoz et al., 2015; Collins et al., 2021). Many publications in Spanish, Portuguese, and English emphasize that relationship with adults is crucial (Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Goh & Baruch, 2018; Husby et al., 2018; Inchaurrondo et al., 2018; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Seim & Slettebø, 2017; Toros et al.). However, the intergenerational dynamics of the power of adults over young people in spaces of participation are often identified as a barrier to children's participation (Bennouna et al., 2017; Caputo, 2017;

Contreras & Pérez, 2011; Cussianovich, 2013; Husby et al., 2018; Pavez-Soto, 2012; Tisdall, 2017). This power imbalance is even more exacerbated for marginalized children (e.g. Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Collins et al., 2021, p.301). Yet, despite all the power inequality between adults and children, researchers maintain that participation should involve both children and adults in processes and benefits from collectivity rather than isolation of age groups and individuals (Collins et al., 2021).

Within the context of participatory research, it is important to note that children's rights, from protection to autonomy, agency, and participation, are interconnected, and no single right takes precedence over another (Collins et al., 2021). However, children's right to participate is overshadowed by their right to protect them. The literature indicates that outdated perceptions of protection hinder the formal child protection sector. Numerous studies highlight a tendency among child protection specialists to prioritize protection rights over participation (Bennouna et al., 2017; Inchaurrondo et al., 2018; Križ & Skivenes, 2017). This prevalence of paternalism (Alfandari, 2017; Evans, 2009) and protectionism (McCafferty, 2017; Skyrme & Woods, 2018) reinforces the prioritization of child protection over participation (Vis et al., 2012). For instance, paternalistic ideologies reflect the belief that adults understand what is in the child's best interest (Vis et al., 2012). Many studies discuss tensions between child participation and other rights, particularly concerning the best interest principle (Bennouna et al., 2017; Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Holt, 2018; Streuli et al., 2009; van Bijleveld et al., 2015). However, it is argued that determining the best interest of children necessitates listening to them and considering their views (Coyne et al., 2011; Streuli et al., 2009; Vis et al., 2012). Consequently, the interwoven conceptualizations of protection and participation significantly impact the equitable implementation of their rights.

In keeping with the above considerations regarding the interconnectedness of children's rights, the Vienna Programme of Action by the UN in 1993 emphasizes the indivisibility and interconnection of human rights, discouraging the prioritization of one right over another. The Children's Rights Convention CRC, in alignment with this principle, goes beyond protection to encompass aspects of participation and provision as well (e.g. Collins et al., 2021; Heimer & Palme, 2016; Murray, 2010; Zhang, 2018). However, Collins et al. claim that their data not only affirm a disconnection but also indicate a corresponding lack of recognition for the interrelationship between conceptualizations of children's rights to protection and participation (2021).

To find reasons behind challenges in implementing children's rights and valuing all rights as important, Latin American writers have employed the term 'adultocentrismo' to

illustrate how decision-making processes regarding children's rights and protection are oriented towards adults (Gallego-Henao & Gutiérrez-Suárez, 2015, cited in Collins et al.2021). Acero and Ayala (2010) observed that children are often viewed as adults' property, as potentials rather than existing individuals, and as individuals deprived of their rights as citizens (cited in Collins et al., 2021). Similarly, the English-language literature acknowledges the prevalence of adult-centred spaces and processes that lack inclusivity for children's participation (Claasen & Spies, 2017; Pert et al., 2017). For children to engage in meaningful participation, it is essential that they possess a degree of authority and impact in decision-making processes (Sæbjørnsen & Willumsen, 2017; Tisdall, 2017).

Children's Empowerment in Participatory Research

Being ethical also means researchers should consider how their research contributes to children's development, empowerment, and agency. As Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes, being ethical does not mean that researchers should only follow the Research Ethics Board to protect their institutional and professional image and status. In other words, researchers should "critically consider the contribution that the research would make to the participants' overall development" (Agbenyega, 2014). Given this perspective, children as participants could be empowered to be the agents of sustainable social change. More scholars are stressing the capacity of children to be change-makers and agents to communicate and collaborate in transforming society into a more sustainable and just world (Carnevale, 2020).

At the same time, participatory research still needs to be improved with respect to designs, consent, and children's agency. These challenges could be addressed via Bourdieu's critical social theory and concepts of habitus, field and capital. Bourdieu (Agbenyega, 2014) encourages researchers to evaluate the tools they can use critically. For instance, each tool, such as drawing or using video and photo, or a combination of them, has different implications and empowers children differently. As Agbenyega notes, it also involves critical reflexivity with the data they generate, the meanings they make out of them, and how they apply research findings to benefit children, their families and all those people who are the focus of the research (Agbenyega, 2014). Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus assist in understanding how and why some visual research practices still constitute practices of domination and exploitation of children (Mills & Gale 2007).

For instance, Agbenyega (2014) notes that Bourdieu's capital critically evaluates how each visual methodology tool, such as cameras, iPads, and drawings, addresses the economic capital in research. In one research, multilayers of capital, such as knowledge power as cultural

capital and relations and networking as social capital, affect the power and agency equation in participatory research. Meanwhile, he discusses the role of habitus, convention and practices as deciding elements in power relations and children's agency.

Why Participatory Research with Refugee Children?

Many scholars, like Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), stress the importance of not seeing refugees solely as powerless victims. In line with this perspective, researchers can adopt participatory research as an ethical approach that acknowledges the cultural richness of refugee families and their children, recognizing how they can enrich research data. This method also helps researchers understand power dynamics within research contexts and ensures that our design empowers participants, particularly children in our case. A key aspect of participatory action research was its focus on empowering participants throughout the research process and its outcomes. Liamputtong and Ezzy go on to highlight how participatory action research can analyze political structures that disempower marginalized and oppressed individuals; they then propose ways to change these structures.

In line with developing ethical methods and techniques for refugee children, researchers should recognize young children's abilities and interests, considering their circumstances. Young people naturally excel at storytelling, creating representative drawings, and manipulating objects. They are also often captivated by technology and computers. By incorporating these and other preferred media into data collection methods, researchers can offer young people multiple ways to express themselves. This approach not only respects young people's preferences but also enhances knowledge construction (Dodds et al., 2010; Zwi, Herzberg; Lawrence et al., 2013).

Lawrence et al. emphasize that overprotective measures, such as excessive anonymity, could silence marginalized voices. As their study demonstrates, the safety and protection of children are important, yet it should not undermine their basic human rights of expressing themselves. In that sense, art-based methods can protect children's dignity and perspectives in workshops and engage them meaningfully. Over-protection, especially by research committees, can silence young people. Refugee youth have the right to appropriate opportunities to be heard, just as we rely on their input for knowledge. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC, 1989), particularly Articles 10, 12, and 13, ensures children's rights to hold and express views and to seek, receive, and share knowledge appropriate to their age and maturity. These rights are based on children's ability to form and express opinions, showing that competence and rights are interconnected (Lawrence et al., 2013).

In summary, participatory action research isn't just a single method like focus groups or interviews; it's an overarching methodology and a distinct philosophy of social research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). It allows for various interpretations and applications across different research areas and contexts. What remains consistent across these variations is the focus on involving participants in the research process as both subjects and collaborators. This approach proved particularly beneficial for studying our diverse communities during ethnographic fieldwork (Halilovich, 2013). However, researchers working with refugee children deal with complex challenges, requiring them to demonstrate flexibility and creativity. Given the many factors involved, researchers need to adapt their methods to the specific circumstances of their participants rather than relying on standardized approaches. The extensive scale of forced displacement globally makes standardized methods problematic and potentially not fully representative (Halilovich, 2013).

Part Three: Ethics and Children's Agency

Examining children's agency and participation requires a reflexive approach. According to Samia Michail (2023), a child's voice becomes apparent when they have autonomy – defined as the entitlement and conditions for self-governance – while agency is the capacity to take action and bring about positive change in their lives. In this context, it is essential to recognize that a child's agency differs from their participation (Michail, 2023).

When discussing children's agency, it must extend beyond the child's autonomy and parental consent; parents play a crucial role in this dynamic. The line between parents' right to decide in the best interest of their children and the inherent rights of those children is controversial. At times, parents' decisions to safeguard their children may inadvertently impede the rights of those children to participate and be involved in matters that directly affect them (Michail, 2023).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, REB and Tri-Council protocols (2018) emphasize that certain individuals, like children, might not be able to make decisions independently due to factors such as age and cognitive development. Therefore, the policy recommends that researchers obtain consent from a person legally authorized to make decisions for them in these situations. According to the Tri-Council (2018), this authorized person takes responsibility based on their understanding of the individual children, considering known preferences and well-being if parents are unavailable.

Yet Tri-Council guidelines stress the importance of involving individuals in decision-making whenever possible. Researchers are encouraged to consider participants' feelings about

involvement and actively seek their agreement (TCPS, 2018). Acero and Ayala (2010) argue that children's feelings and rights are often overlooked, with children being seen as possessions or potentials rather than as existing individuals with their own rights as citizens. Paternalistic ideologies, for example, assume that adults know what is best for children (Vis et al., 2012).

After reviewing 56 articles over the past three decades since the release of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, McMellon and Tisdall (2020) concluded that terms like "agency" and "competency" are frequently introduced but seldom clearly defined or conceptually explained. Defining the concept of agency in childhood studies is challenging, and it remains unclear whether children's agency is inherently positive. This issue is widely debated, particularly because the legitimacy of children's agency can be problematic in certain instances (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012; Edmonds, 2019). Additionally, it is not clear whether agency is an intrinsic part of a child's personality or defined by the circumstances and environments in which children interact with others. It is often referred to as if it were a possession of children rather than an expression shaped by relationships (Esser et al., 2016; Gallagher, 2019). If agency is defined in relation to others, we must focus on enhancing children's expressions of agency and critically examine who defines and enforces the norms of children's agency (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020).

The above suggests that children's agency and voices are defined in relation to others. However, children's agency in decision-making is often affected by adults who may marginalize children from participating in decision-making due to perceived capacities and competencies (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019). The broader attitudes and systems of adults may not consistently include or adjust to the perspectives of children and young people, leading to the exclusion or insufficient consideration of their views (Gal & Duramy, 2015; Mcmello, 2020). Within the realm of collective decision-making, children's autonomy and agency in participatory activities are often criticized for being tokenistic and lacking real influence in the decision-making process. Researchers commonly neglect to offer prompt feedback to children and young people about decisions and their rationale (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Lundy, 2019).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC, 2009) emphasizes children's rights to decision-making, agency, effective engagement, and empowerment. Although well-being is an important criterion regarding equity, equality and social justice, it does not necessarily contribute to children's agency and empowerment. Agency and empowerment are interrelated and reciprocal. If research empowers children, it contributes to their agency and vice versa. In their study "Multidimensionality of Empowerment and

Empirical Considerations," Drydyk et al. (2014) underpin that (1) Expansion of agency is necessary for empowerment: suppose a paternalistic band of Martians invades Earth and hypnotizes humanity to live better lives. In that case, this may enhance their well-being, but it does not empower them**.** From this, we can conclude that well-being does not always translate into empowerment and agency. In contrast, expanding agency is necessary for empowerment enhancing capabilities that could lead to well-being: (2) if the captain of the Titanic informs passengers that they may now arrange the deck chairs as they see fit before impact with the iceberg, their agency has been expanded, but learning evacuation procedures would have expanded their agency in ways more useful and relevant to their well-being. Therefore, we must judge the expansion of agency as empowering as the degree to which it enhances well-being, freedom, and agency. Drydyk et al. also add that (3) gaining power can also mean gains in agency, freedom and well-being. One reason for this is that power can limit vulnerability (2014).

The above echoes Pierre Bourdieu's principle (Agbenyega, 2014) that ethical research should contribute to children's empowerment and agency. Participatory research design allows researchers to accommodate moments of revelation, critical thinking and development. Yet autonomy and agency are not guaranteed: being highly interrelated and intersubjective, there are moments of power imbalance also affected by researchers' positionality and identity. As such, reflexivity and deliberation are needed to deepen the methodology.

Nonetheless, simply allowing children to express their opinions and participate does not fully create an environment that empowers them (Collins, 2017; Dillon et al., 2016). Michail (2023) discusses that organizations and professionals use tools to talk with children and understand their thoughts. This helps share children's ideas and influence decisions. However, just doing this does not guarantee that children can really make a difference in their own lives. To truly empower children, we need big changes in how things are set up, making kids a crucial part of planning services. Using tools to get children's opinions can be confusing if not done thoughtfully, without a clear plan on how those ideas will actually bring about important changes. This argument suggests that kids are part of a power-related web of relations often overlooked by child-focused approaches. The idea and practice of letting children speak up may be better seen as political and different from children's participation (Michail, 2023).

Bourdieu's social theory critically evaluates social capital as a way of fostering children's agency, arguing that children's agency in reciprocal relations can promote their social capital (Stjernqvist et al., 2019). Pierre Bourdieu, the French Sociologist, was the first

person to use the term social capital in his sociological writings, and later, American Political scientists Robert Putnam and James Coleman used it in a broader sense (Moore & Kawachi, 2017). Jorgensen (2016), in her article "Peer Social Capital and Network of Migrants and Minority ethnic youth in England and Spain," argues that although the concept of social capital has been used extensively in educational research, the focus was mainly on achievements as an outcome and hardly were aspects of the socio-emotional and wellbeing considered as an outcome. She also argues that bridging and bonding friendships are interlinked with well-being (2016).

In this context, as discussed earlier, advocating for children's agency and valuing their voices is an ethical concern in research, as Bourdieu suggests (Agbenyega, 2014). He emphasizes that ethical research empowers children and contributes to their development and agency. Therefore, it's crucial to explore how visual tools like cameras, iPads, and drawings enhance children's cultural and social capital in research involving children – particularly participatory research (Agbenyega, 2014). These tools empower them to connect across diverse backgrounds and establish links with authoritative figures. Various forms of capital, including knowledge, cultural capital, and social capital in terms of relationships and networking, influence power dynamics and agency in participatory research (McGonigal et al., 2010). Hence, reflective and critical incorporation of these different forms of capital can significantly contribute to upholding children's rights, including their right to well-being, agency, and effective participation.

Why Reflexivity in Research with/on Children Matters

Why does reflexivity matter? This question offers a lot of insight into ethics in research regarding children. Joe Warin (2011) links reflexivity to "Ethical mindfulness." In his article "Ethical Mindfulness and Reflexivity: Managing a Research Relationship with Children and Young People in a 14-Year Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) Study," he argues and concludes that "reflexivity and ethical mindfulness are interdependent concepts, an understanding that is particularly valuable for child-focused researchers" (Warin, 2011). Other researchers and philosophers have underscored the significance of critical thinking and mindfulness in ethical reflexivity. In this context, they differentiate between reflection and reflexivity, with the latter incorporating moment-to-moment mindfulness and critical thinking. This approach aims to prompt researchers to scrutinize their assumptions about childhood and reconsider the role and place of children in society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005; Gildersleeve, 2010; Powell et al., 2016).

As such, Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) offers a "Getting Started" tool which offers numerous questions to encourage researchers to think critically, engage deeply and evaluate each stage of their research, from planning and preparation, research design and methods of data collection and analysis to writing and dissemination. Meanwhile, ERIC offers various case studies from around the world and encourages other researchers to share their ethical dilemmas to provide insights for other researchers. For instance, the section on exclusion and inclusion of participants, which is one of the challenging issues, offers a lot of questions regarding the exclusion of a group of children or a child based on their age, race, ethnicity, culture, disability, language, and/or family composition, mental health and overall well-being. These critical questions encourage researchers to re-evaluate their decision and whether the child is excluded for reasons not specifically related to children or for research design, such as the scope of the study, methodological preferences, or constraints such as financial, geographical, among others.

Each of these questions addresses specific ethical dilemmas arising while doing research. In that sense, ERIC highlights mindfulness as an important criterion, which involves the continuous, moment-by-moment awareness of ethical considerations and implications in every action involving children. This practice is intricately connected to reflexivity and applying ethics in practical situations.

Within the context of ethics in practical situations, we can also discuss ethics in practice, which is commonly known as situation ethics, in-situ ethics, relational ethics, situated ethics, micro ethics, and ethically important moments. Graham et al. (2013) argue that while procedural ethics encompasses regulations, guidelines, and approval processes undertaken before initiating research, ethics in practice delves into day-to-day dilemmas, nuanced issues, and ethically significant "moments" that surface throughout the research process, particularly, but not exclusively, in qualitative research. These challenges often arise within the dynamics of research relationships and may be influenced by the context of the research setting. They frequently lack straightforward, textbook solutions, as they are moral dilemmas specific to the situation and individuals involved. "Ethics in practice" demands researchers to be reflexive and consistently mindful of the ethical dimensions inherent in all interactions, decisions, and potential implications (Graham et al., 2013).

But Reflexivity is Neglected

Although reflexivity is central to the context of research on/with children, it is arguably neglected in much research on/with children (Richard & Coombs, 2023). Richard and Coombs

(2023) emphasize that the adaptability of ongoing reflexivity as a research tool in research with children is crucial to ensure that children's autonomy and dignity have been protected. More importantly, reflexivity helps to minimize the possible mistakes we make while conducting research with children and underpinning crucial issues, including the emotional labour of doing research with children, taking care of their voices and not privileging one voice over the other, and avoiding systematic marginalization of their voice while conducting research with children.

Richard and Coombs reemphasize that although reflexivity should be seen in journal articles, research books, and conference presentations, the absence is quite palpable. Even more importantly, reflexivity as a method is unclear, not well-defined, and sometimes ambiguous. These researchers underline that the absence of this discourse in journal articles, books, and conference presentations intensifies children's vulnerability, in default of the needed research discussions and dissemination. The absence of reflexivity in books, articles and conference presentations means that researchers are more reluctant to talk about their mistakes while presenting their research (2023).

In contrast, acknowledging mistakes, self-doubt, and contemplation are the ethical acts researchers can carry out while conducting and presenting their research. Next to reflexivity, they also highlight the pivotal role of positionality in ethics, which is a twin companion of reflexivity. Positionality in research involving children could lead to more explicit discussions about the researcher's identity, the emotional effort invested, the ethical and moral challenges, the ambiguity in decision-making, and the occasional occurrence of mistakes (Richard & Coombs, 2023).

A researcher's positionality is a frequently used term when conducting qualitative research. However, regarding research on children, we do not hear enough about this feature. Positionality complements reflexivity in research and is a crucial attribute in ethical thoughts and concepts. Within this context, concepts like identity and partisanship can assist in comprehending the concept of positionality in research. It is defined in connection with or in relation to others; as such, the research context influences the ethical aspect of one's positionality. The significance of positionality lies in its clarification of how our identification is influenced by our values and perspectives, impacting the ethical approach to conducting and presenting research (Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, positionality plays a crucial role in shaping our perception of ethical dilemmas in research. Richards and Coombs highlight that "who we are as individuals characterizes who we are as researchers and informs not only what we see and how we respond" but also what our participants see and respond to when interacting with

us: our ethnicity, gender, and age, for example, become all relevant to our data and its interpretation (2023).

Analyzing case studies can provide insight for other researchers within the context of the reflexivity over the moment-to-moment and day-to-day ethical challenges while doing research with children. Case studies, presented in the researchers' own words, help others reflect on some of the more challenging critical and debated ethical issues they might face. The following story is enlightening in terms of how ethical challenges can remain with researchers for years and could be analyzed from diverse perspectives.

Reflexivity and Dilemmas, Owning Our Mistakes – A Case Study

"I got an academic career out of Baan Nua; the children got nothing."
Heather Montgomery

In "Owning Our Mistakes: Confessions of an Unethical Researcher," Heather Montgomery reflects on the ethical mistakes she made during her research on child prostitution in Thailand. As a young social anthropologist, she was driven by a sincere belief that her work could influence national and international policies to defend children's rights. However, these aspirations were not realized in practice. Instead, her project helped her complete her Ph.D., secure scholarships, and advance professionally. In hindsight, she acknowledges that her publications and analyses left many critical aspects "unsaid and unexplored" (2023, p. 158).

Montgomery critiques her own work, stating that her mistakes did not serve as learning opportunities but remained unresolved issues. She notes the irony in her research, where listening to children sometimes meant ignoring their voices, leading to flawed findings. Her work was influenced by the "New Social Science of Childhood," particularly James Prout's theory, which emphasized involving children as informants to reshape power dynamics and respect their agency (Montgomery, 2023). Her research was driven by the international concern over child prostitution in Southeast Asia, highlighted by media reports in the mid-1990s about Western men exploiting young children in Thailand, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. These stories, depicting a gross violation of children's rights with minimal consequences for perpetrators, motivated her to investigate the issue more deeply. She believed thorough fieldwork could offer a nuanced narrative beyond the media's portrayal and potentially influence policy.

However, conducting this research was fraught with challenges. Connecting with a church NGO working with these children took three months. The complexity was compounded by parents sending their young children into prostitution to fulfill economic and filial duties,

viewing harm as purely physical and disregarding psychological impacts. This belief was prevalent among demographers from rural poor areas, who thought short-term involvement in such activities wouldn't cause long-term mental health issues

Seven years later, Montgomery published her book "Baan Nua," but chose to only hint at the harsh realities faced by the children, fearing accusations of sensationalism or voyeurism. This reflection serves as a broader commentary on the ethical responsibilities of researchers, emphasizing the need for honesty about the limitations and challenges of fieldwork, especially when dealing with vulnerable populations The following excerpt is from her published book: For many outsiders, mothers allowing their children to engage in prostitution is seen as a betrayal and a failure of parental duty. However, in Baan Nua, parents don't see it that way. They believe they aren't harming their children, viewing it as a necessary means to survive. Life is hard for everyone, and children, like their parents, must contribute. When asked why she sold her son, Sompot's mother, Pen, replied, "It's just for one hour. What harm can happen to him in one hour? (Montgomery, 2001).

Within that context, children denied what they were doing and used euphemisms for their practices; they preferred to discuss and name those European men as their friends and emphasized friendship rather than money transactions and prostitution. The truth is that those children spent very little time doing this job; they spent a huge amount of their time playing football, playing computer games, and attending schools at the NGO.

The researcher faced complex challenges in understanding and intervening in the children's lives due to their and their families' conflicting agendas. Contrary to her expectations of anger towards their abusers, neither the children nor their families expressed such emotions, nor did they perceive harm in the interactions. This complicated her understanding of agency, preventing her from reporting these cases to the police. She believed reporting would betray the children's trust and violate her promise of non-interference, respecting their perceived agency and decision to support their families through these interactions.

