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**LITERATURE REVIEW ON QUALITATIVE  
METHODS AND STANDARDS FOR  
ENGAGING AND STUDYING  
INDEPENDENT CHILDREN IN THE  
DEVELOPING WORLD**

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# **Literature Review on Qualitative Methods and Standards for Engaging and Studying Independent Children in the Developing World**

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**Summary:** This paper identifies and evaluates qualitative methods appropriate for use in conducting policy-relevant research on the experiences, motivations, agency and life histories of autonomous and semi-autonomous children and adolescents, including those who migrate independently of parents and adult guardians. First, the paper presents an overview of qualitative research practice and the potential for qualitative research to extend and deepen knowledge of children's varied and independently negotiated life circumstances. It is argued that qualitative approaches are necessary to understand and meaningfully respond to the experiences of diverse physical, social and cultural environments. Research ethics are discussed from several points of view, highlighting both the importance of maintaining, and difficulty of defining, ethical engagement with subjects whose vulnerabilities and capabilities are manifest in ways that unsettle many traditional conceptions of children.

The second, longer section of the paper presents illustrative examples of qualitative research techniques. An illustrated inventory of research tools is presented with seven categories: surveys; interviews and focus groups; observation and participant observation; life histories and biographical methods; visual and textual methods; performance, play and arts-based methods; and virtual and computer-aided methods. Particular attention is given to practical details of field research, including subject recruitment/sampling, research setting, facilitation of interaction with subjects through intermediary contacts and organizations, and the specific steps taken to collect qualitative data. The concluding section synthesizes the information presented and provides guidance on how to incorporate qualitative methods, and qualitative methodologies, into research on children who live independently of parents and adult guardians or who exercise autonomy in more limited contexts.

**Keywords:** independent children, qualitative research, ethics.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies and evaluates qualitative methods appropriate for use in conducting policy-relevant research on the experiences, motivations, agency, and life histories of autonomous and semi-autonomous children and adolescents, including those who migrate independently of parents and adult guardians. It discusses and assesses methodological strategies of existing studies, and offers recommendations on qualitative data creation and collection. This includes effectively managing challenges related to: engaging and learning from independent children in their origin and destination settings; maintaining high ethical standards in all aspects of the research; and generating qualitative data that relates to and increases the value of quantitative data collected as part of an overall research strategy.

The first section of the paper presents an overview of qualitative research practice and the potential for qualitative research to extend and deepen knowledge of children's varied and independently negotiated life circumstances. Basic definitions are provided as a starting point. It is argued that qualitative approaches are necessary to understand and meaningfully respond to the experiences of diverse physical, social, and cultural environments. The utilization of qualitative data is differentiated from qualitative paradigms of inquiry.

Qualitative data and methods can be usefully incorporated into mixed-methodology research while retaining commitment to traditional research frameworks (i.e., objectivity, validity, and control) that are frequently abandoned in wholly interpretive research. Some interpretive and ethnographic paradigms do not rely as heavily on the strictures of scientific methodology (Guba and Lincoln 2005), and the paper considers benefits and limitations of this. We discuss how mixed-methods research can integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches, maintaining objectivity and trustworthiness as well as attention to unique subject positions. Mixed methods can help reveal the interconnections and negotiations between localized and transformative practices of individuals, families, and other social groups, and their larger-scale socio-cultural, physical, and political environments.

We review how the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have played out in qualitative research, and discuss its relevance for research ethics. We emphasize the concept of reciprocity as a worthy goal for researchers, especially those working with research participants who have little power and few resources. Finally, the value of, and ethical considerations in, participatory research are summarized. It is especially pertinent that 'children's participation' is considered in research design for, as Bourdillon (2004, 100) argues, the number of children living independently of adults itself should convince policy makers of the "potential competence of children" and "their agency in plans for improving livelihood." Still, the commitment to actively engage children in research activities expands our concern for ethical and 'child-friendly' research methods.

The second section presents illustrative examples of qualitative research techniques. This includes literature on independent child migrants, which, to date, is quite limited, as well as relevant research on: migration in developing regions; children who are living and/or acting independently without migrating; and family dynamics in developing regions that are the source of significant numbers of migrants. An illustrated inventory of research tools is

presented with seven categories: observation and participant observation, interviews, focus groups, surveys, life histories and biographical methods, visual and textual methods, performance, play and arts-based methods, and virtual and computer-aided methods.

Particular attention is given to practical details of field research, including subject recruitment/sampling, research setting, facilitation of interaction with subjects through intermediary contacts and organizations, and the specific steps taken to collect qualitative data. Key articles – those that present model strategies and include sufficient information about field research techniques and their effectiveness to enable replication in the proposed research – are highlighted in greater detail.

The concluding section synthesizes the information presented and provides guidance on how to incorporate qualitative methods into research on children who live independently of parents and adult guardians or who exercise autonomy in more limited contexts.



## **2. ROLE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND DATA IN STUDYING INDEPENDENT CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

This section sets the stage for understanding the importance of qualitative research and data for studying independent child migrants in developing countries. It suggests that qualitative methodologies enable a focus on children's presence, agency, creativity, responsiveness and resistance in shaping and re-shaping the contexts of their lives. This kind of understanding has a significant potential for enriching policy-oriented studies. In what follows we elaborate more fully some of the foundations of qualitative methodologies.

Our conceptions of the value of qualitative research are shaped against the backdrop of a shift towards a child-centred focus on 'well-being', to replace a more traditional systemic focus (White 2002; Jones and Sumner 2007). This shift, while not restricted to research on children, has advantages that align well with children's rights, and specifically independent children, because it

- “- focuses on what children feel about what they can do and be;
- respects children's feelings about what they can do and be;
- expands the focus to include children's physiology and psychology;
- is based on children's current experiences;
- emphasises the importance of local cultural context and specificity in construction of childhood well-being;
- addresses 'new' areas of well-being particularly important to children
- autonomy, enjoyment/fun, relatedness, and status.” (Jones and Sumner 2007, 4).

### **2.1. The Impact of Diverse Methodological Theories on Research Practices**

Sayer (1992, 12) proposes that the term 'method' “suggests a carefully considered way of approaching the world so that we may understand it better.” Concepts used by the researcher significantly shape ideas about the appropriate methods for observing and creating empirical data about phenomena. Sayer's broadening of the concept of method to encompass both empirical study and theorizing is useful because it illuminates the ways in which 'methods,' more narrowly construed as techniques for data collection and analysis, are shaped by how we conceptualize the world around us.

This is important for child-centred research because it points to the difficulty of moving beyond adult-defined research agendas and worldviews that emanate from theoretical concerns that may be irreconcilable with the contexts of young people. An important achievement of recent sociological, anthropological and human geographic work has been to show that young people are not passive in the face of social and economic change, and they actively and creatively shape the world around them. This emphasis on young people's capacities also means greater expectation that young people can understand and engage with research agendas and the ways that methodologies are tied to those agendas. Within the context of ethics and reciprocity that we discuss below, it is important to unpack the

complex relations between adult researchers, their theories and those who are the subject of the research.

The terrain of social research is dominated at a coarse, theoretical scale by a small number of major features (for example, paradigmatic philosophies of knowledge and models of inquiry) that are seen as distinct in character and frequently oppositional. At this theoretical level, we see positivism and interpretivism, objectivity and subjectivity, individual and society, and quantitative and qualitative as somewhat irreconcilable descriptors.

Crotty (1998, 3) defines four elements of the research process: methods, methodology, theoretical perspectives, and epistemology:

“Methods: the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis.

Methodology: the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.

Theoretical perspective: the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.

Epistemology: the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.”

The four elements helps move beyond rigid, yet inexact, conceptions of research practice to show how scholars and their work have tended to reflect strong commitments within one element of research practice. The other elements of research practice have then been negotiated and/or developed in relation to those foundational commitments in order to “ensure the soundness of our research and make its outcomes convincing” (p. 6).

**Table 1: Locating Key Terms Based on Crotty’s (1998) Four Elements of Research Practice**

<i>Epistemology</i>	<i>Theoretical perspective</i>	<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Method</i>
Objectivism	Positivism (and post-positivism)	Experimental research	Sampling Measurement and scaling
Constructionism		Survey research	Questionnaire
Subjectivism	Symbolic interaction	Ethnography	Observation (participant and non-participant)
Humanism	Critical inquiry	Phenomenological research	Interview
Pragmatism	Feminism	Grounded theory	Focus group
Idealism	Postmodernism	Heuristic inquiry	Case study
(and their variants)	Marxism	Action research	Life history
	Poststructuralism	Discourse analysis	Narrative
		Feminist standpoint research	Visual ethnographic methods
		Gendered research	Statistical analysis
			Cognitive mapping
			Document analysis
			Content analysis
			Meta-analysis

Crotty uses examples to show how alignment of these elements creates internal continuity within research practices and bolsters claims to knowledge. So, along one axis of research practice, objectivism is a universal epistemology that informs positivism, a theoretical perspective on how knowledge can be advanced. Experimental research is a methodology to collect data, and statistical analysis a method for analyzing those data, with both adhering to the precepts of positivism. A positivist worldview requires objectivity, and its related methodologies create data that can be isolated from the life experiences of the subject for statistical analyses that support generalization and model building. Along another axis of research practice, constructionism is one epistemology that departs from objectivism, makes a case for the importance of non-positivist research, and spins off theories regarding the subjective construction of reality. Anthropology's insights into human experience as a set of socially constructed symbolic relations emerge, then, as a theoretical development within constructionism. Ethnography, a methodology with roots in sociological and anthropological theory, has been appropriated by symbolic interactionists because it is useful in bringing subjective experience into the realm of interpretable data. Participant observation is described as the preferred method for ethnographers, based on their interest in creating data that retain specificity with regard to contexts such as time, place, and subject identity. The development of these concepts as differentiating ways of knowing is one important way that social scientists have challenged each other, through critique and competition, to justify and strengthen their analytical approaches and support their claims to knowledge.

While a person's environments and activities can be observed and objectively described, qualitative approaches are needed to link those observations into a coherent story that adequately accounts for identities, perceptions and motivations – in other words, culture and agency.

Qualitative methodologies have been developed to meaningfully account for and gain insight from localized environments, cultural systems, and society as they shape and are creatively re-molded through individual life-courses, family and community. Howitt and Stevens, for example, explain that cross-cultural field-based research “involves respectful listening, difficult and challenging engagements, careful attention to nuances in the lives of ‘others,’ and a critical, long-term consideration of the implications of methods in the construction of meaning” (2000, 30). Qualitative methodologies, in moving away from the relatively stable ground of objectivism and into the realm of the social and cultural, consistently reflect concern for the role of symbols and language and of the act of research in creating representations of, rather than revealing truths about different aspects of human experience. As Denzin states:

“Humans live in a secondhand world of meanings. They have no direct access to reality. Reality as it is known is mediated by symbolic representation, by narrative texts, and by cinematic and televisual structures that stand between the person and the so-called real world.” (1997, xvi).

As a result of this, researching and making sense of the lives of others becomes a more challenging and layered enterprise. Generalizability, for example, is more difficult to achieve because the researcher is creating meaning that is linked to the life of the individual and his or her relations with others and the world around. Knowing the experiences, meanings and

symbols of a single person, such as a loved parent, makes that person harder to compare with another.

Reflexivity is an important part of qualitative methods. Denzin (1997, xi) points out that “[e]thnography is that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the way of life of the writer and those written about.” Qualitative research involves interpretation at every stage such that no stark line can be drawn between researchers and subjects, or between theories and conclusions. Hypothesizing, collection of data, analysis of data, and writing up of findings are interrelated steps in the research process, and each step reflects the situation of the researcher as much as the situation of his/her research subjects. “More and more, qualitative researchers are understanding that rather than being an afterthought or merely a mode of communication, writing is part and parcel of the interpretive act. Qualitative researchers write all the way along, inscribing their understandings in field notes, interview questions, analytical memos, and finally in a text that tells the world about some aspect of the process” (Graue and Walsh 1998, 207). As a practical consideration, then, it is important for qualitative researchers to reflect on their capacity to represent the worlds of research subjects and, as a reference point, to include the voices of research subjects alongside their own voices.

The debates over theory and methods that generate the distance between hallmark positions in the social sciences – the scientist who performs laboratory experiments, the statistician that uses mathematical formulas and models to generate explanation, and the ethnographer that uses thick description of the lives of others, for three examples – can have the tendency of obscuring the legitimacy and value of hybrid approaches by valorising ideal-types. A finer scale examination of the same terrain reveals a surface convoluted by faulting, fragmentation, and slippages reflected in research practices that tend toward fluid recombination of philosophies, methodologies, and practical strategies. This fluidity is highly practical, especially for those who want to conduct research that can help point the way toward more effective social policies.

Neither qualitative description of the life experiences of independent children nor quantitative measurement of the social processes underlying the creation of the phenomenon of autonomous children is fully adequate if we seek to understand causes, adaptations, and potentially useful interventions. Therefore, social researchers have increasingly sought to integrate and combine methods in their research. Brannen (2005, 12-14) lists four functions of combining methods. These are:

- “- elaboration or expansion (‘the use of one type of data analysis adds to the understanding being gained by another’);
- initiation (‘the use of a first method sparks new hypotheses or research questions that can be pursued using a different method’);
- complementarity (‘together the data analyses from the two methods are juxtaposed and generate complementary insights that together create a bigger picture’);
- contradictions (‘simply juxtapose the contradictions for others to explore in further research’).”

Cope (2009) observes that there is nothing particularly new about this approach, except perhaps the naming and explicit reflexivity of multi-methods research. She argues that using multiple methods to collect and interpret data has a long tradition in many of the social sciences, but that “the ‘methods wars’ of the late twentieth century perhaps clouded our rear-view mirror and rigidly placed researchers on opposing sides of a qualitative/quantitative divide.” We are now at a point, she goes on to say, when quantitative methods have been reclaimed from an assumption of underlying positivism (Lawson and Staeheli 1990), and qualitative methods have been reclaimed from accusations of soft science and wishy-washy anecdotes (Baxter and Eyles 1997). Knigge and Cope (2006) argue that we are now poised to put into practice the potential of not only multiple methods, but mixed-methods, whereby the blending of research practices becomes iterative, reflexive, and integrated.

Mixed-methods, and also interdisciplinary and transnational research, are recognized as productive and practical means to generating breadth and depth in our understanding of complex social processes, such as those that generate and characterize occurrences of independent child migration.

“Social research today is highly diverse in nearly every respect, including methodology. Researchers in different social scientific disciplines and subdisciplines now study a myriad of research problems not only from a number of different theoretical perspectives but also with several quite different types of research methods. This diversity of methods implies rich opportunities for cross-validating and cross-fertilizing research procedures, findings, and theories. However, to exploit these opportunities, we must develop more cosmopolitan research strategies. What is needed are approaches that systematically explore the new avenues of research that methodological diversity affords.” (Brewer and Hunter 1989, 13)

Policy-oriented research on child migrants in developing regions needs to be human-centred while it seeks to guide policies and solve large-scale problems. Any single method has limited analytic power if used narrowly to illustrate or exemplify trends identified through other analyses. Toward that end, we argue that best use of human-centred data is achieved by employing qualitative methodologies to analyze and interpret qualitative data in ways that contextualize, specify, complement and also challenge the interpretation of quantitative research strategies. It is impossible to quantify everything that is important for human-centered research (for example, the experiential, embodied, and emotive qualities of human experience that contribute to the narrative quality of a child’s life).

Transnational research enables understanding of young people’s circumstances in different geographical contexts. Local changes associated with global economic restructuring, unemployment, global health risks, militarization and educational transformations have fundamentally altered how people negotiate “transitions to independence and adulthood” (Aitken 2001; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008). For example, several researchers note the erosion of adolescence for the poor in parts of Africa and Asia (Robson 2004b; Dolby and Rizvi 2008). Robson (2004b) shows that children in Zimbabwe looking after parents with HIV often sacrifice opportunities for education. Others suggest new forms of youth are being created in poorer parts of the world (Nieuwenhuys 2008; Dyson 2008). Mixed qualitative methods enable a better understanding of the nuances of these changes. For example, Dyson (2008) uses a combination of participatory, discourse and biographical methods to show that changes

in education and marital practices in a remote part of the Indian Himalayas resulted in the emergence of a new period of “youth” (jawaani) between childhood and the end of puberty.

This section has focused on the importance of understanding the epistemological and theoretical basis of qualitative research and how that relates to methodologies and the choice of a set of methods. Researchers need to carefully consider the worldviews that permeate their practices. As a reflexive practice, all stages of qualitative research question the relations between the researchers and the researched. Finally, it is important to realize the ways that research is an ongoing process that creates fluid interpretations, representations and meanings that are partial and contestable.

## **2.2. Ethics of Social Research: Rights, Representation, Reciprocation, and Participation**

The importance of research ethics is grounded in the understanding that research is a social process that cannot be artificially separated from the structures of the society it attempts to understand. This has at least two significant implications in terms of how the effects of research practice on people should be actively managed. First, research practice, as an activity carried out through direct or indirect engagement between individuals with identifiable rights, should be accountable to the same moral discourse according to which other social interactions are evaluated. Regardless of the potential value of the knowledge that may ultimately be produced through a project, researchers must find ways to carry out their fieldwork that neither violate the rights of research participants nor dismiss their responsibilities to others. These imperatives are always framed outside the research process, such as through laws, ethical codes, professional standards, and local customs, and cannot be reworked to suit the aims of a project. Second, the potential social impact of the knowledge produced through research is a feature of the research for which responsibility must be taken. In the case of social research, that responsibility is shared by researchers and other research participants, since both were involved in producing the knowledge. Yet it is the researcher who is in a position to frame and provide access to that knowledge.

Ethical awareness implies reflecting on our responsibilities to our participants and informants. Research ethics are raised in different contexts: institutional review boards, such as within universities; the consciences of individual researchers, groups of researchers, and the organizations they represent; and the realms of national and international law in which personal rights and protections are afforded to people. Within any of these contexts, sensitivities are heightened when research participants and/or subjects are part of a vulnerable population, including children living independently. Operationalizing ethical commitments requires researchers to explore and manage the relationship between themselves and the people from whom they are attempting to learn. Yet, even and perhaps especially when our research subjects are children, it is also important to maintain respect for the sovereignty and capabilities of the people who become research subjects and avoid disempowering them within the interaction. Ethical responsibilities relate also to providing young people with the opportunity to influence how they are represented.

