Ethical Issues in Child Research: Incongruence between Intentions and Realizations

ANN-BRITT ENOCHSSON
ANNICA LÖFDAHL
Karlstad University
Division for Educational Sciences
SE-651 88 KARLSTAD

Ethical Issues in Child Research

ann-britt.enochsson@kau.se
054 – 700 1908
fax – 054 -700 1886
annica.lofdahl@kau.se
054 - 700 1612
fax – 054 - 700 1886

ABSTRACT *The aim of this article is to find out how ethical principles and intentions are realized in child research. Do ethical dilemmas occur? If, how are these dilemmas made visible and dealt with in articles? Are different perspectives of children discussed? Do the researchers declare or discuss the significance of different perspectives on children?*
The authors would like to extend the problem to include also what it means to the children in preschool and school to participate in a scientific study, and put focus on ethical aspects which can arise when children and researchers meet.
The main results from a literature review of 381 articles from 8 different journals show that few studies focusing child research hold ethical considerations. Ethical intentions are seldom visualized, it seems like ethical dilemmas are exceptions and researcher's perspectives on children are of less concern.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on ethical problems that can appear in child research, e.g. research with a view to getting to know more about children and conditions for children's development in a broad sense. It seems to us that intentions in research with children and the methods being used are incongruent. It has become more and more common that children act as participants, research subjects or even co-researchers, but the methods and ethical considerations are mostly based on the adult researcher's perspectives. We have found that this can cause problems if the perspective is not articulated in studies. Since we think it is an ethical issue the way we treat our informants, we want to look closer at how researchers express their view of their informants, when these are children.

The overall aim of this article is to find out to what extent ethical issues are realized in child research. Since both authors conduct research within educational settings like pre-school and primary/elementary school, we also want to put focus on the educational environment.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

The voluntariness for subjects to participate in research is emphasized in documents and guidelines concerning ethics in research, like the statement in the Nuremberg Code from 1946, "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential." (ACHES-MC, 1946, ¶ 3) and the responsibility for ascertaining the consent rests upon the researcher. The subjects should also be informed of their rights to abstain from participation or to withdraw their consent (WMA, 1964/2002). When we deal with children and their participation as research subjects, we also have to obtain consent from their legally authorized representatives, in most cases their parents. These documents focus medical research with human subjects, but documents concerning social sciences focus the same issues. Mostly when ethical issues are debated it is within the health and care sciences, and many of these ethical discussions deal with research design and how to handle cheating (SOU, 1999:4).

In its ethical principles within the Humanities and the Social Sciences, the Swedish Research Council (2002) states both 'the demand of research' and 'the demands of individual protection', which are assumed to be working together. The demand of research means development of available knowledge and improvement of methods. The demands of individual protection are concretized into four general demands with regard to information, consent, confidentiality and use. Some rules are given prominence, like the participants' right to be informed of their role, their possibilities to decide conditions for participation and withdrawing, and also that participants should not be exposed to pressure or influence to continue when they decide to withdraw.

Guidelines and rules do not state an explicit children's role or status in research, which can be interpreted as if children are embraced by the same principles as in all research with human beings. One problem, as we see it, is how guidelines can be applied in child research, since there is doubleness in looking at children on one hand as participants and on the other hand as vulnerable persons due to their less experience (Gulløv & Højlund, 2003). Another problem is the power relations and the subordinate and mostly marginal positions children occupy vis-à-vis adults. The concept 'informed consent' is somehow difficult when dealing with pre-school children as participants. Backe-Hansen (2002) calls attention to 'assent' or 'accept' as an alternative when small children are participants, which means children's positive confirmation that they want to participate, or if this positive confirmation is lacking, when children do not

protest, their behaviour may be interpreted as acceptance. Though, as Backe-Hansen argues, even 'accept' is unsure in relation to children's ability to understand the conditions for participating. She stresses the need to develop specific procedures for consent with children, where children's own perspectives are considered. She also points at the researcher's responsibility for making it possible throughout the research process for the children to withdraw.

Limitations in educational research

Educational sciences seem, to a great extent, to lack the discussion of ethical questions in research with children. Even the Swedish government bill of January 2003 concerning ethical examination of research (Swedish Government, 2003) seems to avoid topics like children's *participating* in research and the specific issues that may occur in educational settings. The term used in this document is research *on* human beings. It may not be enough to rely on experiences from the medical and health and caring sciences, or even social sciences in a broad sense. Research in educational settings like school/pre-school may face challenges and ethical dilemmas which contain other characteristics, not yet explored. If a researcher is doing research in a class, it can be difficult to say no to participation. David *et al*. (2001) discuss this in terms of 'educated consent' in contrast to 'informed consent'.