After completing the research, she actively presented and discussed her findings at conferences and through publications, receiving positive feedback for her academic contributions. However, she was haunted by specific incidents, like an eight-year-old boy's bleeding after abuse and his mother's indifference, which led her to regret her silence and inaction. She acknowledged her internal conflict and guilt over prioritizing academic success over the children's well-being.

In hindsight, she ultimately recognized that her silence, justified by respecting the children's and parents' agency, stemmed from fears of public and academic backlash. This partial presentation of the story highlighted broader issues within the research community, where ethical dilemmas and researchers' mistakes are often underreported.

In reflecting on her experience, the author stressed the importance of not categorizing the affected children merely as victims but recognizing their resilience and loyalty to their families. She criticized the simplistic blame on families for not protecting their children and not understanding their constrained choices. Successful interventions, she argued, require a deep understanding of the children's perspectives and should involve honest accounts of the research challenges. Ethical approaches to researching children in difficult circumstances can be developed through thorough cross-case comparisons and transparency about the problems faced

The above illuminates the considerable size of what is at stake in research and data collection. Ethical dilemmas often arise while doing research; they are context-based and inter-relational. Meanwhile, her revelation proves that researchers have a tough time handling multiple challenges in doing research with children, and sometimes, the emotional ordeal and ethical engagements remain with them for their whole lives.

Summary

The chapter offered a snapshot of the literature on ethical dimensions of research involving children, starting with an overview of children's ethics and their rights, welfare, and protection. It then raised the ethical considerations of participatory research methodologies and the interconnection between ethics and children's agency. The background highlighted the historical development of ethical standards in research, tracing back to principles established after WWII. It discussed various international guidelines and regulations governing research ethics, emphasizing the importance of voluntary consent and minimizing harm to participants. The chapter also explored the ethical landscape in social research, including guidelines from organizations like the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. It touched on the concept of child protection discourse, encompassing considerations of legal frameworks, ethical principles, and creating supportive environments for children's safety.

Various ethical principles were highlighted, including respect for persons, welfare, and justice, with a focus on the unique challenges of researching with children, such as autonomy and vulnerability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child was presented as a milestone in recognizing children's rights in research, although challenges remain in balancing protection with autonomy. Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) was also

briefly introduced, a resource that supports researchers in prioritizing children's rights and well-being. ERIC's framework addresses key ethical dilemmas and emphasizes respect, benefit, and justice principles.

Participatory research with refugee children was also a focus in this chapter. It advocates against viewing refugees solely as victims, values the cultural richness of refugee families, and empowers participants, particularly children, throughout the research process. It addresses power dynamics and aims to analyze and change political structures that marginalize individuals. Recognizing children's abilities and interests, researchers should use methods that allow for creative expression, such as storytelling, art, and technology, to enhance data collection and respect children's preferences. Highlighting that researchers must be flexible and creative when working with refugee children due to the complex challenges and diverse circumstances, making standardized methods often inadequate.

Reflexivity was highlighted as crucial for researchers to critically examine their assumptions, positionality, and biases, particularly in research involving children. It was pointed out that, despite its importance, reflexivity is often overlooked, leading to ethical dilemmas. A case study illustrated the complexities of conducting research on sensitive topics involving children. In highlighting the importance of reflexivity in research practices and the need to recognize children's autonomy, competency, and agency, the chapter added that, despite long-standing advocacy for children's participation rights, there are persistent issues regarding tokenism, power dynamics, and the marginalization of children's voices in the decision-making process.

The interplay between protecting children's rights and their participation was discussed, with a focus on the need to balance these rights effectively. The concepts of children's empowerment within participatory research were mentioned, drawing on theories by Pierre Bourdieu to emphasize the importance of critical reflection and the promotion of children's agency. I also discussed the interconnectedness of children's rights and the challenges in recognizing and valuing all rights equally. Finally, I addressed methodological considerations in participatory research, particularly regarding using visual tools and enhancing children's cultural and social capital to uphold their rights effectively. This chapter concluded by outlining the ethical considerations and challenges of participatory research with children, advocating for greater recognition of children's autonomy, agency, and empowerment in research practices.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In this chapter, I lay out the design of my study, which is an autoethnographically informed reflection on childhood ethics and agency using the methods of participatory research. I reflexively evaluate how respecting ethics and children's agency in participatory research empowers children to be agents of change who challenge systematic injustice. I also reflect on the moments when I as the researcher could contribute to children's cognitive development, building on their skills such as communication, creativity, collaboration, teamwork, and critical thinking. To do this, I conduct self-reflexive work based on my jotting notes, field notes and reflections, which I created while contributing to the Wellbeing research.

My research, in line with the overarching project – Art-Based Wellbeing Research with Children for Social Justice in Pandemic Times – utilizes field notes to observe and analyze participatory workshops with children. In my field notes, I reflect on how participatory research can be employed not only as a tool to combat systemic injustice but also as an ethical intervention to empower children to be agents of change and engage them in matters related to them. As such, I use both ethnography and autoethnography techniques, using jottings and fieldnotes, to investigate how participatory research could be more ethical with respect to children's agency and development, how it could promote their agency, and what challenges exist in this research method. In this mode of analysis, one of the most challenging moments for a fieldnote taker is to be honest with oneself and take care of the positionality and biases of which I, as a researcher, might not be aware. On yet another level, it is of paramount importance to be aware of tokenism, representation, and manipulations while engaging in the participatory method and analyzing the field notes (Lundy, 2018).

Navigating the Researcher "I" as an Insider and Outsider: An Exploration of Autoethnographic Method

I situate my approach within the realm of autoethnographic tools and methods, building on the work of key researchers in the area of autoethnography, such as Adames, Jones and Ellis (2022) and Jones et al., 2016. The term "autoethnography" consists of three parts: "auto," meaning "self," "ethno," meaning "culture," and "graphy," meaning "representation." Through this triadic model, autoethnography can be seen as a method for creating representations that link personal experiences to broader cultural contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Various forms of autoethnography have been discussed, but most can be categorized as either evocative or

analytic. Evocative autoethnography emphasizes the self (auto) aspect, while analytic autoethnography focuses on the research process (graphy) to understand culture (ethno).

The issue with evocative autoethnography is that, despite its ability to provide a "vulnerable" and "intimate" account of personal experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), its lack of abstraction can make it challenging to connect with the wider context. Conversely, analytic autoethnography's emphasis on broader connections can undermine the intimacy crucial to autoethnography, resulting in what Wall (2016) describes as merely an "enhanced" ethnography. My project strives to balance the evocative aspect of writing about personal experiences with a rigorous analytical commitment to sociological research.

Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as writing about the personal and its connection to culture. It's an autobiographical genre of writing and research that reveals multiple layers of awareness. She highlights how autoethnographers move back and forth in their gaze: initially, they use an ethnographic wide-angle lens to focus on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they turn inward, revealing a vulnerable standpoint, self-influenced by and possibly influencing cultural interpretations. As they shift their focus inward and outward, the distinction between the personal and cultural often becomes blurred, sometimes to the point of being indistinguishable (Ellis, 2004). While discussing ethical dilemmas, the uncertainty between inward and outward perspectives becomes more apparent as I strive to balance my roles as an insider and outsider in the research field. As such, through reading, rereading, and reflecting on the events I observed, I position my method within the realm of autoethnographic tools and methods. This approach allows me to explore my personal viewpoints on the shared experiences of children, parents, and the larger context of Global Haven.

Adams et al. (2022) argue that autoethnography becomes increasingly essential as we advocate for social justice. With this insight, while ethical dilemmas in research unfold, utilizing autoethnographic tools such as reflexivity and analyzing cases from various perspectives feels necessary. This highlights what Adams et al. address: rejecting the notion of an objective, detached viewpoint and acknowledging that personal experiences and perspectives are always present in social life and research. This method allows researchers to merge the personal with the political, emphasizing that our language, creations, and values are all influenced by our unique perspectives and experiences. Autoethnography thus helps us confront contemporary challenges and create compelling and insightful accounts of personal and cultural experiences. Unlike objective and detached writing, autoethnographers strive to make their work engaging and evocative. Using techniques from real-life writing, such as

character development and narrative voice, and from ethnography, such as "thick descriptions" of cultural life, they craft vibrant, well-written stories that provide rich, detailed representations of their subjects, aiming to work towards a better future (Adams et al., 2022).

Situating Myself in the Fieldsite

For the thesis, I have been involved with the main project on three levels: (1) building strong relationships with the community of Global Haven[2] to support work with children, (2) engaging in ongoing reflection on ethics, children's agency, and development through art workshops and providing jotting notes while at the scene, and (3) reflecting on the jotted notes and field notes.

The involvement with Global Haven unfolded in two distinct phases. The initial phase, which occurred during the first year, was characterized by informal interactions aimed at acquainting ourselves with the residents, children, and staff. The subsequent phase, marked by data collection, transpired in the second year of collaboration with the shelter, exhibiting a more structured and frequent approach. During the initial year, I engaged with the children at Global Haven both as a volunteer and as a research assistant, delving into literature pertaining to children's ethics and agency. In the second year, I formulated my thesis based on insights gleaned from this project, observing, taking notes, documenting the events in the workshops systematically, and subsequently analyzing jottings and fieldnotes within the framework of my research.

In my first year working as a volunteer, I facilitated workshops every second Thursday of the month. In my second year, I helped the team with art workshops, group paintings, music sessions, and city excursions. The frequency of workshops doubled, tripled, and quadrupled based on the children's availability, Global Haven's requirements to involve children during parental community meetings, and the research agenda to orchestrate sessions effectively with meaningful outcomes.

All research sessions have been art-based and participatory, spanning two to three hours each. These workshops encompassed various artistic mediums, including singing, painting, visual methodologies, photography, cellphilm, collage creation, video production, chalk and body mapping, animations, and other forms of visual expression. Throughout the sessions, I diligently jotted down notes whenever possible, contributing to a collective pool of data

[2]-To ensure the highest ethical consideration and protect participants' safety, anonymity, and privacy, all names in this thesis, including those of participants, researchers, and the shelter, are pseudonyms.

3- The research project initially comprised eight individuals, including researchers, research assistants, the director of Global Haven, a music therapist and an art therapist

alongside field notes provided by other research assistants. These notes proved invaluable during our session debriefings. Field notes were collected over the course of eight months, commencing in August 2023 and ending in March 2024.

About the Workshops

I describe the workshops here to situate my reflections and fieldnotes in the next chapter. The level of detail I provide reflects the ethnographic nature of my research, in an attempt to offer a holistic picture of the events and participatory nature of the project, as designed by the research team leaders.

Each workshop begins with snack time, during which selections of fruit are offered to the children, and they engage in friendly conversation. This informal phase plays a crucial role in breaking the ice and making the children feel at home, thereby fostering reciprocal communication between researchers and children. In line with Global Haven's emphasis on healthy snacks, the team often includes fruits as part of healthy nutrition offerings. Also, it is ensured that water and glasses are provided for the children during the workshops. Furthermore, as the team spent more time with the children, we gained insights into their cultural practices. For instance, the research team learned that some five-year-old children might refrain from eating Gummi Candy or pizza made with pork due to religious dietary restrictions within their families. This understanding allowed us to accommodate their cultural preferences and ensure an inclusive environment during our sessions.

Following snack time, children are organized into a line and guided to the designated room where all activities take place, thus separating the snack room from the workshop space. Subsequently, after entering the workshop room, they are gathered in a circle to engage in an Imaginary Ball game. This game serves as an icebreaker, enabling children to learn each other's names; as they throw the imaginary ball, they choose the next person and throw the imaginary ball; this activity empowers them to select the next participant in the line to receive the imaginary ball.

After practicing an imaginary ball activity, Karine, who leads the singing workshops, commences singing lyrics; the chosen lyrics are simple and involve acting and movements so as to make it more accessible for children who have a huge language barrier. To help children better understand the lyrics, songs are written on a board, and some pictures are added; while singing, all act out the parts. Songs are derived from the children's cultural backgrounds and, accordingly, are in different languages such as Spanish, Farsi, and Urdu. There are a fair number of French and English songs since all children have some command over these two

languages. Following the lyric section, there are special guest sessions. The special guest is a resident from either the children's parents or Global Haven. These guests represent songs and music from their original countries and cultures.

After the special guest moment, the team invites the children to the painting area or station. The team ensures all necessary materials for painting are readily available: paper, watercolours, brushes, water, tissues, and towels for cleaning their brushes. This section consistently proves to be the most popular among the children, often becoming their favourite part of the workshop. Soft music, including the ones they had offered and the ones guest speakers introduced to our workshops, fills the background as children paint, enhancing the creative atmosphere. The music played during each session is curated by the special guest, often incorporating selections from the singing workshops. In addition to singing workshops, other modes of expression, including sessions with art therapists, are added later on down the line. These sessions usually start with snack time, followed by a gathering in the communal area. Here, children are equipped with tools to express their thoughts through drawing, painting, handy crafts and collage, which collectively contribute to the creation of a large poster. Throughout this creative process, they enjoy an eclectic mix of music selected by themselves, guest speakers, and researchers. With the freedom to sing along to the songs, they may also feel inspired to dance to the music and lyrics, further enriching their artistic experience.

Manu, the Puppet Researcher. The research team used a puppet named "Manu" to convey the research question and the researcher's role to the children, resonating with the backgrounds of those who immigrated to Canada. Manu, symbolizing an immigrant bird, resonates with the backgrounds of immigrant children and is easily pronounced in multiple languages such as English, Farsi, French, Spanish, and Urdu. The puppet activity, led by Karine, soon grows into a favorite and popular activity among the children, fostering communication and engagement. Manu also plays a crucial role during special guest sessions, where residents share songs and music from their cultures. The puppet initiates dialogue, allowing children to explore various cultures and share narratives, heritage, and identity. Manu helps introduce the research, ask questions, and facilitate meaningful discussions.

Preparation and Debriefing Sessions online. These sessions were conducted online using Zoom or Teams, with a preference for Teams due to its transcript recording capability. In these sessions, the team meticulously planned art workshops, determining the necessary number of researchers, assistants, and volunteers needed to facilitate the activities and interact with the children. Discussions included refining existing methods and integrating new tools to enhance

the children's engagement. Following each workshop, researchers convened on Zoom the next day to analyze the session, discuss findings, and strategize effectively addressing challenges in subsequent sessions. Anonymity was maintained by using unique coded identifiers for each of the children and parents. The team also evaluated engagement levels and considered adjustments to improve interactivity in future workshops.

Jotting notes, Field notes, and Reflexivity as a Method

Field notes are valuable tools for qualitative researchers, facilitating reflective practice (Maharaj, 2016). They are a cornerstone of rigorous qualitative research. They serve as a vital methodological instrument across the social sciences and are crucial in documenting observations, descriptions, and interpretations while sparking critical reflection to navigate researcher subjectivity and positioning (Thompson & Burkholder, 2020). Historically, "scratch notes" or field notes have been a central component of qualitative research since the early 1900s, originating in ethnographic anthropology (Emerson et al., 2011). Writing and reviewing field notes regularly and extracting key insights through various active writing methods are essential components of the toolkit for qualitative researchers (Pacheco-Vega, 2019).

Thompson and Burkholder (2020), in their book *Qualitative Education and Social Science Research*, briefly explain that field notes encompass various documentation methods researchers utilize. These include forms such as scratch notes, jottings, voice memos, sound recordings, sketches, drawings, photos, maps, and video recordings. Field notes are not limited to solitary observations but can be collaborative endeavours shared among research teams and diverse audiences. They are produced, analyzed, and disseminated through digital platforms like documents, emails, blogs, vlogs, and other online spaces. This expansion underscores the complexity and versatility of fieldnotes practices in contemporary research (2020).

In the same book, Vanner (2020) underscores that field notes serve as more than just records of observations; they also provide researchers with a therapeutic outlet, allowing them to express frustrations and reflect on their process. Through analyzing the field notes, researchers gain awareness of their subjectivity and its impact on their interactions with participants, highlighting issues of power, privilege, and positionality. Reflecting on their field notes, they also reach more conscious awareness of biases and discomfort, prompting adjustments in their research approach. Through these notes, researchers also can recognize their discomfort as an indicator of ethical dilemmas or power dynamics, sometimes leading to changes in the direction of the research. As such, she emphasizes the importance of treating

field notes as a dynamic space for reflexivity, enabling more ethical and purposeful research outcomes (2020).

In the same volume, *Qualitative Education and Social Science Research* (2020), Croker and McKee employ a dance metaphor to conceptualize the creation and application of field notes, emphasizing both the technical and aesthetic dimensions of field notes. They liken the process to square dance, a fitting analogy that underscores inclusivity and adaptability, accommodating participants of varying skill levels while offering a blend of traditional and innovative elements. Drawing inspiration from North American square dancing, where a Caller guides dancers through patterns and sequences, the metaphor underscores the vital role of field researchers in providing structure and guidance amidst the complexities of data collection and interpretation (2020).

Bridging "Methods" and "Findings"

But how do field notes and field experiences translate into ethnographic writing? And where do the boundaries between fieldwork and ethnography lie? The process typically involves immersing oneself in a community, observing and recording observations, followed by writing upon returning home. Ethnography is sometimes considered a form of literary journalism or travel writing (Maanen, 2011). During my early days volunteering at the Global Haven, as I was involved more deeply in the work and my interactions with the shelter's residents grew routine, I gradually realized the importance of documenting events, contexts, cultures, and social realities in the form of fieldnotes, ethnography and autoethnography. With each visit, I felt more compelled to structure my thoughts more coherently. Despite deep fears and uncertainties about the nature of this work, as my role transitioned from a volunteer to a research assistant, I gained the confidence to cut deeper into details and critically analyze the occurrences around me.

A notable aspect of my qualitative research methodology was its autoethnographic nature. I actively and voluntarily engaged with the community within the Global Haven, laying the groundwork for comparative and cross-cultural analyses of individuals and events. My background as an immigrant mom with a child enabled me to empathize with the residents' vulnerability in the host country. Consequently, intertwined with theirs, my personal experiences and self-reflection served as a key source of data for exploring cultural phenomena within the Wellbeing Project.

In such a context, the essence of ethnographic research could be separated from the methodologies employed to gather it, seeing as these two elements are inherently intertwined

with the interactions and relationships cultivated during the fieldwork (Emerson et al., 2011). Throughout my fieldwork, I meticulously recorded my emotional responses in various forms within my notes. When faced with events and interactions involving children, I aimed for descriptive accounts, engaging in reflective writing in my fieldnotes, analyzing my inner dialogue in diaries, and striving for honesty during debriefing sessions with the Wellbeing team.

Jottings

Jottings are brief written records by field researchers during moments in the field when they feel certain events or impressions should be recorded to maintain accuracy and detail (Emerson et al., 2011). Unlike mere "headnotes," jottings capture events and impressions in keywords and phrases, translating observations into quick scribbles on paper. These notes serve as memory aids for later recall and aid in constructing vivid descriptions of scenes. Jottings may range from a single word or two to more extensive recordings of ongoing dialogues or responses to questions (Emerson et al., 2011).

Emerson et al. (2011) suggest that notetaking is a social and interactive process, often conducted in proximity to the individuals under study, without strict rules governing when or how to make jottings. Researchers develop their own practices over time. They may opt for traditional pen and paper or utilize electronic devices, each method offering its own advantages. Abbreviations and symbols are frequently employed to expedite notetaking and ensure confidentiality. The decisions regarding when, where, and how to make jottings can significantly influence relationships with participants and the researcher’s ability to observe field activities effectively (Emerson et al., 2011).

Emerson et al. (2011) shed light on the challenges of taking jottings by providing a nuanced perspective surrounding the practice during fieldwork. They underline the fact that on one level, researchers aim to capture the immediacy of moments, yet simultaneously, they have concerns that this may disrupt the authenticity of interactions and lead participants to distrust them. Ethical considerations emerge, with differing views on the necessity of full disclosure and consent from those studied. Some argue for transparency, while others advocate for flexibility, acknowledging the inevitability of social dissimulation and the potential societal benefits of their research. Maintaining openness and honesty with participants is paramount, as covert methods can lead to breaches of trust and strained relationships. For instance, I recall a moment when a father, who was our guest speaker, noticed me jotting down notes in a notebook. He smiled and asked if I was taking notes for the research, to which I smiled back

in confirmation. I knew the principal researcher had informed him about our work, which facilitated the exchange.

However, despite the usefulness of jotting as a technique, many researchers still rely on mental notes; returning home, they reconstruct scenes and impressions into written field notes (Emerson, 2011). In our research, almost all my teammates adopted the latter method for their field notes, taking mental notes during ongoing scenes, events, and interactions, which they later expanded into full field notes at home. For each session, three of us provided field notes and uploaded them to the UQAM drive as part of our data collection duties. Other teammates, for various reasons, including being busy leading the session and playing the music, opted for the latter method for their field notes. I experimented with both methods, i.e. jotting and mental notes. However, through my experiments with the former, I realized the benefits of jottings. Yet, I must admit, jottings present particular challenges. As the note-taker, inevitably in direct interaction with the people involved in the field, I had to decide when and how to take jottings, which sometimes turned into a dilemma.

Maintaining the habit was not easy amidst numerous responsibilities in the field, such as recording workshops, taking photos, and supervising children. I actively participated in artwork activities, engaging with the kids and their parents, singing along, and encouraging children to participate. At times, I had to weigh the best strategy: jotting down notes immediately or waiting until returning home to write the next day. Our sessions typically ran from 5-7 pm, and I did not return home until around 9:30 pm, with my child awaiting my return. Consequently, I often postponed notetaking until the following day, fearing I might forget crucial details of each event. I also doubted the best tool for notetaking: a notebook or my laptop, each with its advantages and downsides.

Ethnographers have historically utilized various tools to document their field notes, ranging from typewriters to handwritten pads and notebooks. In contemporary practice, computers equipped with word-processing programs are favored for their efficiency, precision, and adaptability (Emerson, 2011). Personally, I embraced this modern approach due to the time-consuming nature of transcribing handwritten notes into a digital format. Additionally, and on a quirkier note, the risk of misplacing my notebook, especially in the dynamic environment of working with children, was a constant concern.

Once, while working in the playground at the Global Haven, I experienced a rush of panic at having misplaced my notebook. The dismal prospect of compromising confidentiality or losing valuable data to such an incident was overwhelming. If a resident found my notes, it could potentially cause trouble. Fortunately, I managed to retrieve my lost notebook after half

an hour. However, this incident left a profound impression on me, leading me to prioritize the security and convenience of digital documentation. Even with a laptop, I remained vigilant, making sure that it was safeguarded from potential damage during our interactions with the children in their lively playground. Below, you can find examples of notes I took in both digital and handwritten formats while I was at the Global Haven:

La chanson du Cua Cuac

Cuac Cuac Cuac

Karine first slowly sings the lyrics, so all the children understand the words; after that, David starts the music, and everybody starts singing.