In working with children living independently in developing countries, the task of balancing responsibility with respect is especially challenging. This research is cross-cultural, cross-

age, cross-class, and cross-gender, and each of those juxtapositions presents its own issues while also complicating the other factors. Iris Marion Young (1990) suggests that one important way researchers can approach and study a population such as this is by avoiding reifying categories of social and cultural difference that tend to oversimplify relationships between groups and overlook variations within groups. Although contemporary society is discursively committed to equality, at the ideological level injustices to those categorized as “other” are veiled in everyday habits and cultural meanings (Young 1990, 124). Side-stepping patterns, Young reformulates explicit axes of oppression such as racism, sexism, ageism and homophobia into five broader modalities of power; these she labels exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young 1990). By so doing, Young is attempting to move beyond neat categories of difference and singular alignments between, for example, oppressed and oppressor, child and adult. Young’s work reminds researchers to develop methodological strategies that can detect and generate empirical data on the processes through which vulnerabilities, disenfranchisement, and oppression are articulated in everyday life in order to avoid essentializing those conditions as characteristics of certain groups of people. Methodologically, each of Young’s five criteria of oppression can be operationalized; “each can be applied through the assessment of observable behaviour, status relationships, distributions, texts and other cultural artefacts” (Young 1990, 64).

The vulnerability of children increases through the cumulative effects of age, independence, and poverty. In many situations, researchers are in positions to prevent or reduce harm to children, and that reality must be addressed. That said, the worldview of researchers may be quite different from the young people they study. The application of concepts of development in cross-cultural research, for example, is generally problematic because “adolescent psychology is a Eurocentric enterprise.” (Nsamenang 2002, 61) Aitken and his colleagues (2008) show that child development and national economic development are often conflated in problematic ways. By living independently, children are autonomous in a very practical and immediate sense, so the meaning of their age may be further mediated. As a result, the use of age, or the overall framework of ‘child-development,’ as a guide in designing research methods may be of minimal value or actually undermine the ability to represent the experiences of independent children. Both social scientists and philosophers have argued that it is helpful to move away from a deficit model of childhood and toward a model of childhood that relates to but does not depend upon adulthood (Aitken and Herman 1997; Mathews 2000). This move has implications for the three contexts in which we will consider research ethics, below, and it also impacts the recommendations we make for appropriate research methods later in the paper.

Jo Boyden (2003, 21) is concerned about age-appropriate methods, and she is also concerned that other contexts, such as political upheaval and armed conflict, pose problematic methodological, theoretical and epistemological challenges for research on children. In the same way that a child development framework can lead to a deficit model of childhood, she argues that a focus on political violence can lead researchers to continue dominant discourses of “vulnerability, sickness, crisis, and loss” that negate children’s resilience and capacities. Boyden helpfully reconsiders research ethics and age-appropriate methods in her work with children affected by armed conflict, being careful to avoid the potential for empathy for children’s hardships to undermine her interest in helping support children in overcoming

difficult situations. She makes the case that standing on the side of children, rather than positioning oneself as the defender of children, is both more ethical and more methodologically pragmatic.

“The perception of the child as vulnerable victim may have powerful emotional appeal for adults, but can in many circumstances be quite detrimental to children since it renders them helpless and incompetent in the face of adult decisions and actions, many of which may not be in children's best interests. It also ignores the possibility that children may have insights and opinions about solutions to their problems that could be highly appropriate and valid.

Competence and acceptance are central features of wellbeing in children and adults alike, suggesting that insofar as policy purports to foster the interests of children who confront environmental adversities it should try whenever feasible to reinforce the active role of children in their family and community and in all decisions and processes affecting them.”

Research is a social process, and research ethics require consideration of the social contexts of children. Young people's vulnerabilities and their strengths, their dependencies and their independencies, are partly a function of their social reality and partly a function of their own characteristics. One purpose of research ethics is to ensure due care in not conflating the two. Another purpose of ethics is to raise awareness that the researcher's worldview – and the epistemological and theoretical basis of research methods – may not align well with the worldview of those being researched, and this is particularly the case with independent children.

### **2.2.1. Ethics in the Context of Institutional Review Boards**

Institutional Review Boards, or Committees on the Protection of Human Subjects, are bodies organized to assure that researchers engaging human subjects in their research comply with minimum ethical standards. Those ethical standards are established in law and elaborated upon by professional associations. They are intended to address “the conduct of researchers and their responsibilities and obligations to those involved in the research, including sponsors, the general public and most importantly, the subjects of the research” (O'Connell-Davidson and Layder 1994, 55).

The precedent for human subjects' protection is the Nuremberg Code (1947), which established new standards for medical ethics post World War II. This stipulated ten standards to which physicians must conform when carrying out experiments on human subjects. Amongst other requirements is that of *voluntary informed consent* of the subject, which protects the right of the individual to control his or her own body. This code also recognizes that the risk of negative outcomes for the individual subject must be weighed against the expected benefit for society, and that unnecessary pain and suffering must be avoided (Ensign 2003; Nuremberg 1947).

Subsequent to the Nuremberg Code, national law further developed safeguards for human subjects. The United States government, for example, established the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research, whose members wrote the Belmont Report in 1979 (Sugarman et al. 1998).

“The Commission looked for commonalities among competing ethical theories and distilled three ‘basic principles’ from these: (1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence and (3) justice.



Furthermore, they established that these three basic ethical principles were co-equal in importance, purposefully avoiding hierarchical ranking or establishment of one overarching ethical principle for guiding research (Levine 1986).” (Ensign 2003, 44)

International codes of professional practice expanded the types of research to which human subjects’ safeguards were applied, and clarified the ways in which researchers should apply the three basic principles present in the Nuremberg Code (Reynolds 1982).

University-based ethical guidelines, as applied by Institutional Review Boards (IRB), reflect key concerns around which institutions have been compelled to interject standards and a review mechanism that are meant to ensure protection of human subjects. Social and policy-based research, non-experimental research, and qualitative inquiry raised challenges for IRBs because the basis for modern research ethics evolved in biomedical research. For example, it is often difficult to stipulate for an IRB precisely what will occur during ethnographic research. Given the fluid nature of qualitative research, it is impossible to anticipate all eventualities. In one case a researcher wanted to provide disposable cameras to low-income immigrant children so they could photograph their day, and a diary to record their time use. The university IRB required a full protocol because the research involved children, but ultimately did not approve the study. They argued the researcher did not specify protocols if a photograph emerged suggesting child abuse, or time budget diaries emerged on undocumented immigrants – either of which would have triggered a legal requirement to involve the authorities.

The application of IRB guidelines to transnational research with non-adult research participants raises significant difficulties. For example, work by one of us on child labour in Tijuana required IRB approval from two institutions, one in the United States and one in Mexico (Aitken et al., 2006; Jennings et al. 2006; Aitken 2008). Both institutions raised concerns about what would happen when researchers spent complete days with the young people to get a sense of the complexity of their daily round. How would the children be treated? What specific questions would be asked? How would the researchers deal with a situation where an adult manager was abusing a young worker? One institution required written consent from parents, children, and the children’s employers while the other required only written consent from the parents and verbal consent from the children. IRB approval was granted when the researchers provided a detailed protocol that itemized daily activities – including modes of transportation from one place to another – and created a detailed sequence of possible questions that would be asked of the children both at work and in later focus groups. In addition, they agreed to report all instances of potential abuse by employers to the local social welfare office at which point the employers dropped their support for the project.

### **Respect for persons: privacy and confidentiality**

Respect for persons requires researchers to assure privacy and confidentiality for research participants. This standard reflects the responsibility of the researcher to protect and control access to information collected and to maintain anonymity of participants, where appropriate: “In qualitative research, breach of confidentiality and the resultant invasion of privacy are usually the greatest risks of harm” (Ensign 2003, 47).

For research participants who are legally defined as dependent (e.g., minors), the issues of confidentiality is complicated and potentially undermined by adult guardianship and, in the absence of guardianship, adult authority. The legal framework of adult responsibility for children denies children agency within research projects at the cost of affording protection. Independent youths may be engaged in risky and/or illegal activities, and even if this is not the focus of the research, it is important to plan for such possibilities and to clearly inform potential participants on what disclosures may be deemed necessary and how to respond to information revealed during the course of research. The issue of confidentiality among other research participants and potential participants is also potentially problematic.

Young people may lack the wisdom to understand the ramifications of what they reveal about themselves in focus groups or other group settings (Leadbeater 2002). For example, when young children hear that they may appear in a publication they often do not want to appear as a pseudonym. In one example described by Aitken (2001), a boy felt that his appearance in a publication would make him “world famous” and he wanted his real name used. Even after the reasons for a pseudonym were explained to him, the young informant was adamant that he appear in the publication, but the IRB approval would have been withdrawn without the use of a pseudonym. He was delighted when, with the permission of his parents (and their and his written consent), his photograph appeared in related publication.

### **Beneficence: recognizing harm**

The third principle of research ethics, beneficence, regards the avoidance of harm and the mitigation of the potential for participants and researchers to be harmed by research. More often than not, beneficence is broadened to include the concept of non-maleficence or avoiding harm. This latter contingency removes the researcher from a position of indifference in the face of obvious harm.

Respectively, beneficence and non-maleficence mean ‘doing good’ and ‘avoiding harm’ to the extent that a research maximizes benefits for participants and minimizes physical, emotional, economic and environmental harms or discomforts. Having moved on from its conceptualization in the Nuremberg Code, harm is now understood as potentially physical, social, psychological, or even political, and this means the commitment to minimize harm also permeated the mandates for informed consent and confidentiality. The appropriation of people’s life stories for consumption as academic knowledge requires a delicate balance: “Good qualitative data are distinguished by their ‘richness’ or ‘thickness’. These same qualities that can give a feeling of getting to know people’s lives can also be used to sensationalize the results; readers and researchers begin to look more like academic voyeurs than compassionate and responsible adults” (Ensign 2003, 48).

### **Justice: informed consent**

The principle of justice in research translates practically into the need for informed consent. Researchers are responsible for disclosure of research purpose, themes, and expectations of participants, and participants explicitly agree to participate in research. According to a strict interpretation of the standards of the Nuremberg Code requiring informed consent of all research participants, children and adolescents would be excluded from research as they

usually cannot give fully informed consent. This is due to their perceived and actual reduced capacity to understand the consequences of actions, including participation in research activities. One problem is that there is no universally accepted age definition of adolescence or of the age of majority and ability to give consent, and cross-cultural research may bridge across societies in which concepts of childhood and adult responsibility vary greatly. Ensign (2003, 45) provides an overview of perspectives on the capacity of children and adolescents to provide consent.

“Typically in more developed countries the legal age of consent (and beginning of adulthood) is 18–21 years of age, and those younger than that require parental consent for most medical care and participation in research. However, in countries such as the US, adolescents over 14 years of age can give legal consent for certain kinds of health care, such as for reproductive and mental health, and this ability to give consent for medical care is often used as a precedence for their ability to give consent for participation in certain types of research. Although varying according to individual state law, some young people in the US are considered ‘emancipated’ or ‘mature’ minors (such as parenting or married teenagers, or those financially independent of their parents), and can give consent for all of their own medical care and research (Rew et al. 2000). In the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, a similar principle is called the ‘Gillick competence’, and refers to the perception by health care professionals that an adolescent is deemed of sufficient maturity and understanding to consent for medical care or research (Council 2002; NHMRC 2002).

Empirical evidence indicates that by the age of 14, most adolescents are as capable as adults of making competent decisions about participation in research (Levine 1995; Petersen and Leffert 1995). Adolescent development experts observe that young people who are under extreme stress at the time of the research may have more difficulty giving truly informed consent, but this is also true for adults (Petersen and Leffert 1995). At the same time, they acknowledge that experience with difficult life situations can help adolescents have greater life wisdom and earlier capacity to give informed consent. Some researchers on adolescence and advocates have noted that we know relatively little about the effects of research participation on this group, or about their perceptions and experiences as research participants (Hoagwood et al. 1996; Fisher and Wallace 2000).”

During the child labor research in Tijuana, researchers were confronted with children as young as eleven years of age who took financial responsibility for their families. In the work program under study a male or female child could earn up to \$80 a week working part-time, while a single mother working full-time in a maquiladora earned only \$65. This not only changed the economic dynamics of the family, it created interesting issues that related to the ways the eleven year-old’s competency might be assessed. Adult-child interdependencies were reshaped within families in ways that tended to equalize standing, yet the ethical responsibilities of researchers were still defined

In a quite different situation, Dyson (2008) notes a gendered complexity: boys in the village she studied in the Indian Himalayas were defined as adults when they gained financial independence from parents or senior mentors, whereas girls attained adulthood through the establishment of a long-term partnership (typically through marriage). Boyden (2003, 8-9) further elaborates on ways in which social constructions of childhood are gendered, activity-related, context specific, negotiated, and contested.

“For example, in Bangladesh an individual who goes to school and has no economic or social responsibilities may be termed a “child” (shishu) up to the age of puberty, whereas a boy or girl who works will no longer be referred to as shishu even at age six (Blanchet 1996). Such distinctions radically affect the way children experience childhood. Thus, in many contexts gender differentiation brings childhood to an end for girls far sooner than for boys. In some settings childhood is a contested category. Hence, during the various apartheid regimes in South Africa, young political activists were defined by the authorities as “youth” to establish their legal culpability, while the activists referred to themselves as “children” in order to avoid adult penalties (Comaroff 2000).”

These three criteria for research ethics – privacy and confidentiality, beneficence, and informed consent – provide guidelines for Institutional Review Boards but they do not fully address the complex sets of relations that are part of research practice.

### **2.2.2. Going Beyond Research Ethics to Ethical Engagement**

While it is imperative that researchers adequately adhere to the basic principles of research ethics observed by institutions, reciprocal research relations are put forward as a goal for those conducting research. This means that the overall interaction between researchers and their research participants should be understood by both as a beneficial experience. The interests of researchers should not be valued above the interests and concerns of their research subjects/participants, and this challenges the notion of the autonomous subject – or the possibility that there are objective and independent relations that are worthy of qualitative study – as well as the detached scientist whose only purpose in the field is to collect data.

In the case of children and adolescents, the commitment of researchers to mitigate potentially harmful affects of research participation requires constructing and operationalizing the concept of a child as a legal subject. In the Western developed world, law tends toward liberal and neo-liberal notions of people as autonomous, rational, self-interested and responsible. The law then focuses primarily on the subject’s rights and freedoms and takes no direct account of dependencies and welfare (Diduck 1999).

Rights-based liberal and neo-liberal agendas tend not to deal well with relations and the family and/or community contexts of lived experiences that are part of most young people’s lives. A re-conception of legal justice that attends to subjects’ dependence and independence can deepen the extent to which ethics are incorporated into qualitative research and also move away from a deficit-based concept of child subjects (Matthews 2006). The notion of individuals as both dependent and independent, as both autonomous subjects and relational beings, as complexly woven within the social and cultural fabric of society, is developed through feminist- and difference-based justice (Flax 1990; Moosa-Mitha 2005).

“[A] reconception of the legal subject that takes account of its connections to others and to its situation, and a reconception of justice that recognizes the conditions and relationships of connection may seem to be a violation of those very liberal principles of equality and universality upon which Western law is based. For able-bodied adult males, whose subjectivity rests comfortably within the liberal autonomous tradition, it may cause particular problems. For others, however, particularly for children, the problems may be fewer. It may be easier to incorporate a reconstituted child subject into an integrated notion of legal justice. Children’s

subjectivity, while seemingly and traditionally fixed within the moral realm of dependence and connection, is currently facing a ‘crisis’ which has not directly confronted adult subjectivity.” (Diduck 1999, 121-122)

Feminist inspired difference-centred theorists analyze justice and equality through subjective experiences rather than objective notions of rationality and reason. A research ethic focused on difference is less likely to smooth out the diversities that comprise the complexities of young people’s lives in the search for objectively defined generalities. Further, freedom and justice in difference-centred theories and methodologies is understood as the right to participate differently. Lack of freedom is defined in terms of a lack of recognition of young people’s participation and contribution. Put another way, Moosa-Mitha (2005) redefines children’s rights in a relational way, by examining if children are able to have a presence in the many relationships within which they participate. By presence, she means the degree to which the “voice, contribution and agency of the child is acknowledged” (Moosa-Mitha 2005, 381). A research ethic derived from this perspective would value the presence of young people as much as their active participation -- indeed, not to acknowledge the mere presence of a particular group is seen as a form of oppression.

The reformulated moral and legal ground that Moosa-Mitha and Diduck describe leads us to prefer a transactional understanding of ethics – defined by our direct engagements with other people rather than our representations of them – that values the fluidity of research practice and calls for a focus on difference as well as reciprocal research relations between young people and researchers.

In pursuing protections for young, independent research subjects, it is important to avoid what Howitt and Stevens (2000) call ‘deep colonizing,’ or the disempowering of subjects within research. This calls for research that fosters self-determination and cultural affirmation, nurtures relationships that allow research subjects openly to voice concerns and other feedback, develops collaborative research or contributes to indigenous research projects, and seeks local authorization for research as part of shared ownership. Awareness of the significance of scale in relation to cross-cultural studies requires an understanding of how points of entry into a research settings (for example, through international, national, or regional organizations or through local communities) can shape a researcher’s sense of their own position within the research setting and the way they see the local environment as being constructed (always at a range of scales, but possibly more or less apprehended). It is important to examine not only the way scalar relationships (global, national, local, household) organize the flow of goods, capital, and people but also “the scalar arrangements governing the development of social infrastructure and the way these intersect with the ‘small worlds’ of neighbourhood and household” (Mahon 2006, 458).

### **2.2.3. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Qualitative Research Practice**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets rights and core principles for the support and protection of children: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. It is therefore helpful to review the literature concerned with how the UNCRC plays out in qualitative research practice, and understand its relevance for studying children living independently in developing countries. This understanding is formed by an analysis and critique of the UNCRC, with attention to ‘children’s participation’ and ‘research ethics’.

The UNCRC is celebrated as a significant achievement in establishing the rights of the child and their status as social agents at an international level (Archard 1993, Bourdillon 2004, Freeman 2007, Reynolds et al. 2006, James et al. 1998). It is also commended for leading the way in changing how children and childhood are conceptualized (Panter-Brick 2002). This suggests it can be a resource for those conducting research with children.