How, for example, do we handle the fact that we are adults in pre-school or school? Depending on the situation in the class, the researcher can be seen either as a teacher or as a stranger not worth being paid attention to by the children. Eliasson (1992) and Hake (1999) point to the importance of researchers being aware of our role and of the perspective we choose. An inside perspective in a class of children can be to join the teachers in their fostering role, an outside perspective can be the opposite. Both sides can be insulting to the children. As researchers we do not have a role as fostering teachers, but we have a responsibility as adults, not to let the children do whatever they like. Eliasson as well as Hake think that both perspectives are needed. The problem is if the perspective we choose is unconscious and/or unspoken. In spite of different ethical codices, principles and guidelines, there are also what Forsman (2002) calls grey areas where new ethical issues originate. Doing research on children's activities on the Internet is one such new area (Löfberg, 2003), another is researching children and childhood from new perspectives where children are participating.

Even in studies where we may assume that the researchers understand and are aware of the significance of the communicative conditions under which children are informed of and accept participation, it is not visible in the researchers' accounts of participants, design and methods. Let us use one study (with full respect to the authors and their findings) as an example of an ordinary description: "The children were also asked if they wanted to participate and we tried to make the climate in the interviews playful. It is our impression that the children mostly enjoyed participating and they contributed willingly." (Mauritzson & Säljö, 2001, p.218)

One finding from Mauritzson and Säljö's study shows that children understand and act within the discursive practice they are situated in, and that communicative support from adults is of great importance in children's understanding of a task. Implications from this and similar findings should lead us to ask what kinds of communicative support are given to children when we ask them to participate, and to consider the communicative situation where this happens.

The questions we deal with from experiences in our own research show the necessity both of developing and improving methods and of including these efforts with discussions of individual protection. It also means that these questions must be debated, and this article should be regarded as a contribution to this debate.

ACCESS TO CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

When we deal with getting access to children's activities, we are eager to ensure that our data will be as valid as possible. We prepare carefully and methodological guidelines help us to enter the field (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000) and to get participant status in children's peer-cultures. But do we ask ourselves how we prepare the children to be participating subjects in our research projects? As children nowadays often are regarded as participants instead of objects in research (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000), we may also put focus onto the debate of appropriate methodologies. Some researchers want the adult researcher to be 'a fly on the wall' or to take the 'least-adult-role' (Thorne, 1993; Holmes, 1998), others plead for the researcher being a friend (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). More recently we can find ethical and methodological discussions connected to the 'new' image of children as social actors (James et al., 1998). A common standpoint among ethnographers in school/pre-school settings today is to let children be participants and thereby to be engaged in dialogues and conversations with the children (Mayall, 2000; Enochsson, 2001; Löfdahl, 2002). This will also bring focus onto ethical aspects as well as children's rights, as Alderson (2000) states, referring to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Alderson (in Kampmann, 2000) lists some ethical questions of relevance which researchers ought to raise when planning a study. Above all it is a question of aspects of information, intimacy, sampling and what consequences (costs and benefits) the results of the study may have for children specifically and generally. Similar questions are focused by Christensen Haudrup (2000), who also thinks that ethical reflections about dilemmas must continue during the research process and also involve children in the process. She argues that when children are regarded as social actors, we can no longer insist that they are too small to have opinions about the research they are involved in. Discussions concerning children's perspectives and children as participants in research are mainly focused in qualitative studies, according to Ottosen (2002). Literature on quantitative research methodology, like surveys, hardly ever mentions why or how children are participating, and thereby ethical aspects are rarely discussed.

Ethical dilemmas

Episodes from our own empirical studies (Enochsson, 2001; Löfdahl, 2002) will serve as examples to show what might happen in research with children in school/preschool settings and some ethical issues that bothered us. We prefer to call this *ethical dilemmas* since they occurred in spite of our efforts to put into practice ethical guidelines and because there were no absolute solutions to this often immediate situations. Afterwards we were able to reflect upon and even re-interpret our own actions, but in the here-and-now situation time for reflection was mostly not available.