Karine starts choco la cho. Nelson starts signing, saying that it is an easy song for everyone.

Cho chocolo Cho…. All the children sang this song; they liked it. Even Lina, who was outside playing, came inside and joined the children in singing the song; meanwhile, a parent came out of the kitchen and looked at the children with a smile.

Arman is in the window singing and playing with his cards.

Fahima is still silent, but she probably feels better because she is more attentive and listens to the children with interest.

Negin says to Prudence, “She is not in the mood, but she is ok now.”

Arman is singing the song while playing with a little horse, and he even starts riding the horse.

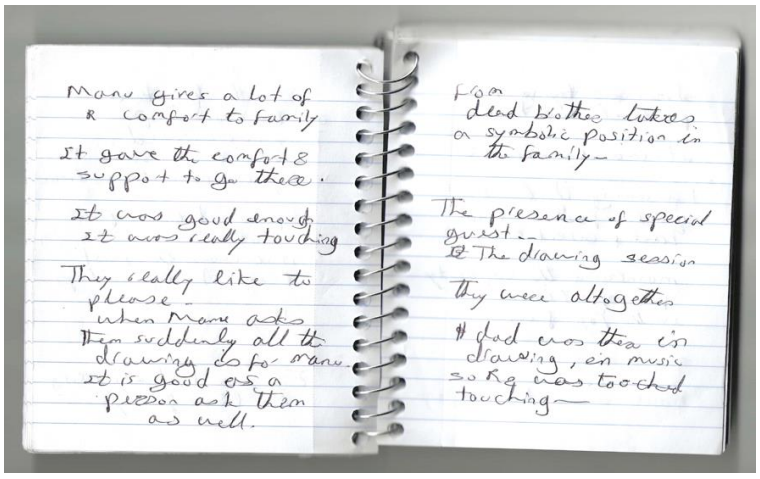

Figure 1. My small notebook and the image of my jotting notes

Within the practice of jotting, either with a notebook or my laptop, my primary goal was to capture experiences. They were fresh records, which, as Emerson highlights, results in hurried and unpolished notes that read like an outpouring rather than refined excerpts. Emerson et al. believe the focus is on recording scenes quickly without worrying about consistency or

style. The aim is to get as much detail down as possible, delaying evaluation and editing until later (Emerson et al., 2011).

Upon realizing its effectiveness through experiencing it firsthand, I adopted Emerson et al.'s style, finding it immensely useful. Jottings allowed me to focus on capturing information in the moment, with the understanding that refinement could come later during the writing process. An important lesson from Emerson is to avoid questioning the relevance of scenes while in the act of writing, as it can hinder the capturing of valuable information. Reflecting on this principle during the analysis phase, I noticed that the sessions where I committed to diligently describing every detail without worrying about finding the perfect word or phrase proved to be the most rewarding.

Given my experience with detailed notes, another significant question comes into the picture: How detailed should the notes be, and to what extent should they depict the scene? The ethnographer's primary goal is to depict a social world and its inhabitants. However, as Emerson et al. stress, novice researchers frequently generate field notes that lack sufficient depth and liveliness. This occurs when fieldworkers inadvertently summarize their observations and experiences using evaluative language, failing to describe what they have encountered adequately (2011).

This important emphasis captures a critical aspect of composing field notes. If they are to depict events accurately, they must include comprehensive details about the location, individuals involved, and unfolding occurrences (Emerson et al., 2011). According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017), information about participants – such as their religion, beliefs, overall appearance, demeanour in the research setting, cost of living, and any relevant cultural ceremonies like Christmas – carries equal importance to the events occurring within the research.

However, in my experience, I encountered two challenges. First, I grappled with ethical concerns regarding how I could provide descriptive accounts of events and maintain participants' privacy and confidence. Second, I faced logistical constraints, such as those related to time. Nevertheless, reflecting on these insights and drawing on my research experience, I realized the power of detailed descriptions, dialogue, and characterization in field notes. These strategies allow researchers to capture observed moments vividly (Emerson et al., 2011).

Clichéd Description versus Lively Details

There is a serious challenge to describing people's appearances in ethnographic fieldnotes; observers often resort to stereotyped descriptions based on gender, age, or race (Emerson et al., 2011). These can be simplistic and clichéd, detracting from an otherwise engaging account and accurate portrayal. Fieldworkers often use such descriptions not to convey visual details but to label characters for clarity within the narrative. However, the ethnographer is urged to move beyond these stereotypes and capture distinctive qualities that enrich the reader's understanding of the observed individuals (Emerson et al., 2011).

I encountered significant challenges in my approach, primarily due to ethical constraints and my limited experience. As a result, I often relied on simplistic descriptors such as age, race, and gender, which I now realize are inherently limiting. Nonetheless, I endeavoured to transcend these limitations by characterizing participants based on their individual abilities and actions, attributing nuanced dynamics to them. For instance, I remember Raphael, a nine-year-old boy from South America, who assumed the role of translator during our interactions. This portrayal offers a more insightful and authentic representation, moving beyond clichés. Similarly, when discussing Sara, a five-year-old from Afghanistan, I emphasized her exceptional intelligence and innate leadership qualities, which challenge the stereotypical portrayal of Afghan girls as being passive. By highlighting these individual traits and talents, I sought to humanize the participants and present a more nuanced understanding of their identities. Below is an example of reflective field notes that were written the day after the workshop. They portray the children's abilities and courage:

> Imaginary Ball
>
> This apparently simple scenario involves courage and creativity while helping children feel included and welcomed. For instance, Athena, the four-year-old, looks into Karine's eyes before throwing the ball, finds the courage to ask her name in French, to which she is still very new as she is still acquiring that language, and she poses an imperative question, all of which is quite a brave act. It is a simple question, but it needs a very complex development on the part of a child who arrived only a few months ago in Quebec, Canada, picking a new language and culture.

This method of detailed "description," as delineated by Emerson and advocated by Goffman (1961), accentuates the significance of crafting a vibrant narrative through descriptive prose. It revolves around the idea of immersing the reader in the story by appealing to their senses and conjuring vivid mental images. Emerson et al. (2011) highlight description as a method of bringing concrete sensory details, settings, and characters to life through the

evocative description. By incorporating elements such as colour, shape, sound characteristics, smell, and gestures, the writer can create a multi-dimensional experience for the reader. Goffman's counsel to write "lushly" underscores the importance of employing rich language, including adjectives and adverbs, to enrich the descriptive quality of the narrative. This approach adds depth and nuance to the writing, enabling readers to visualize scenes and characters with greater clarity and immersion.

Working with Jottings and Fieldnotes as Data

As I will explore in Chapter 4, the jottings and fieldnotes became central to my reflexive analysis of issues of ethics and agency in the participatory work with the children at the Global Haven and with the research team. At the outset of data collection, I drew inspiration from Catherine Vanner's "Writing in My Little Red Book," which expounds on the various forms of field notes. Vanner delineates four distinct types: "jottings," "a diary," "a log," and "field notes proper" (2020, p. 16), while acknowledging the flexibility of field note approaches based on theoretical, epistemological, and personal orientation.

My standard entry typically began with detailed jottings, capturing immediate observations, followed by more reflective fieldnotes. These notes often intertwine with diary entries, reflecting personal experiences and emotions. As my research progressed, I increasingly valued the inclusion of personal reflections akin to diary entries. This evolution led me to recognize the necessity of adopting a diary format to navigate the emotional highs and lows inherent in the research process. Vanner (2020) emphasizes that a diary serves as a medium for recording personal dialogues and inner reflections, aiding in the organization of thought.

Moreover, my diary allowed me to incorporate personal reflections and experiences into meaningful artifacts for my thesis. This aspect of my research made my ethnography studies more akin to autoethnography. As Adams et al. discuss, an autoethnography shares intimate and vulnerable experiences that sometimes bring forth shame or sorrow, experiences and situations that shaped us and these events, and moments that motivated joy, confusion, conflict, grief, passion, and possibly trauma. We talk about these events and feelings to show how we and others with whom we interact might make sense of life, disrupt unnecessary silences about uncomfortable issues, and reveal stories that haven't been told. We hope these stories challenge institutional and insidious ideas and practices and offer lessons about making do, getting by, and living our best lives (2022).

As Adames et al. highlight, the creative side of an autoethnographical approach to research challenges research norms and traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality, advocating for the inclusion of personal experience and researcher positionality. They argue for research that acknowledges and celebrates personal perspectives, making their work accessible and engaging to wider audiences (2022).

While documenting my experience and reflections, I discovered that encapsulating jottings, fieldnotes, and diaries within a single entry served as a powerful tool for instantly recalling events and scenes in vivid detail. This approach resonates with Sanjek's (1990) position that the conventional separation between jottings, often seen as "data," and "personal reactions," as well as between "fieldnote records" and "diaries" or "journals," is misleading. In the same spirit, Emerson et al. argue that such a division overlooks the inherent subjectivity involved in data collection; by treating data as objective information independent of the ethnographer's actions and personal reactions, this approach fails to acknowledge this subjectivity (Emerson et al., 2011). Moreover, this separation assumes that subjective reactions should be controlled and disassociated from objective data, thereby undermining the richness and authenticity of the research findings.

To engage in reflexive analysis of my data, I have adopted both phenomenological and hermeneutical modes, guided by what phenomenologist Max Van Manen (1990) describes as "the writing is the writing" (p. 92), recognizing the variability in the forms this writing may take. For instance, for Jacqueline Kirk (2003), who explored women teachers in Pakistan, the writing manifested as vignettes. Haleh Raissaidat (2023), in her reflexive examination of participatory visual research, employed compositions. She "presented each interview in the form of a composition in which the context for each interview and the interaction between the researcher and the project are closely considered" (p. 88). In my case, I read and re-read my jottings, diaries and notes to form a narrative of the children at Global Haven. In so doing, I identified four main areas: a) Singing and inclusivity; b) Visual Expression; c) Faces, Voices Within Cellphilm; d) Positionality and the Consent Paradigm.

In organizing my notes into four distinct categories, I relied on the directions provided by Emerson et al. in their book *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2011) and Burkholder and Thompson in the book *Qualitative Education and Social Science Research* (2020). Following their recommendations, I revisited my notes and field observations frequently, seeking potential excerpts to develop the storyline. As suggested, I began by identifying relevant pieces of fieldnote data and then providing interpretive commentary on these excerpts. Each excerpt

and commentary unit underwent refinement to ensure that the analysis expanded upon and emphasized the core fieldnotes. Finally, I organized these excerpt-commentary segments into cohesive sections to construct a narrative

To do this, I meticulously selected field notes for their inherent interest and, following Emerson, for their ability to illustrate patterns of behavior and typical situations while evoking emotions. In addition, to further enrich the analysis, I approached my field notes with a new perspective, treating them as a dataset to be systematically examined. This process included meticulously reviewing, re-experiencing, and re-evaluating all the recorded observations. Simultaneously, I worked to identify themes, patterns, and variations present within this dataset, as laid out by Emerson et al. (2011).

Moreover, I looked at the patterns and themes as significant avenues for investigating my own positionality and power dynamics, employing critical theoretical frameworks to analyze how power shapes knowledge creation. By examining how field notes capture the essence of individuals, locations, and activities, this compilation prompts a critical assessment of how power dynamics operate in fieldnote practices, reinforcing and challenging existing structures (Burkholder & Thompson, 2020).

In aligning my fieldnotes analysis with the above insights, I grounded my research within a reflexive framework, following Burkholder and Thompson's lead (2020). Within the same text, Vanner emphasizes the critical importance, particularly in qualitative research, of understanding how researchers' positionality, power, and privilege shape their projects. She advocates for challenging power dynamics and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups through ethical research practices. She asserts that both qualitative and feminist research rejects objective methodologies, instead highlighting the examination of subjectivity to mitigate adverse impacts on participants. Vanner emphasizes that reflexivity, entailing a critical examination of researchers' beliefs and emotions throughout the research process, is essential to rigorous qualitative research. This involves exploring motivations, biases, and values that may influence the research process and relationships, thereby encouraging researchers to confront discomfort and challenge hegemonic structures (Vanner, 2020).

Summary

The chapter outlines the methodological framework of the thesis, focusing on autoethnographic reflexivity concerning childhood ethics and agency in participatory research, particularly the Art-Based Wellbeing Research with Children for Social Justice project. Participatory research is highlighted as a tool to investigate systematic injustice and empower children. I delved into the critical role of field notes and reflexivity in qualitative research, especially when studying

marginalized immigrant children. I explore how field notes are crucial tools for ethnographic researchers, as they document observations, descriptions, and interpretations, and facilitate critical reflection to navigate researcher subjectivity and positioning. Field notes encompass various documentation methods, often processed, analyzed, and shared through digital platforms. They not only record observations but also serve as a therapeutic outlet for researchers, helping them express frustrations and reflect on their process. Additionally, field notes aid in reflexivity by enabling researchers to become aware of their biases and discomforts, allowing them to adjust their research approach accordingly.

I discussed the nuances of taking jottings during fieldwork, highlighting their importance as memory aids for later recall and aids in constructing vivid descriptions of scenes. Ethical considerations surrounding the practice of jotting are explored, emphasizing the importance of maintaining openness and honesty with participants. The challenges and benefits of jotting versus mental notes are examined, and personal experiences illustrate the complexities involved in field data collection.

Finally, I further delved into the process of organizing field notes and jottings, emphasizing the importance of detailed descriptions and lively details in ethnographic writing. Ethical concerns regarding the maintaining of participants' privacy and confidence and logistical constraints such as time management are addressed. This chapter also touches upon the significance of adopting a reflexive framework in qualitative research, acknowledging researchers' positionality, power dynamics, and privilege throughout the research process. Reflexivity is essential to challenging power dynamics and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, thereby ensuring rigorous and ethical research outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR: WORKING WITH FIELD NOTES

Introduction

Participatory research is an asset-based methodology used to conduct sociological research that involves both the researchers and the subjects of the research. When used within the context of research related to children, it has the capacity to amplify children's agency and uphold four important ethical criteria: autonomy, well-being, justice, and the minimization of potential harm. It allows for a crucial environment to facilitate communication, creativity and collaboration among children from diverse backgrounds, to enhance their bonds, and to connect them with individuals beyond their immediate community. Within the context of Global Haven[3], participatory art-based research generates a dynamic space for children and parents. As such, it has the potential to increase the chances of bonding among children who come from diverse countries, ethnicities, and cultures, speaking different languages.

This research design accommodates the possibility of involving parents in activities whenever possible to strengthen bonds among parents and children, parents, researchers and Global Haven staff involved in the project. It recognizes the importance of occasional adult involvement, frequently echoed in research focused on the crucial role of adults' relationships with children (Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Goh & Baruch, 2018; Husby et al., 2018; Inchaurrondo et al., 2018; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Seim & Slettebø, 2017; Toros et al., 2018).

In this sense, participatory activities foster social capital within the community, promoting bonding among the children and their parents while bridging diverse backgrounds and cultures. As such, participatory research is an ethical shift from a mere harm reduction approach to an empowering one that promotes children's welfare and respects their agency. Within the context of the above and in alignment with the principles of well-being outlined by the World Health Organization in 2013, I have explored how art-based workshops enhance the socioemotional well-being of children.

In the sections that follow, I delve into and analyze four primary types of episodes: a) Singing and Inclusion, which includes the Imaginary Ball, Choosing Songs and the Concert, Manu the Puppet Researcher, and Special Guests; b) Visual Expression encompassing Painting session and Body Map Section; c) Faces, Voices and Cellphilm exploring the discourse on Face

4- To ensure the highest ethical consideration and protect participants' safety, anonymity, and privacy, all names in this thesis, including those of participants, researchers, and the shelter, are pseudonyms.

and Representation, featuring the Callphilm and Cellphilm Award; and d) Inclusion, Exclusion, Positionality and Consent.

Throughout my involvement in the Wellbeing Project, I've gathered approximately thirty jottings, field notes and diary entries. I draw upon a sampling of these writings. For each, I added context, interpretation, and discussions to the notes. I then linked these observations to the broader contexts of analyses, findings, and theories. As such, these four parts are situated within two main overarching themes: 1- Participation, Inclusion, and Social Capital, and 2- Ethics, Reflexivity, and Positionality.

Part One: Participation, Inclusion and Social Capital

In this section, I will reflect on various participatory activities within the Wellbeing projects. I endeavour to be descriptive, providing clear depictions of events and challenges, along with my observations and interpretations derived from synthesizing the events, pertinent theories, and literature. My recollection of events primarily relies on my jotting notes, field notes, diary and memory, and key takeaways gleaned from these experiences.

Fieldnotes Episode #1: Singing and Inclusion

Participation, Inclusion and Imaginary Ball

Context: One of the activities that we incorporated in nearly every session of the singing workshop was the Imaginary Ball. Typically, the first activity after the initial snack time was the Imaginary Ball. This simple game provides an initial space for agency, social bonding, bridging, and linking. In this activity, children, RAs, and others in the room will stand in a circle. A child throws an imaginary ball at someone in the circle, calling out the name of the person to whom they are throwing the ball. This helps them get familiar with new playmates, RAs, and the other people present. The person who receives the ball has the authority to choose who in the circle they want to throw the ball to. Everyone keeps waiting until they decide, and with their choice, they are encouraged to move forward in that socio-emotional relationship. Children are empowered by the authority to choose adults, researchers, or adult figures, and at the same time, experience joy and excitement. I call the imaginary ball the "unity circle" since we practice inclusion and unity within it, encompassing everyone from different backgrounds, religions, and ethnicities.

As adults who lead the research, we try to be quite theatrical in the Imaginary Ball activity. We exaggerate when catching the ball to inspire children to be freer and more easygoing in their pantomime of the imaginary ball when it is their turn. Normally, Karine

starts the circle. She acts as if the ball falls into her hand, then finds one in the circle, speaks the name, and throws the ball.

Jotting Notes:

> Karine throws the ball to Arman, a three-year-old, who gives it to one of our team adults, Cyrus, probably because he is wearing a funny, childish hat, which makes him more approachable to kids. Cyrus gives it back to Athena. She looks into Karine's eyes and asks her, "C'est quo ton nom?" then she repeats the name and throws the imaginary ball into Karine's hands; Karine, in turn, speaks a name and passes it to another person.
>
> Lucia is reluctant to join the circle, but when she sees other kids join, she joins them. Lucia also asks Karine what her name is. This time, Athena confidently and with joy informs Lucia that the name is Karine, which worked well. The children seemed to have some difficulty calling the names of all participants. The imaginary ball was great; nearly all the kids except Lucas were engaged. This time, it was Nelson who sent the ball. Florence asks them "Mon amis, est-ce que correct Je prends une photo, Sara dit moi, Qui"; other children approve by moving their heads. (Jotting Notes, August 11, 2023)

Interpretation: This apparently simple scenario involves courage and creativity while helping children feel included and welcome. For instance, Athena, the four-year-old, looks into Karine's eyes before throwing the ball, finds the courage to ask her in French, to which she is still very new since she is still acquiring it, and she poses an imperative question, all of which is quite a brave act. It is a simple question but it needs, nonetheless, a very complex development on the part of a child who arrived only a few months ago in Quebec, Canada, picking up a new language and culture. These kids have much to process and learn; thus, such development is very significant. This echoes Bourdieu's idea that ethical research promotes children's development and builds on their agency. We are doing research about marginalized kids' well-being, and it is about ethics and how to treat children ethically. In this context, the empowerment of children means a lot.

This ritual is not always successful. As I observed in my field notes: "*When we changed rooms and went downstairs to the big meeting room with a sofa and other furniture, the children were not that language-wise in the Imaginary Ball section. The younger ones stayed with Karine, but the rest went to the back of the room, started playing on the sofa, and didn't listen to us. We had a really hard time engaging them in the imaginary ball. This chaotic mood also extended to the singing worksho*p" (Fieldnotes, October 12, 2023).

Discussion: The structure and the manner of presentation are fundamental. The lesson I learned early on in my research and acknowledged in my teaching experience was what constitutes an axiomatic principle in many modes of human communication, case in point being literary

language. While numerous expressions convey the sentiment of "I love you," the form chosen by a poet is what distinguishes the message; the question of the "how" of conveying meaning is paramount in literature. This same principle applies to conducting workshops with children. While adults often prioritize functionality and practicality due to their busy schedules, children value attention to detail and are remarkably attuned to form.

That was one of the first things I learned in teaching and engaging with children: children care about detail and are quite sensitive to form. This is probably why I care about imagination, fantasy, puppets and imaginary balls. What was important about the imaginary ball circle was also the form; we all stood in a circle, held each other's hands, and looked at each other's eyes as if the most important thing was to establish our identity in that instant, to speak our names, learn our friends' and play mates' names, show our power to decide who will take the ball next in line, use our imagination to act out while taking the ball, connect with the next person in the form of bonding and bridging, etc. This simple activity, taking 10-15 minutes of our time, had functionality beyond that simple moment and on various levels.

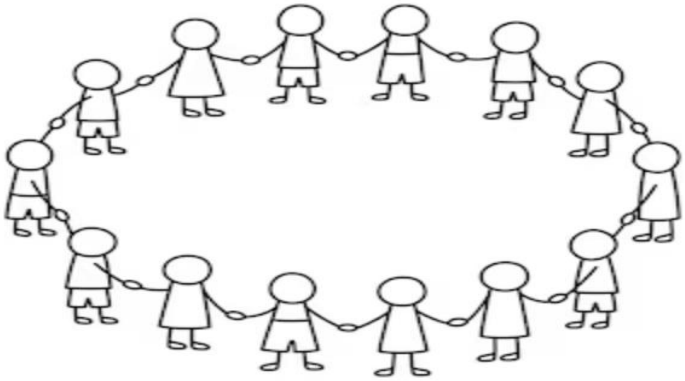

Figure 1. Graphic illustration of children playing in an imaginary ball circle

This circle obviously symbolizes friendship in context, participation, inclusion, support, and unity. The image is similar to that of Global Haven, a house for children from around the world.

Figure 2. An analogy illustrating friendship and inclusion

It shows that, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, language, or biases, children still know how to get together, form a happy circle, and have fun. As such, Imaginary Ball circles in our workshops had strong implications for conducting participatory research with children while valuing their agency. It was the true form of doing research with children and observing their right to participate, which is as important as the right to protection. In that circle, we did not care about gender, age, religion, skin colour, language, country of origin, or other differences. What we cared about was enjoying a happy moment, feeling empowered with our choices, and having a sense of belonging. After many Imaginary Ball sessions, children realized that whatever their choice of the next person was, they would be supported by happy cheers.