Yet the UNCRC is not without critics. The UNCRC is commonly critiqued for being a Western construct (Mayall 2000, Pupavac 2001, Reynolds et al. 2006, White 2002a, Young and Barrett 2001) perceived to have universalizing tendencies based on abstract notions of what constitutes a good and 'normal' childhood for all children. One view is that the UNCRC is a form of "cultural imperialism" (White 2002a, 727) pathologizing the developing world (Pupavac 2001, 101). Skelton (2008b, 165) notes that the UNCRC introduced participation as a third P alongside provision and protection in understanding children's lives. Participation is identified as a meaningful facet of social development.

There is nonetheless a potential for the positive aspects of children's lives to be disregarded by researchers and policy makers because they do not fit the ideals of what is 'normal' and 'good' for a child (Reynolds et al. 2006, 292). In addition, it is important to keep a critical eye on what participation is and whom it is for. Thus, the UNCRC also poses a challenge for those researchers who wish to understand the diversity and reality of children's lives in the children's own terms. The UNCRC is simultaneously a framework for recognizing the agency and status of individual children and a framework for universalizing a particular image and experience of childhood.

Researchers like Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) and Reynolds et al. (2006) suggest that the UNCRC can be interpreted and operationalized in ways that sidestep the ongoing debates about its applicability and relevance at the local scale in developing countries. The former argue that the most conducive way of interpreting the UNCRC is "as a social and political platform that creates space for 'meaning making', with parents and children, and with regard to the societal context" (Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2007, 441). The UNCRC is not viewed as simply giving children a set of rights that can be operationalized in a neutral and standardized manner. Instead the UNCRC is seen as a tool that allows for the realization of children's rights in different ways.

Reynolds et al. (2006) also call for a "non-essentialist" approach to children's rights. Rather than viewing rights as instrumental tools and looking at the extent to which rights are being realized, they promote a more complex approach. Such an approach would allow for the contradictions inherent in a rights discourse, such as the way it was used to evoke support for competing sides of the child labour debate, to be accepted (Reynolds et al. 2006, 294). This kind of approach considers rights to be produced and reproduced in everyday practice, where the meaning of 'rights' is open to change (Reynolds et al. 2006, 299). This means that any claims about 'rights' and good/bad childhoods need to be very carefully made when operationalizing the UNCRC in research practice. Reynolds et al. (2006, 299-300) suggest that a research agenda, using anthropological tools, can "help support a vision of children's rights as a living practice" and be open to difference. This approach can be challenging for researchers as it may serve to contradict the agendas of well-intentioned NGOs (Reynolds et

al. 2006) and unsettle the fundamental moral base of a researcher's world view (Montgomery 2007).

Whether research works with the traditional view of children's rights as universal, transferable and borderless, or adopts a less essentialist, more flexible and localized approach, researchers need to be aware and be transparent about the assumptions that underlie their views of 'children's rights' and of 'childhood'. This can help ensure that assumptions are not uncritically assimilated into the research design and process. Skelton (2008b) for example, raises the issue of researchers being wary of what they call 'participation', arguing that studies must talk about of what is "meaningful, genuine and authentic participation" rather than "manipulation, exploitation or tokenism."

Putting the UNCRC into practice is also complicated because of "problems of operational definition" due to the ambiguity of many of the core terms (Saks 1996). Whilst this ambiguity (or flexibility) perhaps exists for a good reason (to avoid being exclusionary, overly deterministic and allow for alternative interpretations), the ambiguity creates a challenge for those researching its implementation (Saks 1996) and presumably also those trying to implement it in research practice.

Putting to one side, but remaining sensitive to, concerns about the Western and universalizing nature of the UNCRC, what are potential and challenges of the putting the principles of the UNCRC into research practice? The UNCRC is commonly perceived as having three main principles; the right of the child to protection, provision and participation (Alderson 2000a). These principles are suggested to present "a confusing and not altogether coherent mix of ideas" (James et al. 1998, 6) that indicates researchers need to consider how to hold together these tensions in some way. Qualitative researchers seeking to involve children in telling their own stories must develop practices that are engaging enough to promote participation and also manageable enough to allow the researcher exercise responsibility for reasonably protecting research participants from anticipated and unanticipated dangers. Cohen and Naimark (1991, 63) consider the significance of the UNCRC for social scientific research practice, highlighting the issue of balancing the right of the child to protection with the right of the child to participation and autonomy:

"The Convention [UNCRC] is designed to set minimal standards regarding the rights of every child. Social scientists can adhere as closely as possible to particular standards applicable to their area of professional expertise and practice. This means that social scientists should regularly take into consideration the delicate balance between protection/nurturance rights and participation/self-determination rights of children as implied in the Convention."

Careful attention needs to be given to how these, potentially conflicting, principles are operationalized as adults tend to be more comfortable promoting protection and provision over participation (Panter-Brick 2002) especially as the principles of protecting children involve elements of control that might undermine children's participation rights (Mayall 2000).

Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) suggest that in developing worlds protection rights are even more likely to be emphasized. This construction of 'the developing world child' as vulnerable, in need of protection and expert intervention is questionable in situations where

children have been actively engaged developing a future for themselves and/or their family (Reynolds et al. 2006, 292) such as children living independently of adults.

Hashim (2006, 29), for example, notes that movement of children away from their families is often seen as a reflection of a pathological situation such as a rupture in family relations: “Children’s migration may indeed signal a breakdown of the inter-generational contract indicating that parents or guardians are not caring adequately for their children within locally specific norms ... or alternatively that children want to break the bonds of their responsibility to their seniors.” But she goes on to point out that significant rupture of family relations must be established empirically and cannot be assumed. It may also be that children, faced with a variety of options on how to use their time, may chose migration over schooling and village-based agricultural work.

Punch (2001b), identifies this choice amongst young people in Bolivia who move to Argentina for work and she points out further that information on migration possibilities come from older siblings rather than adults. Of course, while migration may enable young people access to opportunities they might not otherwise realize, they also may put themselves at risk or have their desire to pursue opportunities preyed upon by others. Whereas Punch found that child migrants from Bolivia generally fared well, Hashim found child migrants in Ghana who were maltreated and poorly paid. Moreover, Hashim (2006, 30) makes the important point that children’s own positive views about their experiences need to be set in the context of extreme poverty: “They tell us only what people choose given their circumstances, not what they would choose given alternatives.”

The ‘best interest’ of the child (article 3) is considered to be the primary consideration when putting the UNCRC into practice. Who decides what is in the ‘best interest’ of the child creates a challenge for those wishing to conduct direct research with children. Whilst, the child is firmly positioned as the holder of individual rights in the UNCRC (Cohen and Naimark 1991) the autonomy of the child is repeatedly moderated, not least through notions of ‘developmentalism’, such as the ‘evolving capacities of the child’ (Alderson 2000a). A bio-psychological developmentalism related to ages and stages of competencies is engrained in the thinking, and in fact the economic and social policies, of Western society (Mayall 2000).

The UNCRC states the level of maturity and development of the child need to be taken account when giving attention to their perspective. Making rights contingent upon capacity is argued by Panter-Brick (2002) to be problematic. This is because it is adults who judge the competency of children and perhaps do so from their own worldview, rather than the child’s viewpoint. Thus, if the child’s perception of what is in his/her best interest clashes with what the adult views as in the child’s best interest, there is always potential for the child to be deemed too immature to know what is in his/her best interests, and the child’s ‘bad’ choice taken as ‘proof’ of this. There exists an “ambivalence about agency” in the UNCRC (White 2002b, 1101), where the child has rights and is seen as a competent subject, yet has need for external advocacy thus undermining his/her competency (Panter-Brick 2002; Pupavac 2001; White 2002b).



Reynolds et al. (2006) and Panter-Brick (2002) consider the challenges when the child's right to choose and their own priorities clash with what others perceive to be in their 'best interests.' They draw on examples where a child chooses (in response to their circumstances) to live on the streets, live with peers rather than with a family, to participate in armed conflict, to turn to sex work, to demonstrate how a child's choices can be rational while at the same time conflicting with adults' prevailing conceptions of his/her best interests (Panter-Brick 2002; Reynolds et al. 2006).

In researching child prostitutes in Thailand, Montgomery (2007) asks how a child-centered research strategy should deal with witnessing extreme exploitation of children and its interpretation from children's perspectives. She notes ethical guidelines when researching with children emphasize the moral obligation of researchers to protect children at risk, even if this means losing access and trust. Whilst agreeing with this in principle, Montgomery (2007) argues that it is not all that helpful in practice when the researcher's moral obligation is unclear in the context of the children's lives and the resources and support available post-intervention.

Reflecting this, Powell and Smith (2006) point out that there is a need for more guidance on how to deal with the tension between participation rights of children and their right to protection. Whilst attention is given in the methods literature on ethics on protocol, such as getting access and consent strategies, less has been given to the everyday negotiation of ethics in research practice (Powell and Smith 2006). In other words, researchers need to be prepared to make moral judgments in the field and to be able to justify any trade-offs between the right of the child to self-determination and the right of the child to protection.

Freeman's (2007) discussion of what to do when a child's right to autonomy in the short term may reduce their potential for long term autonomy implies that a researcher committed to a qualitative methodology that aims to understand children's perspectives can help with this dilemma. In discussing the example of the right of the child to refuse medical treatment, he states:

"There is not a simple answer to this, or a simple solution. However, there undoubtedly needs to be less emphasis on what these young persons know—less talk in other words of knowledge and understanding— and more on how the decision they have reached furthers their goals and coheres with their system of values." (Freeman 2007, 15).

Rather than drawing a bright line between ethical and unethical research practices with regard to children, the UNCRC locates axes along which a child's rights are defined and urges researchers, among others, to account for the impacts of their own choices. The relations between the UNCRC and research practice are therefore dynamic, and the nineteen years since the convention established elements of a rights-based approach to children have raised a number of important questions. These questions focus on how to respect children's rights holistically by first assessing the balance of protection/ nurturance and participation/self-determination appropriate for each research setting and then successfully managing the research process to maintain that balance. Where a particular child's right to autonomy ends and an adult's responsibility for providing protection begins will always be debatable among researchers looking to follow the guidelines provided therein, yet the UNCRC provides

useful frames within which deliberations can be carried out and thereby has an undeniable influence in creating more ethical research practices.

#### **2.2.4. Participatory research: benefits and challenges**

A rights-based methodology can be aligned with the approaches to children and childhood in the new social studies of childhood (see James et al. 1998). In these approaches, children's participation is centralized, as they are recognized as capable, social agents. Researching children this way is considered to be an ethical strategy (Panter-Brick 2002). As Pain and Francis (2003) point out, terms like 'participation' and 'participatory research' have power in creating an image of the research as more respectful of rights and ethical, even if this not actually the case. The child's views and their experiences have not always been centralized in development practice (Bourdillon 2004; Edwards 1996), and it is especially pertinent that 'children's participation' is considered and effected in research.

Qualitative methodologies offer the possibility of participants contributing directly to the research process rather than simply being an object of study (Cousins and Milner 2007; Grover 2004). Grover (2004) argues that qualitative methodologies should not displace quantitative methodologies but that qualitative methodologies are needed to understand people's lived experiences, to provide the stories behind the statistical patterns. Children's participation can take many forms and operate at different levels in this research process, from children participating as research informants to children participating as researchers. Article 12 of the UNCRC, children's right to have their opinions heard and taken seriously about issues concerning them, can provide the backbone to 'ethical' research strategies. Key issues surrounding children's participation in research and the forms this may take in qualitative research practice are now considered.

White (2002c) argues that operationalizing children's 'participation rights' as part of a research strategy is not a neutral process. She suggests there is a need to consider the 'politics of participation': the efficacy of participation, tokenism, and the dangers of co-option, manipulation and misrepresentation and the costs of participation. There is also the problem of raising expectations, and researchers need to be very clear about their agenda and the possibility or not of children's views being acted upon.

For children to be able to participate in research it might be necessary to develop different non-adult centred methods. John (2007, 159) suggests there is a need for "age-appropriate" methods that "empower children" and lead to "valid child-led data". However, it is questionable whether research with children is fundamentally different to research with adults. There is much diversity amongst children, and many, though not all, child-friendly methodologies could equally be used with adults. Punch (2002) argues that where the differences do exist these are produced by the way adults conceptualize children and children's disempowered position in society rather than from some fundamental difference between adults and children.

In some ways 'user-friendly' research might be a more useful way to think about a rights-based approach, rather than child-friendly or child-centred research which might be based on assumptions about the nature of children and childhood. This would recognize the particular

competencies and context of the lives of those included in the research, and look for methods that reflect the way they experience and communicate with their worlds, ultimately reflecting the method of communication the participant is most comfortable with (Cousins and Milner 2007). As a sub-set of user-friendly research, child-friendly methodologies focus critically on child contexts and relations.

Further, there is a need to understand whether it makes sense – and what methods might help it make sense – to ask children certain kinds of questions and not others. For example, there are clearly times when children should be asked questions that they themselves may not value – such as their expectations about the future – but which have strong policy-relevance. With regard to the research of Hashim and Punch discussed above, it might be appropriate to ask young people of different ages questions about the trade-offs between migration risks versus economic gain or expectations of increased cultural and social capital. Children may not sense the relevance of intervention from state institutions and NGOs but it is nonetheless sometimes fruitful to question them about the ways these institutions impact their lives. Child-friendly methodologies are not focused solely on what may be meaningful to a child participant, but what is meaningful to larger contexts of children’s lives.

For meaningful children’s participation it may be necessary to first act upon protection and provision rights, as Mayall (2000, 48) suggests:

“in order to honour children’s participations rights we [adults] must establish the conditions in which they can be honoured. That is, we adults have to carry out the work of protecting children and providing for them so that they have a securely based arena within which they may participate in working through issues that affect them.”

This means imagining and creating a research situation that facilitates children’s participation in research in a way that does not expose them to risks or disempower them, in other words conducting ‘ethical’ research. Researchers need to be aware when they are asking children to participate and express a view on something which involves reflecting on traumatic experiences, such as reasons for their independent migration (Hopkins and Hill 2008). Recalling such experiences in a research context might be something that a child participant can handle with appropriate preparation and support on the part of the researcher.

Alderson and Morrow (2004) provide practical guidance in ethical issues in designing and conducting research with children, including consent, confidentiality and payment. They suggest questions for researchers to attend to when planning research, and consider the different possibilities without providing a blue print on how ‘to do’ ethical research. For example, in assessing the risks and benefits of a project, should these be assessed only in relation to the participants or should the hoped for benefits for the wider population of children be added into the equation? How are the wider benefits measured? What are the experiences, interests and values of the children under study and how do they differ from the researcher’s? Each question is intended to promote reflection on different aspects of children’s rights in the context of the proposed research. As Sime (2008, 76) points out not all ethical dilemmas can be planned for beforehand and researchers need to be able to make ethical decisions during data collection, and this may include “spontaneous alterations” to the research design. There also needs to be a genuine consideration of who the ethical frameworks are actually protecting. Skelton (2008a) suggests that sometimes the protection is

more about protecting the researcher and the research institution than protecting the child, and in the process may exclude children from expressing their views.

Involving children as direct participants is considered to raise the 'ethical acceptability' of research but this approach raises a new set of ethical concerns: disparities in power between adults and children (Panter-Brick 2002; Powell and Smith 2006; Thomas and O'Kane 1998; Sime 2008). These concerns are attended to somewhat in discussions of 'participatory methodologies', which goes beyond 'user-friendly' techniques, and aims to give control of the research process to children. Pain and Francis (2003) conceptualize a participatory methodology as empowering and facilitating of a process of change or emancipation with research participants. They caution against the uncritical use of the terms 'participation' and 'participatory research', terms which are prominent within research and policy rhetoric (Pain and Francis 2003). For research to be genuinely participatory it should not be hierarchical, rushed or 'extractive' (Pain and Francis 2003). Conducting research within the 'participatory' or 'action research' paradigm can raise particular problems when the research involves children:

“Any attempt at doing PAR [Participatory Action Research] with children confronts even the most unassuming researcher with major dilemmas: first, the need for the researcher to take responsibility for the children who are the intended actors in research; second, his/her ambivalent role as a mediator on whose motivation and skills children's participation depends; and third, the necessity to negotiate the needs of children whom society perceives as deviant” (Nieuwenhuys 1997, 238)

Nieuwenhuys (1997) provides examples of how these dilemmas can play out differently. She suggests that rather than operationalizing PAR as a fast and cheap means of doing research and change (where it can then also be a quick and dirty method used to control children and obtain sensitive and dangerous data from them) it should be used as an empowering process. This will involve a greater investment of time and the creation of a space where the status quo can be challenged at a local level (Nieuwenhuys 1997). It is also necessary to be aware that a participatory approach however well intentioned and planned can have unintended consequences that serve to undermine the principles of empowerment and emancipation, 'worsening' the situation of the participants (Pain and Francis 2003).

Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest it is important to offer children a choice throughout the research process including whether they want to take part, how to take part, when and where to take part and how to be open to the children's agenda as well as the researcher's agenda. They advise having a range of participatory tools that children can choose whether or not to engage with during individual sessions. In UK research, they ran 'activity days' of 'serious fun', which provided space to address research questions, and play and relax in a group. The children were paid for their participation. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) involved the children in the analysis and interpretation of the data, which they found required a reflexive and flexible approach from the researchers.

Petrie et al (2006) approached participation differently, opting for a youth advisory group to be involved throughout the research process. They point out that in research involving multiple sites that a youth advisory group is a means of giving control and power to some young people when it may not be possible to include all the young research informants in this

way. Pain and Francis (2003) also suggest a steering group can be useful when there are not existing structures to facilitate the participatory research process.

Taking a more radical approach Alderson (2000b), Kellett (2005) and Bourdillon (2004) discuss the concept and practicalities of involving children in the research process as researchers. Alderson (2000b) sees the potential for greater and effective involvement of children as producers of research studies. She discusses a range of 'positive' examples of involving children as researchers, which vary in the type of research, the age of the children and the context (both developed and developing worlds). Alderson (2000b, 252) highlights some practical problems of involving children as researchers, such as how much of children's time can be demanded, whether they should be paid and the problems of power, exploitation and coercion.

Kellett (2005) wrote a substantive review on the concept of children as researchers. She argues that the UNCRC and the recognition of the participation rights of children has led to more active participation of children in research, but that many participatory approaches are still adults-centric, as they are designed and led by adults. Kellett argues that children are equally capable of conducting research, once they have learnt research skills like any other aspiring researcher, and that they can do research in ways that adults cannot and thus provide alternative insights. In the developing world context, Bourdillon (2004) uses a number of examples to demonstrate how involving children (with the right support and encouragement) as collaborators in the research process can provide unexpected findings that were also helpful to the children's situation. Bourdillon (2004) does issue a warning against children simply becoming cheap and exploited research assistants, suggesting there need to be fair and ethical benefits for their involvement. He also stresses that whilst children's views are important they need to be balanced with 'expert' knowledge, reflecting the ongoing need to find a balance between local and expert knowledge in any development practice (Bourdillon 2004).