Children's use of darkness

In my study (Löfdahl, 2002) children were observed and videotaped during their free play inside the pre-school setting. Children were asked to give their permission before they were observed which they did almost every time. A common play situation among these children aged 3-6 years, was to play "It's night and we are sleeping", and to switch off the light to make the room more like the real night. As I (the researcher) needed the artificial light to be able to videotape the play situation, I asked them to turn the light on again, otherwise my camera did not work. It happened, quite frequently, that the children switched off the light and prevented me from using the camera.

The ethical issue I would like to put in focus is whether my efforts to make them turn the light on could be considered as an attempt to persuasion and using my authority as an adult to get

access even if the children did not want to? In my study, to start with, playing 'night' was just an ordinary play scenario, but when the children noticed my inability to use the camera in the dark, they started to use these situations to express their withdrawal. I did not understand their possible efforts to withdraw until the analyses of my data, which in turn gave rise to another ethical dilemma. I did not use the play situations for further analysis when I realized the children's wishes to withdraw, but several situations had already been objects of analysis and thereby I gained knowledge about play situations they did not want me to know about.

Participating for fame

Lucas (10 years old) was very eager to participate in the study (Enochsson, 2001). During the interview it became obvious why. He asked starry-eyed if he was going to become famous when he was cited in my book. The fame of the children had never occurred to me as an option. To me as a researcher, confidentiality was an absolute condition, and the teacher and I had carefully informed the children about what anonymity meant. Here was Lucas expecting to become famous through my book!

In this case we tried to solve this ethical dilemma by asking all the children and their parents if they wanted the children's names mentioned in the preface. Everybody said yes, and Lucas could have his real name in the book as he said he wanted. But this does not mean that Lucas was satisfied afterwards. Persons seldom become famous by a mention in a doctoral dissertation preface.

Showing the video film to others

Video sequences from the children's play were used as a sort of scaffolding for the children's memory when we talked about their play (Löfdahl, 2002). Children from the peer group, though they were not acting in that specific video sequence, still took part in our talks about play. This is considered a common method when group interviews are used, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1995). Amongst other things this was meant to help to reveal the complexity of the situation and facilitate gaining more knowledge about their play actions.

An ethical dilemma occurred when I realized that a boy who had been excluded from the girls' play was able to watch the end of the play afterwards. He uttered with surprise –*Now I am able to hear them*. In addition to that he also commented on the girls' vocabulary as improper, –*They are talking about farts, and it is not funny at all*.

I carefully planned to protect the children from insulting their integrity vis-à-vis adults, but did not realize fully that this could also happen vis-à-vis other children. Probably, the girls would not have agreed to let him watch that play sequence if I had asked them.

Revealing facts

Another similar event took place in Enochsson's (2001) study. More than a year after the realization of the empirical study, I decided to present some of the results to the children, to see if they could recognize themselves as a group. It had been very important to change facts, so that no one would be able to find out who was who. There were a lot of quotations from my field notes and the interviews, and if the children had been working with the Swedish winter sports resort Idre, for example, I changed it to a similar resort, etc. Some facts were not very easy to change. Since my study concerned reliability on the Internet, it was very interesting when one of the students began to talk about the reincarnation of a famous artist and connected sites on the net. I did not know any comparable artist, so the name was left in the text.

Afterwards, the student came to me and said that he was the only one in the class who admired this artist, and he felt pointed out. I interpreted his comment just as a way of focusing my attention on this, because he then said that it was OK for me to write it in the book. But I still wonder what he really wanted me to do.

In our own examples of ethical dilemmas we have become aware of the difficulties of dealing with the demand of individual protection as well of the more concretized demand of how to use the results. We have also noticed how easily one can get information off-the–record when doing research in pre-school/school settings; you can chat with a parent or participate in teachers' meeting. The researcher gets knowledge but can not write it down; still the researcher has the knowledge and we believe this will influence the results.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Children and childhood can be seen in different ways. Johansson (2000) discerns three paradigms. One paradigm is what Johansson calls *childhood as cultural construction*, which means that childhood is a conception within our culture, and is similar to the perspective we advocate. Childhood does not necessarily look the same everywhere, and obviously it does not. Interpreting childhood in this way does not mean that childhood does not exist or denying children's conditions of life. Looking at childhood as a construction provides space for difference and change, which can be difficult to explain from a deterministic, developmental point of view. This paradigm has emerged within ethnographic research and an ethnographic approach containing observations, interviews etc. is the most suitable, since it gives children the possibility of being a participating subject in data production (James & Prout, 1997).

Both children and technology are conceptions closely related to the future. One of Enochsson's (2001) informants – John – said several times that he thought it was silly to say that children are the future. He said that children are the present "because we are just as important now". John's thoughts exemplify this paradigm, and a reaction to another way of thinking.