Choosing Songs and the Concert

Context: At the beginning of the project, pieces of music were chosen from five different languages: Farsi, Spanish, and Urdu, two in French and one in English. Children and their parents later added more selections of music to the workshops as the project evolved. In each session, we had a special guest chosen from parents and the residents of Global Haven to celebrate various cultures, music, and languages, which enriched our singing workshops.

Given the context of Global Haven, housing children from different backgrounds and language barriers, we believed lyrics and music would mitigate the overwhelming feeling of inability to communicate. Music would give children the possibility to articulate repeated words in a group and feel united and relieved. Among many lyrics, a couple of easy French ones were very popular among the children: the cho, cho chocolate so si tu aim le soleil, tape des mains ng, and Zu Zi Z for younger ones.

Jotting Notes:

> David says, Qui tu veux chanter? They start with si tu aimes le soleil, tape des mains.
>
> revellier toi, Si tu aimes tap les main , Si tu aimes …
>
> Fahima goes to Negin and hugs her. Today, she looks down; Negin says, “She is like me; sometimes she feels down for no reason” … Fahima does not join the children in singing …
>
> Before playing the song Zu za zi ze. Karine prepares children for “Zu Za zi” , Zu zazi za Nu n ani ne nu na ni ne U u ua li …Vu van in du da di du da di de, Zu za zi zu za zi ze …Tu ta tit e… Karine first slowly sings the lyrics, so all the children understand the words; after that, David starts the music, and everybody starts singing.
>
> Karine starts choco la cho. Nelson starts signing, saying that it is an easy song for everyone. Cho chocolo Cho…. All the children sang and liked it. Even Lina, who was outside playing, came inside and joined in singing; meanwhile, a parent came out of the kitchen and looked at the children, beaming delightedly. Arman is in the window singing and playing with his cards.

Fahima is still silent, but she probably feels better, looking more attentive and listening to children with interest.

Arman is singing the song while playing with a little horse; he even starts riding the horse. Then: Khosh halo shado khandanam Translation: (I am happy, and I laugh)

Ghadre donya ra midanam (I know the value of the world)

Lucia says the song "khoshalo khandanam est très difficult pour moi", mais Sara dit ques "c'est très facile pour moi." Karine looks at Sara and tells her because you know Farsi, the language of the song (Jotting Notes, August 25, 2023).

Interpretation: I helped Karine choose a popular and easy song in Farsi; the kids who spoke Farsi liked it, but it was difficult for Spanish-speaking children to sing those raw, fairly long lyrics. Urdu speakers could somehow feel connected to that lyric for obvious cross-linguistic reasons and similarities. Below are the musical notes of the chosen music in Farsi.

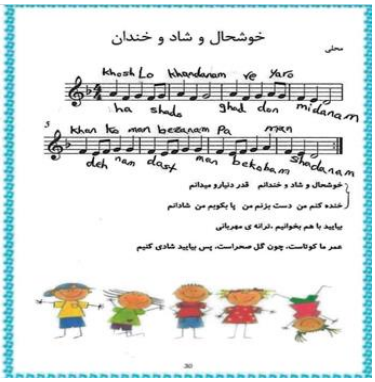

Figure 3. Musical notes for the music in Farsi

These challenges emerge for long lyrics. Still, children tried to pick up the language, picking up simple words from other languages in a few sessions when the song was accompanied by music. For instance, there was a song in Urdu with words in Arabic like "Rabbi," which means my God, and "Alhamdulillah," which means 'thank God.' As I noted in my fieldnotes, *"The Spanish-speaking children really liked it and sang and danced to this song along with Farsi- and Urdu-speaking children; it was one of their favorite songs to dance and play around to in the last round of the workshop after painting and when all the rituals were done. I was amazed at how children pick up culturally disparate music without biases and how they merge it"* (Fieldnotes August 25, 2023). In fact, the scene lends support to the belief that music has the power to connect and unite, and that kids could use this tool to create nebulous, primordial ties connecting different cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religions and bring about peace and balanced coexistence.

Gradually, we introduced lyrics in different languages to prepare them for the community concert; each child could find one lyric in her mother tongue and a couple of English and French pieces of music. Each session, with the help of our music therapist, Steve, who played the guitar and the piano, adjusting his pace to fit the children's needs, we practiced all those lyrics, which were together about five to six. Sometimes, we practiced the music all the kids liked more or were more comfortable with, preparing them little by little for the concert. I noted, *"The idea of performing in front of all their parents and residents at Global Haven motivated and encouraged the team and the children"* (Fieldnotes, August 25, 2023).

What stood out in those sessions was the children's happiness, feeling united and empowered, and experience of love and development. Our connection and bonding deepened during those sessions, and they began to see the team members as part of their family; we liked them like our children. I observed: *"They felt united and connected. More importantly, since, over the sessions, they figured out what the plan was, they were organized, knowing what would happen next and what should be done; with this in mind, they nearly led the session"* (Fieldnotes 25, August 2023).

On the final rehearsal day, as I documented in my field notes, *"They were so excited about the concert that they refused to stop and leave when their moms came to pick them up. They insisted on continuing their rehearsal. They didn't want to stop singing the song"* (Fieldnotes, August 25, 2023). It was not just for the idea of performing in front of their parents; they enjoyed being together, playing, singing and dancing. However, as in our debriefing sessions with the Wellbeing team, in our discussion with the team it became evident that children out of those workshops or other classes did not have much freedom to play together; parents feared they might hurt each other or a conflict might arise among them, so they did not let them play together at the lobbies of Global Haven. Thus, they really valued such get-togethers in our workshops, where they had the liberty to have fun. These workshops and rehearsals culminated in a concert at the community dinner.

I noted in my fieldnotes that the children were quite energetic and happy to be there; at the end of singing all the lyrics, they even asked for more singing, such as Chocolate Cho. *"Parents were so excited to see their children singing so happily that they started filming them. It was amazing seeing children who were confident and proud of themselves. Even the youngest, a three-year-old, could sing and perform in the team. Parents cheered, encouraged them, and filmed their children with cell phones. They were all from around the world, with different colors, languages, cultures, and ethnicities, but united in one concert group, quite organized as if they had had hours of practice. Parents were also very attentive to them. The*

team was also excited and proud; we all felt connected, united, and in a great mood" (Fieldnotes, August 25, 2023).

Discussion: Musical performances proved to be a creative and suitable method of communicating with young children; they helped them feel united, empowered, and connected. The selection of easy classical music allowed even younger children to take part in a teamwork activity. Choosing songs from various countries brought parents to the concert and made room for their cultural heritage.

Music and lyrics in singing workshops were based on each child's country of origin and the language unique to that country; each piece of music echoed one cultural DNA and heritage. Each piece of music manifested their identity and helped them construct their personality based on the selected music. It manifested their agency through performing music with roots in their language and culture of origin performed in the host country.

Given the belief that identity and agency are evolving processes constructed every day, one of the questions I have encountered concerns the role of music and songs in shaping children's identity, agency and empowerment and the way the presence of *Others* in the form of other nations and host countries affected that agency and the process. If agency, as the post-modern sociologist Anthony Giddens describes, is "body plus power" (1991), then having the power to perform the music of one's own country in the form of dance, play, and singing is a representation of agency in the field which belongs to *the Others* who could be the researchers as an authority, the playmates, and the host country and language.

My observation of the context brought to my attention the relationship between music and the question of agency, which gives children the means to see things and interpret songs as they see them, not as WE do. As researchers and parents, we let such crucial interfaces take shape, like having children and their parents choose music from their cultures of origins and present it in singing workshops or enabling the context where a Latin American child can sing and dance to a song in Urdu with Arabic words and context. This observation affirms Giddens's theory that agency does not reside solely within individuals but rather emerges from the interactions and relationships among individuals and between individuals and societal structures such as institutions. From this perspective, agency is not static; it is not a possession but rather a phenomenon that arises within specific circumstances and contexts (Giddens, 1984).

Music offers the dynamic necessary for agency by offering diverse perspectives and delving into the complexity of *'otherness.*' It can instantly take one into *the other*'s context. However, connecting with *'the other'* requires a fundamental openness and, crucially, empathy

"to foster cultural and cross-cultural understanding" (Ilari, 2017). Music, as a potent social tool, is intricately intertwined with empathy. Children naturally have that level of openness and empathy and can easily connect. As a social act embodying the emotions and attitudes of others, music holds the potential to cultivate empathy and nurture the growth of positive interpersonal relationships as a result. It could establish an ethical basis for engaging both reflexively and reflectively with the music and those with whom children interact through music (Cross et al., 2012). As such, such musical participatory activity could catalyze agency, empathy, dialogue and peace.

Manu, the Puppet Researcher

Context: The team introduced the use of a puppet named "Manu" to effectively communicate the research question and the researcher's role with regard to the children. A big golden duck representing an immigrant bird, Manu resonates with the backgrounds of many immigrant children in Canada. The team collectively chose the name "Manu" for the bird puppet. It is easy to pronounce and carries connotations with the words "Me," "Moi," "Man," and "Ami" in English, French, Farsi, Urdu, and Spanish. Led by Karine, the puppet "Manu" functioned as a friendly and approachable mentor for children. It prompted discussions, posed questions about their feelings and artworks, and encouraged playful interactions. This methodology not only helped gather valuable input from children but also created a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere for their participation in the research process.

During special guest sessions, Manu posed questions to guests, mainly residents and children's parents. In each session, a special guest represented a song and music from their culture, facilitating cultural exploration for children and fostering dialogue among participants with different cultural backgrounds.

Jotting Notes:

> Karine brings Manu and asks everyone, "What is my name?" "qu'est-ce que je dis?" Athena and Arman hug Manu. Manu tells them that they will perform a spectacle for parents in the last session. Florence and Manu ask the children what spectacle means in Farsi.
>
> They say "namayesh"; Karine leads. Manu says: Je m'appelle Manu, Je suis chercheur, on parle Farsi.
>
> Est-ce que ça intéressant? Je suis vraiment content. Florence asks the kids what we are doing. She explains to them that we are doing research, and Manu is helping us to do research to see how children feel. "C'est très important que vous dites nous qu'est-ce que vous pensez, qu'est-ce que vous dites? Parce que vous êtes très important pour nous. C'est important pour nous comment les enfant pense".

> Younes is listening very carefully and curiously. He thinks about the words as if he is curious to see what they mean. At the same time, other kids arrive. Arman hugs Manu again. Lucia is playing with Bizhan. She is laughing and hides behind the chair. All the children are on the balcony. Manu joins them, and they all start singing their music. “On va chanter”
> Children hug Manu. Florence asks ”qui veut prendre une photo avec Manu?”
> Tous les enfants disent moi, moi. Fahima came down later than the other children; earlier, her sister told us she would not come down since she was scared of singing; the children are happy with her presence. Florence again asks who wants to have a picture with Manu. They all say moi, jumping up and down, excited. Florence tells them: “All say Cheese.” Even Lina joins them! Sara is still singing “on va chanter” “on va dancer…” (August 11, 2023)

Interpretation: I documented in my fieldnotes *“Manu, the puppet researcher, started a conversation with the guest asking questions about the selected song's history, tale, and message and why it fits our theme”* (Field notes, August 11, 2023). This was a great chance for the kids to learn about different cultures through music. At the same time, it let residents, kids, and parents share their own stories, cultural backgrounds, and who they were. Manu, the puppet, helped guide the session by introducing the research to guests, asking interesting questions, and encouraging meaningful talks with the children. I point these out in my fieldnotes:

“In singing workshops, the presence of Guitar and Manu among the children has been notably positive. Children showed interest in those two new additions to the research field. They felt like touching and trying the guitar, seeing how those strings made sounds. Steve, the music artist, also expertly helped children feel connected and happy while playing the guitar. They were equally delighted to touch the guitar and hug Manu, finding both experiences enjoyable and entertaining. Catharine showed the children Manu, and Manu asked our research questions, what made them feel better, and how they liked their painting sessions or other parts of the workshop. They were very excited talking to Manu. It was great to let the children touch and hug the puppet” (Fieldnotes, October 2023).

In the beginning, Karine followed the theatre convention and hid behind the counter while Manu, at the top of the counter, talked with the children. However, she later learned, through practice, that *“children were still welcoming and accepting Manu as a character, even more so when it was among them, and they could touch or hug it. They did not mind seeing Manu with Karine, the puppeteer! As such, even if the puppeteer’s concealment had established and well-known advantages, joining the children proved to even more promising and constructive”* (Fieldnotes October 2023).

As I document in my field notes, Karine's initiative in terms of bringing Manu among the children was particularly positive since it gave children, especially the younger ones, the opportunity to interact with it more effectively. For instance, they made space for it to sit next to them. As I observed in my fieldnotes, *"One of the scenes that caught my attention as the note taker was when Arman, the three-year-old, made room for Manu to sit next to him; he accepted Manu as a participant in their circle. Fahima, the five-year-old, liked to touch her"* (Fieldnotes, October 2023).

Discussion: Children are naturally drawn to tactile experiences; the guitar and Manu held a special appeal. They liked touching the guitar and hugging the puppet. They perceived those objects as fun and mysterious, prompting them to explore and interact eagerly – the inclination to see the world around them as living beings.

Moreover, children are often captivated by mystical and fantastical elements, such as puppets and imaginary objects like magical balls. These elements immediately capture their imagination and hold their attention. The presence of fantasy in objects such as puppets and the embedded symbolism and semiotics have the capacity to engage children deeply. Recognizing this, it becomes evident that incorporating elements of fantasy, such as puppets, musical instruments, and imaginary objects, can effectively engage children and foster their participation and interest in various activities.

Research supports the idea that "using puppets produces a powerful connection and trust" (Hulburd, 2021, p.130). My observation holds up the fact that children felt less stressed when a puppet posed the questions than adults. They could easily approach the puppet, initiate conversation, and hug it as if they had known it for a long time without feeling shy. Scholars like Emily Howarth (1968) suggest that puppets create an atmosphere of fantasy for children while remaining non-threatening. Within this context, Manu, the puppet researcher, was an excellent transitional tool to facilitate the shifts between reality and fantasy, between children's worlds and the research questions (Sweeney & Homeyer, 1999). Manu established an inviting and non-intimidating environment, alleviating tension and creating comfort for children during workshops, especially when responding to the researcher's questions. In this spirit, Cheryl Hulburd also emphasizes the significance of incorporating puppets into interactions with children within the framework of Fun theory. She highlights the puppets' capacity to invoke fun and positively influence behaviour, particularly among children (2021).

Adults and Parents as special guests, the act of bridging and bonding

Context: For each singing workshop, we invited a parent or resident to introduce a specific musical piece or song that was of personal significance to them or represented their country of origin. In the following sections, I outline three scenarios of special guest sessions. The first episode features our inaugural special guest, an adult asylum seeker residing at Global Haven. The second scenario involves a father, and the third showcases children as special guests. Throughout the project, we welcomed over ten special guests. Choosing from the diverse range of guests presented a challenge, but to align with the scope of my thesis, I focused on only three episodes while drawing insights from other sessions when relevant. This practice nurtured connections among diverse cultures and countries, significantly enhancing the bond between parents and children, recognized as crucial for children's holistic wellbeing, as well as promoting harmony within Global Haven – a setting abounding in diverse cultures, languages, and ethnicities, where tensions were unavoidable.

Chloe is Our Special Guest

Jotting Notes:

> Chloe is an adult resident from Georgia at Global Haven. Her song is (to Khanjereh Man) "Missing Your Country." She sang along to the music with a very beautiful voice. Most of us, including the children, did not know the language, but the music was moving and powerful across the board. The children liked the music session. Even though they did not understand the language, they respected the song and sat there for a long time. (Jotting Notes, August 11)

Interpretation: Chloe's presentation was the first in those series. It was a mysterious piece of music in a language we did not understand, but we all could feel the theme of "Missing Your Country" nonetheless. Nearly all people in the room except Florence and Karine were immigrants. I observed: "*We were silent, and the music was so powerful that even the noisiest children were hooked. Tears rolled down my cheek listening to it, as someone who missed her land so badly"* (Fieldnotes, August 11, 2023).

Discussion: This was the power of music as a universal language speaking to people from around the world. The Special Guest sessions were participatory, liberating, and decolonizing as they created a space for cultural heritage; children would learn to respect their cultural background and appreciate the wealth in other lands worldwide. The philosophy here was also liberating; acknowledging the mother tongue was, in fact, acknowledging children's agency. My observation underscored that agency was not limited to letting children move around freely; it went beyond physical movement. It was, in fact, the host country recognizing their mother

tongue, cultural heritage, and music, as parts of their identity, valuing them as experts in their culture, and respecting their coloring of cultural knowledge and background.

A Father as a Special Guest

Context: A father was invited to one of those sessions; I observed in my fieldnotes *"since the beginning of the session, his two daughters, Diana, the 7-year-old, and Fahima, the 5-year-old, were very excited with the news that their father was supposed to be there as a special guest that day"* (Fieldnotes, August 19, 2023). These two children were living in that shelter with their father without a mom; they had lost her one year before. Only the anticipation of having their father as a participant lifted the mood of the two young sisters, especially the younger one, who was most of the time in low spirits.

The year before when they arrived at the shelter, the younger one was depressed and sad, which was quite understandable; a four-year-old child who lost her mom almost a year before. She did not talk to anyone and kept gazing at the wall. But she easily welcomed every female hug who approached her; she clearly needed and wanted affectionate hugs. Over the past year, she has stayed in the shelter with the community's help, particularly with the help of Negin, a girl with some disabilities who acted as a mother figure for her and her six-year-old sister. Over the past year, her demeanour has shifted noticeably, with occasional touches of laughter and an increased interaction with other children. This positive shift aligns with the ethos of the Wellbeing project and its workshops, designed to nurture children's emotional health, bring them together and create the much-needed socio-emotional bonding and community for mental health.

Jotting Notes:

> That day, Fahima, the five-year-old girl, was clearly happy; the older six-year-old was also excited. To my surprise, Lucia, another 5-year-old who was their close friend, was also happy. Lucia told me Fahima and Diana's father "was nice to me." Their dad had selected a song he watched on TV as a child back in their home country. The selected musical piece was a musical animated cartoon of a boy who loved to have a horse, but since he did not have one, he played with a stick-shaped horse head, ran around, and sang that song; the musical was quite lively and fun. It had strong elements from the region he came from; it helped the audience get some idea of the culture and context where had grown up. That animated musical resonated with the children in the workshop, being a nice piece for their age. (Jotting Notes, August 18).

Interpretation: Undoubtedly, those special guest sessions were effective in bridging and networking with broader contexts and people. However, as I noted in my fieldnotes, *"the two young sisters' reactions were significant in that session. Another noteworthy aspect was*

Lucia's response; their five-year-old friend shared the same level of joy as her friends Fahima and Diana" (Fieldnotes August 19, 2023). Lucia's mom, Monica, had also been our special guest in a previous session, where she introduced a lively Spanish salsa song to our workshop. M5 and her daughter Lucia danced all the way through the song.

However, it's essential to acknowledge music's profound impact on eliciting various emotions in children. For instance, during a session later in October, coinciding with the Halloween, a couple from Latin America introduced their favourite Spanish song with a deeper, more sombre tone. As the music filled the room and they sang along with other Spanish attendees, I observed the following: *"Tears streamed down Lucia's face. She was singing and crying with the music as if it had awakened heartfelt memories in her young mind; the song was in her mother tongue. Her reaction was authentic and deeply moving. Sometimes, I doubt the age they are at; they exhibit maturity beyond their years"* (Jotting notes, October 28, 2023). Nevertheless, on a day when Diana and Fahima's father was invited, Lucia and her two friends were happy and smiling, celebrating the presence of their father as a special guest, which made them feel more at home.

I wrote, *"The presence of the father figure was a pleasing experience for Lucia, who had a close relationship with Diana and Fahima, as if they were three sisters who were happy with the father figure being around*" (Fieldnotes, August 19). Lucia was in the shelter with her mom and two older brothers. *"She mentioned that her friend's father had always been so kind to her, and she liked him"* (Fieldnotes, August 19). Those children who were hardly seven years old knew what they liked most and what helped them to feel better. *"After the musical section, the father-guest stayed longer and participated in the painting and drawing section"* (Jotting Notes August 18, 2023).

Discussion: Those sessions were significant in terms of strengthening the bond among the children and between them and their parents. It contributed to their socio-emotional wellbeing. Within the above context, participatory research created a space for the children to express their feelings, exert power, show more agency regarding their feelings and express themselves on matters that concerned them. In this capacity, they were empowered to create a healing space regarding the hardships and challenges they were dealing with and that they could not express with their limited context and language. The workshop created a capacity for them to express those feelings; what mattered most was their voice, whether in the form of painting, dancing, singing or the sheer structure enabling the expression of their feelings.

Children as Special Guest

Context: There were more than ten singing workshop sessions over three months. During those sessions, we focused on the role of music, dancing, and songs accompanied by artworks such as paintings. Our special guests were mainly adults. However, the last session contained a turning point. For some reason, our special adult guest did not show up. Luckily, the children were there to help. Even though our special guests that day were the children, it was not a planned or smart idea to offer the stage in the last session to them. All the same, it was a turning point in our sessions!

In the week before the last session, it was decided that the mother of a seven-year-old girl who could play the guitar and sing would be our guest, but she fell sick on that day (she was receiving treatment for first-stage cancer and that day she was not feeling well enough to sing and play the guitar in the session).

Jotting Notes:

It is time for a special guest; all children clap their hands and sing Manu, Manu, Manu, .. Manu comes among the children, Nelson, Lina and Fahima hug Manu. Manu says: Alor, l'invité special, c'est qui aujourd'hui? Qui a voulu partager une chanson pour nous?

Nelson dit, moi, Fehima léve aussi la main. Raphael dit, moi, Manu says, tois aussi,

aujourd'hui. C'est une journée special, parce que tout le monde a envie de

partager, on peut.

Raphael says moi. All the kids clap their hands and call his name. He starts singing: Nous sommes les musiciens/ Quel instrument jouez-vous? De tout, de tout/ Nous sommes les musiciens/ Et nous jouons du piano /Pia pia piano/ Ta tarara tarara tata/Ta tarara tarara tat. As Raphael sings the song, Manu dances along. All kids are silent listening to Raphael, when he finishes, they all applaud…Then Lina raises her hand half up and half down. Manu says Lina, Lina, at which all the children keep saying Lina, Lina, giving her a big applause. She then comes and sits on a special guest chair and sings:

On écrit sur les murs le nom de ceux qu'on aime

messages pour les jours à venir. On écrit sur les murs à l'encre de nos veines

On dessine tout ce que l'on voudrait dire. Partout autour de nous

All the children join her… Lina looks at the camera. At the same time, her mom, Silvana, opens the door and comes in. Everyone shouts her name: Silvana, Silvana, … and claps hands. Manu says cette soirée est special. Sh1 asks her daughter to sing the song; Lina sings:

Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white.