The UNCRC is part of a significant shift in thinking about children, young people and childhood. In particular, by adding a concern for child participation as well as concerns for provision and protection it moves thinking about children as autonomous in their thinking and practice. In combination with larger concerns about research ethics, ideas propelled by the UNCRC set the stage for a more specific look at qualitative methodologies and how they are practiced within the context of studies aiming to illuminate and understand the agency of children. The major focus of the literature review in the next section is on methodological strategies used in studies with children who, by migrating and/or living on the street independently, are taking on substantial responsibility for their day-to-day protection and well-being as well as their futures. These circumstances are defined by the extreme degree of children's reliance on their own agency, yet there is wide applicability of the discussion of methods to situations in which children retain more traditional connections to a home and adult care giving and practice their independence more subtly.

### **3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PRACTICE: MODELS AND EXAMPLES FROM THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this section is to define and illustrate models for conducting qualitative research that may be useful in studying independent migrant children in developing world contexts. We begin by surveying the literature, first to pull out topical connections relevant to the population and phenomenon of interest. We then survey the methodological approaches that are prominent within the literature on autonomous children in developing regions as well as related topics identified in the initial discussion. While not intended to provide the detail necessary to support replication of methods, this broad discussion is meant to illustrate the ways in which researchers ground and interconnect the methods they use to gain insight and establish confidence in their findings.

The bulk of this section of the paper is devoted to detailed descriptions of the methods. These examples from the literature provide models for research practice and are used to make recommendations regarding the best qualitative research strategies for engaging and learning about independent children and adolescents who have migrated, children and families in migrant sending areas, and the people who interact with child migrants in destination regions. While often mixed in research practice, our discussion groups methods according to commonly used categories (interviews, focus groups, life histories and biographical methods, etc.) in order to facilitate consideration of the opportunities and challenges of different methods.

#### **3.1 Identifying Relevant Literature**

##### **3.1.1 Migration literature**

While often driven by economic motives, many factors play into migration. Feminist and post-colonial research has shown that focus on the perspectives of migrants and household dynamics raises new questions about who migrates and why. They reveal that household power dynamics are not neutral and are guided by dominant representations of family, morality, sexuality, and domestic harmony (see Silvey and Lawson 1999). For some, migration must also be noted as a means to accumulation, driven by conspicuous consumption and status. Remittances sent home by migrant workers help transform the countryside through new forms of architecture and changing patterns of land ownership (Bebbington 2000; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1994). Violence and political oppression can also be important factors in generating migration responses and, in particular, those that involve children (Cheney 2005; Peters 2006). This more complex theoretical framework increasingly emphasizes the value of ethnographic methods for migration research (see, for example, Findlay and Li, 1997; Gutting, 1996; Lawson, 2000; Potts, 1995).

Rural-to-urban migration in developing regions is a long-standing pattern (see Larson and Harris 1995; Powers 1995). Colloredo-Mansfeld (2003) explores how indigenous Tiguans live a composite of rural and urban lives. By focusing on Tiguans who have moved to Quito, he reveals how “[l]iving in cities, indigenous people interact repeatedly within their communities and outside of them in fluid ways less tied to categorical divisions of place and

people” (276). Part of his research focuses on the preoccupations of adolescent boys, sons of the pioneering generation of migrants. By examining their place-making activities that pattern social and ethnic relations, he reveals their restless mobility. Years of moving around due to concerns over education, crime, or proximity to fellow Tiguans have attenuated youth’s geographic loyalties; they are caught between the rural and the urban, unsure where they belong.

Through a study in rural Bolivia, Punch (2002) examines how children and youth negotiate school-to-work transitions. She explores how various factors including limited economic resources, perceived value of education, parental attitudes, gender, birth order, social networks, and peers affect children’s decisions to migrate for educational or work opportunities. She concludes that potential work opportunities in urban Bolivia or Argentina often persuade youth to migrate, since work enhances both economic and social capital. Punch stresses that despite various structural constraints, rural young people are still able to assert some level of agency over the choices they make.

In the Philippines, Camacho (1999) also stresses children’s agency in migration decisions. Camacho reveals that child domestic workers in Metro Manila are the primary decision-makers in their personal migration. Although they consult with their families, these girls choose to leave their communities. Camacho notes that their moves to the city may be perceived as less risky due to well-established social networks of domestic workers in Metro Manila.

Onta-Bhatta (1997) investigates children’s rural-to-urban journeys to the streets of Nepal. She emphasizes the importance of studying rural-to-urban migration in the multiple contexts of capitalist penetration, transformation of urban spaces, migration patterns, and the expectations of the migrants. To illustrate this point, she focuses on the carpet industry as it attracts rural Nepali children to participate in the capitalist urban economy, but reveals how many of these children end up working in the informal street economy. She argues that not only poverty but, also, domestic violence and globalized cultural pulls play powerful roles in the political economy of migration.

In southern Africa, Young and Ansell (2003) explore how the HIV/AIDS pandemic is restructuring households and affecting children’s migration. Describing this migration as both a support system and means for coping, the authors reveal how children move to help sick relatives, to receive personal support (i.e., due to a death in the family), and to engage in paid work to support their households. They argue that children’s migration as a result of HIV/AIDS often results in multiple moves and sibling dispersal and is contributing to the increasing complexity of southern African households.

Although not specifically focusing on youth, Lentz (1997) explores the historical transformation of a rural indigenous village in the Ecuadorian sierra. Based on research conducted in the 1980s, she reveals how migration to both plantations and urban centers has affected families, consumption, values, and political organization. Elsewhere (Lentz 2000) she explores how this migration has affected the construction of community members’ identities, who at once attempt to display their affiliation with the ‘modern’ and to indigenous

tradition. Herrera (2002) explores representations of Quito in the minds of an older generation of indigenous migrants.

Although the migration literature is replete with examples of children's mobilities, only recently has a literature on autonomous child mobility emerged. This literature gathers some impetus from the growing literature on children's independence and autonomy.

### **3.1.2. Literature on independent children**

It is unfortunate that children's autonomy has not always been well-represented in the literature on migration because "the context of their movement tends to be subsumed within the literature on family migration or on 'trafficking', where it is assumed that coercion plays a major role" (Hashim 2007, 912). Several recent studies do begin to examine children as agents shaping their own lives through the act of migration, and the methods used in those studies will be discussed further in this paper. Hopkins (2008) and Hashim (2007) both conducted research on the experiences of children migrating independently between world regions, for example, while other researchers studied children moving from homes to life on the streets (Onta-Bhatta, 1997; Young, 2004; Conticini and Hulme, 2007; Plummer et al., 2007). The motivations, actions, and experiences of children acting independently are now being examined independently of the motivations, actions, and experiences of adults who may choose to include their children in migration.

Despite recent attention to children's roles in migration, there are other contexts in which children's autonomy has been examined. Dependency is a concept central to the definition of childhood in western cultures. As a result, children's autonomy is often overlooked or, when recognized, talked about in negative terms and as the result of adults' failure to exercise responsibility for children. Furthermore, Aitken (2001) points out that there are constant disruptions of boundaries of meaning around what constitutes childhood because children exercising autonomy are often characterized as unchildlike. For example, from feminism, Diduck (1999) looks at unchildlike behavior as part of larger societal transformations; from education, McLaren (1995) looks at some of the myths surrounding the commodification of young people and their lives; from geography, Aitken (2001) and Aitken and Marchant (2003) study aspects of children's violent behaviour; from geography and sociology, Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine (2003) and David Buckingham (2000) look at young people's independence around technology and the Internet. Research studies from these fields can help inform research on child migrants, especially in terms of choosing qualitative methods to engage and learn from subjects, because they incorporate a strong understanding of the potential for children to think and act independently.

A large number of studies have examined the life circumstances and everyday activities of children living in street situations (e.g., Onta-Bhatta 2000; Rafaelli et al. 2001; Beazley 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Diversi 2006; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Davies 2008; Kaime-Atterhog and Ahlberg 2008; Kudrati et al. 2008). These studies are typically set in the majority world, with 'homeless youth' more frequently seen as a focus for research conducted in minority world contexts (e.g., Ruddick 1996; Rew et al. 2000; Ensign 2003). It is important to distinguish between these two terms, though, because street children are not necessarily homeless. Taracena and Tavera (2000), for example, found in their study of



Brazilian ‘street kids’ that only about 15 per cent were actually homeless. Children associated with the street are most often defined by their non-participation in formal education and their involvement (work) in informal economic activities.

Research on people who are living on the street brings young people’s agency to the fore, but it also explicitly distinguishes children’s relationships to places, spatiality, and movement. In some sense, many of the subjects of these studies are in the process of migration, having departed from a family home or state institution as a result of push factors such as lack of resources or threats to safety. They may not have knowledge of a specific destination or means to reach the potential destinations that are known to them, and they almost always lack the capacity to situate themselves within a new home of their own. In other cases, however, children and young people create and align themselves with street/homeless cultures that embrace a nomadic lifestyle, possibly as a rejection of their experiences as part of homes, families, and/or institutions of guardianship (c.f., Beazley 2000 on Indonesian street kids; Ruddick 1996 on homeless youth in the US). Therefore, the street is not defined solely as ‘not a home.’ It also becomes a place, and even a home, with its own pull factors.

Research on children’s work also raises the issue of autonomy. Research on the participation of children in criminal behaviour and drug taking also frequently represents children as autonomous subjects (e.g., Kelly 2006; MacLean 2007). In the context of Africa, researchers have focused on orphaned children with a particular concern about relations between dependence and independence (Young and Ansell 2003; Henderson 2006). The widespread impact of HIV/AIDS on that continent has created a huge change for many young people in Africa that has propelled them into a context that complicates the notion of autonomy.

Elsbeth Robson and Nicola Ansell (1996, 2000, 2001; Ansell and Van Blerk 2005), for example, are concerned about hidden child work that presupposes a survival initiative where desirable health resources are for the most part unavailable. Robson and Ansell’s focus is children’s autonomous labour in caring for relatives with HIV/AIDS in their homes in Zimbabwe. In general, she is concerned about children’s roles within the changing spaces of the global economy. Robson and Ansell’s work was some of the first to recognize the labour of young people as care-givers to people with HIV/AIDS. Through in-depth interviews with young people and with professional NGO social workers and UNICEF workers, Robson and Ansell elaborate on several stories of carers who “give up their childhood” to help an ailing relative. However, the issue of children’s autonomy is not clear. In many cases, adults made the decision that young people should become carers, often at the expense of the children’s education. It is not unusual for Zimbabwean youngsters to expect to be subordinated to their parent’s decision-making until they are well into their twenties. Robson notes that age, gender and class are significant factors in determining who becomes a caregiver with poor working- and middle-class girls of around 15 years being the most common workers in this arena. Although one of her informants is a boy she notes that gender is irrelevant in his case because in the poverty of their circumstances there was no one else left to care for his ailing mother. Girls’ early socialization in reproductive tasks makes them more likely to become carers than boys.

Robson reveals how young people who care for relatives generally lose touch with friends of their own age and find that their experiences as caregivers result in them having little in

common with their peers. Other costs include the tiring demands and difficulties of looking after a sick person and the trauma of facing illness and death. Several of her respondents noted important benefits such as growing maturity, becoming strong and taking on responsibilities that empowered them as household decision-makers. There is also pride in caring and the benefits of a close loving relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient. After caring for a mother with terminal cancer for 11 months, for example, one 17 year old expressed the ambition to nurse in a cancer ward. Robson points out that the articulation of benefits may be part of strategies for sheer survival, and that social isolation and shouldering responsibilities of these kinds can take huge tolls. That these tolls, and the very existence of full-time child care-givers, are not recognized by many Zimbabwean officials suggests to Robson that this is indeed a hidden form of child labour and that these children will continue their toil unsupported by governmental agencies. She found that members of NGOs and other non-state officials were very critical of the inadequate governmental support for young care-givers. From a policy perspective, however, it is clear that most of these young care-givers need financial or material help to alleviate poverty that comes from loss of income (their own and that of the ailing relative) and the cost of looking after a terminally ill patient.

This review of the migration literature in general and autonomous children in particular opens a window for discussion in the next section on the application of qualitative methods to study independent child migrants.

### **3.2 Qualitative Methods for Collecting Empirical Data on Independent Children in the Developing World**

Qualitative data collection tools make it possible for researchers to engage the complexity of the social world, assemble useful representations of what is happening within a particular situation, and ultimately relate the dynamics of that situation to a remote audience in ways that add value (e.g., build theory) through identifications of pattern or explanation of causation. The following inventory of tools will identify methods appropriate for studying children in different cultures. Explanation of how each tool is used will be accompanied by references to multiple studies that use the tool to study children, independent children, migration, and/or everyday life in the developing world.

#### **3.2.1 Surveys**

Survey research includes cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection. Surveys are used to gather standardized and easily comparable information from a relatively large sample of respondents, with their careful organization promoting efficiency and consistency in data collection. In cases where subjects have a high level of literacy, the use of written surveys can also help researchers connect with respondents very efficiently while maintaining high levels of convenience and privacy.

In any case, surveys feature a high level of researcher control through a comprehensive data collection instrument. Because of this, survey data are amenable to quantitative analysis. To support statistical analysis, survey questions often use closed-ended responses, placing great emphasis on researchers' ability to design questions that subjects can understand, response

options that adequately anticipate the range of subject experiences, and surveys that will work in different research contexts given time and other constraints. Closed-response questions can be used to collect data about subjective, qualitative experiences, but the analytical technique remains quantitative. Survey questions that allow for open-ended responses are qualitative in nature because they allow for respondents to express their ideas in their own words, even if the expression is highly organized through the presentation of questions. Many researchers use interpretive analysis with this kind of information, but it is possible to apply coding to open-ended responses in order to categorize responses for aggregation and statistical analysis. Categories can be identified in advance of data collection, or a post-coding strategy can be used whereby categories are developed in relation to the responses generated. While more time-consuming, the latter technique is more effective in making use of unanticipated information.

Surveys are often used with the intent of detecting differences among groups and generalizing findings from a sample to a population, and in this case representative sampling and sampling sizes become a significant issue. Surveys are also used in mixed-methods research to generate qualitative descriptions of research participants, to identify individuals with certain characteristics to include in subsequent, intensive qualitative methods, or to identify areas for more detailed investigation in interviews or focus groups.

In their research on children living and working on the streets in Khartoum, Sudan, Plummer et al. (2007) conducted a survey with 1,649 children, most estimated to be between 7 and 18 years of age. The research team involved both adult and youth researchers who administered surveys on the streets in 2000 and 2001. The team also conducted individual and group interviews with over 500 children and used participant observation and other ethnographic methods to supplement these data. Both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study used convenience sampling. The questionnaire used in the study was quantitative, in that it had only closed-ended responses, and was developed specifically for this research project.

“[W]orking child and street child questionnaires were drafted in English, translated into Arabic, pre-tested, and back-translated into English before finalization. Questionnaires had 70–80 questions on topics such as family, education, health, substance use, reasons for being on the streets, and life on the streets. In August–September 2000, two teams of eight adult field workers conducted a street-based survey. To identify potential respondents, research teams began in a central sug location and fanned outwards, selecting children via convenience sampling.” (Plummer et al. 2007, 1523)

Questionnaires were administered verbally with researchers documenting response choices. The time to complete one survey was approximately twenty minutes. Willingness to participate in the survey was generally high, but varied somewhat between groups.

“Of all children approached, 70% (397/565) of street boys and 66% (35/53) of street girls consented to be interviewed, compared to 85% (1025/1205) of working boys and 89% (192/216) of working girls.” (1524)

The results of the survey were analyzed using Chi-square and Fisher exact tests for significance and differences among groups. The table below shows data from one portion of the survey that addresses the reasons why children live and/or work on the street.

Trends identified in the survey portion of the research were subsequently investigated in individual and group interviews and participant observation. Quotes from those interviews were used to support and illustrate findings from the survey. For example, poverty was a factor in pushing the majority of children onto the streets, and a specific account is provided by a 16 year-old bus conductor during his interview.

“When I find someone on his way to my [distant] home, I send money to my family. If nobody goes there, I take it with me when I go back home to school. I buy some clothes, exercise books and pens for myself... I pay the school fees and my travelling expenses too.” (1527)

**Table 2: Survey data from a study of children living and working in the street in Khartoum, Sudan**

Reasons why children came to work or live on streets								
Reason came to streets	Percent Respondents <sup>a</sup>				<i>p</i> -values			
	i. Working boys (n=1025)	ii. Working girls (n=192)	iii. Street boys (n=397)	iv. Street girls (n=35)	i. vs. ii.	i. vs. iii.	iii. vs. iv.	ii. vs. iv.
<i>Poverty</i>								
My family was very poor/in a difficult situation	80	83	70	74	n.s. <sup>b</sup>	<0.001	n.s.	n.s.
My family needed money	74	81	67	71	0.037	0.009	n.s.	n.s.
There was no money for school fees <sup>c</sup>	80	82	72	72	n.s.	0.001	n.s.	n.s.
There was not enough food at home	43	59	40	63	<0.001	n.s.	0.008	n.s.
My family asked me to look for work	53	52	-- <sup>d</sup>	--	n.s.	--	--	--
I liked to have pocket money to spend during my free time	86	78	--	--	0.004	--	--	--
I was forced to work	70	76	--	--	n.s.	--	--	--
I came to look for work	--	--	84	71	--	--	n.s.	--
My family was also homeless	--	--	9	23	--	--	0.019	--
<i>Death/separation from parent</i>								
My father died	21	30	22	27	0.010	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
My mother died	9	14	17	20	0.029	<0.001	n.s.	n.s.
Both of my parents died	3	10	4	6	<0.001	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mother and/or father died	27	34	35	40	0.047	0.003	n.s.	n.s.
I came to look for my parents	--	--	6	6	--	--	n.s.	--
<i>Disharmony with family</i>								
I had disagreement(s) with my family	--	--	43	54	--	--	n.s.	--
I was physically abused/exploited at home	--	--	27	40	--	--	n.s.	--
I was sexually abused at home	--	--	<1	3	--	--	n.s.	--
My family threw me out	--	--	18	17	--	--	n.s.	--
I was pregnant	--	2 <sup>e</sup>	--	9	--	--	--	n.s.
<i>Displacement</i>								
There was war/conflict in my home area	--	--	27	29	--	--	n.s.	--
There was drought in my home area	--	--	13	17	--	--	n.s.	--
<i>"Pull" of street life</i>								
I had friends in the <i>sug</i> and/or my friends convinced me	51	33	41	49	<0.001	<0.001	n.s.	n.s.
I believed there were nice things at the <i>sug</i> /in the city	46	30	43	54	<0.001	n.s.	n.s.	0.006
I was bored at home	45	34	48	80	<0.05	n.s.	<0.001	<0.001

<sup>a</sup> "Do not know" responses were excluded for each question. Number excluded by group were i. 0-11, ii. 0-5, iii. 0-6, iv. 0-2, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>b</sup> "n.s." means not significant ( $p>0.05$ ).