The other two paradigms, expressed by the words *development* and *socialization*, have for a long time been dominating the understanding of children and childhood. The development paradigm assumes there is a 'normal' development to which the child's progress can be related. The concept *stage* is widely used, and childhood is compared to climbing stairs until adulthood is reached and the individual is a complete person. The concept *socialization* represents the transfer of the society's or the group's knowledge, norms and values to the child. The two paradigms have in common that the child is seen as an incomplete person who should be educated, and childhood is a condition whose only purpose is to be passed through. Just what John's reactions were about.

Incompetent Objects vs. Competent Subjects

Depending on what perspective or paradigm the researcher uses, the children will be treated differently and, as a consequence of this, different conclusions can be drawn. As Alanen (1992) claims, the adults have the power and precedence over the interpretation. Even when adults intend to listen to children, some problems arise, as listening implies hearing and also interpreting what you hear. These problems are dealt with in the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2000), a framework for listening to young children , where children's different voices and languages are recognized and taken into account.

Our ambitions so far have been to describe the *intentions* in child research. In spite of the ethical guidelines; methodological knowledge and the recent year's discussions on the 'new image of the child', we have read several results from articles related to the information-seeking field, where children were treated more like 'incompetent objects' than 'competent subjects'. In the following examples children are treated differently from adults, and conclusions have been drawn which probably would not have been drawn if the respondents had been adults. We may wonder if these conclusions have met the ethical requirements if the participants had been adults?

In an interview study of the information-seeking process with 12-year old students, Large and Beheshti (2000) question the validity of the children's answers with the words: "Can students be relied upon to answer questions honestly?" (p. 1072). A tendency towards this kind of interpretation is also found in studies on demands of information from different databases (Wallace & Kupperman, 1997; Hirsh, 1999) where children's answer were treated different from answers given by adults in studies of the same kind (Barry, 1993; Barry, 1994; Barry & Schamber, 1995). The adults in these studies are described as serious information seekers, which they probably are, but the children are described as less serious and more attracted to the appearance of web sites than to the content although the children have the same demands on the information searched for: informative, current, easy to read and access, etc. The Danish child psychologist Kragh-Müller (2000) turns this upside-down and says that we can as well question the researcher as receiver, and she also points to the responsibility of being up-dated with children's culture, for example, when working with children. A final example shows how the researcher (Bilal, 2000) draws the conclusion that 12-13 years old students do not have the cognitive abilities to use the search engine Yahooligans. In her study Bilal did not take into account their lack of experience in her interpretation, though she was very well aware of their limited time (a total amount of five hours) for practice.

The citations above are all examples of manifestations of a perspective where children are seen as not yet ready and thus not dependable – as incompetent objects. The researcher allows her- or himself to treat the children differently from adults. With such a perspective, the researcher never questions the correctness of doing so. Problem arises when studies with this perspective are compared to studies where children are seen as fellow beings, and this is not taken into account, since data can be interpreted into different results depending on the perspective.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the results described above in mind, we started to ask ourselves how *realizations* of ethical issues are described in journal articles within our own areas of child research.

- The aim of this article is to find out to what extent ethical issues are dealt with in research studies when children participate. The questions we focus on in this study are:

- How are ethical principles and intentions realized in child research?

- Do ethical dilemmas occur in child research? If, how are these dilemmas made visible and dealt with in research articles?

- Are different perspectives on children discussed in research articles? Do the researchers declare or discuss the significance of different perspectives on children?

METHOD

The review was limited to articles from 8 different journals concerning child research in pre-school, the field of information seeking, and computers in school. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige* [Educational Research in Sweden] and *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* were chosen because of their general educational subject and connection to research in the Nordic countries. One further limitation was to choose only the two latest volumes available for each journal, e.g. mostly 2001-2002. Exceptions from this are indicated in Table I. We read abstracts from 381 articles available in Full Text or paper format at Karlstad University library and selected articles that focused on children under the age of 15, e.g. focus on older students, teachers, parents or curricula were excluded. A total amount of 88 articles focusing on child research were scrutinized regarding the ethical issues discussed above (Table I).