Manu says I did not know the song and liked it. C'est un bon message.

Maintenant, Est-ce-que vous voulez faire de la peinture? All reply oui, (December 7, 2023).

Interpretation: At the last minute, we learned that Silvana would not join us as a special guest. Consequently, Karine, also a singing instructor, asks the children who among them would like to sing and be a special guest. What follows are my extended fieldnotes on the occasion: "*Raphael, a nine-year-old from South America, raises his hand. He has the experience of taking the role of a translator for our special guests from South America, effectively translating the Spanish words of Nelson's parents and their chosen song into French for us. He started singing a song he had learned in school"* (December 2023).

"Next in line was Lina, the seven-year-old girl whose mom was our special guest. In the beginning, she was not sure and was somehow shy. Her hand kept rising and dropping half-heartedly, and for seconds hanging half-raised, but at other children's encouragement, she did step up and moved to the front of the crowd, sitting on the special guest's chair. She started singing, and the other children joined her. She was halfway through it when, suddenly, we saw her mom open the door and join our team, sitting on another coach and observing her daughter. She asked her child to sign the song, "Jesus loves all children of the world", giving her daughter encouragement, affection and support (December 7, 2023).

That event held deep value and meaning for us who knew everything happening around those workshops in the lives of those children. For instance*, "we knew that Lina had a hard time receiving emotional support from her mother, who was quite critical or not that supportive, probably due to the hardships she had gone through in her own life, such as her treatment of cancer"* (Fieldnotes December 8, 2023). This mother also had difficulty interacting with other residents in that temporary shelter, rarely joining our workshops, while other parents occasionally joined the events and supported their children. Her child was, consequently, always alone there. This incident was thus a valuable and enlightening moment in our singing workshop, as if we had received the reward for what we originally sought: the children's agency, wellbeing, socio-emotional ties, bonding and bridging together. It was the climax of all those sessions. It was only one example of many small achievements regarding wellbeing and socio-emotional outcomes.

Another pivotal moment occurred when Sara, a five-year-old Afghan girl, demonstrated her remarkable talent during her session at Global Haven. Known for her brightness and creativity, she often took on a leadership role in our singing performances. As I observed: "*On that occasion, at the very beginning of the session, before snack time, she picked up the guitar and proceeded to play and sing for nearly half an hour, flawlessly recalling all the lyrics and songs she had learned over the past year. Despite initially struggling to handle the guitar properly, with a little help, she steadily improved over the course of half an hour. Her*

confidence and unwavering concentration truly distinguished her performance; maintaining such focus and singing continuously for half an hour is no small feat for a child. She effortlessly recited all the lyrics from memory, showcasing her dedication, talent, and love for art (Fieldnotes, October 12, 2023*).*

Sara's performance inspired other children to join in, including her nine-year-old brother, Hamid, who had previously been a passive observer during our workshops. On that day, he decided to participate, playing the piano with his sister despite not being as proficient. I noted, "*Despite his limited experience, he earnestly attempted to stay in tune, contributing to the harmony of the performance. Two other children, Raphael and Diana, grabbed iPads and began filming the event* (Field Notes, October 12, 2023). Those moments were noted in my records as powerful instances of genuine participation, voice, and agency among the children, featuring a climax in the narrative of Global Haven's children.

Discussion: These sessions significantly contributed to the evolving confidence and self-esteem of the children. They slowly built such level of confidence as to take roles, lead the group, and feel empowered to sing and talk in front of a group of people. This happened in the course of time and was part of their evolving identity in that community. *"I remember last year, when we first entered that big room in the basements, children, especially boys, kept jumping on the sofas, screaming, shouting and fighting. But after a year, they had evolved into such an expanded capacity of communication and interaction as to perform, sing, and talk, which was amazing. More importantly, they were aware that they were doing something extraordinary. They knew that they were loved and treated as special experts* (Fieldnotes, January 2024).

I go on to write, *"Another significant outcome of these workshops was the sense of togetherness they fostered among the children, as often expressed by them in the feedback section in the final phase of the workshop, during what we called "juice time". When we asked the children what they had enjoyed most about the day and the workshop, nearly all of them voiced their satisfaction with simply being together"* (Field notes, December 2023). Despite residing in the same shelter, they had few opportunities for meaningful interaction. Language barriers and misunderstandings further hindered their chances to properly come together. Attempts to gather without the guidance of experienced instructors often led to conflicts among the children and misunderstandings among the adults, leaving parents struggling to resolve disputes. I observed in my field notes, *"Therefore, these workshops, offering a safe environment and structure for social interaction, became invaluable moments for both the children and their parents"* (Fieldnotes, December 2023).

By the end of that workshop, we had a lot of amazing, brilliant stories, memories and artworks made by those children. They were brilliant pieces, and more importantly, the workshops built an environment and a capacity to cultivate their agency, strengthening bonding among those children. Another important and positive note was that such an event helped a lot with bridging, especially with newcomer children, particularly because many new children joining our team suffered from big language barriers and could hardly communicate in English or French. Those participatory events strengthened their socio-emotional ties and went a long way to giving them a sense of wellbeing.

Fieldnotes Episode #2: Visual Expression, Paintings and Body Map

Painting Sessions, Children as Active Agents

Context: Drawing and painting are effective tools to promote children's agency. When discussing children, we must consider their age and language barriers. In this regard, drawing and painting were crucial tools for Global Haven's children. Being newcomers to Quebec and struggling with language barriers, painting and drawing gave them the tools to express their feelings. In the beginning, we tried to give them a theme, asking them to paint building on that theme, but this soon turned out not to be working; they kept painting what mattered to them and used it to express and communicate their feelings at that point of time. Consequently, we changed our approach; when they finished their paintings, we asked them about their paintings and added themes accordingly.

Jotting Notes:

> Arman's language has improved; he asks Karine to look at her painting. He thinks it is beautiful.
>
> Yesterday, Fahima was sad because she was somehow behind in painting. She felt disappointed and refused to color her artwork.
>
> Athena often creates colorful paintings; she uses flowery images that are clear and distinct, while her sister uses heavy black and mixes her images. Diana is sick, she leaves the workshop/room early today. In the beginning, she wanted me to hug her. I spent some time with her for a while, but was caught busy a bit later, so I had to leave her. I am sad I did not understand she was that sick…now she's gone. Sara asks Florence, are you Manu? Florence says no. I am Florence.
>
> Athena explains to Sara, her sister, that Manu is the one who says quack, quack.
>
> Florence asks Athena, "Can I film your painting?" She says yes. She is happy with her painting and does not care what others think. She is self-sufficient and somehow introverted but has a smiling face and confidence.

> This time, Karine has introduced a new painting color to the room: a sparkling hue. All the children are keen to use this new twinkling shade. Arman is so engrossed in painting that he completes one piece of paper and asks for another piece. Upon our asking him what he has painted, he responds that it is a mouth and asks us to display it on the wall. He is so eager that we stick it to the wall-produced watercolor. It is very wet, so we have to be careful so as not to tear it. He loves painting. Other children also love their artistic creations. Raphael and Lina make their paintings red and golden. Arman again asks adults to look at his painting; he is so devoted to his artwork. The presence of music and the impact of listening while painting make things flow. (October 2023)

Interpretation: The painting section of our workshop, which took place every session at the end of our singing workshop so as to enable the children to express the feelings that they had that day, was the favourite section for the kids. It was a time when they could show their feelings and agency and act freely without any rules or instructions. They were the kings and queens of their own land. They could easily talk, discuss their choice of colors, and even decide to collaborate on one painting or add one color more than another.

I highlighted in my field notes, *"While painting, children could build on their language and practice communicating more effectively and powerfully. They like painting sessions because they are free in their field of painting. They did not have to listen to the selected special music, sit down, or be passive and submissive. They had more power and agency in the drawing section, making them feel better"* (fieldnotes October 2023). What stood out to me in those sessions was the power of art to balance children's feelings. In one example, a six-year-old who struggled with teamwork and hardly shared her property decided to share her paper with two of her peers; they painted a rainbow, a sky, and a land while talking, laughing, and painting. Later on down the line, they bonded and forged a nicely intimate friendship.

On another occasion, Fahima, the five-year-old whose mom had passed away before and was often aloof, sad and depressed, painted a flower for her mom. This happened as her father, who was our special guest for the singing workshop, stayed longer and joined them in the painting section. I noted, *"The father painted a horse that day, and her daughters, Diana and Fahima, painted hearts with the brightest colors. The father's presence was a positive factor for his two young daughters. The five-year-old painted the heart and told us she had painted that red heart for her dead mom to tell her how she loves her and that her mom was alive in her heart. She smiled when speaking those words as if she could see her or feel her presence. Those smiles were very rare. The scene was really touching, truly touching. The heart shape, adorned with red and pink colors, next to the rainbow painted with bright hues,*

along with Fahima's words, was a powerful expression and response to the events of that day. It happened after one month of workshops nearly every week, spending 2-3 hours there singing, painting, dancing and playing together (Fieldnotes, August 19, 2023).

Discussion: Participatory painting sessions have been exceptionally productive and empowering. In the painting workshops, children are active agents. The tools give them the means to exert their autonomy and be genuine agents in their field. They can experiment with different colors and express themselves without worrying about being judged. They practice collaborating, creativity, critical thinking, and communication while drawing and painting. Paintings and drawings become extensions of their identities, allowing them to delve into their innermost selves and articulate emotions in ways that words alone cannot capture. As noted by Burnard (2002), image-based techniques serve the purpose of eliciting representations of their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge, thereby facilitating dialogue and expression. In essence, these sessions serve as a platform for children to both discover and convey the depths of their understanding and experiences.

An Inclusive Painting Session After Juice Time

Context: Below, I look at one of my jotting notes on juice time and the following events:
Juice time typically marked the last section in singing workshops where Manu asked children what they liked and did not like that day. Singing workshops started with snack time and the Imaginary Ball activity and would progress through lyrics, music, special guests, creative painting sessions, and culminate in juice time. However, on this particular day, our routine was disrupted when a child who had been absent from our workshop due to a family outing arrived late at the session, just as we were about to begin juice time and call it a day. Despite this unexpected interruption, the team's adaptability to the children's needs turned these final moments into an enriching and insightful experience. Here are some of the notes I jotted down during that session:

Jotting Notes:

> Cyrus gives children juice…
>
> Karine: Dis-moi ce que tu as aimé? Dis-moi ce que tu n'as pas aimé?
>
> Diana: Mon painture. Fahima: J'aime la peinture pour ma mama"
>
> Lucia: J'aime la peinture parce qu'elle était avec Diana and Fahima et elle était contente. Raphael: J'aimes la chanson
>
> Sara, the five-year-old, arrives late, around Juice time. She is so curious about the event and asks if Manu and I are there. She is sad that she has not made it to this event on time. She wants to catch up with everything. She obviously likes the workshop very much, and missing part of

> it makes her sad. Being so energetic and bright, she does her best to catch up with all the events at the last minute. Florence, an expert child psychologist, knows how to help her and creates opportunities for her to fulfil her expectations. She suggests that she could paint; Sara picks up a Sharpie and starts drawing images. Her drawing is quite organized, including images of her family members, mom, siblings, and Manu. By the end, Florence asks her if she can film her, and she agrees. In front of the camera, she explains her drawing, that the figures are of her brothers and sister. She calls her painting "hale khoob" ,حال خوب-which means "feeling Well". The workshop has ended, but we are still collecting things, and the children are still playing. While we were collecting and cleaning up, Cyrus, our volunteer teammate, was still playing with the kids and began to play ball with Arman. We work fast to clean and sort out everything. Our teammates are very attentive to children's safety and take good care of different things. Children are still playing and enjoying the very last moments of the time in the playing room (September 2023).

Interpretation: Sara is a bright, exceptionally outspoken child with a remarkable artistic talent. Not sharing her siblings' dark brown hair, she stands out with her golden locks. Though slightly shorter than her four-year-old younger sister, she exudes an air of authenticity and intelligence that captivates those around her. It was particularly touching when she seized the opportunity to depict her family members in a vivid drawing with Manu, the puppet researcher, by her side.

In these sessions, children like Sara knew that their artwork was valued, giving them a platform to showcase their talents and receive feedback and encouragement. Drawing became a powerful means of communication, capable of expressing what words often cannot. To truly get a purchase on how its significance extended beyond mere representation and enriched the children's expressive abilities, one would need to use theoretical models in semiotics, phenomenology, and even hermeneutics. Such research could be valuable grounds for future studies.

At any rate, I found these moments ethically revealing, as we accommodated the children's needs even amidst fatigue and the impending return home. It presented an opportunity to engage with Sara, learn more about her background, and demonstrate flexibility whenever possible. It underscored the importance of respecting children's participation rights and amplifying their voices in the process. These moments, imbued with strong ethical underpinnings, reinforced the power of listening and responding to the needs of each child.

Discussion: Children taking the lead in the session was another remarkable highlight across numerous workshops. In each workshop, we meticulously planned all activities. The session typically began with a snack, followed by an interactive activity, such as passing an imaginary

ball. We included singing, music, special guests, and painting sessions in between, concluding with juice time, which marked the end of the session. Following this structured agenda, when Sara arrived towards the end of the workshop, we could typically have apologized to her. As I wrote in my field notes, *"As an expert child researcher, Florence demonstrated remarkable flexibility in catering to the child's needs"* (Fieldnotes, September 2023). This led to an unexpectedly valuable drawing session. Beyond the artwork, the child received the attention and care she desired. This moment struck me as both deconstructive and decolonizing. It was deconstructive because the child, not the researchers, led the session – a powerful demonstration of child agency and their right to participate actively in research, where they are the protagonists. It was decolonizing because the child wielded the power to express herself in a language beyond the dominant ones like French, English, or Spanish. At just five years old, she named her drawing using the Farsi expression " حال خوب", i.e. "wellbeing".

Body Mapping, Drawing and Painting for Agency and Participation

How does children's participation in body mapping promote their agency? For different reasons, body mapping could be a great choice for a participatory activity with young children. It involves their body, accompanied by painting and group work, promoting their agency, communication, and creativity in several ways.

Here, I recall one body mapping session and its challenges. Given that it was summer and the weather was pleasant, earlier in the preparation Zoom meeting, we agreed to take the children to the park and conduct the workshop afterwards. Unfortunately, after checking the weather forecast, we realized it would rain that day, so we conducted it in the small playroom. We could not change the workshop day because we had to adjust our plan to Global Haven's schedule; they wanted us to conduct our workshops on the second Thursday of each month so they could hold the community meeting with parents while children were engaged there. For body mapping sessions, every child would lie down on a big piece of paper while we traced their body onto it using a Sharpie. Following this, they would use their skills to paint and color this life-sized representation, adding features such as eyes and ears.

Jotting Notes:

> Arman, the 3-year-old boy, is the first person to lie down. Karine, using a Sharpie, draws a map around his body. Arman is excited about the idea; we give him the brush and colors and ask him to paint. Next in line are Sara and Athena. They decide to paint a body map together. Baharis is there and helps them, so the three children start painting one body map.

> As Emily stays in the line, Karine asks her to lie down, and she starts mapping her body. The room is small, with little space left for other children. Things get chaotic and messy. Plus, there is only one Sharpie!
>
> I took the initiative and used a brush and watercolor to do Diana's body map. She is so happy, but since there is no space for her younger sister, Fahima looks frustrated.
>
> Fahima, aged four, felt sad seeing her six-year-old sister with the necessary supplies while she had to wait for the space and painting gear. She was grumpy and complained about not being offered paper and space earlier on.
>
> I asked Cyrus, who was playing chess with older children in another room, if he could take Fahima to the hallway and draw her body map there.
>
> Cyrus takes two of the children to the hallway. Oliver does not know how to use watercolor. He threw all his black paint on the paper and got paint on his clothes. We are worried that he will ruin his clothes; we have no idea how his mom will take it.
>
> Arman keeps asking us to look at his painting. He says, “Look at me, look at me!” He is so proud of his painting.
>
> He has recently started speaking three languages: Farsi, English, and French. Surprisingly, his mom joined us and helped him with his painting, which was a great turn of events! She tries to be cooperative and attentive to her child's needs. (August 10, 2023)

Interpretation: I observed, *“The playroom space was too small for the body mapping activity, causing a few children to have it performed outside of the room in the hallway. Cyrus, one of our teammates, helped them draw in the hallway because some kids, especially the younger ones, wanted their own body map and did not opt for a shared one with peers”* (Fieldnotes, August 2023). Consequently, it was important to note this so that we could consider their needs and the rising challenges to minimize environmental issues later in the following sessions, or in our findings for conducting ethical research with kids. We had the distinct feeling that the space issue was really a challenge in that workshop. As I observed in my fieldnotes, *“Still, as a Wellbeing project, we wondered how they felt about this challenge, which we could not help with. It was a Global Haven space, and they provided us with that small playroom”* (Fieldnotes, August 10, 2023).

In this connection, I note in my field notes that *“In other sessions, when there was enough space and the playroom was not that occupied, we provided the alternative option for older children to go around and have fun. Yet, given that the body map was a lot of work for younger children, some of the older ones offered to help them finish their tasks. It was great seeing a child offer to help another child. They helped each other in that process. Although the corridor solution effectively solved the space issue, the children inadvertently made some*

noise, prompting complaints from parents attending the meeting. As researchers, we found ourselves caught between meeting the children's needs and ensuring they were quiet and content while appeasing the adults present. Working with children involved caring for both parents and children, which was one of the most important challenges of working with this age group" (Fieldnotes, August 10, 2023).

What stood out in that workshop, and what we all acknowledged, was the enthusiasm of Arman, the three-year-old child who loved the body map activity. In field notes on the same day, I wrote, *"He continuously exclaimed excitedly, "Look at me!" and eagerly showed us his painting. Interestingly, his mother visited the session to ensure everything was fine with him"* (Fieldnotes, August 10, 2023), given his young age and his previous experience with bullying in another session with the Global Haven team. She expressed concerns about his safety, especially since she was a single parent and was still mourning the loss of her young husband, a policeman in Afghanistan, to the Taliban in 2021; with the support of his father, she left Afghanistan with his four children, aged 9, 5, 4 and 3, respectively to secure safety and a future for them.

In that session, to our surprise, despite her earlier disagreement to participate with her children in the workshops, upon witnessing her children's enthusiasm for the activity, she allowed them to join the session. I noted in my fieldnote, on that special day, *"Hana actively participated in the workshop alongside her children, creating a heartwarming moment for them and for us as facilitators and researchers. This interaction was significant for the Wellbeing project since one of its implicit goals was to foster bonding among children and parents"* (Field notes, August 2023). We were amazed at how the child and her mom collaborated and cheerfully completed the task. Equally important were the children who decided to work with the team; that was an important turning point regarding their problem-solving ability. *"After understanding the space issue, three children aged 9, 5, and 4 realized that teamwork would solve the problem. It was interesting to observe this amazing, evolving dynamic. They were surprisingly creative and exhibited great teamwork when discussing the colors and patterns for that big body map"* (Fieldnotes, August 2023).

The above scenario triggered some reactions and comments during the debriefing session; for instance, one of our team members commented, "I was surprised that those who did not like it participated more." Florence added, "Does the mom know that they can always send their child even if they did not sign the consent form? Do you think the child knows the mother has refused to sign the consent paper? The child should know that her mom refused to let them be there". Thus, our team discussion acknowledged the amazing scene of the mom

helping her child. It was an outstanding gesture because this mom did not sign the consent form that would allow her child to participate in the workshop for reasons that I will discuss in more detail in the consent and ethics part of this thesis.

Discussion: Engaging children in participatory activities, such as body mapping, nurtures their confidence and autonomy by allowing them to lead tasks, make choices, and take responsibility for their actions. This process also enhances their communication skills as they collaborate with peers, negotiate, and express their needs and preferences. Additionally, the challenge of creating a large-scale, personal body map encourages problem-solving abilities, often leading to creative collaborations among children. Observing and learning from peers fosters innovation and creativity, contributing to the development of essential skills like collaboration, communication, and critical thinking – collectively known as the 4Cs. However, facilitating such activities comes with its own challenges, requiring fairness, patience, and attentiveness.

Furthermore, these activities can extend beyond children, encouraging parental involvement and fostering communication between researchers and caregivers. By emphasizing the research's focus on promoting children's wellbeing and social justice, workshops become avenues for building supportive communities, particularly for marginalized migrant populations. These interactions provide valuable resources for understanding and integration into diverse societies, fostering bonds among children and bridging cultural divides. However, despite benevolent intentions, challenges persist, such as unintentionally creating new traumas due to inadequate training or biases. Thus, supporting these communities requires ongoing efforts from authorities to navigate the complexities of diverse cultural contexts effectively.

Analysis of Part One, Participation, Inclusion and Social Capital

One point of emphasis is in order here. The analysis presented in this section draws from the fieldnotes and jottings, which serve as foundational elements shaping the insights explored. The meticulous documentation and reflection inherent in these records form the backbone of the analytical process, providing a rich reservoir of firsthand observations and reflections upon which the subsequent discussion is built.

Participatory activities within the Wellbeing project, such as singing workshops, painting sessions, and group musical activities, provided valuable opportunities for children to exercise agency, communicate, collaborate, and negotiate roles within the community. These engagements facilitated self-expression, nurtured interpersonal relationships, and fostered a sense of empowerment among the children. These findings are particularly significant. While

extensive literature explores the correlation between social capital and children's wellbeing in educational settings (Stjernqvist et al., 2019), a notable research gap exists concerning refugee children in participatory research contexts. Understanding how such involvement shapes their agency in constructing social capital is crucial for comprehending its impact on their socio-emotional wellbeing.

The concept of social capital has roots in the work of Émile Durkheim. Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, however, was the first person to use the term in his sociological writings, and later, American political scientists Robert Putnam and James Coleman used it in a more general sense. Within their framework, two primary conceptualizations can be discerned: the perspective of social cohesion and the standpoint of social networks (Moore and Kawachi, 2017). The latter draws upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, emphasizing family ties, friendships, professional relationships, relationships, and community affiliations, while the former draws upon the work of Robert Putnam, emphasizing the emotional and relational aspects of social life, including trust, shared values, a sense of belonging and the degree of connectedness within the community (Erikson, 2011; Stjernqvist,2019)). Bourdieu is more prominently a proponent of an individual approach, and Putman has a more collective approach to social capital (Erikson, 2011, p.2).