<sup>c</sup> Not applicable answers were excluded. Number excluded by group were i. 32, ii. 2, iii. 15, iv. 2.

<sup>d</sup> "--" means question not asked.

<sup>e</sup> 43 respondents reported "do not know".

Source: (Plummer et al. 2007, 1525).

Experience of violence at home was also a factor cited by many survey respondents and then detailed in later qualitative methods, including interviews and children's drawings. Expanding on information reported on the survey with these additional data collection techniques allowed research subjects to express their feelings about their experiences and add information that might not have been elicited by the survey.

While the data collected in this study was rich in many ways, the authors do reference some challenges they encountered. Plummer and her colleagues recognize four limitations specific to the survey they implemented with a sample stratified by gender and living situation. First, they found it is sometimes difficult to cross-reference data collected through different methods since the survey did not include some questions that later were identified as relevant. Second, some differences between groups are not detected in statistical significance tests when sample sizes are small among one or more sub-groups (in their case 'street girls'). Third, they recognize that it is difficult to interpret differences with subjective variables.

“For example, significantly higher proportions of working boys than street boys reported poverty-related reasons for why they came to the streets. It seems possible that, in absolute terms, street boys' families were as poor or poorer than those of working boys, and this contributed to their street life, but they did not report this because they did not consider themselves to be poor, or they felt other reasons were more important” (p. 1534).

Finally, they acknowledge that false reporting is a problem with all forms of social research that might be especially prominent with working and street children conditioned to exercise caution for their own protection. The use of multiple methods, however, helped increase confidence in their survey data. They “promoted data validity through rapport-building exercises with researchers, the involvement of street child interviewers, and the triangulation of qualitative self reports, quantitative self reports, and third-person observational data (Connolly and Ennew 1996)” (p. 1534).

Stephenson (2001) uses survey questionnaires featuring both open- and closed-ended questions as one of several methods during her field work among street children, those with limited or no access to housing, in Moscow. She used the questionnaire with 123 children aged 7-17, excluding the younger children she encountered based on an estimate of the developmental level of the survey, and later followed-up with twenty in-depth interviews (with children and adults working in youth-serving agencies) and four focus groups. She conducted participant observation throughout her three months in the field.

Stephenson recruited most of her subjects through local aid agencies and conducted the majority of her interviews in their facilities. She was able to use to use their records to align her sample with the known population of children living on the streets and set representative targets for participation from each gender and age range. Ninety-one subjects were contacted through this process, while an additional 32 children were part of a random sample recruited on the street.

Stephenson combined methods “to improve the quality of research results and combine the benefits (and limit the disadvantages) of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies” (p. 535). In analyzing the resourcefulness of the children in using social capital strategies, however, Stephenson refers directly only to her qualitative data derived from her interviews,

focus groups, and informal conversations with survey respondents. Stephenson is sensitive to some of the same reliability questions raised by Plummer et al. (2007), and her work is an example of the use of surveys in an introductory or exploratory stage of mixed-methods research.

“The quantitative survey did provide us with important, albeit indicative, background information on the family compositions, parental occupations, and places of residence. The survey also provided some indicators of the behaviour of parents and guardians toward the children including family violence and abuse etc. The need to undertake such a survey was partly based on the fact that no such surveys have been conducted to date (this was the first research of this kind in Russia since the 1920s-1930s). But the survey results can only be treated as having a limited reliability. We cannot claim that our sample was truly representative (an impossible task with hidden and oppressed populations such as street children). Also, although we interviewed children only after participant observation in the institutions and in the streets and so had established a prior contact with most of them, we could not be sure that this contact was enough to enable them to talk freely to us. We could not be sure that the categories we were imposing on children, when we were asking them about the reasons for their being in the streets or their experiences in the streets, corresponded to their own definitions and perceptions” (Stephenson 2001, 535-536).

Young and Ansell (2003) also use surveys in their research on children in southern Africa whose migration was prompted by AIDS-related deaths of parents and guardians. In their study, “an extensive survey was conducted in order to examine the nature, extent and causes of children’s migration, which was triangulated with qualitative techniques for a more in-depth insight into young people’s responses and needs” (p. 339). The survey of 822 children in four different communities supported comparative investigation into the experiences of children living in urban and rural environments and also into the different political and social environments of Malawi and Lesotho.

Young and Ansell accessed children who were 10-17 years old through local primary schools. After involving children in drafting and piloting the questionnaire, the researchers administered it in a group setting. Before the survey was given, the researchers conducted “a brainstorming session regarding migration,” (339) to present their interests and prepare children to respond to the survey. Young and Ansell’s used their survey results primarily to identify young migrants for involvement in subsequent phases of their data collection.

“The results of the extensive research revealed that 58% of respondents in Malawi and 40% in Lesotho had moved at least once. From these, approximately 300 young migrants were invited to take part in focus groups, for a more detailed discussion of their migration experiences. From this, a further 65 children took part in making migration storyboards. This allowed the children to define the important aspects of their migration story through pictures, which were subsequently used as prompts for eliciting oral description. In addition, and in order to cover a full range of experiences, focus groups and migration storyboards were undertaken with children residing in institutional care and on the streets.” (Young and Ansell 2003, 339-340)

The storyboards created by survey respondents provide personalized narratives that help give depth and specificity to the survey’s overall findings. The data generated by the storyboards, however, seems to take on independent and greater significance in their analysis. Their results section reflects upon issues raised in the survey but almost exclusively utilizes the

storyboards and children's descriptions of what they mean to generate understanding of the children's experiences.

Taken in combination, these examples of survey use in the literature underline the way in which data reliability and analytical power are restructured in qualitative and mixed-methods research. Researchers are uncomfortable with the isolation of variables and claims of sampling adequacy and prefer to expand the depth of their data to include rich personal and social contexts useful in developing thorough explanations of complex human phenomena. As Stephenson (2001) argues, efforts designed to understand and assist independent children, which may include removing children from unhealthy situations, need to be informed by children's idiosyncratic responses to challenges and respect their achievements, in many cases, in constructing support systems where none are supposed to exist.

### **3.2.2. Interviews and focus groups**

An interview is a technique used by researchers to gather information from informants through oral communication, usually though not always, one informant at a time. Interviewers pose questions to respondents, and respondents provide answers directly to researchers, so there is an interactional process that is automatically quite personal in comparison to surveys.

Since interviews depend on oral communication, they reduce complications created by limited literacy levels in respondents, yet they raise new challenges related to the clarity of oral communication. Interviewers need to be able to speak in the language of targeted respondents, and it may also be important for them to speak the language in the register common to respondents. They also need to account for informal language, speech patterns, and non-verbal forms of communication that may be very important to the way a particular respondent or group of respondents conveys information.

Interviews vary substantially in terms of the structure applied by the researcher – that is, the degree to which questions are scripted and/or sequenced, allowance for open-ended or forced choice responses or follow-up and probing questions, and also the time and place in which they occur. More structured interviews are an extension of the survey method and help to assure that responses remain relevant to areas of concern to the researcher. Less structured interviews, among other things, allow respondents to negotiate with researchers in terms of what topics and types of information are significant and what the respondent can contribute to the research.

Group interviews are often referred to as focus groups or focus group interviews, and they retain many characteristics of individual interviews while adding the possibility for interaction among respondents.

Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002) use interviews as a central element of their overall research design looking at the experiences of children in families migrating to US from the developing world. Their research design incorporated structured interviews (with a quantitative component) as well as in-depth interviews and the creation of 80 biographies, or case studies, of children.



The data collection methods were established within a large, longitudinal research project. The Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA) conducted at Harvard University documented the adaptations of recently arrived youth coming from a variety of sending countries. LISA used anthropological research to gain perspectives on immigrant cultural models and social practices and psychology to establish baselines on immigration histories, social and family relations, and academic attitudes and behaviours.

A convenience sample of 385 early adolescents (9-14 years at beginning of 5-year study) originating from China, Central America, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico was recruited through contacts with schools in the United States. Initial parent and child interviews were designed to elicit descriptive information about respondents. Comparison of descriptive statistics of participants to census data and other information was used to establish confidence in the representativeness of the sample. Structured student interviews employed a variety of question formats: open-ended, forced choice or multiple choice, and narrative. Quantitative analyses were applied to structured interview data after a coding system was developed and refined until high interrater reliability was established, meaning that interpretations could be consistently applied by all members of the research team.

Follow-up interviews specifically about separation and reunification were arranged with a second sample of children supported by data from LISA interviews with children, parents and other adults. Twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth who had undergone lengthy separations. Longitudinal involvement of 80 children in repeated interviews and ethnographic observations enabled researchers to develop 80 case studies, or biographies, based on individual experiences.

Hashim (2007) utilized interviews to research child migrants of a broad range of ages who moved from rural, farming households in northeastern Ghana to rural and urban households in central and southern Ghana. In particular, her research examined whether the assumption that child migration undermines opportunities to pursue education is actually true in the particular cases of these young migrants' lives. Initial fieldwork in 2000-1 in the village of Tempane Natinga examined "how children spent their time, the work that they did for their farming households and their experiences of education" (p. 912). The village economies were based on labour-intensive family farming, and villagers experienced high rates of poverty and low rates of education. Children contributed to household subsistence as early as four or five years of age and performed the complete range of household and farming labour tasks by the age of fourteen. The insights available from interviews enabled Hashim to explore local perspectives on children's participation in agricultural production and household labour.

"Work is thus seen as age-appropriate behaviour for children... It is a process of enculturation into their roles in the domestic economy and wider community. Central to this is the understanding of their responsibilities in the production of the households' food and cash crops, and their roles in the reproductive labour necessary to secure the household's subsistence. However, because the domestic economy includes the pursuit of private endeavours, it also involves a sense of self-reliance" (p. 914).

Having found that relatively large numbers of children were living and/or working outside the village without their parents, Hashim conducted a second round of interviews in 2004 "to explore boys' and girls' reasons for, and experiences of migration, as well as the negotiations

surrounding the decision to migrate and the social networks utilized to facilitate migration” (p. 913).

Hashim interviewed 70 migrant children and 20 parents, connecting with them both in Tempene Natinga and in eighteen migration destinations lying 400-600 kilometres south from the village.

“Contact with the migrant children was established either through existing contacts made in earlier research, or through influential community members. Interviews were carried out in the Kusasi’ language, Kusaal, and recorded verbatim as translated to me by my translator. The interviews were semi-structured, [with] children responding to open-ended questions posed throughout the course of the interviews” (p. 912-13).

Hashim’s willingness to cover great distances to conduct interviews in origin and destination areas suggests the important role that context can play in this method. Of course, mobility can be an important consideration for those studying a mobile population, but that is not the only practicality to her strategy. The timing and location of data collection can be used to make participation more comfortable for subjects and to encourage communication about events and issues of importance to the researcher. To the extent that the researcher creates a controlled time and space for interviewing, some risk is introduced that the respondent may be uncomfortable and the content of the conversation an artefact of the setting.

Lam and Chan (2004) go even further than Hashim to exploit the potential of interviews to bring the voices and stories of research subjects to the fore while reducing the structuring influence of researchers’ questions. Lam and Chan use interviewing techniques that are designed to capture not only information about experiences but also the expressive qualities of their coherent narration of those experiences. They describe the narrative analysis they apply to their interview transcripts as “a meaning-extraction process that looks into the stories people tell when they are talking about themselves” (p. 436). Further developments along this trajectory will be discussed in later sections of the paper devoted to textual methods, where subjects produce written records of their experiences, and life histories and biographical methods, where stories are linked together to trace an individual life over an extended period. Lam and Chan use only oral communication to gather data, and they focus on episodic stories (what they call salient incidents after Lincoln and Guba 1985) told by Chinese youth about their immigration to Hong Kong to reunite with their families.

The data used by Lam and Chan were collected during two separate field studies. In both instances they identified subjects with the cooperation of schools and social workers in Hong Kong. Because they were interested in the experience of young people who were assessed as having successfully adjusted to life in Hong Kong, they used results of psychosocial instruments that measure psychological symptoms, mental health and life satisfaction to qualify individuals for participation in the research. It was not stated whether these instruments were administered by the researchers or the children’s social workers or whether they were introduced specifically for the purposes of the research project or as part of a social support strategy. The twelve participants in the first study were aged 19 to 24 years but were an average of 15.8 years at time of immigration and had spent an average of six years in Hong Kong. The fifteen participants in the second study were 12 to 17 years old, and averaged 12.6 years old at immigration and 19.5 months of residence in Hong Kong.

The focus on experiences in the past that may be subject to the imperfections and filters of memory make Lam and Chan's focus on narration very practical. They organized their two in-depth interviews with each subject in such a way as to promote story-telling.

“An interview guide was used, but participants were not asked a standard set of questions so that they can freely narrate their stories in their own way. The interviews were conducted according to the following principles: the questions asked were experience-based (e.g., ‘Please describe experiences and feelings on the first day of your arrival’), participants were encouraged to tell their stories in their own words, sufficient time and flexibility were given to the participants to complete their stories in an atmosphere where they felt safe and respected, and the interviewers did not try to offer interpretations to the participants (Polkinghorne 1988; Chase 1995)” (p. 436-437).

This last point is critical because Lam and Chan's interviewing technique allowed and encouraged respondents to develop subjective themes in connection with their own stories. These themes reflected how subjects generally interpret their world and experiences and gave unique significance to their lived experiences. The continuity of young people's themes can make sense out of stories whose elements may otherwise appear inconsistent or contradictory, and the ascription of meaning from the subject's point of view helps researchers guard against interjecting their own perspectives when they seek to identify the content relevant for analysis.

With the use of focus groups, research subjects are brought together in conversations and can engage in collective meaning making. In some types of research, focus groups are conducted in tightly controlled environments under strict protocols to measure opinions as they occur in a social setting. For qualitative researchers, a focus group is simply an organized event in which a researcher selects and assembles a group of individuals to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Gibbs 1997, Powell and Single 1996). Beyond the ability to generate data on interpersonal communication, focus groups may create environments in which subjects feel more comfortable answering researchers' questions, even though privacy is reduced. According to Kneale (2001), in-depth groups have the potential to shift the balance of power away from the researcher toward the participants and allow for supportive and reflexive encounters.

Stephenson (2001), whose work on Moscow street children was referenced in the previous section on surveys, found focus groups to be useful in her research. She organized groups of six to eight children with similar characteristics: 9-13 year-old boys and girls from Moscow, 9-13 year-old migrant boys, and separate groups for migrant boys and girls from 14-17 years old.

“Focus groups were particularly important in getting access to collective representations and norms governing interaction in street communities...It proved to be very easy to talk to children (particularly in focus groups when, after some initial hesitation, they gave each other a sanction to discuss the behaviours which could be seen as problematic or illegal)” (p. 536).

Kudrati et al. (2008) also describe the use of qualitative group interviews among a range of other techniques in their research on the daily lives of street children in Khartoum, Sudan (Plummer et al. 2007, cited above, reports related research). Their groups were relatively

large (approximately 20 children) and took place over several hours. This was necessitated by the environment in which the research was carried out, which is in institutions providing services to the children. Local organizations that can help researchers to make contact with children can have a preference for researchers to engage children in groups, in the interest of both convenience and protection of their right to provision. To engage this number of children, the researchers interjected more participatory activities, such as dramatic role playing and drawing (techniques to be discussed in a later section), along with group discussion. Like individual interviews, group interviews allow a high degree of flexibility in the way they are approached.

### **3.2.3 Observation and participant observation**

Observation is perhaps the most basic of all data collection methods and is used in both experimental research and qualitative research. Traditional forms of observation incorporated aspects of positivistic science, including objectivity and neutrality, even while the researcher became immersed in the physical space of her or his subjects. More recently, ethnographers have recognized the problematic nature, even impossibility, of maintaining objectivity and have turned greater attention to the meaning of their participation in, and connection to, the cultures they study. They reflect on and critically engage with their own participation within the ethnographic frame, producing knowledge that is always connected to the particularities of their research experience, including their identities. Qualitative researchers, and the discussion that follows here, shifts to a language of participant observation in recognition of the impossibility of observing children's activities, and particularly the subjective nature of their experiences, in the field without the surveillance causing its own bias.

Participant observation has emerged as the most privileged of ethnographic methods since its initial development in the late 19th century as a method for studying small, homogeneous cultures (Tedlock 2005). The strength of participation has long been regarded as its capacity to overcome social and cultural differences and generate insider perspectives with a large degree of validity.

“Ethnographers were expected to live in a society for an extended period of time, actively participate in the daily life of its members, and carefully observe their joys and sufferings as a way of obtaining material for social scientific study. This method was widely believed to produce documentary information that not only was ‘true’ but also reflected the native’s own view about reality.” (Tedlock 2005, 467)

Given the distinction of children and youth cultures as sub-sets of larger cultural formations, participant observation has significant potential to contribute depth to research on children and youth. However, the ability for adults to fully participate in children's worlds is questioned by many researchers (e.g., Aitken and Herman 1997; Punch 2002a). Greater reflexivity in the practice of ethnographic research has helped to address this problem. Researchers are now more inclined give space in their writing to the unmediated voices of research subjects and their own field notes. They also include their own identities as one of the contexts that might have shaped data collection and analyses, thus accounting for possible limitations to their access to subjects' experiences. While reflexivity is an important way in which qualitative researchers themselves and their own knowledge in relation to the identities and experiences of their subjects, the fact remains that participant observers need to be able to

move through, understand, and engage with the everyday environments of their subjects in order to effectively use this method.