Table I. *Number of articles focusing child research.*
) indicates exceptions from volumes 2001–2002 due to too few issues

Journal volumes 2001-2002. *) indicates that there can be articles also from year 2000	Articles in total / articles focusing children	Empirical studies / literature or research reviews focusing children
Early Childhood Education Journal	56 / 16	5 / 11
International Journal of Early Years Education	29 / 14	12 / 2
Journal of Research on Computing in Education	46 / 5	5
*) *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research*	59 / 4	4
Computers in Education	96 /11	11
*) *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige [Educational Research in Sweden]*	27 / 12	6 / 6
Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research	42 / 14	14
*) *Tidsskrift for Børne –og Ungdomskultur [Journal of Child- and Youth Culture]*	26 / 11	9 / 2

RESULTS

Ethical concerns and dilemmas are rare in articles from all journals but when they are made visible they appear in very different forms, which make it difficult to compare and put together. Roughly, we can describe it as from 88 articles, 17 explain some aspect of how ethical intentions were realized, which also means in 71 articles focusing child research there were no ethical considerations at all mentioned. In 5 articles we found some dilemmas visible in the text and in 14 articles the researchers are discussing or reflecting upon different perspectives on children. 66 articles hold no reflections of these kinds.

The figures are somehow misleading due to the diversity of descriptions. Journals have different aims and scope, which of course must be taken into account when doing a review of this kind. Nevertheless, we found it interesting to show some differences and similarities. Let's take a closer look at how ethical concerns and dilemmas are realized and visualized in some example we found relevant.

Realization of ethical intentions

What is behind the figures of the 17 articles describing some kind of realizations of ethical intentions? Some articles describes how the voluntary participation was established among the caregivers and the children's parents, some studies comment upon the demand of confidentiality and mention that all names are synonyms. We have noticed, in line with Ottosen (2002) that quantitative studies seem to be less concerned with ethical issues; only one such study briefly mentions that the criteria for selection were willingness. Even if we can read between the lines that teachers or schools have been asked to participate in surveys, this is not explicitly stated. Even though qualitative studies are more eager to describe ethical issues, it is rare. Very few researchers make it visible how they realized for example informed consent among the children participating in the study.

We found one example were the researcher in a project on 'media culture' visualize her intentions by simply telling us what she did to avoid using the children in a negative manner. Tufte (2001) regard the children as co-researchers and experts who stimulate the process rather than victims who are used by the researchers.

Some more examples show how ambiguous and difficult this issue is. Williams (2001) introduces her study with references to both curriculum and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which claims that "children have the rights to express their views on all matters of concern to them"(p. 317), but ethical considerations are not mentioned at all. Räty *et al*. (2002) describe their efforts to ask for permission from all parents and the children before interviews started and claim that "the children did them willingly" (p. 125). Though, they also admit, "Individually prompting was used when deemed necessary" (p. 125). It seems to us that, first: the basic ethical principle of voluntariness was neglected, and second: ethically dilemmas do arise. This will lead us to our next topic.

Ethical dilemmas

Only in 5 articles ethical dilemmas were discussed. All of these studies were conducted within an ethnographic tradition, where rich descriptions are common. The dilemmas described in the articles are all connected to the methods used, which are interviews, video taping and to participate on the whole. Johansson (2003) describes a situation where she was filming a child, who started to cry. Another child let her know that this was not appropriate and said with an indignant voice: "Are you filming while he is crying!"(p. 45, authors trans.). Johansson argues that sensitivity and respect for children's integrity and critique of the methods used

by the researcher are essential. She also points at the dilemma that these violations of children's integrity often become visible when they already have happened, as with the crying child.

All 5 studies mention the problem with children's informed consent and some studies stress the importance of showing respect and to interpret the signals the children give, since they are not always able to express themselves in words. Another dilemma mentioned in two articles is whether the researcher can interpret the answers given. Jónsson and Pálsdóttir (2000) writes that the researchers' wishes to find out specific answers affect the children's positions in the interviews.

Perspectives on children

A relatively large number of articles, 14, are discussing different perspectives on children, which can be related to a theme-issue of children's perspective and child perspective in Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige (vol 8, issue 1-2,), which holds 6 of these articles.

It is regarded as a matter of perspective, for example, *what kind* of questions researchers expect children to answer (Qvarsell, 2003) as well as *how* children's utterances are reproduced and *how* the researcher choose to interpret the results (Halldén, 2003).