To better understand social capital, one needs to look at the three forms in which it manifests itself: bonding, bridging, and linking (Erikson, 2011). In recognizing the value inherent in different types of social capital, for instance, strong bonding ties tend to create solidarity and support and thus represent a social and emotional resource for children (Jorgensen, 2016); bridging social capital, on the other hand, tends to create a broader identity, and, by extension, more inclusiveness (McGonigal et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000). Woolcock (1998) introduced a third form, "linking" social capital to tie individuals with different amounts of power (McGonigal et al., 2007). Communities rich in different types of social capital, including cross-cutting networks, are likely to be cohesive and act collectively on shared objectives (Granovetter, 1973).

Participatory research projects can map and mobilize social capital within a community to create social cohesion and social networks towards promoting wellbeing and social justice. But we should remember that "social capital is necessarily context-bound. Thus, from a global perspective, it cannot be used as a 'cookbook' on achieving supportive environments and community action smoothly" (Erikson 2011, p.1). However, social capital theories can provide us with new ideas regarding children's agency, ethics, and wellbeing in research involving refugee children and children in general. Undoubtedly, social capital is a significant element in

refugee children's wellbeing and their collaboration towards peace in their community, and against the broader social spectrum of the whole nation, particularly in the context of countries like Canada and other multicultural societies.

In the context of Global Haven, while every culture and ethnicity tends to have its own cluster with specific languages and cultures, children play an important role in acting as strong, weak ties, bridging one cluster to the other and bringing about peace and harmonious co-existence. In other words, children are bridges with the ability to initiate dialogues and create spaces for collaboration and communication among families and communities with different backgrounds. Directly and indirectly, their power ties in with their right to participate, social and emotional wellbeing, agency and participation. Granovetter's "Strength of Weak Ties" offers an insightful approach to the study of integration in networks of face-to-face interaction consisting of multiple subgroups" (Friedkin,1980). The figure below is derived from Granovetter's "Strength of Weak Ties."

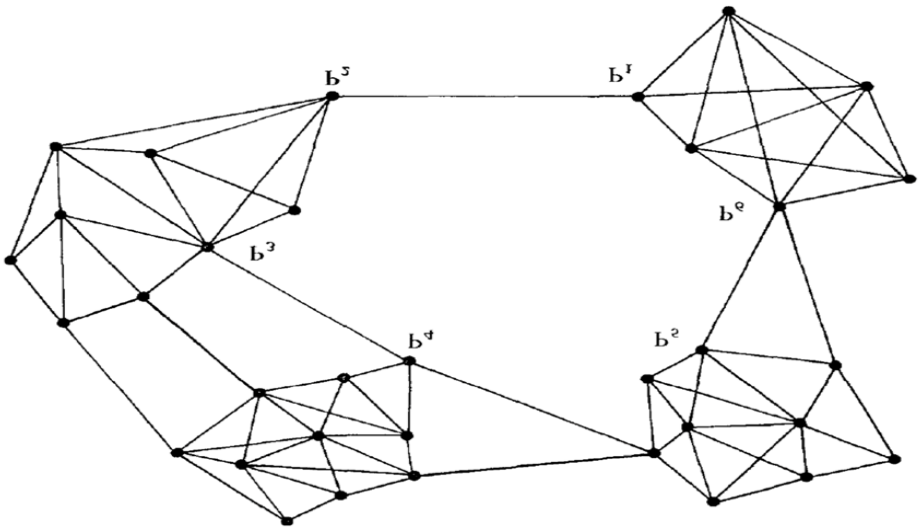

Figure 4. The figure is derived from Granovetter's "Strength of Weak Ties."

Figure 1. shows how interaction and face-to-face relations can create bonding. This bonding can potentially create a bridge to connect to other clusters. In the case of Global Haven, where there are families from around the world with different cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities, participatory art-based workshops and research create a space to build on children's bonding; children, in turn, would connect families and cultures.

Children can act as weak ties with the capacity to establish strong connections; their interaction and participation go a long way toward changing the system to become more inclusive and less biased. They connect despite adults' disputes as they have the magical power

to connect, link, and bridge the gaps. This capacity is of utmost importance in the establishment of multicultural societies as agents of peace.

Participatory workshops at Global Haven provided the ideal setting for field children to tap into their magical potential. Such workshops proved invaluable given the restrictions on unsupervised socialization due to parental concerns about safety and cultural differences within the communal living environment. They not only offered a safe and supervised space for children to interact but also served as a platform for building relationships among the children and their families. This was particularly crucial during committee meetings, where parents required childcare support. Children's attendance in these workshops, alongside the parents' committee meetings, fostered dialogue and peace among residents, creating a friendly and productive environment for everyone involved.

Children's participation promotes their agency and, in turn, their parents' wellbeing and the whole of society, which is often a reciprocal relationship. A healthy, dynamic society more readily serves children's socio-emotional sense of well-being. Promoting children's agency empowers them to change their environment in their favour, leading, in the long term, to their wellbeing. The most ethical thing while working and doing research with children is to empower them and create a space for their development. While research with children is messy and complex and not as structured as with adults, it helps them with social skills needed for their wellbeing.

Part Two: Ethical Dilemmas, Reflexivity and Positionality

Introduction

This section focuses on the intricate interplay of ethical dilemmas, which are colored by my positionality, epistemology, and identity. Nevertheless, these discussions remain intertwined with participatory activities, which are essential to the research methodology.

Fieldnotes Episode #3: Faces, Voices and Cellphilm

The Issue of Showing Faces and the Question of Ownership

Context: One of the constraints in doing visual research is visual ethics, the issue of anonymity, and the question of whether faces should be shown. Similarly, in the current work, we as researchers bore the ethical responsibility to take good care of children's images and preserve the anonymity of research participants. While children's images were prevalent on Instagram

and Facebook, there were still concerns with depicting images in our research methodology, particularly regarding the ethical implications of using children's faces.

In such a context, our team, like every other visual research community, was overwhelmed by concerns regarding institutional and cultural regulations that hinder certain visual research involving children. For one thing, strict ethical guidelines regarding the use of images in research moved us to obscure faces to protect anonymity. As such, I often maintained a critical standpoint regarding the source of the concern, questioning whether it truly stemmed from an authentic concern for children or if it was aimed at safeguarding the institutions and research team "to avoid litigation" (Lodge, 2009). Gunsalus et al (2007) and Wiles et al (2008) emphasize that this prioritization often favors institutional protection over the rights of research participants. In the Wellbeing project, while we possessed the authorization to film children's workshops for further dissemination, we were prohibited from revealing any faces or identifying objects during the knowledge mobilization phase. Similarly, we were bound to uphold participants' anonymity and confidentiality with utmost care.

Jotting Notes:

> Over the course of the project, I sometimes felt really frustrated and sad recording and editing scenes that I know are going to be deleted in the near future. Those children are gifted, and their artistic performances, such as singing and music, are magnificent. Those moments are their lived experience, part of their precious memory. I and the rest of my team strongly feel that it is their right to have those moments. However, since other kids and their friends are in those videos, we could not give them those recorded scenes. I feel that the ethical question in that research is the question of ownership. (December 2023)

Interpretation: There were numerous occasions when children eagerly posed in front of the camera, enthusiastic about documenting their lives. They expressed joy knowing that these moments were being captured. Perhaps they trusted us, believing we would eventually return all the recorded memories to them. I often wondered how they would react if they discovered they might never have access to their videos, realizing that once the project concluded, all recordings would be permanently erased. How would they feel? Would they still feel valued for being filmed and documented? The below excerpt "Did you tape me?" from Sorensen's *Ethics in Researching Young Children's Play in Preschool* (Sorensen, 2014) resonated deeply with me, as it echoed a frequent common conundrum I encountered in the Wellbeing project. A child asked the researcher whether she had recorded the moment when she was swinging and then fell. This question struck a chord with me because I often faced similar inquiries.

While I would also respond in the affirmative, I never fully disclosed that these recordings would be erased someday.

Figure 5. “Did you tape me?” Reprinted from Sorensen’s book, *Ethics in Researching Young Children’s Play in Preschool*

One of the pressing moments was when children had the opportunity to watch the edited versions of their rehearsal sessions and concert videos. What I understood from their reaction and body language was that they really wanted to own those videos, although they could not put it into words and express it properly.

I observed in my fieldnotes, “*While watching the video of the concert they had in the summer, they were moved by the pang of nostalgia for good old days, particularly that five-minute video which included the image of their old friends, Sara, Athena, Arman and Younes, who left Global Haven for good – those children including Raphael, Lucia, Fahima, Diana, Lina still living in Global Haven got no news nor any calls from them. While they were watching that movie, a couple of them, Raphael, Lucia and Diana, came to me and asked me to give them the iPad so they could record those films; that was the only way they knew to record it. They were so excited and emotional that a couple of them, including Raphael and Lucia, started crying because they had missed their friends whom they had not seen or heard of for a long time; the emotional reaction was very evocative of the bereaved, as if they were gone forever* (Fieldnotes, December 8, 2023).

“Why did the children have to resort to the surreal action of filming with an iPad?” (Fieldnotes, December 8, 2023). The straightforward answer lies in their lack of access to the original movie. Why were the children, the rightful owners of the movies, denied access to the recorded sessions? “Ethical concerns loomed large; sharing a video that revealed the faces and identities of other team members raised red flags. Safely distributing it without risking transfer

to individuals outside Global Haven posed challenges. Any dissemination beyond the research team, including their parents, risked legal and ethical complications. We lacked the authority to circulate these faces beyond the confines of the research team, prioritizing identity protection. In contrast, in real life, they could freely share and even post such content online. However, the genuine desire persisted among the children to possess the movie of the concert and their friends, as it encapsulated a pivotal moment in their lives – one of their fondest memories with friends who were more like family.

I considered in my fieldnotes: *As for their friends who left Global Haven, I realized their parents never called each other afterwards or provided those children with an opportunity to talk with their playmates, who, after one year of living together in Global Haven, were more than friends; they were siblings somewhat* (Fieldnotes, December 8, 2023). The truth was that parents had their biases on both sides; they were not on friendly terms. The Afghan family, with four children, left Global Haven. They were asked to leave early to make space for the new ones. After one year or two, families would leave the shelter; they wait until their documents are ready, acquire some basic language, and leave to make space for new arrivals. As for the Afghan Family, a team member informed me about their leaving, which was not the only reason they left. They could probably stay longer if they were more cooperative.

As I noted in my field notes, "My understanding of the situation was that the language barrier probably played a role in that misunderstanding. Except for children who acquired some basic languages, the grandpa and mom could hardly speak any English or French yet, and this caused a big problem with staff and other residents. In contrast, the Latin American families and those with English as a second language who arrived at the shelter simultaneously were still there long after them, enabling distinctly more horizons and opportunities. Thus, the language barrier was important for refugees and their wellbeing (Fieldnotes, October 2023).

In light of children missing their friends, in a debriefing session, our team explored the possibility of initiating a conversation with Global Haven's director and authorities to facilitate video calls for children to connect with their friends. Typically, in the hectic lives of adults and amidst the myriad pressing issues faced by researchers and directors, children's emotional wellbeing often takes a backseat. Such considerations are often deemed luxuries and may only exist in tokenistic gestures, rarely translating into tangible actions. However, this discussion progressed and was conveyed to the director. As I learned later from the team, the shelter arranged gatherings, allowing children to see each other.

Discussion: Within this context, I felt that the ownership of images and faces is critical. Child development research requires visual researchers to first and foremost serve the interests of

children and critically assess the impact the research would have on the overall development of the participants rather than solely focusing on institutional and professional recognition (Fleer et al. 2014, p.155). Concerns about tokenism often arise in research involving children, requiring researchers to navigate various perspectives. Within this dynamic, discrepancies and power imbalances may emerge between children's interests and the preferences of institutions, authorities, policies, adults, and parents. This can lead to a neglect of children's genuine needs and preferences.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) emphasize that visual research can depersonalize, objectify, and compartmentalize without critical reflexivity, reducing research participants to mechanical entities and overlooking their real needs inherent in visual research. Bourdieu critiques what he terms the 'intellectualist bias,' which arises when visual researchers fail to sufficiently question the visual tools employed, the research environment, the visual representations, and the underlying assumptions shaping their worldview.

Faces and Cellphilming

Context: In the Wellbeing project at Global Haven, we used cellphilm as a method and medium to communicate children's concerns. However, due to financial constraints and the follow-up workload for editing and uploading produced data, our project was limited to a few sessions using iPads. The expenses involved, such as iPads and subsequent activities for file transfer, editing, merging, and presentation, posed significant barriers. The affordability issues also underscore Bourdieu's insights into the influence of economic, cultural, and knowledge capital in participatory research.

One of the substantial workshops on cellphilm took place last April during the 11th anniversary of the International Cellphilm Festival at McGill. Children from the Global Haven were encouraged to collaborate and contribute to this festival. Regarding technology, we borrowed five iPads from the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL), and adults and researchers could use their own cell phones. A team of seven adults was present to assist the children and care for the younger participants.

Nevertheless, this was not the whole story; this issue of children's faces was another concern. From this perspective, the cellphilm workshop was a challenge, especially since the artwork was to be sent to the McGill Cellphilm Festival. At some points, showing children's faces and images was inevitable as we encouraged children to use iPads and film whatever they liked; they did so freely without concern about anonymity. At this phase of the project, the children were quite creative and outspoken. Cellphilmin gave those "usually silenced and

marginalized" (Lodge, 2009) and those with language barriers a tool to voice what was on their minds. But the point was that due to visual ethics, we had serious concerns about using their artwork, involving their images and sending it to the Cellphilm Festival.

Jotting Notes:

> There are ongoing questions in our cellphilm workshop, such as why we cannot use their cellphilm with their faces in the videos while the images of those children were on Instagram and other social networks, which were public and easy for everyone to access. Still, since the McGill Cellphilm festival was an academic opportunity, we concluded that depriving them of showcasing their artwork because of their faces was ethically unacceptable. We decided to investigate, ask their parents for consent, check Global Haven's Instagram account to see if the images were public or not, and analyze any potential harm in sending those one-minute clips to the Cellphilm Festival. Finally, we decided to let the children film their faces (April 2023).

Interpretation: Utilizing children's images solely because of their cuteness and potential for instant impact is ethically questionable. Regrettably, many adults, including parents, exploit their children's images on platforms like Instagram and Facebook to gain more followers, often without considering the long-term consequences of this practice. Similarly, numerous schools use children's faces for promotional purposes without adequately considering the ethical implications. There ought to be clear ethical guidelines governing the use of children's images (Lodge 2009).

Within this context, based on my observation and reflecting upon available literature on the ethics of facial representation, I came to the conclusion that while the *no-face* code of ethics prioritizes anonymity and privacy, it also raises concerns about the potential infringement upon their participants' right to express themselves freely. This concern falls in line with Lodge's (2009) apt note that anonymity can serve to silence as much as protect. Consequently, the team and the Festival, whenever the potential harm did not outweigh the benefits, considered the use of images to convey messages and amplify marginalized voices.

Discussion: The question of image in visual research if paramount importance. Numerous concerns revolve around issues such as informed consent, identification, image abuse, identity, publication and ownership, especially when involving images of children (Lodge, 2009). But the pressing question remains: does anonymity still hold the same significance in this rapidly evolving technological landscape, where online platforms have redefined the concept of image anonymity from what it was twenty years ago?

Even more critical questions arise: How can we effectively engage with children in visual methodology and leverage their perspectives if we discard a significant portion of our

data, considering their valuable insights into children's concerns and thoughts? In the 21st century, visual methodology is widely recognized for its immense potential to involve children as active research participants and academic co-researchers.

Undoubtedly, visual methodology has opened a window into children's minds, providing us with a tool to elucidate previously inaccessible implicit knowledge. It offers a practical means of gaining their perspectives on matters that concern them deeply. As Pam Burnard (Burnard, 2002) highlights, children possess a wealth of knowledge beyond their conscious awareness. They undoubtedly possess insights into their own understanding that often surpass those of the researchers. Much of this knowledge remains implicit. Burnard emphasizes that knowledge is not neatly filed in pupils' heads, awaiting the perfect question to unlock it. Images and visual methodologies enable children to represent what they know, feel, and think about their understanding and articulate it (2002).

The potential for utilizing digital images in research has already been widely attested. However, omitting or minimizing a significant portion of data containing children's images to protect children could constitute a form of manipulation. Striking an ethical balance between excluding children's images to safeguard their image and including them while respecting their rights is paramount, particularly given the potential vulnerability it may expose them to. Reflexivity and mindfulness play pivotal roles in navigating these ethical challenges within research.

A Critical Stance on the Cellphilm Festival Award

Context: As already discussed, we held our cellphilm workshops around the time of McGill cellphilm Festival. In our workshop, to facilitate a brainstorming session with the children and introduce the topic of cellphilm, the research team showcased videos created by children from Global Haven from the previous year at the session's outset. Following a discussion between the children and the team regarding cellphilms and that year's theme – "What is the message? If you had one minute to change the world, what would you say?" – the focus shifted to exploring the theme for the year 2023.

Jotting Notes:

> The team shared a cellphilm from last year, sparking real enthusiasm. When we mentioned the possibility of creating a movie with iPads, Sara, Raphael, and Diana were thrilled to use iPads for shooting. They particularly enjoyed utilizing an iPad to capture photos and record footage. Raphael and Diana are really good at taking shots. We asked the children questions like, "How would you change the world?" or "What actions would make the world a better place?" I

translated this phrase into Farsi for the younger children from Afghanistan, especially for SARA, whose mother tongue was Farsi:

I asked Sara:چی کار کنیم دنیا جای بهتری برای زندگی بشه؟ چی تو را خوشحال می کنه؟ " translated as: "What makes the world a better place to live in?" "What makes you happier?", "What is your message?"

With a sudden and visible pang of sadness and excitement, Sara replied: "I would bring my grandmother here from Afghanistan and all my other family, and invite them to the park to picnic and have fun." Sara told me she missed her grandma. At the same time, we gave iPads to the children so they could go around and find their theme.

As I passed the corridor, I spotted Karine in the kitchen with Diana and Fahima and a few puppets behind the desk. She posed them questions so they, as the puppeteers, could answer in those new roles. I found the idea of puppets to be an excellent one; it would eliminate the issue of children's faces, so we could protect their anonymity and not show their faces in the cellphilm.

Then we decided to go to the park. Global Haven's door opens into a very big park; we went to the park and asked the children to cellphilm what they thought would be important to them to convey a message.

I gave Sara the iPad; she started filming. Then Diana approached me, took the iPad from me, and started filming Sara who looked at the camera and said, "Les enfants, let's go to the park!"

A few weeks before, a storm had sent big tree branches flying and shattering to pieces, still scattered around the park. Children played around and recorded many cellphones (May 2023).

Interpretation: This cellphilm workshop with children of Global Haven resulted in a couple of exciting clips, such as "Let's Hug Our Friends," "Let's Go to the Park," and "Let's Reunite Families" and "After the Storm". Later, the "After the Storm" clip would go on to win the Cellphilm Festival competition in the children's section.

In a follow-up discussion with the team, we had some concerns and reflexivity regarding the award selection method for the Cellphilm festival. The clip that won the award was, in fact, one that had benefited from huge editing techniques done by adults; there were a couple of other authentic clips done by children, obviously less professional and less appealing in terms of effects and music, but more realistic and truer to echoing the real voice of children. But the festival judges chose the one with more aesthetic features, effects, and added music. I posited that a contributing factor to the success of the "After the Storm" cellphilm was its minimal focus on *faces*, coupled with a resonating message that echoed the universal theme of 'resilience.'

In response to the question of the Cellphilm Festival, “What would make the world a better place?” we had a couple of clear, authentic answers from children, including “Let’s Go to the Park and Have Fun,” “Let’s Hug Each other,” and “Let’s Reunite Families.” The latter was a cellphilm by Sara, a five-year-old Afghan girl whose response as I noted was: “*I would bring my grandmother here from Afghanistan, and all my other family, invite them to the park to picnic and have fun”* (Fieldnotes, May 2023). She had a serious concern for those left behind and for families who had been separated. In her case, it was her grandmom who was left behind; it turned out she could not walk properly, and at the time of the Taliban’s takeover in that chaos, she failed to accompany them to the airport. With her father, an Afghan police officer, killed at the time, her mom was very anxious to save her four children, seizing on the opportunity to board the aeroplane destined for North America. Their grandfather had no option but to accompany her daughter and her now four orphaned children; the youngest one at the time was barely one, and the oldest barely eight. With her walking problem, their grandmom could not accompany them and was left behind. But here still, every time they called the grandmother on the phone, both the child and her grandmom burst into tears; I heard the story from the child’s mom later.

As for “Let's Hug Each Other,” it was the very true story of Diana and Fahima, two young children who lost their mom at the tender ages of five and three. As frequently documented in my fieldnotes, *“Every time we saw these two very young children, they asked for a hug and hungered for it more than any of the other children* (Fieldnotes, January 20204). For them, the world would be better if there were more hugs. It would probably be even better if someone gave her back their mom’s hug and love.

Discussion: The ethical question was how representation defeats reality. This fact echoes Bourdieu’s cultural capital and its subcategory, i.e. knowledge capital. In the festival, cellphilms with more capital and investment regarding cultural and knowledge capital such as editing, effects, added music, and captions had a higher chance of winning the award. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can be converted into economic and social capital, contributing to an individual’s social mobility and success within a given social structure. The family home, he contends, is the primary source for accumulating the cultural capital valued within educational institutions. The lack of this cultural capital among working-class youth presents a significantly more formidable obstacle to social mobility than mere material poverty (Bourdieu, 1997). In our case, the children who received better editing support with added effects from adults and caregivers had a higher chance of winning the award and, therefore,

acquiring a higher level of cultural capital because they already had received a higher level of cultural and knowledge capital.

In the context of cultural capital, Bourdieu highlights the role of "commodity fetishism," which captures how individuals and groups accumulate symbolic resources such as education, knowledge, and cultural tastes, which can be converted into social advantages and play a role in attributing social prestige and status to certain goods or cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1997). Applying this concept to the award-winning process in the Cellphilm Festival reveals that those with higher cultural capital have a higher chance of winning the award and its symbolic value. In contrast, those who fail to fit into the judges' value system cannot win and acquire that cultural commodity. At the end of the day, only a limited set of symbols and meanings can be reproduced and maintain the ground for further accumulated symbolic values.

In the above case, "commodity fetishism" and the symbolic value attributed to the award fails to acknowledge the collective efforts and marginalized voices involved in the production process. During our team discussion, one of our team members mentioned that she felt uncomfortable with the results of the Cellphilm Festival, feeling that the award-winning cellphilm didn't fully represent the direct voice of the children. She maintained that although the shots were taken by children themselves, editing, music, and the title played significant roles in elevating the winning cellphilm.