Davies (2008) used participant observation in research on street children in Makutano, West Pokot, Kenya, during fieldwork in 2003 and 2006. He did not utilize questionnaires or surveys of any kind and conducted formal interviews with children only at the end of his study. Initially, he worked in conjunction with an NGO in the area. He spent at least six days per week, from morning to night, with his subjects, even spending the night with them on two occasions. During these periods of intense involvement, he captured data about the activities and ideas of children living on the street.

While ethnographers endeavour to enter into the worlds of their subjects in an unobtrusive way, Davies' experience outlines some of the problems that can be encountered, especially when observing children. Before participant observation can occur, a relationship must be established so that barriers to becoming embedded can be resolved.

“Contact with the street children was at first problematic. Attempting to engage them in the centre of the town was difficult as I was soon mobbed by children and crowds of onlookers. As such I came to use the stadium on the fringes of town as a quiet, sheltered place to meet and talk to the children. I was aware, however, that such a situation removed them from their normal environments and placed them into one of my own creation. However, after a time I found that I was able to move much more freely around the centre of the town and the areas where the children spent most of their time. Clearly, at first, my presence greatly altered the daily lives of the children; hopefully, however, my prolonged familiarity allowed the children to return to the more normal activities. In particular, I found that it became possible to remain on the margins of the areas in which the children gathered, speaking to a small group, while observing the activities of the others. Simply walking around the town also often led to encounters with smaller groups of children performing certain tasks unobservable from a fixed location.” (Davies 2008, 311)

Davies interviewed children he was able to access through the NGO, and he eventually identified forty-two children who identified themselves as street children, or *chokkra* in Swahili. Most had at least some parental contact, and a small proportion actually slept in a parental home. Only eighteen of the forty-two children actually slept on the street while the others worked there. Four participants were girls, and the other thirty-eight were boys, and their ages ranged from 6 to 18 years with a mean of 12.5 years. The children came from three different ethnic backgrounds, although their identity as *chokkra* and part of a street family was observed to be more significant to them than their affiliation with ethnic cultures. Most have only partial knowledge of the languages of their ethnic group, using amongst themselves a hodgepodge of languages and slang terms that is intelligible only to other *chokkra*. This linguistic strategy contributed to a sense of identity and helped the children retain some privacy among adults on the street, including an ethnographer.

Davies observed children's use of space for work, protection, and identity building, something that would have likely remained invisible if he was using other research methods.

“The children of Makutano have actively and creatively used space to construct a world, which is partially beyond the adult ‘gaze’, beyond adult supervision, and therefore intimidating and threatening to adults. Here the children are in the ascendancy and, despite the fact that this

ascendancy is achieved through the manipulation of negative images, we should not deny the children's very real agency in creating such a world." (322)

In addition to observing the spatial boundaries and remapped meanings of places observed by the street children, Davies was also able to gain insight into the creation and maintenance of an oppositional sub-culture. He observed activities of some children, such as gambling and glue sniffing, that are viewed as problematic from outside this sub-culture yet valorised within it. Taken in total, street children's activities can be seen as a reclaiming of their own identities by taking ownership of negative perceptions placed on them by outsiders.

"The children's 'anti-society' works because it plays on the fears of general society; the children are dirty, dangerous and wild, in stark contrast to 'normal' children (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003), yet it is precisely these values, negative to the public, that for the street child take on a positive value and act as a form of empowerment. While Makutano society marginalizes the street children, making them 'different', the street children take these differences and emphasize them further (Beazley 2003a). Through creative use of space and the development of unique slang, games, gestures and appearance (an anti-language), the children insulate themselves from their marginalizers and reject adult intervention, choosing instead to rely upon each other. Communicating through their shared understandings and meanings, the world of the street children is impenetrable to both adults and other children alike. This lack of understanding ensures that the myth of the street child, as both different and dangerous, remains unchallenged." (327)

Davies' commitment to observing street children in the settings that they normally occupy enabled him to successfully challenge "western perceptions of street children's lives as impoverished, unstimulating and physically and mentally detrimental" (327). Even when their behaviour seems extremely anti-social and endangers their own health, it may have an identifiable logic that is tied to children's capacities to respond to challenging situations. In the midst of a social environment appearing to offer only a bleak future for them, the children respond with an alternative social model, and this resilience is laudable in concept if not always in practice.

Langevang (2007) uses participant observation in combination with life histories, written diaries, photo-diaries and group discussions to capture the diversity and complexity of youth experiences in Accra, Ghana. He sees participant observation as a mode of sharing time and space. It is not only a way to understand young people's life worlds but also to form relationships and trust. Conscious of the need to share as much time and space with the young people as possible, he made his home on the centre of Madina and from there moved among the children and participated in their daily lives. The practice involved 'going along' with the young people (to visit friends and family members) and 'hanging out' "on ubiquitous plastic chairs and wooden benches in hairdressing and barber salons, the yards of compounds, and young people's meeting places" (Langevang 2007, 271). He makes the important point that participant observation works best when combined with a variety of other qualitative methods. Combing different methods, he argues, provides young people with the space and time they require to communicate the complexities of their lives.

Diversi (2006) demonstrates how the method of participant observation can fluidly connect a researcher's own life experiences to their data collection activities carried out in the field as part of a defined research project. He conducted participant observation among street kids in

Campinas, Brazil, in part because he was fascinated and scared by street kids he saw but did not know during his own childhood in this area. More specifically, he sought to collect information that could help strengthen programs that had been created to reach, educate, and assist children living on the street. Taking on the role of a street educator, he was able to spend time immersed in the everyday worlds of this little understood group. While Diversi was an insider in the sense of sharing nationality, regional customs, and language with the street youth, he remained an outsider to the street children.

“As for the analytical part of my ethnography with these street youth, I have attempted to position myself as an outsider who was accepted and trusted but who nevertheless could not enter their minds or speak for them. The best I could do, and have tried to do in the short stories presented in this article, was to position myself as a participant and observer with a view from “somewhere”—a view from a trusted outsider who wanted to make sense of these street youth’s lived experiences against a background informed by theories of power, identity, and humanization. To create a sense of being there, of seeing oneself in the skin of the street youth, I decided to represent my ethnographic experience through stories reconstructed from my fieldnotes” (p. 378)

Diversi’s method prioritized presence with the street children and direct engagement with their struggles, which helped him to gain acceptance. During the day, he not only gained firsthand knowledge of street kids lives, he also “spent hours fighting public servants to get food, clean water, and clothes for the kids” (p. 377). He wrote his field notes only at the end of each day when he had left the children. He reflects that his “reliable presence among and advocacy for the street kids, over time” helped him overcome initial mistrust.

Having gained access to street kids’ lives through commitment and persistence, Diversi accumulated stories about the struggles faced by the children at home and then on the streets and the strategies they used to escape and persevere. His strategy of immersion revealed its power when he was able to unravel a central narrative that was constructed very differently in their lives and in media accounts of their lives and revealed important connections between local and global contexts. Behind the sensational stories of street kids savagely killing for Nike shoes to sell on the black market, Diversi found in the children’s stories a symbolic significance attached to the shoes that indicated “a more sophisticated understanding of the cultural consumerism pervasive in the capitalist world rather than a mere attempt at economic gains” (p. 378)

#### **3.2.4. Life histories and biographical methods**

Life histories and biographical methods differentiate themselves from other ethnographic methods on the issue of scale. These methods position individuals as cases to be examined in their own right. This tight focus enables the deepest possible consideration of personal experiences, activities and motivations, situated knowledge, and cultural practices. Life histories can utilize data from secondary sources or build upon data collected by diaries, researcher interviews, participant observation, or other methods.

Like other ethnographic methods, life history methods “try to get behind the bare outlines of reported behaviour to the underlying beliefs, strategies and constraints which shaped that behaviour” (Francis 1993, 92). At the scale of the individual, explanation can be detailed and

precise, but significant groundwork must be laid through advanced research activities. The researcher is, as with ethnography generally, challenged to understand the larger scales of social organization in which the individual operates: family, community, culture, and society. The individual narrative is then woven through this larger scale understanding, with the subject of the life history and other informants contributing insight. Francis (1993, 93) reflects on these challenges in studying the Luo people in western Kenya.

“The usefulness of the life-history approach is critically dependent on several factors. In the first place, the researcher needs to have a thorough understanding of the macro-developments which provide the context of constraints and opportunities within which people have acted. [...] Without this context, it can be difficult to interpret the reasons informants give for their actions. It is also important to interview the widest possible cross-section of people[...] Lastly, this research technique is one in which a rapport between interviewer and informant is absolutely crucial.”

Francis originally set out to collect twenty life histories, as part of an ethnographic research design involving interviews with a larger number of people. Because she found interviews oriented to collecting life history data to be “a flexible research tool which also encouraged many informants to open up far more than in other types of interview,” she actually collected sixty life histories, shifting her fieldwork activities to facilitate this methodology. Her collection of life histories came at a late stage of research, enabling her to construct a quasi-representative sample with representations of different genders, generations, types of employment, and family roles. Her sampling carefully considered the merits of including specific individuals who were sometimes in unique positions. She also experienced self-selection among recruits with varying willingness to talk to her. Her sampling strategy successfully allowed Francis to cross-reference and contrast information provided by different informants and portray community issues through a diversity of insightful lenses.

Henderson (2006) developed life histories of youth between the ages of 14 and 22 who had become orphans when their parents died of AIDS in Magangangozi, KwaZulu-Natal. Her research project began in 2003 and involved 31 young people living in rural conditions. Henderson’s access to youth in this community was facilitated by a local intervention project serving orphaned, Zulu-speaking children. The intervention project involved the development of local economic strategies: community gardening and raising of chickens for sale.

“In December 2001, February 2002 and May 2002, Zanele Mchunu, a community worker in the uThukela District Child Survival Project (TDCSP) funded by World Vision began what became generally known as the Leaders of Tomorrow (LOT) project, a set of intervention programmes for orphaned, Zulu-speaking children in three communities in Okhahlamba, a subregion of the uThukela District of KwaZulu-Natal. The three areas – Rookdale, Bethany and Magangangozi – were identified as having high numbers of orphans through a few locally conducted surveys. In Magangangozi, a rural community situated in beautiful, mountainous terrain on the Road to Cathedral Peak in the Drakensberg – a towering range of mountains rising to 3000 metres or more in places – Mchunu began to work with 31 young people ranging in age from 14 to 20.” (Henderson 2006, 308).

The leader of the intervention project, beyond providing access, became an important research collaborator. Henderson worked alongside the project leader to observe the intervention and attended weekly meetings with the young participants at the local high



school, where many of them were pupils. The meetings were initially used for workshops on “transformational leadership training,” during which young people created a project vision and addressed practical issues related to their operations. Later, Henderson introduced theatre games to the meeting time “to create a sense of fun, unpredictability and immediate accomplishment, and thus to disrupt some of the children’s habitual ways of being in the classroom” (310). This shift helped free up communication between the children and adults and enabled children to be more creative and expressive.

Data collected by Henderson to develop her life histories of her subjects came through a variety of methods. The study made significant use of performance-based research strategies, not only with the theatre games that became part of the regular meetings but by subsequently involving the children in a week-long workshop during which they produced a play about their own lives in Magangangozi. This approach helped respondents to talk about painful past experiences and how they coped with them (see Section 6, below, for more discussion of performance-based methods). Concurrent with their weekly group meetings, the researcher and project leader went on visits to children’s homes, which were sometimes only reachable by long treks into mountainous terrain. During these visits, they conducted in-depth interviews, first with the children and then with their guardians. The interviews were conducted in isiZulu, the language spoken by residents of Magangangozi. The team also conducted limited participant observation, accompanying children when they did household chores such as firewood collection, cutting of thatch grass, and repairing of homesteads.

Henderson developed varying length biographical sketches of eight children and youth from the same community to make specific points regarding similarities and differences among them. One goal of the research is to create more nuanced understandings of the lives of children labelled as “AIDS orphans” while breaking apart stereotypes and meta-narratives. The assembly of these coherent profiles becomes part of the data collection method in that the process dictates other aspects of field work, such as appropriate frequency and scope of interviews, the length of participant observation, or the number of informants needed. One of her biographical sketches is summarized here to give a sense of how she presents a narrative of one young person’s life trajectory while drawing upon data she has obtained through a range of methods and sources.

This sketch specifically illustrates one young woman’s experience of mobility, which has contradictory meaning in her life. Her mobility is an outcome of the loss she has experienced and is therefore a source of pain, but it is also a source of strength and inspiration for the young woman named Xoli. Henderson begins by referencing social aspects of childhood in the local society gleaned from broad observations and unspecified sources. This is done to frame her individual story:

“In an environment where some children have lived for more time with their mothers than with their fathers due to fathers’ migrancy, or due to the informal nature of the relationship between their parents, in a public sense they still mark their identities through their father’s family. Children insist that a sense of who they ‘really’ are becomes recognized and coheres through performing the rituals pertinent to fathers’ clans. Young people who behave badly attribute their ‘unruliness’ to the fact that their father’s people, including their father’s ancestors, have not properly acknowledged, or ‘seen’ them” (p. 318).

Henderson then captures the personality of Xoli by briefly citing other community members' perceptions of her as well as characteristic ways of thinking observed during interaction with the subject. This humanizes her story and counterbalances the connection to macro-level trends identified at the outset of the sketch. Henderson then moves through a chronological retelling of key events in Zoli's life, focusing on the content of the events and key influences in her life trajectory while not particularly privileging Xoli's perspective over perspectives of other informants or herself. She brings the subject's perspective into view once by drawing on Xoli's own words:

"Xoli appeared to be very happy in her new home with the Bhengus. She wrote a letter both to me and Zanele asking us to visit her there, which we did. An extract from the letter addressed to Zanele indicates Xoli's happiness with the change in her life. It also shows her closeness to both of us and the ways in which our friendship over time supported her:

Oh my God! I thank God for taking me out of the mud. He has placed me in the light. Gloria threw away all my opportunities. Until I die I will not forget how she made a fool of me [udlala ngami] wasting my time. But at home [meaning at the Bhengus'] they love me. They have sent me to night-school. I am so grateful, Ma[ka]Zethi [mother of Zethi, referring to Zanele], I am so happy, I am cool [ngipholile]. If I was not short of money, I would come to tell you nice stories that do not mean anything [ngazonixoxela ezimnadi izindatshana ezingasholutho]. I would like you to come here to Escourt, to Ntabamhlophe, to Golton with Patti. (Letter, 28 February 2004)" (p. 320)

Within the scope of the life history, the researcher concludes by stating her own ideas about the threads of continuity within the story (categories for the diverse data she collected) that define the subject.

"What is particularly important in Xoli's story is a simultaneous coupling of strength and fragility. It, together with Xoli's general demeanour, demonstrates a profound restlessness of spirit – a compulsion to mobility. Yet running together with this thread is a resourcefulness and determination to make her way" (p. 321).

Henderson is successful in using diverse data to create portraits of Xoli and other young people in Magangangozi. Her article draws attention to agency and even autonomy by pointing to "the dexterity young people bring to bear in drawing on networks of kin to reconfigure a sense of place for themselves," but the success of her technique is also reflected in the fact that her collection of biographical sketches "alludes to a layering of pain that is not easily exposed" (322).

Leinaweaver (2007a) bases an article on children's agency as a response to vulnerability on the life history of a single adolescent girl in Peru. The researcher had contact with the girl over a two year period while she lived in the highland city of Ayacucho conducting participant observation and having informal conversations while conducting a research project on movements of children away from their natal homes that used diverse field methods and generated family as well as life histories (see Leinaweaver 2007b). This source of data was supplemented by a three hour interview held at the end of the research when the girl was seventeen years old. Presumably, the idea to develop this life history was made based on an opportunity identified while in the field, and thus the interview was conducted largely with the intention of understanding the importance of the girl's choice to enter an

orphanage, rather than stay in an undesirable living situation with an older sibling, at the age of 10.

In Leinaweaver's life history, she positions the girl as made vulnerable by the violence and poverty in the wider community of Ayacucho that took the lives of her parents and displaced her from her family home. Leinaweaver then demonstrates how she responded by focusing, even at a young age and then continually throughout her young life (including in her reflection on that life during the interview), on her own autonomy rather than the ties of emotional support that might have been maintained with kin. Trying to increase control over her own life, the girl understood her choice to enter an institutionalized care setting as a strategy to access material support and resources she thought would end her vulnerability to further disruptions.

Jeffrey and Dyson (2008) provide a series of narrative descriptions that they call 'portraits' of young lives. They are particularly interested in uncovering issues of youth and political change, based on vignettes of a single young person to highlight broader youth issues. Jeffrey and Dyson (2008, 2) share with Arnold and Blackburn (2005, 43) the notion that a focus on a narrative of an individual life "reveal[s] insights not just into the experiences and attitudes of the individuals directly concerned, but also of the wider society or social segment of which they are also part." For Jeffrey and Dyson (2008, 2), narrative methodologies "... can illustrate how processes cohere to produce human outcomes, convey the textured experiences of youth, and instil in readers empathy, respect, and understanding."

They bring together narratives of young lives from around the world -- including Sierra Leone, India, Ecuador, Scotland, Tanzania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Africa, England and the United States -- placing a premium on clarity and accessibility. The story-telling is devoid of academic citations, specialist or theoretical debate: "[t]hey are written as far as possible through reference to the words, actions, and comportment of individual youth, and they often focus on relatively mundane aspects of young people's lives." This is a step away from the type of multi-sourced narration used by Henderson, and it privileges the subjective experiences of children over the categories and explanations of researchers. The authors of the stories in this volume engage practices that are endorsed by contemporary feminist, post-colonial and post-structural approaches to constructing knowledge whereby attempts are made.

- to break down the boundaries between researcher and researched;
- to develop and recover knowledge that serves to counter oppression;
- to recognize the unequal relations of authority and privilege that structure all elements of research,

These commitments become part of the ethical framework for many researchers concerned with justice, and they impact data collection practices in the field as much as they impact writing and representation practices. This requires researchers to have extended interactions with subjects, develop relationships of trust, and use participant observation, informal interviewing, and other data collection methods in ways that are openly negotiated with empowered subjects.

Narrative methodologies also enable ethical reflexivity. The young people in Jeffrey and Dyson's volume were provided opportunities to influence how they were represented. In addition, the research and writing process enabled critical reflection on the ways narrative methodologies might influence policy-making by "broadening popular understanding of marginalization or illustrating opportunities for political change" (Jeffrey and Dyson 2008, 2). The use of youth vignettes is not uncommon amongst policy-oriented institutions such as the World Bank (WDR 2007) and UNICEF (UNICEF 1995) which use biographical accounts and digital diaries (multimedia stories produced and accessed on a computer), respectively, to illustrate the importance connecting young people to larger global processes. What Jeffrey and Dyson (2008, 3) offer is a deeper politics of representation to the extent that their vignettes "foreground links between young people's lives and broader structural inequalities" along the continuum from global south to global north.