Some studies stress the image of children as resilient and competent beings and reflect upon the methods and the perspectives from which young children's actions are interpreted. Lindahl and Pramling Samuelsson (2002) claims that instead of seeing mistakes when children act in unexpected ways, it is about variation which is part of children's strategies for learning. Finally we would like to show one, as we mean, both good and unique example. In her study on children's experiences of school, Westling Allodi (2002) is focusing children's perspectives and also problematize what it means to interpret children's narratives. The children were asked if they wanted to participate in her study. Westling Allodi's basic assumption is that children are worth listening to. She shows that children can be treated with respect both in analyses and in discussions, which means "avoiding assessing children's language ability or level of moral development and instead considering the children as competent informants who are able to assess their educational environments" (p. 203). She also stresses that what may be seen as trivial content in children's narratives from our adult perspective may be considered as relevant to the children. What is unique in her study is that she throughout the study is *realizing* the intentions that most researchers only discuss as desirable and sometimes possible.

2/3 (9) of these 14 articles are built on empirical studies and 1/3 (5) is based on literature/research reviews. It shows that it is possible to reflect upon and take into account the researchers perspectives and basic assumptions on children in relation to empirical studies.

CONCLUSION

The main results from this study show that few studies focusing child research hold ethical considerations. Ethical intentions are seldom visualized, it seems like ethical dilemmas are exceptions and researcher's perspectives on children are of less concern. We may ask us what this means both to the methodological field of ethical issues as well as to the field of child research. Is it enough if this topic is a separate niche discussed in separate forums, not active and visible in reports and articles? A risk as we see it, is that ethical concerns will never become an integrated part of child research. Do we wish to learn from each other's empirical examples or do we prefer these concerns to be discerned from empirical studies?

We found some results worth discussing further. The review shows that ethical considerations were more common in qualitative studies, and those few studies visualizing dilemmas were ethnographic studies. It could be that in ethnographic studies, where the researcher is prepared for listening to whatever happens, it is easier to be sensitive to dilemmas that might occur, and the whole research process is focussed on listening to the informants. But it would be surprising if dilemmas do not occur in other types of studies.

All ethical guidelines state voluntariness as essential. In spite of that, our results show examples of children that have been prompted. It is still possible to claim that participation is voluntary, since the children still can answer yes or no. But taken into account the power relation between a child and a researcher, we think this is something worth reflecting upon. Among those articles which visualize informed consent, we have noticed that it is more common to inform and ask parents and teachers rather than the children. It is difficult to get informed consent from toddlers or pre-school children and sometimes even older children. But few articles discusses what Backe-Hansen (2002) calls 'assent' or 'accept' from the children. There is a need to develop knowledge about how children express their consent or right to abstain from participation and to understand their abilities to express themselves in other terms than yes or no. The children in Löfdahl's (2002) study developed a reflexive thinking about the research process which also shows that researchers need to reconsider children's initial consent, especially in ethnographic studies where we can expect children to develop new understanding during the time spent in the field.

Empirical data from different studies indicate that children seem to have different reasons for participating as subjects, which shows the need to develop a reflexive attitude towards children's informed consent. Are we able to come up to children's expectations of participating? The boy in Enochsson's (2001) study shows us that children's reasons for participating may be of a totally different character than adult researchers have in their minds. We claim that it is important to discuss dilemmas similar to the ones we have highlighted, even if there are no definite answers.

According to Hake (1999) and Eliasson (1992), it is important to be aware of the role we take as researchers and which perspective on children we choose. Few researchers discuss perspectives in their articles, and we do not know whether the perspective is conscious or not. How do we know the basic assumptions from all these studies when they are not visualized? With different perspectives, e.g. different ways of constructing questions and interpreting results (Halldén, 2003; Qvarsell, 2003), the research questions and results may not be comparable, since they hold different nuances. Several articles (22) or 1/4 of the scrutinized articles are based on literature/research reviews. This tendency was also mentioned in a survey study on content in representative publications in early childhood education journals (Gargiulo et al., 2001) where reviews were found to be a common format. Very few of these studies reflect upon ethical considerations in the refereed studies, and such reflections are rare even in studies holding both reviews and empirical studies. It means that we are building a 'cumulative unconsciousness' of ethical realizations.

These results raise the questions: Is it necessary to visualize ethical issues or can we assume that intentions are realized even if they are invisible? Who holds the responsibility for this, editors; reviewers; funding boards or the authors alone?

From our perspective child research would gain a lot if we integrate methodological concerns and empirical processes and make ethical issues visible in research articles. We think this might be a way of confronting the problem in purpose to handle the incongruence we have seen between ethical intentions and realization in child research. We regard this article as an

introduction to this important issue and look forward to an open debate on these issues from researchers in the field.