Nonetheless, it seems the crucial issue was not solely about authenticity but how such labels and symbols overshadowed potentially more authentic but marginalized voices and efforts. Thus, "commodity fetishism", as exemplified by *award fetishism* within the world of artworks aimed at fostering social change, could make for adverse effects despite its various positive impacts. It stimulates the creation of valuable artwork and facilitates collaborative dialogue among researchers and the public to advance discussions on social issues. It can also decidedly stifle marginalized voices in cultivating a competitive ethos that undermines children's wellbeing. In such a scenario, adults may become fixated on accolades, recognition, and admiration instead of prioritizing children's empowerment and autonomy in taking the shots. This effect, in turn, exacerbates the marginalization of voices and silences authentic but less sophisticated values and messages.

In praise of the award winner, "After the Storm," the judges talked about resilience. This was true, and the cellphilm could indeed be interpreted in that light, carrying a coherent and relevant message. However, it was important to acknowledge that resilience was not the sole or a fresh context-based message. Rather, it echoed a familiar narrative often heard in adult

discourse – one that can sometimes overlook the nuanced experience of those facing adversity. The interpretation suggested that refugee children should embody resilience amidst their challenges. In reality, however, the storm had not subsided for them. While they might have found some semblance of security and adapted to a new normalcy, they still yearned for the warmth of their families back home, its comfort, and the unity, love, and affection they had lost, losses that continued to linger.

That event brought to mind a recent narrative shared by one of our teammates who had experienced life as a refugee child at Global Haven and was now a young adult attending university in Montreal. She expressed her belief that adults often project their own thoughts and preferences onto children's artwork. Recounting one painting session at Global Haven, she described how she had painted a boat on the sea. However, one of the facilitators leading the session took her painting and proclaimed to everyone present, "Look, this child has depicted the boat she arrived here with, symbolizing her journey to Canada." Our teammate recounted that despite her attempts to explain, the facilitator didn't listen and insisted on her own interpretation, disregarding that she had travelled to Canada by air!

These facts explain why ethical reflexivity is crucial in research, particularly in the dissemination phase. This context highlights what Bourdieu underpins as symbolic and social meaning attributed to cultural practices, which shape social justice and ethical implications. Thus, the analysis phase is important in terms of ethics, how we represent the truth, whether we have been critical of take-for-granted incidents if we apply reflexivity highlighted by Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC), and the consideration of the three Rs: rights, relationships and reflexivity (Powell et al., 2009).

Let Children Lead the Session: An Ethical Design with iPads

Context: There were many occasions when children felt like approaching me while recording the workshops, asking me to give them the iPad. Over the course of one year, some of them acquired the skill to record videos. I would give them one iPad, when possible, as only a couple of iPads were available. I could see how having an iPad in their hands boosted their confidence and helped them feel empowered to move around and act on their own initiative; it was a tool to bring balance to the workshop. They often used iPads to lead the session.

After the first concert, we showed the children a four-minute edited version of the extracts from rehearsal sessions and the concert day. The team asked me to extract scenes from recorded sessions and the concert day, put them in chronological and narrative order, and make a four-minute movie so the children could see how their skills and the story evolved into a

concert. As a team, we also gathered their feedback to do the last edit based on their point of view. As I noted, "*What stood out throughout the sessions was that Raphael and Diana, the nine-year-old and the seven-year-old, took the iPads from me and started filming their peers' reactions watching their concert. I let them lead the session that way* (Fieldnotes, October 12, 2023). I was researching ethics and children's agency and actively sought out instances of children's agencies exploring how we can boost their self-confidence.

Jotting Notes:

> "On another occasion, commemorating the anniversary of two dead people – Diana and Fahima's mother and Raphael's brother lost to a miscarriage – Diana and Raphael took the iPad and went on the balcony, filming one another while talking about family members who had passed away; Diana shared memories of her mother, while Raphael opened up about his stillborn brother, both navigating the weight of their sad losses. Their emotions overflowed, and they burst into tears. Sara, seeing them crying, joined them in tears, and she also talked about the loss of her father. She asked us to sing a song for her father, and they sang a song together, finding solace in music. Their spirit lifted, and laughter eventually filled the air (October 12, 22023).

Interpretation: This event, which I captured in my field notes, underscores the role of the art-based use of technology, specifically the iPads, in facilitating open dialogue and emotional expression, providing them with a channel to articulate the pain nestled in their hearts. Over the past year, some of the children have developed skills in using iPads to create cellphilms, express their emotions and convey messages with a creative approach to their surroundings. The above-mentioned incident was a sideline to the main project, but still as important as the planned use of iPads.

Discussion: Giving children chances to lead the session echoes Pierre Bourdieu's theory of ethical visual research. He believes that, with children and their parents, an ethical act is when we encourage them to use their initiative to lead the session. He reminds us that the true measure of a visual researcher's respect for children's rights and acknowledgment of their contributions to knowledge lies not merely in the design laid out on paper but rather in how the process engages the children in data gathering, analysis, and interpretation. In this outlook, viewing children as mere participants and their families as uninformed risks would impose rigid structures that diminish their knowledge and experiences. Conversely, embracing a positive view of children empowers the visual researcher to employ practices that recognize children's developmental capacities and draw upon their cultural and symbolic capital. Such approaches enrich the data and visual research analysis (Agbenyega, 2014).

Fieldnotes Episode #4: Ethical Dilemma, Positionality and Consent

Inclusion and Exclusion Challenges

When do we include and not include children? Why? Inclusion and exclusion are critical issues considering children's agency and ethics in participatory research. In each study, researchers must often decide on the inclusion and exclusion of some participants, sometimes changing the design of the whole study. The research board urges researchers to ensure that the participant population fully reflects the target population under study. The emphasis of the research board is mainly on including the target group in a way that reflects the full range of the community members, considering criteria such as age, gender, and socio-economic circumstances, avoiding choosing a group of people because they are convenient and do not represent the whole community.

At Global Haven, similarly, we faced the challenge of unduly including and excluding children. One point was that children were not at the same age, so to include all age ranges, we frequently opted to design one main and one alternative activity for the other age group. Normally, there were three age groups: toddlers, those less than three years old, children between three and nine, and children older than nine. Our main focus was on kids between three and nine.

Jotting Notes:

> Florence poses thought-provoking questions to the team:
> When do we include children and when do we not? Why?
> There is a small child; should we include him? Why?
> If the child wants to join, it is no problem, but if he wants to play ball and take up the whole room, it is impossible. We kind of prioritize those three to nine years old. To include the children who disturb others, the question of sharing experiences and less positive experiences for other children arises. There is some negative impact that flows from it. I mean, we have ethical questions and dilemmas in such cases!
> What do you think? Do you include or exclude the child? So, do we include the child? What is the negative effect on other children? (December 2023).

Interpretation: While doing research with children, there are occasions when, due to ethical issues and children's will, the researcher has to tailor the primary design of the research. Questions thus arise as to whether it is necessary to include or exclude some participants, for instance, in cases where a parent does not want to send their child to the workshop, even though the child wants to participate. In such cases, there are a range of ethical questions regarding the

child's exclusion, and the researcher should consider if changing the research design could help bring the child back to the research.

In research dealing with children, children's inclusion and exclusion mainly depend on the researchers, parents and the institute rather than the child. Yet, it is a matter of exerting power and influence. In the case of the Wellbeing project at Global Haven, it is mainly the parents who decide whether or not their child would attend the workshop. Permitting children to participate in a workshop or research depends on many factors outside the workshop, not directly related to participatory activities and their functionality, and a few things relevant to the team's functionality over the sessions.

As documented, *"Parents often prioritize their right to protection over children's right to participation. Essentially, children's willingness to engage is disregarded at the mercy of parental consent. Within the framework of Global Haven, these dynamics manifest themselves when parents leverage their authority and control over their children to wield influence within the community"* (Fieldnotes, December 2023). For instance, if parents harbor biases against a particular family, they may prevent their own children from participating in activities involving that family's children, regardless of their own children's desire to join. Consequently, children's involvement in workshops becomes politicized, entangled in factors beyond their inherent right to participate.

Another question is whether there is an urge to include a new participant or a participant outside the demography of the earlier research project design. For instance, when the project's design focuses on *refugee children's wellbeing*, and isolating children makes parents feel uncomfortable with the stigma attached to the label of *refugee children*, should the researcher consider broadening the demography to reduce the stigma attached to the label, so as to make it more inclusive and less ethnic-based and segregated and let in the occasional presence of other children from other demographic bases? According to my experience with this project for marginalized immigrants, there are occasions when inclusion and exclusion become a dire ethical dilemma, and paying attention to this matter becomes paramount.

Discussion: The inclusion and exclusion of workshop participants carry significant political undertones. Even the selection process for volunteers and researchers is not merely spontaneous; rather, it's influenced by factors such as research design, objectives, the overarching research question, power, and positionality. However, ethical considerations invariably play a crucial role and may become urgent ethical dilemmas. Multiple stakeholders contribute to these decisions, with the principal investigator being one of many agents involved in determining who is included and excluded.

Consent Challenge, Positionality and Epistemology

Context: In research involving children, I advocate a standpoint that emphasizes going beyond a harm reduction perspective toward empowerment and development. I approached the ethical dilemmas that arose throughout the research through the lens of the very question of how our research contributes to their agency and dignity simultaneously. Questions like how I can serve our participants firsthand, how we can empower them to be agents of social change, and how and why I should be sensitive to matters that concern them helped me grow more critical of our ongoing workshops, ranging from singing and painting activities to visual digital methodologies. That mindset and positionality provided me with a context to engage children and their families with tools and means that enhance their ability to express themselves and communicate what concerns them.

In my journey in this research, I often had to face my identity and the way it affected my questions of ethics and reflexivity. In fact, my identity and positionality helped me see events from different angles; one perspective was that of a research assistant, the other that of a mom and newcomer to Canada. My identity as an international student from the Middle East and a mother to a nine-year-old intersected with the participants' in the research. Simultaneously, I had my academic perspective, researcher's consciousness, and experience. I believe my multilayered perspectives as an international student and immigrant parent bear on the research endeavor. These layers of identity no doubt fed into my approach and perspective and how I would communicate with participants and the researchers. Therefore, my story of immigration, in many ways, intersected with theirs.

However, when the project started off officially, I realized that language barriers and cultural gaps were some of the biggest challenges, which reflect positionality and could bring about biases, particularly when we asked the families to sign the consent form. *"We had a difficult time with an Afghan family who could only speak Farsi; as a person whose mother tongue was Persian/Farsi, I was invited to translate the consent form. To our surprise, however, the mom did not agree to sign the paper; she was concerned that if she signed it, she would lose CUSTODY of her children to someone else or the government!* (Fieldnotes, August 2023). I explained the context to her, that they were only researchers, and that the form had nothing to do with her children's custody. She remained confused, and as one can imagine, in such cases, the more you explain, the worse things get.

At the same time, the mom and the research team were curious about my translation and whether I had done a good job. "Due to the language barrier on both sides of the equation and the vast cultural gap, they misunderstood one another; a ten-minute session to discuss all

matters was not enough to allay possible reservations" (Fieldnotes, August 2023). In other words, they needed at least a couple of sessions to talk, engage, get to know each other, and then go for a consent form. Below are my fieldnotes from the consent day and the circumstances around the event:

Jotting Notes:

> Today, upon my arrival at Global Haven, Karine asked me to go with her to the community dining room, translate what she intended to tell Hana regarding the consent form, and ask her to sign the paper. Florence was not there yet.
>
> But this was all really difficult. When we first asked Hana if she liked her children to attend art-based workshops and the project, she willingly agreed and said a very clear yes with a smile. But she got suspicious when we informed her that she should sign a paper.
>
> I was the interpreter, translating what Karine asked me to tell her.
>
> With this impression and the question, I decided to talk more with her and Hana's Father and see why they were so suspicious of the whole story. The children loved participating, considering that the mom was also happy with the workshops before asking for their signature. When I spoke with the children's grandfather, who used to be a doctor back in Afghanistan, he told me his daughter was worried about the children's safety; children are all she has after the tragic death of her husband in the hands of the Taliban.
>
> A few days ago, the youngest three-year-old child, Arman, was bullied in the playroom; someone had slapped his face in a way that the handprint was on the child's face for hours. She was worried about her children's safety and dignity. Hana asked me if I thought that they treated her child that way because they are refugees and Afghans. That was a pressing ethical question for me: whether we should adjust the research design and make workshops more inclusive when needed, to avoid the label of refugee children. (August 18, 2023).

Interpretation: The language barrier and cultural differences caused misunderstandings. In Afghanistan, people typically sign contracts in severe and untoward circumstances such as when selling things, performing property transactions, or going to the judiciary. For a matter possibly as foreign to them as doing participatory research, which in this case involved painting and singing with children and amusing and teaching them, parents would hardly want to sign a paper.

On another level, the question arose in my fieldnotes about *"whether the principal researcher and other teammates on the "Wellbeing" project had failed to connect with this particular parent earlier, possibly due to language barriers. They had solely interacted with the staff and children at Global Haven, assuming that the parents were aware of their project and research"* (Fieldnotes, August 2024*). They had solely interacted with the staff and children*

at Global Haven, assuming that the parents were aware of their project and research" (Fieldnotes, August 2024*)*. However, other parents, such as Lina's mother, Diana and Fahima's father, and Raphael and Lucia's mother, were proficient in English and Spanish. This proficiency facilitated easy communication, allowing them to discuss the nature of the research and the reason for signing the paperwork well before the consent day.

As someone familiar with the Afghan culture, I observed in my field notes, "*I could see why Hana feared signing a paper concerning her children. She was a single mom whose young husband was killed by the Taliban; she felt responsible for her children's safety and health. She could not risk signing a paper whose content was unclear to her* (Fieldnotes, August 2023). I translated the contract into Farsi, but the content was unfamiliar to her and was more than five pages long. It was difficult for her to read all the pages and ensure no risk was involved. She probably thought, why would they ask her to sign it if it was not harmful? I understood the cultural gap, the language barrier, and the trauma of starting a life in a new land with cultural differences. Therefore, I explained to her that it was nothing about child custody and asked her to take a few days and send it to a family member to read to ensure there was no harm in signing it. Also, due to the language barrier, she could not share her complaint about the incident of her child being bullied in the playing room and investigate the question of it happening due to their being Afghan refugees. Consent time allowed her to open up about her concerns.

Discussion: As for the Afghan mom's doubts, we stopped asking Hana for any signature or consent until she felt assured that there was no risk or harm. The truth was that her four children were the most active members of our workshops; they simply loved the activities. Her five-year-old daughter, Sara, was particularly dedicated and enthusiastic. She was a genius, a fast learner, full of ideas and a leader in the team; everybody loved her. As a team, we wanted those children to be included in the project and, at the same time, benefit from the workshops. Still, knowing the culture, I advised the team to give them time to observe, take it all in, understand, and decide without the slightest hint of duress. My best hopes were showing promising signs of fulfilment; later, when the mother saw other families in that temporary shelter send their children to the workshop without any worries, she continued sending them and even collaborated in many more ways, sharing her feelings and asking questions when any arose for her.

In my position in that project, the dual role of a researcher and an ally to Afghan families sometimes blurred my identity and positionality. I had to begin a journey of identity and decide which category I belonged to in that dichotomy of positions. On the one hand, I had an ethical responsibility toward families and children who could speak only Farsi/Persian. On the other,

I had a moral responsibility toward my teammates and the project itself. At times, I had to interrogate myself and ask what it means to be a researcher and a person who speaks Farsi and who comes from a country in the Middle East that neighbors Afghanistan, is fairly aware of their culture, and a scholar navigating the turbulent waters of various cultures.

In that light, I approached the research reflexively, aiming to challenge power structures. Reflexivity serves as the method feminists employ to transform these structures towards greater equity, partly achieved by amplifying the voices and experiences of the marginalized through ethical research processes (Collins, 2000; McCormick, 2012). In our research, we actively sought to amplify the voices of marginalized groups in general, specifically migrants within Global Haven facing double marginalization due to language barriers and ethnicity; we also sought to be attentive to what mattered to them.

Analysis of Part Two, Ethics, Reflexivity and Positionality

In part two, I acknowledged the importance of critical reflection regarding my positionality in the face of ethics, embracing the evolution. Initially, I had not planned to split the research into two parts. Upon re-reading my notes, it became evident that my arguments fell within the two broad domains of “Participation, Inclusion and Social Capital” and “Ethics, Reflexivity and Positionality,” echoing the research question on Children’s Participation, research, ethics and reflexivity.

This dual approach mirrors Cathrine Vanner’s method in her doctoral research. She maintained two typed journals for expanding upon her handwritten fieldnotes, one labelled "School Research" and the other "Positionality" (2020). Similarly, my notes evolved into two main parts: “Participatory Research” and “Ethics and Positionality,” although these domains occasionally intersected.

In delving deeper into my notes, I confronted my positionality within the research. At times, I found myself contemplating the exclusion of certain episodes from this chapter to uphold ethical standards toward others, including participants, parents, teammates, staff and more, recognizing how my own epistemology could potentially bias the interpretation of data. Zhao et al. highlight that the ethical approach intersects with the researcher’s positionality, epistemology and intersubjectivity “because behaving ethically requires some understanding of others and our relationship with them” (2012, p.69). In that sense, positionality encompasses not only alignment with certain ideologies but also biases and ontological perspectives, thus significantly influencing the researcher’s comprehension of ethics and moral principles.

I approached my positionality and the emotions involved with reflexivity; this reflexivity ignited emotions, internal dialogue, and questions to foster more ethical research and minimize harm to participants (Carter et al., 2014). However, reflexivity imposed a significant emotional burden on me, eliciting feelings of vulnerability, discomfort, anxiety, hope, fear, and disappointment. In that sense, my emotional reaction resonated with Bloor and Fincham's observation regarding this emotional burden (2008); in that sense, composing the second phase of my thesis proved to be considerably more challenging. I constantly grappled with questioning my positionality and perspective and ensuring fairness to all participants, my teammates and my commitment to my research question and design.

In the research project, while working as a fellow researcher in Global Haven's research team, my positionality and intersubjectivity with participants slowly made me sensitive to the discourse of "Otherness" in a way that empowers and privileges the researchers to define their subject of study, which sometimes made me feel uneasy, though it was inevitable. I was collaborating in an SSHRC research conducted and funded by Western people *on/with* marginalized immigrants; half of those children and families were from the Middle East and regions neighboring my home country, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, which brought concepts like intersubjectivity to the scene.

Unconsciously, I think I wanted to protect the children and their families from judgmental Western eyes, which I felt somehow pitied their misery and displacement rather than empathize with them. Like countless others, I firmly believe that the revolution some forty years ago in my country, the war and the displacement story in Afghanistan, Syria, the neighboring countries and the wars in the whole Middle East were the result of international policies, so everybody globally was responsible for those children's displacement. As such, although my inner thoughts challenged me, I had to acknowledge that fusing those layers would give me a unique perspective and a unique depth to my analysis; I later deliberately worked to cultivate it.

For instance, in the case of the Afghan family, communicating in their language created some emotional bonds. My positionality had me vacillate between a dual identity of an insider and outsider in an interdisciplinary role with many layers, potentially conducive to a constructive re-articulation of identity on the horizon for me. The same ability and positionality, while an Afghan family could hardly communicate in other languages, helped me support the team and the family.

The bond I forged with families at Global Haven and with their children enabled me to share bonds of ethnicity and tacit implicit cultural knowledge while integrating myself into the

communities and lives of those I studied. Likewise, my status as a researcher enables me to illuminate new understandings and insights and communicate those findings in a way that resonates with my teammates, co-researchers, and scholars in the bigger picture and beyond the research field.

Reflecting on the Use of Fieldnotes to Study Agency and Ethics in Research with Asylum-Seeking Children

Writing this chapter marks a key milestone in my journey as an ethical researcher working with children, emphasizing reflexivity and autoethnography. I used various personal records to maintain a critical stance, aiming for an authentic investigation that valued all voices amidst my biases. This method bears significant similarities to autoethnography; as Mitchell and Weber underscore, "memory-work autoethnography is a method" (1998, 1999) [developed and was] later extended by Samaras (2011)" (Pithouse-Morgan & Van Laren, 2015, p.83).

Within this context, the current chapter probed the intricacies of ethics within participatory workshops, examining social capital and children's ethics and agency within the multicultural setting of the Global Haven community. My argument addressed two main themes: participatory research and ethics in research with children. The first part focused on the participatory nature of research with children, while the second part emphasized ethics, positionality, and reflexivity.

The chapter examined children's participation and agency in building social capital, highlighting the importance of participatory activities in fostering social cohesion, trust, and collective action among children and their parents. Using social capital theory, it explains bonding, bridging, and linking social capital and their roles in community cohesion and inclusivity. It emphasizes that participatory research is ethical, despite challenges like power imbalances and parental influence, by recognizing children's right to participate and exploring the interplay between agency, power, positionality, and wellbeing.

Empowering children and promoting their agency in research is presented as the most ethical approach, requiring reflexivity and critical examination of biases to handle inclusion and participation challenges. Activities like the Imaginary Ball, singing workshops, paintings, and cellphilm production are highlighted to promote children's agency and social inclusion. The relationship between music, identity, and agency is explored, noting how music from one's culture represents a form of agency. The thought is that recognizing children's cultural heritage and music in host countries is crucial for their identity.

I address the tension between privacy and authentic research, along with the ethical dilemma of ownership of recorded materials and the importance of reflexivity. The chapter discusses that visual tools like iPads for cellphilm productions empower children's self-expression, but anonymity concerns must be managed to avoid silencing voices. The selection process for the McGill Cellphilm Festival is critiqued for potentially overlooking collaborative efforts.

Aligned with Pierre Bourdieu's theory (Agbenyega, 2014), I reflect on how empowering children to lead sessions is crucial for ethical research. Respecting children's rights and contributions in data gathering, analysis, and interpretation is considered an ethical approach to building on their agency. Viewing children positively allows researchers to leverage their cultural and symbolic capital, enriching data and analysis. The positionality section discusses consent's complexities, cultural intricacies, and power dynamics. The author's insider-outsider perspective on the community provided insights into cultural challenges and ethical approaches to agency and participation, stressing fairness, reflexivity, and navigating ethical dilemmas thoughtfully.

These cumulative experiences enable me to explore the interplay between ethical dilemmas, participant rights, positionality, and epistemology in research, with a focus on the researcher's perspective and identity. Ultimately, the researcher's commitment to empowering participants and advancing research drives me to negotiate ethical challenges, prioritize participants' welfare, and catalyze societal transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary

In this thesis, I explored the use of reflexive methods to study the significance of ethics, agency, and empowerment in participatory research involving children. The thesis is divided into five chapters.