The narratives in Jeffrey and Dyson's book contain elements of individual biographies, which open a window not just on the everyday experiences of the young people, but also on how they remember, revisit and interpret their own childhoods: "[t]he distinctiveness of [narrative methodologies] lies here ... in the scars to which it bears witness of lost and local(ized) childhoods ... as well as vague hopes for the future, all swept away in the face of changes that are partially just those of growing up but that have also been indelibly structured by the crosscutting of globe-spanning political-economic forces and socio-cultural pressures" (Philo and Swanson 2008, 206).

### **3.2.5. Visual and textual methods**

Visual and textual methods are grouped together here because they both utilize artefacts of social life as data to use in making interpretations and developing insights into social phenomena. Written texts, recorded speech, and representative images are approached as "naturally occurring empirical materials" (Perakyla 2005, 869). These materials are then carefully examined for clues that reveal characteristics of the social settings out of which they were produced, the individuals that produced them, and their patterns of communication and meaning-making. So it is accurate to say that visual and textual methods are primarily concerned with analyzing data and only secondarily concerned with creating data. For example, historical discourse analysis inspired by Foucault analyzes how objects and subjects are constituted within accounts of historical events (cf. Rose 2007, 141).

Nonetheless, texts and images used for analysis may actually be produced as part of research interactions, and this is potentially significant to the study of marginalized subjects, like child migrants, who are not the focus of naturally occurring texts or images. Collaboration in creating artefacts can also be a way for researchers to give voice to, and work toward reciprocity and empathy with, under-represented subjects such as children:

"One way that social scientists in general can be sensitive to these issues is by giving a voice to the vulnerable, rather than by creating images of those studied which are infused with the political and social agendas of the power elite" (Grover 2004, 83).

Visual methods also have the advantage of reducing the importance of language abilities within research, and this is particularly important for research on children and other populations that may have limited or no literacy. Another advantage of textual and visual

methods over, for example, interviews, is that the researcher is able to maintain a form of direct contact with subjective experiences of research subjects, as represented in data artefacts, without requiring ongoing access to subjects (Perakyla 2005). The fact that the researcher's contact with research subjects may be partially or even entirely mediated by these artefacts is not necessarily problematic because these methods are grounded in interpretivism. The possibility of objectively perceiving or knowing the importance of subject positions is given up in favour of greater attention to the ways in which representations, language, and symbolism shape subjectivity and knowledge claims. The importance of textual analysis may be apparent given the predominant place of language in forming and regulating social relations. Yet the power of visualization is also now understood to the extent that "we need to learn to interpret visual images because they are an important means through which social life happens" (Rose 2007, xiii).

The work of Young and Barrett (2001) on street children in Kampala, Uganda demonstrates a high level of sensitivity to methodological issues pertinent to doing research with children. In addressing the need to give their subjects voice through child-friendly forms of participation, they ultimately utilize visual methods in their study.

"These child-centred and child-led participatory methods are particularly relevant when researching street children, given the unique set of circumstances that impinge on the lifeworld of a child living and surviving in the cityscape. Furthermore, the intense, haphazard nature of street life often results in a way of living that is alien to the majority of researchers. It is for this reason that Bemak (1996) calls for researchers to become 'street researchers' getting to know the street environment and way of life by entering into a mutual trust relationship with the children prior to developing and initiating a research strategy. According to Rudestam and Newton (1992) researchers must become more creative and flexible in exploring street child environments. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt visual methods to the particular lifeworld of the street child."(Young and Barrett 2001, 142)

Four visual methods are used in the study: mapping of activity spaces and key features of the local environment; thematic and non-thematic drawings; daily activity time lines; and photo diaries. Discussion of each method is provided below. Visual methods were not used exclusively but were employed along with other ethnographic methods in order to maximize opportunities for researchers to understand the children's experiences. The combination of methods also allowed researchers to be more perceptive about the ways children expressed themselves with the visual methods.

"Although observation, discussion, role-play and written techniques were used, visual methods proved to be particularly important for developing gainful insight into the street child's urban environment from the child's perspective. They introduced a relaxed, fun atmosphere and allowed the children to take control of the process without imposing adult influence."(142)

The children who participated in the Young and Barrett study were nine to seventeen years old and had left home permanently. Their traumatic past experiences and limited communication skills both contributed to their greater comfort with visual methods.

"Most had little or no contact with parents or guardians, having left home principally because of the micro effects of mistreatment, parental death or poverty. They therefore had to create their own survival opportunities and coping mechanisms. Furthermore, the street children were an eclectic mix of individuals coming from different background situations and with various

mother tongues. Their spoken language, Luyaaye, was a combination of words and phrases adopted from various Ugandan languages and dialects. When coupled with the fact that many of the children in the sample were illiterate, the use of visual methods was particularly important for encouraging free expression.” (143)

Researcher access to this group of children was facilitated by collaboration with a local non-governmental organization and further enhanced by the employment within that organization of a collaborator, a young man who had previously lived on the streets of Kampala and was well-known and respected by current street children. These factors provided an entry to the street child population, established a degree of researcher credibility and trust, and supported the utilization of additional sources of information for triangulation.

Children were oriented to research activities in groups. While more than twenty children participated in each research method (out of an estimated 300 street children in Kampala), smaller groups were used to increase communication and understanding between researchers and subjects during these activities.

The researchers used a variety of visual methods to collect data on children’s local knowledge. Children drew maps from memory that helped delineate their spatial awareness, the locations of their activities, as well as pathways they use to move through local space. Starting with a blank sheet of paper, respondents were asked to show the places they and other street children go. Participants sometimes had difficulty constructing their maps, and this was based on a lack of spatial concepts as well as the negative effects of fuel sniffing among the children. Copying of maps and map qualities (perspective, symbolization, etc.) among children in groups was also observed but was not widespread.

“The mental and depot maps produced images that were striking and immediately highlighted the individuality amongst the participating children. In particular the variation in work and leisure space became apparent. The coding of places represented on the maps allowed analysis of the spaces used by different age and gender groups. For example, the mental maps demonstrated that, as would be expected, older boys utilize a greater spatial area within the city compared to younger boys and girls.”(145)

Children’s drawings helped clarify their associations with specific places found within their activity spaces, allowing children to name, and represent their feelings with regard to, places and activities of significance. In a second technique, children were again given blank sheets of paper and asked to create three drawings during each of two sessions. The creation of several drawings was used as a way to allow children to express multiple ideas about themselves. This format also recognized the researchers’ observation of short attention spans in the respondents. Children were sometimes asked to draw based on themes such as ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ or to illustrate activities they carried out in daily life. It was, however, often difficult to correctly identify the images on the drawings and to identify the most important features (see also Ennew 1994; Swart 1990), making a strict visual analysis unfruitful. This is an important methodological issue, as textual and visual data collection strategies can become so ‘child-friendly’ that the researcher has difficulty with interpretation. In this study, the pictures were used to prompt more detailed oral information, keeping the visual images as the central reference point. This is an example of how qualitative researchers use engaging, child-friendly methods as an entry point into data collection, but then also simultaneously bring in more traditional interview techniques to bring out the children’s voices, help the

children to tell their stories, and ultimately enhance the researcher's ability to reliably interpret the data.

Daily time lines were created with children as a fun and participatory way of identifying the timing and sequencing of children's activities. As a group, the children listed the activities they did and then created a symbol for each activity. They then placed those symbols on a daily time line to show the content of their day. "With respect to the analysis of daily time lines, the frequency of events was compared with time of day and place of operation in order to highlight street child niches" (147).

Photo diaries were used, in part, to address the limitations experienced by white, female researchers who could not become full participant observers among the Ugandan children.

"From the point of view of the researcher there were four main advantages to using this method. First, the images produced gave excellent coverage of children's daily lives and good representation was produced. Second, the pictures themselves worked exceptionally well as a tool for discussion and on many occasions the dullest and most technically poor pictures elicited the richest information from the photographer. [...]Third, some of the cameras went into places where the researcher in her 'outsider' position would have changed the situation. Finally, often subsidiary images in the pictures highlighted more than the main subjects themselves." (147-148)

Disposable cameras with flash were distributed to children who wished to participate. Instruction on how to use the cameras was provided, and then the children took photos independently or as part of a team for a 24-hour period. No instructions were given regarding what or when to photograph.

It is important to point out that the authors analyzed the photos, maps, and drawings as visual artefacts, but they placed greater importance on using the visual images as catalysts for further oral discussion to properly interpret the images. Using visual and oral ethnographic techniques together allowed more information to be collected than would have been possible because of the ability to cross-reference information from different sources, to use visual data to identify topics that researchers did not know to raise, to overcome limitations in oral communication skills, and to approach subjects which may have been difficult using only oral methods. Among other findings, the authors found that the 'real' images created by the cameras elicited more new information from the children than did the drawings, timelines, or mental maps.

The value of visual methods as a catalyst for more conventional interviewing techniques is also reflected by Punch (2001a) in her study of children in southern Bolivia. She describes how she used visual methods as one strategy in her ethnographic work.

"The visual methods of using drawings, photographs, and PRA techniques were most useful in the initial exploratory stages of the research for the investigation of broad themes and for seeking children's definitions of the important aspects of their lives. The written methods of diaries and worksheets were used to examine those issues that children had raised in more detail. The household visits were useful to provide a broader perspective of their social worlds. They were used with semi-participant observation as complementary to the other methods, to

confirm whether children did in practice what they said they did, and to add greater depth to an understanding of children's rural lives in different contexts." (Punch 2001a, 178)

Textual methods can also usefully complement field methods when incorporating adult, and especially official and institutional, perspectives in research on children. As part of taking responsibility for children, governments, institutions, and aid agencies produce documents reflecting important local knowledge about children. For example, Harinen et al. (2005) use textual analysis of government documents to inform their wide ranging study of the social and cultural membership identifications of immigrant youth in Finland.

Huijsmans (2008) uses secondary data sources to conduct his research on Lao children working in Thailand. Responding to the limited attention paid to children working beyond their home region in migration and labour research and the tendency to address the phenomenon as an outcome of human trafficking, he analyzes a group of recent studies on Lao children working in Thailand. Huijsmans is not looking to generate new data about the phenomena under study, rather he is looking to reposition the discourse about the topic and then reinterpret the data that already exist in order to increase our understanding of what is happening.

"This article sheds light on the phenomenon of children working beyond their localities, with a particular focus on Lao children working in Thailand. It does so by first reviewing the way child labour migration is addressed in the literature. From there, it continues with a deconstruction of the notion of human trafficking in relation to childhood, and a critique of its near default application to child migrant workers. This conceptual discussion is followed by an analysis of the phenomenon of Lao child migrants working in Thailand based on secondary data distilled from seven recent reports." (332)

Huijsman's research strategy examines representations of children's lives rather than the content of the lives as they are lived. He examines seven previous research studies to look at commonalities in their quantitative (age, gender, and socioeconomic background of the young migrants and/or trafficked children) and qualitative (description, reporting of exploitation) aspects. One important finding is that all reports are co-produced by the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a requirement of research in that particular country. Huijsmans finds that studies of Lao children in Thailand conflate migration with human trafficking and obscure issues relevant to children who choose to migrate independently. This creates problems for the development of policies and intervention programs.

### **3.2.6. Performance, arts-based methods, and play**

Arts and play can be brought into the research practice in ways that reflect the role of arts and play in everyday life: as means of expressing and processing complex feelings. Arts, performance and play can contribute to research in the stage of data collection and also in the presentation of findings to an audience, transcending limitations of language and conventions of discourse in both instances.

In her recent book, Patricia Leavy (2008, 343) states that "performance has emerged as an interdisciplinary methodological genre in its own right, located within the extended qualitative paradigm." She goes on to argue that the increased attention to performance is



driven by new epistemological grounding and the complete departure from the notion of objectivity. Her ideas about performance as a cutting edge method are true about the larger category of arts-based methods.

“Arts-based inquiry is one methodological and theoretical genre among many new forms of qualitative inquiry. It is situated within what Lincoln (1995) described as an emerging tradition of participatory critical action research in social science. Practitioners of inquiry in this line propose reinterpretation of the methods and ethics of human social research and seek to construct action-oriented processes for inquiry that are useful within the local community where the research originates.” (Finley 2005, 682)

“[P]erformance methods dismantle the rational-emotional dichotomy, with respect not just to the researcher’s process but also to the consumptive process” (Leavy 2008, 344). The production of art in the research process, whenever it occurs, creates the possibility for a three-part interaction between researcher, subjects, and audience by creating durable artefacts or temporal performances that can be accessed by audience members in a way that reduces mediation while keeping the researcher involved as a type of co-producer.

It is fairly common for qualitative research on children to employ arts-based methods to engage subjects in a developmentally appropriate way. Plummer et al. (2007) included drawing as well as role-playing among several qualitative methods used to follow-up with children on the street in Khartoum after they had participated in interviews. Like Punch (2001a), Plummer and her colleagues found the drawings useful as prompts for discussion, and that aspect of the research was discussed in reference to visual methods. But what we want to point out here is that it was the role of the artistic process in creating child-friendly forms of communication, and not the content of the art pieces as data per se, that were most useful in enriching the overall research. Nonetheless, the fact that the images themselves are powerful representations of children’s perspectives and capacities for self-expression is underscored by the fact that the images were reproduced within academic journal articles.

Artistic methods are child-friendly because they are participatory, minimize the importance of language skills, and allow children a relatively high degree of control, and hence comfort. Young and Barrett (2001) discuss the value of including drawings among several methods they used with street children in Kampala, Uganda.

“[D]rawing pictures allowed the children to freely express themselves and to think about what they wished to portray. Further, they were not inhibited about their drawing capabilities, which often occurs in more literate children who may develop a sense of artistic inadequacy. The images produced were also useful tools in eliciting discussion with individual children as it provided a focus away from the researcher. The children themselves were in control of producing the pictures and therefore, when asked about what they had drawn, the majority talked freely increasing the quality of the information gathered” (Young and Barrett 2001, 145)

Henderson’s (2006) research on South African AIDS orphans reflects the value that arts and performance can have in producing collective stories, in addition to building rapport and expanding communication between researchers and their subjects. Henderson accessed the children involved in her study through an NGO and met with them in the local high school, an institutional setting with some capacity to shape children’s attitudes and behaviours. At an

early stage of research, before she had conducted interviews or participant observation, she used theatre games to break the ice with her child subjects.

“Opening a more expressive space through the introduction of theatre games allowed the children to introduce us to some of their own performance genres; genres that combined self-praise, bodily expression coupled with an insistence on powerful presence, and the potential annunciation of social bonds between the young people.” (Henderson 2006, 310)

Henderson subsequently moved into the area of performance autoethnography by having children develop and perform a play based on their own experiences. This performance became one representation form of the research that was being carried out, and it was a representation form that was wholly in the hands of the children to construct. The creation of the performance was facilitated by taking the children away from home to a week-long theatre workshop. In the conclusion of her study, Henderson begins by recounting the play in order to reset the contexts of the children’s lives and present her main arguments about the resilience and autonomy of children labelled as “orphans.”

“In their play *Imidlalo Yethu*, the 31 young people of Magangangozi show that they are astute commentators on their worlds. In one scene, they are the ones who display a greater familiarity than older people with the latest developments in social services. They, too, are cognisant of the often exasperating dealings with government departments in pursuit of such services. Specifically, they ‘teach’ those acting the parts of grandparents about the niceties of grant applications, accompanying them to the local town to effect the reissuing of their identity documents. In the play, new documents are necessary because they have been burnt when the old people’s homestead caught fire. The grandparents’ documents are required in effecting successful grant applications. The two young people who act parts as the granddaughters acknowledge that they are orphans and that their parents have died of HIV/AIDS. They explain to their grandparents that a new child support grant supplied by the government has been announced at school, and that they as *izintandane* (orphans) are entitled to it.<sup>22</sup> The play contains scenes where traditional healers and diviners lament the widespread death due to the virus (*igciwane*). In their practice they attempt to deal with the disease, as well as to locate cattle thieves and stolen cattle, cattle-theft having been common in the mountains for generations. There is a scene in the play perfectly depicting the mannerisms of a Church of Zion congregation where the prophet (*umphrofethi*) appeals to God to assist his followers in the time of the Mighty Destroyer (*Mashaya Bhuqe*), one of the evocative names given to HIV/AIDS in isiZulu. A desire to transcend the harshness of everyday life is conveyed in the scene through the relief that powerful, collective singing, dancing and prayer can effect. Young people’s knowledge and playfulness is underscored in the play, and yet an intimation of the deeply unravelling effects of HIV/AIDS is given, of the desire to enter a completely different reality.

We see, then, that in the play the young people were able to refer to HIV/AIDS, and even to act out parts as ‘orphans’ – the name given to them in schools and employed by NGOs – when in their everyday life it is generally too painful to describe themselves in this way or to state directly that many of their parents may have died of AIDS. The fact that young people themselves brought up HIV/AIDS as a theme threading through their play suggests that in acting out parts they could point to areas of pain without feeling awkward in the company of their peers.” (Henderson 2006, 321-322)

Arts and performance involve play in the sense that research participants are encouraged to use creativity to convey aspects of their own personal identities and their connections to external realities. Object relations psychoanalysts such as D.W. Winnicott (1971) use the term “transitional space” to describe the environment in which play takes place, relations to external objects are negotiated, and identities are formed and re-formed. Cultural experience, creativity, transitional phenomena and psychotherapy are all considered to take place within transitional space (Ogden 1993). This suggests that the practicality of incorporating play into the data collection methods used for research on children is two-fold. First, the playfulness of interaction between researchers may encourage high levels of participation by child subjects in qualitative data collection. Second, the introduction of play as an activity may enable children to more readily work with and express ideas about core issues of interest within the research, including adults’ responsibilities for children and public policy goals that may be somewhat abstract in terms of children’s experiences.