LITERATURE

ACHES-MC (1946). *Nuremberg Code*, [on-line]. Retrieved December 12, 2002 from Advocacy Committee for Human Experimentation Survivors - Mind Control web site: http://www.aches-mc.org/nurm.htm

ALANEN, LEENA (1992). *Modern childhood? Exploring the 'child question' in sociology*. (Publication Series A 50). Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research.

ALDERSON, PRISCILLA (2000). Children as researchers. The effect of participation rights on research methodology. In P. CHRISTENSEN & A. JAMES (Eds) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices*. London: Falmer Press.

BACKE-HANSEN, ELISABETH (2002). Børns deltakelse i spørreskjemaundersøkelser sett i forhold til generelle forskningsetiske krav. In D. ANDERSEN & M. H. OTTOSEN (Eds) *Børn som respondenter. Om børns medvirken i survey.[Children as respondents. On children's participation in survey; in Danish]* Copenhagen: Socialforskningsinstituttet.

BARRY, CAROL L. (1993). *The identification of user relevance criteria and document characteristics: Beyond the topical approach to information retrieval*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University.

BARRY, CAROL L. (1994). User-defined relevance criteria: An exploratory study. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science 45*; 149-159.

BARRY, CAROL L. & SCHAMBER, LINDA (1995). *User-defined relevance criteria: A comparison of two studies*. Paper presented at The 1995 ASIS Annual Meeting, Chicago: AMIGOS Bibliographic Council, Inc.

BILAL, DANIA (2000). Children's use of Yahooligans! Web search engine: II. Cognitive and physical behaviors on research tasks. *Journal of American Society for Information Science On-line publishing 6 Oct 2000*; 28.

CHRISTENSEN HAUDRUP, PIA (2000). Etiska fordringar. Etik og taktik i forskning med børn . In P. JØRGENSEN & J. KAMPMAN (Eds) *Børn som informanter.[Children as informants; in Danish]* København: Børnerådet.

CLARK, ALLISON (2000). *Gaining multiple perspectives: young children's views and experiences of child care*. Paper presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association, Institute of Education, London University.

CORSARO, WILLIAM A. & MOLINARI, LUISA (2000). Entering and observing in children's worlds. In P. CHRISTENSEN & A. JAMES (Eds) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices*. London & New York: Falmer Press.

DAVID, MIRIAM; EDWARDS, ROSALIND & ALLDRED, PAM (2001). Children and school-based research: 'informed consent' or 'educated consent'? *British Educational Research Journal 27*(3); 347-365.

ELIASSON, ROSMARI (1992). *Forskningsetik och perspektivval [Research ethics and chioce of perspective; in Swedish].* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

ENOCHSSON, ANNBRITT (2001). *Meningen med webben - en studie om Internetsökning utifrån erfarenheter i en fjärdeklass [The use of the web; in Swedish].* (Doctoral Dissertation 2002:7). Karlstad: Division for Educational Sciences.

FINE, GARY ALAN & SANDSTROM, KENT L. (1988). *Knowing Children. Participating Observation with Minors.* Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

FORSMAN, BIRGITTA (2002). *Vetenskap och moral [Science and moral; in Swedish].* Nora: Nya Doxa.

GARGIULO, RICHARD; JALONGO, MARY RENCK & MOTARI, JACQUELINE (2001). Writing for publication in early childhood education: Survey data from editors and advice to authors. *Early Childhood Education Journal 29*(1); 17-23.

GULLØV, EVA & HØJLUND, SUSANNE (2003). *Feltarbejde blandt børn [Field research among children; in Danish].* Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

HAKE, KARIN (1999). Barneperspektivet - en forskningsstrategi. In C. L. CHRISTENSEN (Ed.) *Børn, unge og medier. [Children, youth and media; in Norwegian]* Göteborg: Nordicom.

HALLDÉN, GUNILLA (2003). Barnperspektiv som ideologiskt eller metodologiskt begrepp [Childrens' perspective as an ideological or methodological concept; in Swedish]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige 8*(1-2); 12-23.

HIRSH, SANDRA G. (1999). Children's relevance criteria and information seeking on electronic resources. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science 50*(14); 1265-1283.

HOLMES, ROBYN M. (1998). *Fieldwork with children.* London: Sage.

HOLSTEIN, JAMES A. & GUBRIUM, JABER F. (1995). *The active interview.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

JAMES, ALLISON; JENKS, CHRIS & PROUT, ALAN (1998). *Theorizing childhood.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

JAMES, ALLISON & PROUT, ALAN, (Eds) (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood.* London: Falmer.