In Chapter One, I established a structure for my work, centring on reflexively engaging in studying childhood ethics and agency within participatory research contexts. Drawing upon personal experiences with marginalized immigrant children in my hometown of Yazd, Iran, I underscored the significance of amplifying children's voices and addressing their wellbeing. My research explores ethical considerations like power imbalances and language barriers inherent in participatory research with children. Additionally, I discussed the importance of prioritizing children's voices, empowerment, and wellbeing in research. The discussion extended to the Tri-Council Policy Statement's role in guiding ethical research practices and addressing ongoing ethical dilemmas, highlighting the need for a more ethics-friendly approach in research with marginalized children. Ultimately, I advocated for children's active participation in research processes, promoting their welfare, dignity, and right to express themselves through art-based methods.

Chapter Two delved into more than one hundred studies on children, ethics in research involving them, and the importance of participatory research. The literature reviewed concerned the ethical dimensions inherent in researching children, commencing with an overview of their ethics, rights, and welfare. It traced the historical evolution of research ethics, with a focus on post-WWII principles and international guidelines emphasizing voluntary consent and harm minimization. Ethical considerations specific to refugee children were also examined. Various ethical principles, including respect for persons, welfare, autonomy, vulnerability, and justice, were outlined. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was underscored as a significant milestone in acknowledging children's rights in research. The chapter introduced Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) as a valuable resource for researchers, offering a framework to address ethical dilemmas and prioritize children's rights and wellbeing. Reflexivity was highlighted as a crucial ethical element, urging researchers to critically analyze their assumptions, positionality, and biases, particularly in research involving children. Finally, a case study provided insight into the complexities of conducting research related to sensitive topics with children.

Chapter Three detailed my involvement with Global Haven, outlining the structure of art-based workshops and the innovative use of puppets to engage children in ethical discussions. The methodological framework focused on autoethnographic reflexivity in childhood ethics and agency within participatory research, specifically through the Art-Based Wellbeing Research with Children for Social Justice project. The practice of creating jottings during fieldwork was discussed, highlighting their role as memory aids and ethical considerations. The chapter also explored the organization of field notes, emphasizing detailed descriptions and addressing ethical and logistical concerns. The 'doing' of reflexivity was highlighted, recognizing researcher biases and power dynamics and ensuring rigorous and ethical research outcomes that amplify marginalized voices.

Chapter Four is organized around the use of jottings and fieldnotes, in participatory research with children. The text includes field notes and episodes that illustrate how these workshops promote socio-emotional empowerment, creative expression, and community cohesion despite resource constraints and language barriers. Various workshop activities such as singing sessions, imaginary ball games, painting, and cellphilming, provide opportunities for self-expression and social connection. The research also highlights the transformative power of music in fostering cultural identity and intercultural dialogue within diverse communities. Additionally, ethical considerations regarding children's participation, as well as their inclusion and exclusion in research activities are discussed, addressing power dynamics, positionality, and biases. The chapter advocates for acknowledging children's autonomy and agency while navigating issues like tokenism and power imbalances, aiming for a balanced approach that empowers children within participatory research endeavors.

What Have I Learned? Revisiting the Research Questions

Research question one: What are children's ethical and agency considerations in participatory research beyond harm reduction strategies?

The first and most important point is that ethical research respecting children's agency cannot be conducted in isolation, divorced from their voices, perspectives and experiences. Participatory art-based research provides a potential ethical context within which to value children's insight into matters that concern them while respecting their dignity. It indeed turns out to be an empowering framework for designing ethical research. While ethical considerations are paramount in this context, navigating them in practice can frequently feel akin to walking on a slippery slope. What may align with one ethical code might conflict with

another perspective on ethics. For instance, prioritizing children's anonymity may inadvertently suppress their voices from another standpoint. Thus, reflexivity emerges as a crucial criterion in supporting ethical research. Researchers must deconstruct the value system that prioritizes one aspect over another. Within this framework, it's vital to acknowledge that reflexivity is a multifaceted concept requiring continuous engagement with participants, diverse perspectives, research settings, and broader contexts (Richardson & Coombs, 2023).

In relation to ethics and agency in research with migrants, one notable insight gained in the past year is the recognition that agency and ethics within these demographics and communities extend to allowing children to use their mother tongue whenever feasible. This can manifest itself through music, songs, or expressions in artworks when children choose to write captions for their paintings or record cellphilms in their mother tongue. Acknowledging children's mother tongue and multilingual abilities as additional assets would validate their agency and demonstrate ethical awareness. This perspective perceives them as authorities in their native culture, language, and symbolic capital. It grants them a deeper understanding of their own agency by validating their mother tongue, value system, and cultural heritage, which is integral to their identity within the host community and the research space. Singing workshops, in this context, serve as empowering and decolonizing experiences. For instance, a nine-year-old child translated and contextualized a Spanish song for the audience during a workshop, providing a powerful, deconstructive, and decolonizing experience. In this spirit, designing research incorporating children's mother tongue is found to enhance ethics, agency, and a sense of belonging and confidence in the research process.

Within the same context, ethics also means respecting the value systems of participants. For instance, consider occasions in research where there are some young Muslim children whose parents prohibit them from eating pork or non-halal meat; in such instances, the research team or event organizers should make sure to provide inclusive options like halal pizza or pastille without pork or similar halal ingredients. This ensures that these children don't feel excluded or uncomfortable watching their peers eat. As I observed and noted in my field notes, the Wellbeing research team remained sensitive to such considerations, recognizing that these simple acknowledgments are crucial for upholding ethics and promoting the wellbeing of children.

Based on my observations and research experience, I've learned that consent is not just a one-time event but rather a continuous process of cultural engagement that starts well before

the project and continues throughout its duration. I learned how important it is to explore diverse methods of obtaining consent, such as verbal agreement, active engagement in the project, and a willingness to sustain involvement. Consent forms can be perceived as intimidating within certain cultural contexts, underscoring the necessity for alternative approaches in such instances. In this respect, cultural sensitivity aids in understanding the context and enhancing ethical research practices (Halilovich, 2013). The absence of cultural sensitivity poses significant ethical dilemmas, particularly when researchers hail from different cultural backgrounds than the refugees they study, a common scenario in Western research with marginalized migrants. For instance, obtaining informed consent may necessitate culturally appropriate approaches beyond mere signatures, taking into account factors such as suspicion towards signing documents or varying levels of literacy (Halilovich, 2013). We recounted one such experience we had with one mom who feared signing a paper would mean losing custody of her child.

Allowing children to take the lead in sessions could be a more ethical approach as it may grant a higher sense of agency. In this connection, I drew on Bourdieu's perspective on ethics and agency in research with children. In the process, the importance of allowing children to take the lead in sessions became clear, and this is superior to merely considering them as passive participants and viewing their families as uninformed. By inviting their parents as guest speakers to lead sessions, the Wellbeing team acknowledged the ethical significance of recognizing their expertise and valuing their contributions. These special guest sessions enriched data by incorporating the unique perspectives and cultural heritage embedded in the music from their countries. By treating children and their families as knowledgeable partners rather than mere subjects, the team elevated the quality and depth of our research findings.

Children played a crucial role in connecting newcomers and other parents, establishing lines of communication among various people in Global Haven. In this light, I noticed that children could act as strong "weak ties," using Granovetter's (1973) term. In my observations on children's agency and decision-making power in leading sessions, children had the capacity to interact with individuals from diverse racial, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, transcending power dynamics. Granting them agency and trust in their natural initiatives would recognize their potential to decolonize and unify various ethnic groups. Participatory activities like singing workshops can foster connections and unity among children with different languages, cultures, and religions. To illustrate this, I noted that they seamlessly incorporate words from other languages into their songs and dances, embracing diversity without prejudice

and allowing themselves to become catalysts for peace and harmonious coexistence. This sheds light on how children offer valuable insights into dysfunctional aspects of hegemonies and hierarchies based on race and ethnicity and how they generate the capacity to promote social justice, equality, and equity by demonstrating inclusivity and valuing diversity.

In research with children, inclusion and exclusion are pressing considerations that intersect with various ethical dilemmas and concepts such as consent, positionality, and partisanship. These issues often arise alongside considerations related to research questions and design, potentially narrowing the scope of participation. While children may express their willingness to participate, it is the parents who hold authority. They may use their power to prevent their children's involvement for reasons unrelated to their wellbeing, depriving them of their right to participate. This straddles researchers with an obligation to consider all aspects carefully. In this respect, children's assent/willingness versus parental consent is an ethical dilemma. Balancing parental consent with children's assent presents a nuanced challenge in projects involving children. Researchers must navigate these complexities to maintain ethical research standards, similar to the dual nature of anonymity in research, which can both protect and silence children.

In the field of visual arts, cellphilming is emerging as an insightful artistic approach similar to other visual mediums such as painting and drawing. It helps to rebalance power dynamics and break down formalities between researchers and participants. Additionally, it can be a powerful tool to reach policymakers and bring about social change, especially in children's research where language barriers hinder explicit expression. Children often know more than they can express explicitly (Lodge, 2009), and cellphilming can help capture their implicit knowledge. However, implementing this method with children poses challenges such as equipment affordability, the workload of uploading the produced data, and ethical considerations. Ethical dilemmas arise regarding privacy and consent, and finding a balance between protecting privacy and respecting children's rights requires careful consideration and mindfulness in research.

Along the same lines, painting emerged as a practical tool for children to express their thoughts. During participatory research with young children, we encountered challenges when attempting to guide them with themes for their paintings. Initially, we tried suggesting themes and asking them to paint accordingly but found this approach ineffective in practice. However, we discovered that children were highly expressive when allowed to paint whatever they

wanted to. Using art to express and communicate their emotions provided valuable insights into their perspectives and concerns. For example, children who had lost their mothers often depicted themes related to their mothers, such as the shape of a heart or images of mothers and children, which resonated with their emotions. Additionally, some children expressed themselves through painting and writing captions in Spanish, which helped them discuss their favorite places and activities. In response to their unique painting styles, we asked the children to explain their artwork and assign a theme after completing their paintings. This enabled them to use their artwork as a medium to communicate thoughts and feelings that they struggled to express verbally due to their limited vocabulary. This approach made them feel listened to and understood.

As I reflect on my experiences, I feel compelled to emphasize the use of certain tools, such as puppets and musical instruments, echoing “fun theory” (Hulburd, 2020). Through my research, I’ve discovered that children are naturally drawn to mystical and fantasy objects, including music and puppets. Much like music, painting, and drawing, puppets possess a universal appeal and can be regarded as a unifying force. Additionally, I’ve found that certain participatory activities, such as the "Imaginary Ball" and "Body Mapping," have the ability to transcend surface-level interactions. These activities can be particularly valuable in communities beset with significant language barriers. For example, the "Unity Circle" has proven effective in fostering a sense of unity, empowerment, and inclusion among children with different skin colors, languages, and backgrounds.

Research question 2: How do reflexivity approaches inform our understanding of children’s ethics and agency in participatory research?

Choosing to work with fieldnotes, I sought to illuminate Global Haven’s narrative through my reflections on workshops, unveiling the intricate tapestry of events and characters. While I cannot claim that this was an autoethnography according to the rich body of work on autoethnography (Ellis, 2013; Jones et al., 2016), I do locate it within autoethnographic tools and methods. This method afforded me the privilege of exploring my personal perspectives on the collective experiences of children, parents, and the broader context of Global Haven itself. With each piece added to the puzzle under the guidance of my supervisor, a clearer picture emerged, ultimately culminating in what I have come to term a thesis novel. This amalgamation of creative storytelling and scholarly inquiry serves as a testament to the power of critical thinking and reflexivity in research. By weaving together multifaceted narratives, this thesis

novel not only enriches academic discourse but also offers a valuable tool for researchers seeking to analyze data with depth and nuance.

In her article, "Autoethnography as a Wide-Angle Lens on Looking (Inward and Outward)," Claudia Mitchell (2016) presents six propositions to consider when addressing the inward and outward aspects of autoethnography: 1) creativity and doing something different, 2) collaboration, 3) positionality, 4) ethics, 5) addressing social justice, and 6) advocacy. I explore five of these propositions and consider that although I do not have an explicit method for validating the interpretations of my field notes, I align them with a set of propositions.

“Creativity and Doing Something Different” (Mitchell, 2016, p.181). "In Mitchell's (2016) exploration of creativity in autoethnography, I found inspiration as I embarked on the unconventional journey of crafting a thesis solely from raw jotting notes and field observations, aiming to probe children’s ethics and agency through a lens of reflexivity. Venturing into this less-travelled path among existing theses, my initial vision was clouded, yet my commitment to innovation paved the way for a distinctive research endeavor. Choosing an autoethnographic approach, I sought to illuminate Global Haven’s narrative through the lens of workshops, unveiling the intricate tapestry of events and characters. This method afforded me the privilege of exploring my personal perspective and delving into the collective experiences of children, parents, and the broader context of Global Haven itself.

Positionality**.** I identified with Mitchell's exploration of "Positionality" (2016, p.181) when embracing my background and experiences as a Middle Eastern researcher with strong ties to my Iranian heritage. As a mother to a nine-year-old and an advocate for Global Haven’s children, my journey of immigrating to Canada became a lens through which I connected with families in this community. Drawing on my experiences with refugee children in my hometown of Yazd, Iran, I felt compelled to channel my dedication to championing children’s rights into the participatory research efforts of the Wellbeing Project. This alignment with my ethos of supporting vulnerable populations highlighted the importance of my autoethnographic approach. While cultural background alignment isn’t necessary for understanding research subjects, as Van de Port (1999) suggests, being a "cultural insider" can offer distinct advantages, including enhanced comprehension of issues and facilitated access to participants. Within our team, my immigration journey and shared familiarity with the culture and language of many participants proved invaluable in fostering deeper insights and connections within the research context.

Ethics. As Mitchell (2016) highlighted, I employed meticulous care and consideration when exploring the ethical dimensions of my research, particularly regarding marginalized migrant children. Using reflexivity fieldnotes and jottings, I committed to the highest ethical standards, safeguarding participants' privacy and anonymity by using pseudonyms and omitting unnecessary details. Prioritizing the children's welfare, I sometimes sacrificed specific findings to uphold their rights to anonymity, dignity and justice. I also avoided the narrative and terms like "trauma," which pathologizes their experiences (Halilovich, 2013; Lambert et al., 1998) and undermines the complexity of their experiences by squeezing them into a catchall stereotype. Instead, I opted for a narrative that recognized their resilience and wisdom. My ethical approach was guided by a deep respect for the humanity and dignity of the children and families, honouring their experiences with integrity and empathy.

Social Justice. When exploring the concept of social justice within the framework of autoethnography, as articulated by Mitchell (2016), it becomes evident that researchers wield a unique capacity to instigate change and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities. Central to this notion is the belief that authentically sharing our experiences can catalyze positive transformations within our field and beyond (Amodeo, 2020). It is essential to remain cognizant of systemic injustices, even in seemingly mundane aspects such as snack choices during workshops. By actively considering cultural and religious sensitivities when selecting refreshments, we can foster inclusivity and mitigate the risk of inadvertently perpetuating marginalization. Equally important is recognizing the broader context of social injustice that underpins the refugee crisis, displacement and vulnerability, and acknowledging that these are not inherent characteristics of refugees but are instead the consequences of unjust national and international policies.

Advocacy: Reflecting on this comprehensive narrative of my thesis, it becomes evident that my primary objective was advocating for children's rights. I carefully analyzed my notes and observations to amplify their voices and emphasize their fundamental rights. This advocacy becomes especially critical when studying refugee children, who often lack legal recognition from the state, underscoring the researcher's role as a catalyst for change. However, it's essential to acknowledge the nuanced debates surrounding advocacy within research; while it faces criticism for potentially compromising rigour and objectivity (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003), rigorous methodology can reconcile these concerns, ensuring both validity and ethical standards. Refugee studies acknowledge the deep interconnection between academic research and advocacy (Voutira & Dona, 2007), with research ethics necessitating a commitment to

advocacy (Rousseau & Kirmayer, 2010). My autoethnographic research thus serves as a vehicle for advocacy, striving to effect tangible improvements in the lives of marginalized children and promoting social justice and human rights.

Contributions to New Knowledge

This research examines the significance of fieldnotes and their role as data in social research. Methodologically, it sheds light on the importance of detailed jottings and fieldnotes in employing an interpretative lens, which was a novel experience for me. Given the emphasis on reflexivity, it is crucial to highlight the use of fieldnotes in training and developing guides for qualitative research. Drawing upon the works of Emerson et al. (2011), Richard and Coombs (2023) and Thompson and Burkholder (2020), this study illustrates how reflexivity in a research site, data collection, analysis, and presentation can cast light on ethical issues, agency, socio-emotional wellbeing, and social justice in participatory research involving young children. These insights invoke the need for further research in this area, which would be of significant benefit to researchers and potential target audiences alike. The findings concerning refugee children in this context are invaluable in planning research with children, offering unique insights for social activists and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by migrant, refugee, and marginalized children. Often, children's emotional wellbeing receives insufficient attention amid adult-centric lives, making the presence of a research team crucial in such contexts. Such presence provides vital knowledge and support to these communities, ultimately benefiting society as a whole. Thus, intervention projects like these are essential for conducting comprehensive research into children's wellbeing. The longitudinal engagement would provide a rich narrative and sequence of events, uncovering incidents and dynamics frequently overlooked in conventional research. In this regard, it shares similarities to autoethnography, offering insights into the life experiences of marginalized children and families. The intersection of these experiences with those of the researcher, as a newcomer to Canada with a child navigating language acquisition and societal integration, highlights the challenges faced by residents of Global Haven, fostering empathy and deeper understanding. Reflexivity plays a pivotal role in this context. Undoubtedly, the insights gained about ethics and agency in participatory research with children extend beyond this research field, benefiting social workers, community workers, policymakers, teachers, ethnographers, and international NGOs working with children.

Limitations and Challenges of the Study

The approach of writing fieldnotes and jottings was far from perfect. I could only take notes based on what I could observe, inevitably causing me to miss things, make my perceptions subjective and restricted, and challenge my understanding. Additionally, I was obligated to protect participants' privacy and prioritize ethical concerns over my thesis. The thesis had a defined start and end date, whereas the workshops continued beyond this period, leading me to stop collecting data at a certain point even though the fieldwork continued. My language skills further limited my observations; I do not speak Spanish, while there were some children with limited English and French who spoke Spanish. My French was also not fluent at that time, so there was a possibility of missing important points in French. All these factors limited my observations. The other significant obstacle was the scope of my study. Given the constraints of a master's thesis, I had to be selective in the application of my extensive fieldnotes, focusing only on those more immediately and directly relevant to my thesis. Consequently, numerous valuable insights and interpretations from my reflective notes were sidelined.

Implications for Further Studies

What are the methodological implications? Learning to create detailed notes and then apply an interpretative lens to these field notes was a new experience for me, highlighting the importance of deepening our understanding of positionality. Given the significance of reflexivity, it would make sense to place a greater emphasis on fieldnotes in graduate training and on producing comprehensive guides for them in qualitative research.

Numerous researchers have depicted the bright, romantic aspects of working with children, but few have openly acknowledged the inevitable mistakes and challenges. Consequently, one underrepresented area in the literature pertains to our mistakes and the challenges we encounter, which are consistently present but seldom discussed. Research involving children frequently introduces significant emotional and ethical dilemmas; despite this, there is a notable absence of substantial writing regarding these challenges in the literature. My research dug up only a handful of sources addressing this aspect, which indicates a commensurate dearth and a potential area for further study.

The concept of trauma in studies of refugee children is contentious, with a notable scarcity of research on the repercussions of overusing terms like "trauma," which could inadvertently create additional obstacles to establishing a normal life for these children. Only a limited number of studies look at how certain terminology might inadvertently harm

vulnerable participants, diminishing their valuable experiences, wisdom, and perspectives. Using language that undervalues participants' experiences can position them as being inferior to researchers and those with more privileged backgrounds. Deconstructing stereotypes and clichés demands a meticulous and thoughtful examination to bring forth the wisdom refugees possess, and to present their experiences in a manner that challenges stereotypes and avoids perpetuating negativity. It is crucial not to view refugees as mere collective identities or stereotypes. Leveraging their wisdom can inspire hope and catalyze peace and sustainable development. This perspective resonates with Halilovich's (2013) research and his background as a counsellor and mental health worker for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and Germany. He argues that the excessive use of the term "trauma" has led to the medicalization and pathologizing of human suffering, particularly among refugees and survivors of violence (Lambert et al., 1998).

Moreover, refugee hardship remains an underrepresented area of study, especially in relation to newcomer children and the challenges posed by language barriers that often leave children and their parents vulnerable, requiring high adaptability. Within marginalized migrant communities, there is limited research addressing their unique challenges, such as language barriers and cultural differences, and how these factors impact their wellbeing. While recognizing the inherent value of their perspectives, participatory research would create an opportunity to address these gaps and understand their challenges.

Ethics, children's agency, and social capital remain under-explored areas in research, despite their significant bearing on the wellbeing of refugee children. Exploring how the cultural heritage of refugee children and their families can enrich research and why imposing strict research designs can hinder studies and lead to tokenism presents intriguing avenues for further investigation. Additionally, examining how and why refugee children and youth can serve as agents of social change and advocate for environmental issues within the context of global citizenship and sustainable development offers compelling opportunities for action toward global peace.

Refugee children and youth settling in host communities bring unique perspectives and experiences regarding global challenges, such as environmental issues. These children and youth can act as bridges between their communities and host societies, facilitating dialogue and action on environmental issues such as climate change and water shortages. By sharing their stories and advocating for sustainable practices, they can raise awareness and empathy

among diverse populations. Few studies recognize refugee children as assets equipped with valuable perspectives different from Western ones. Participatory research and education in this domain can potentially empower refugees and host countries. Their voices and experiences can inform more inclusive and responsive policies prioritizing environmental sustainability and social justice.

Finally …

In today's troubled world, children rank among the most vulnerable, bearing witness to the grim realities of conflict and displacement. As I come to the end of this thesis, my thoughts turn to the countless young lives scarred by the horrors of war, violence, suffering, displacement and loss of family members in locations such as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and beyond. Yet amidst the darkness, they also embody seeds of hope, promising a brighter tomorrow. Children possess an innate capacity to deconstruct and dismantle the sources of social injustices, envisioning a sustainable world where no child would have to endure the stabs of conflict or displacement. In this envisioned future, every child's basic needs – food, clean water, safety, wellbeing, gender equity, quality education, and peace – would be upheld and respected. Researchers can delve into today's cultural and social realities through reflective methods, linking these insights with their inner reflections to address pressing challenges.

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