Bingley and Milligan (2007) utilize play methods developed for psychotherapeutic purposes in order to activate the creativity of their socioeconomically diverse 16 to 21 year old research subjects in the UK. The focus of their research is on understanding the long-term mental health effects of different kinds of childhood play space. “By creating a carefully managed and supportive environment for enquiry, Bingley and Milligan made it acceptable for their youthful participants to ‘feel like children again’[.] [T]hey illustrate that research need not be a dry or arduous activity but can be an enjoyable, pleasurable, and even joyous experience for participants.” (Kesby 2007, 195) While this research does not involve independent children or developing world contexts, the methods are worth exploring here because they are potentially useful in relation to those topics.

Bingley and Milligan organized their research into three stages. The first stage involved focus groups and individual interviews that explored participants’ perceptions of mental health issues in their age group, their current recreation behaviours, and their childhood memories of place and play. The second stage, and the centrepiece of their research design, was a one-day practical workshop. A diverse range of participatory and creative activities were used in that workshop to generate reflection and ideas and also elicit data from participants.

The morning started with a walk in the woods, with the youth in small groups accompanied by researchers who documented observations through audio field notes and photographs. The second activity was a session during which students were trained in woodcarving by skilled craftspeople. In the afternoon, the researchers organized “two indoor artwork sessions based on specialist, well-established, psychotherapeutic methodology (including art and play therapy) to facilitate the group to access embodied memory, fantasy and imagination about childhood play space and woodland.” (Bingley and Milligan 2007, 286) The first artistic activity involved approximately 45 minutes of sandplay. Participants are first asked to work the sand with their eyes closed “in order to focus on the non-visual, especially tactile, sensory experience” (291). After that, youth open their eyes and work the sand using small tools to scoop and mold the sand. The second artistic activity was 3-dimensional model making. Participants were given choices for the theme of their model: “reflect a childhood memory stimulated by the woodland experience; depict some imaginary place they associated with the woodland; or express ideas and concepts they had about woods in general” (291). A wide range of art supplies and natural materials were provided as the raw materials for the model

making exercise. The day ended with having groups of participants provide feedback of associations, memories, and ideas related to their art projects.

The third stage of the research design was to conduct individual interviews with all participants approximately one month after the workshop. During these final interviews, photographs of the workshop and the participant's models were used to stimulate discussion and recall the workshop experiences. The experience youth had had in the participatory workshop seemed to facilitate communication during the final interviews

“Participants were very open and willing to share their thoughts, ideas, memories and feelings. There was a sense of having shared a positive experience with the researcher and that taking part in the research had proved unexpectedly interesting. [...] [W]e conclude that the follow-up interview in this study demonstrated a good degree of trust had been engendered and this stage of the research data collection was greatly enhanced by the workshop experience.” (Bingley and Milligan 2007, 294)

Bingley and Milligan found their research to be highly effective in overcoming some of the challenges related to engaging young people in research. Their ideas about older youth in the UK may have applicability to youth in a very wide range of situations, including autonomous children.

“The age group we worked with are less tolerant of the possibility of being bored or disinterested when taking part in activities. They demand a degree of recognition as young adults with a right to exercise their autonomy, but at the same time may need some encouragement to try an activity that does not seem immediately relevant or stimulating. [T]hese techniques facilitated access to embodied memories and ideas. The style of the workshop sessions also encourages active contributions in participants who may be less articulate in group discussions and interviews.” (Bingley and Milligan 2007, 295)

### **3.2.7 Virtual and computer-aided methods**

New technologies are adding to the repertoire of data collection strategies available to qualitative researchers, with computers, digital audio and video, and wireless communication providing new ways for researchers to connect to and interact with research subjects. These new developments do not necessarily change the underlying practice of qualitative research, but they may offer benefits in the areas of efficiency and child-friendliness. Digital cameras, for example, make it much easier for researchers to use photography as a data collection method – that is, to put cameras in the hands of children. In addition to reduced costs and ease of operation, digital photography offers immediate returns that increase a researcher's ability to involve subjects in talking about their photos, thereby generating valuable new data. Design professionals working on research with children in Denmark (Iversen and Nielsen, 2003) are exploring the use of cellular phones with digital camera and digital audio capture functions. They refer to the devices as “digital cultural probes.”

“[I]t is a great challenge to move research into people's homes. In our context it was neither possible nor convenient to follow the children from school to observe their after-school activities and home life on a regular basis. We see digital cultural probes as a way of getting some information about what is important in children's' lives in a way that puts the children in control. Their choices alone govern when and what to photograph and send to us.” (Iversen and Nielsen 2003, 1)

Using phones supplied by researchers, children were able to send photos and audio clips to researchers over a 2 month period.

While technologies like digital cameras, cellular phones, and computers may not be prevalent in the developing world, their cost is coming down to the point where it has become viable, and in many cases cost-effective, for researchers to use digital technologies. New forms of electronic media may in fact help to attract and maximize young people's participation in research. David Buckingham (2008, 42) points out that "[i]n most regions of the world, the media are now an inescapable fact of contemporary childhoods ... Even in the rural areas of developing countries, ... growing numbers of children have access to globally- and locally-produced media material." New social science research seeks to use children's so-called 'media-literacy' to evaluate ways in which this forum of experience is embedded in the contexts and relationships of everyday lives (Livingstone 2002; Holloway and Valentine 2003; Bosco 2008). It is further recognized that children's use of computers, the Internet and other media are framed by the operations of the media industry, and by the constraints exerted by textual meanings (see above).

New technologies are also creating new, so called virtual settings in which to conduct research, as people throughout the world gain access to the Internet and other forms of electronic communication such as cell phones and text messaging. The relationship between children and technology is a key focus of research that seeks understanding of young people's use of space and time (Holloway and Valentine 2003) -- to re-evaluate the notion of what constitutes public space, for example -- and of relatively unregulated virtual forums (e.g. YouTube, MySpace, podcasts and weblogs) to give themselves a voice. Digital diaries are now a common form of data collection although it is not difficult to suggest that they are simply a more convenient way to create and publish diary data. For example, UNICEF added a 'Voice of Youth' section to its web site by linking to young people's digital diaries ([www.unicef.org/voy/takeaction/takeaction\\_2692.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/takeaction/takeaction_2692.html)). These data lend themselves to life history and narrative analysis.

Holloway et al (2001) use group discussions focusing on information and communication technologies to study children's time, space and social networks amongst English school-children. Rybas and Gajjala (2007) discuss research into the online identities of young Mexican-Americans in the US. In their project, undergraduate students researched identities of Mexican-American teens both online and offline through user interviews, textual analyses and "linking/living online in their social networks." The Mexican-American teens were from low income neighbourhoods and had limited access to computers and the Internet in a community centre after school. This group of teenagers was already involved in social networking online. Rybas and Gajjala suggest that their ethnography of online lives is no different than ethnographies of more traditional situations.

Moving beyond broad survey, focus group discussions and interview techniques, Philo and Swanson (2008) use weblogs posted by Mohammed H. Zaid Ali on June 2007 to unravel aspects of a young life lived in Baghdad during the U.S. - driven 'war on terror.' This data was created and made available by a self-motivated subject not aware of researchers and their interest in his life. While not now widely available to children, computers and the Internet could greatly expand opportunities for using narrative methods with diverse and remote

subject populations. Mohammed's narrative, simultaneously a detailed report of personal experiences and a piece of literary art produced entirely by the subject, enables Philo and Swanson to elaborate on:

- childish play at the brink of the conflict suggesting a crisis in the categories of adult, youth and child;
- forsaking the simplicity of childhood for the complications of late-teenage existence in post-invasion Iraq;
- the meeting of the banal (Mohammed's everyday life) with the extraordinary (the horrific perpetrations of adult violence).

In a similar context, Derek Gregory (2004) uses the voice of 'Riverbend' – an Iraqi girl – to create a chilling narrative of the breakdown of civil society after the U.S. led invasion.

“For me, April 9 was a blur of faces distorted with fear, horror and tears. All over Baghdad you could hear shelling, explosions, clashes, fighter planes, the dreaded Apaches and the horrifying tanks tearing down streets and highways. Whether you loved Saddam or hated him, Baghdad tore you to pieces, Baghdad was burning. Baghdad was exploding ... Baghdad was falling ... it was a nightmare beyond anyone's power to describe ... Civilians were being evacuated from one area to another, houses were being shot at by tanks, cars were being burned by Apache helicopters ... Baghdad was full of death and destruction on April 9. Seeing tanks in your city, under any circumstances, is perturbing. Seeing foreign tanks in your capital is devastating” (Riverbend, quote in Gregory 2004, 213).

The affective and emotional content of these kinds of data are important although the informants are a self-selecting and often inspired by specific political agendas. Gregory (2004), for example, uses the weblog of Riverbend as a “spatial story told by the life of an ordinary young person” to put flesh on a framework that mapped a profoundly colonial perimeter of power.

At the level of large surveys, global positioning systems (GPS) are now relatively inexpensive and may be carried by young people as they travel, and they may be combined with digital recorders so they may create travel-logs and diaries. Digital cameras and lap tops may facilitate some significant ease with data collection, but perhaps the most significant aspect of changing technology (and particularly with text messaging, cell phones and the Internet) is the potential of young people to take charge of media and provide unsolicited commentaries. Given that a digital divide between those with access and those without will probably continue, these new technologies nonetheless may be seen as facilitating, if not producing, a qualitatively different experience of dwelling in the world including new articulations of spaces and bodies, self and environment to which many young people are well attuned.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The paper presented examples of qualitative research methods used in anthropology, criminal justice, education, geography, public health, and sociology to study independent children. These examples point to a wealth of opportunities for qualitative researchers to work with and learn from children. Many of the methods can be used in research with children as young as six. While some qualitative methods remain fairly experimental, such as virtual and computer-aided methods, most are well developed and have been refined and specified through repeated use in diverse research contexts. It is important to understand that unlike quantitative methods, which become more procedurally specific and consistent in their use as they develop and gain acceptance, qualitative methods tend to become more diversified and multi-faceted as they are molded to different research questions and conditions. This means that qualitative research cannot be effectively carried out following a prescribed and unified set of procedures. Rather, the methodology depends upon researchers exercising judgment consistently. A researcher must select and combine strategies in ways that make sense for the contexts and subjects of his or her particular project and the questions and issues that he or she wants to explore.

Section II provided an orientation to the issues involved in creating coherent and useful research out of the diversity of methodological options available. Section III discussed seven broad qualitative methods while providing one or two in depth case studies of their use. In this conclusion, a summary of these seven methods is provided in two tables (Table 3 and 4) that relate to the choice of methods and the use of methods respectively. Axes for consideration of method choice are research setting, recruitment/sampling, child friendliness/participation, age-specificity, and ethics. The axes for considerations relevant to the use of qualitative methods are potential biases, reciprocity/reflexivity, interpretation, generalizability, and links to theory. The substance of the tables comprises a summary of some the insights coming from the previous section.

Each of the methods described in the latter half of this report are applicable to the study of independent child migrants, but depending on the circumstances and context of the research some may be more appropriate than others. As is suggested in Tables 3 and 4, interviews and focus groups may be more appropriate for older children whereas performance and art-based methods may suit younger children. Surveys are useful when conducted within a mixed-methods format and they are certainly useful for generating aggregate data, but they can distance respondents from the research and it is likely that certain groups of children will be excluded as statistically less significant than others. Virtual and computer-based methods, and performance based methods may be useful as they have the capacity for young people to take control of the methodology. There is a danger that the researcher will lose the ability to interpret data derived from these methods but this bias may be acceptable in the light of how much empowerment of children is engendered. Biographical and narrative methods are particularly useful for researchers who are interested in contextualizing children in larger social, economic and cultural transformations.

**Table 3: Key Considerations Relevant to the Choice of Methods for Qualitative Data Collection**

	Surveys	Interviews and Focus Groups	Observation & Participant Observation	Life Histories & Biographical Methods	Visual & Textual Methods	Performance, Play and Arts-based Method	Virtual and Computer-aided Methods
<b>Research Setting</b>	Requires appropriate location and time to implement questionnaire	Can be carried out in organized or informal settings, with the latter being more child-friendly and more practical but also requiring more commitment from researcher	Must occur in the everyday settings of subjects' lives, potentially requiring the researcher to be mobile	May change dramatically with the mobility of the child	Usually connects space of interaction, such as a classroom, to remote settings that researchers do not attempt to access	May require dedicated space and materials, but these requirements can be minimal; setting features can facilitate some types of activities	Potential for researcher and subjects to be remote from each other and/or settings of interest to research; access to appropriate computer resources is required
<b>Recruitment/Sampling</b>	Random sample ideal, but convenience samples frequently used	Snowball methods or recruitment through schools, refugee camps, youth groups and NGOs	Significant trust required in order to get agreement from subjects and/or guardians; often second step of participant involvement	Snowball methods or recruitment through schools, refugee camps, youth groups and NGOs	Depends on research design: sampling may be of participants or of artifacts created prior; possibility to re-sample from artifacts created in research process	Recruitment through schools, youth and community groups and NGOs, who may serve as host to research activities	Computer literacy (or support for inexperienced users) and access are likely to determine sample
<b>Child-Friendliness/Participation</b>	Potentially very low, but can be increased with facilitation in a group setting; children can be involved in the creation of surveys; difficult to appropriately gauge literacy level of respondents	Depends on skills of interviewer, but potentially high; challenges raised with regard to clarity of oral communication; adolescents often enjoy group dynamics	Potentially very high as method allows child to lead; increases ability to involve and learn from young children	Potentially very high as method allows child to lead	Potentially very high if young person gains skills and exercises control over medium; amplifies children's voices, visions; supports children's involvement in analysis	Potentially very high due to creative and emotional involvement of participants	Very low to high, depending on if young person gains skills and exercises control over medium
<b>Age-specificity</b>	Older children and adolescents	Older children and adolescents; focus groups are particularly good for adolescents	Applicable with all ages, but may be especially important for research on younger children	Applicable with all ages, but may be especially important for research on children with significant life experiences	Favors older children and adolescents	Applicable with all ages	Older children, unless software designed to support younger users
<b>Ethics</b>	Standard IRB considerations	Need to gain permission from respondent and guardian, if any; authority of interviewer; power dynamics in a group	Covert data collection akin to spying; going native; researcher bias may be high; potential for social stigma in some settings	Need to gain permission from respondent and guardian, if any; authority of interviewer;	Power of child participant may be lost	Child participants may be less aware of research agenda behind methodology	Use of public data on Internet without permission



**Table 4: Key Considerations Relevant to the Use of Qualitative Data Collection Methods**

	Surveys	Interviews & Focus Groups	Observation & Participant Observation	Life Histories & Biographical Methods	Visual & Textual Methods	Performance, Play and Arts-based Method	Virtual and Computer-aided Methods
Potential Biases	Truly random samples are difficult to attain; Some groups may not show up as statistically significant	Certain prominent individuals may control group discussions; Interviews may be biased by power relations	Data are researcher driven	The voice of an individual may seem to outweigh larger social contexts	Focused on a specific form of representation	Some child participants may be uncomfortable with a particular creative/performance base	The 'digital divide' disenfranchises a large number of children
Reciprocity/ Reflexivity	Potentially very little	Potentially strong	Potentially strong	Potentially strong	Potentially little unless child is in control of method	Potentially strong	Potentially low
Interpretation	Standard empiricism; statistical methods and models	Transcription to text loses nuances of conversation; biases of textual methods	Tied to experiences of researcher	May connect to larger social and cultural events		Children are the interpreters	Based on representation; issues of access
Generalizability	Relatively high if representativeness of sample is known or is measured as part of survey	Ability to say something about social and cultural contexts or the ways processes of globalization impact local settings	Possible to generalize to broader culture and other groups of young people	Ability to say something about social and cultural contexts	Perhaps through content or discourse analysis	To the extent that the performance relates to larger cultural productions	Only applicable to those with access and have computer literacy
Links to Theory	Empiricism and positivism, but can provide context to ethnography	Feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism	Symbolic interactionism; phenomenology; Feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism	Discursive Theories; Narrative Theory	Semiotics; rhetorical theory; psychoanalysis; discourse analysis; Feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism	Feminist/ Performativity theory; Identity/Queer theory; Psychoanalysis	Semiotics; rhetorical theory; psychoanalysis; discourse analysis

This paper has treated data collection methods as if they are distinct. In fact, the methods discussed are most frequently employed within complex research projects, and it is important to note that the majority of studies reported in the previous section employed a variety of different methods (Henderson 2006 and Langevang 2007 are particularly good examples). Mixed methods enable the blending of research methodologies as iterative, reflexive, and integrated with results that are always partial. In considering how to blend methods, researchers should consider the level of access they will have to their subjects, since gaining access and maintaining connection over and extended time period may come substantial costs and introduce ethical challenges. Some methods, such as surveys, visual and textual methods, and methods utilizing virtual communication, can be implemented effectively in situations where access to subjects is limited. These methods may be the only ways to generate data about some highly mobile children, and they can also help researchers to understand when more intensive fieldwork would prove fruitful.

It is also important to recognize that some methods may be more or less appropriate for gathering data at different scales. This is because techniques such as biographical and life history methods emphasize the perspective of the individual, but also because their use is so labour intensive as to make the collection of similar data from numerous and diverse informants somewhat impractical. Task-based and artistic methods can be used with groups of research subjects, maintaining individual scale in the creation of perceptual and experiential data while being more cost-effective. The ability to facilitate participation of greater numbers of children, and likely a higher degree of child-friendliness in these highly participatory techniques, is balanced against a reduction in direct contact between researcher and subject. This is also markedly true of surveys, which seek very targeted information and therefore reduce the impact of individual perspectives in favour of comparability and aggregation among individuals. New ethical challenges related to representation creep in here. Observation, participant observation, focus groups and performance-based methods are amenable to generating knowledge about local community contexts and social processes, which connect individuals and families to regional, national and global scale issues. Subjects remain engaged with each other during the research process, and this makes processes of interaction, exchange, and negotiation more directly accessible to study. Interviewing, arguably the core qualitative data collection strategy, is the most scaleable of methods. Researchers can choose the number and diversity of participants they will contact and the scope, length, and frequencies of the interviews they will conduct and make adjustments throughout the course of their study or even within an individual interview.

Mixed-method approaches challenge researchers to capitalize on the insight available through diverse methods by connecting those methods to appropriate analytic and interpretive strategies that embrace the fluid and partial contexts of field research. This means that a comprehensive qualitative methodology – a set of data collection techniques plus the interpretive techniques and theories used to create meaning out of the data – should be given equal, or at least independent, status to any other methodology employed within a mixed-method research project. Policy-oriented research on independent child migrants in developing regions needs to be human-centred and ethically sensitive to child-contexts while it seeks to guide policies and solve large-scale problems.

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