JOHANSSON, BARBRO (2000). *Kom och ät! Jag ska bara dö först.. ['Time to eat.' 'Okay! I'll just die first!'..; in Swedish].* (Doctoral dissertation Etnologiska föreningen i Västsverige 31). Gothenburg: Department of Ethnology.

JOHANSSON, EVA (2003). Att närma sig barns perspektiv: Forskare och pedagogers möten med barns perspektiv [To approach and understand a child's perspective as a teacher and a researcher; in Swedish]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige 8*(1-2); 42-57.

JÓNSSON, JÓN & PÁLSDÓTTIR, RAKEL (2000). Det skrækkelige i islandsk folketro: Udvikling og funktion [the frightening in Icelandic folklore: Development and function; in Scandinavian]. *Tidsskift for børne- og ungdomskultur*(42); 39-56.

KAMPMANN, JAN (2000). Børn som informanter og børneperspektiv. In P. JØRGENSEN & J. KAMPMANN (Eds) *Børn som informanter. [Children as informants; in Danish]* København: Børnerådet.

KRAGH-MÜLLER, GRETHE (2000). Børn siger så meget - forstår de voksne? In P. JÖRGENSEN & J. KAMPMANN (Eds) *Børn som informanter. [Children as informants; in Danish]* København: Børnerådet.

LARGE, ANDREW & BEHESHTI, JAMSHID (2000). The web as a classroom resource: Reactions from the users. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science 51*(12); 1069-1080.

LINDAHL, MARITA & PRAMLING SAMUELSSON, INGRID (2002). Imitation and variation: Reflections on toddlers' strategies for learning. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research 46*(1); 25-45.

LÖFBERG, CECILIA (2003). Ethical and methodological dilemmas in research with/on children and youth on the net. In M. THORSETH (Ed.) *Applied Ethics within Internet Research.* Trondheim: NTNU, Program for anvendt etikk.

LÖFDAHL, ANNICA (2002). *Förskolebarns lek - en arena för kulturellt och socialt meningsskapande [Pre-school children's play - arenas for cultural and social meaning making; in Swedish].* (Doctoral Dissertation 2002:28). Karlstad: Division for Educational Sciences.

MAURITZSON, ULLA & SÄLJÖ, ROGER (2001). Adult questions and children's responses: coordination of perspectives in studies of children's theories of other minds. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research 45*(3); 213-231.

MAYALL, BERRY (2000). Conversations with children. In P. CHRISTENSEN & A. JAMES (Eds) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices.* London: Falmer Press.

OTTOSEN, MAI HEIDE (2002). Forskning og erfaringer på feltet. In D. ANDERSEN & M. H. OTTOSEN (Eds) *Børn som respondenter. Om børns medvirken i survey. [Children as respondents. On children's participating in survey; in Danish]* Copenhagen: Socialforskningsinstituttet.

QVARSELL, BIRGITTA (2003). Barns perspektiv och mänskliga rättigheter [Children's perspectives and human rights; in Swedish]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige 8*(1-2); 101-113.

RÄTY, HANNU; KASANEN, KATI & SNELLMAN, LEILA (2002). What makes one able? The formation of pupil's conception of academic ability. *International Journal of Early Years in Education 10*(2); 121-135.

SOU (1999:4). *God sed i forskningen [Good moral in research; in Swedish]*. Utbildningsdepartementet.

SWEDISH GOVERNMENT (2002/03:50). *Etikprövning av forskning [Ethical consideration of research; in Swedish]*. Stockholm.

SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL (2002/03:50). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning [Ethical principles for research within the humanities and social sciences; in Swedish]*. Stockholm.

THORNE, BARRIE (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutger's University Press.

TUFTE, BIRGITTE (2001). Erfaringer fra ett tværfagligt forskningsprojekt [Experiences from a cross-disciplinary research project; in Danish]. *Tidsskrift for børne- og ungdomskultur 2001*(43); 75-84.

WALLACE, RAVEN & KUPPERMAN, JEFF (1997). *On-line search in the science classroom: Benefits and possibilities*. Paper presented at AERA, Chicago.

WESTLING ALLODI, MARA (2002). Children's experiences of school: narratives of Swedish children with and without learning difficulties. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research 46*(2); 181-205.

WILLIAMS, PIA (2001). Preschool routines, peer learning and participation. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research 45*(4); 317-339.

WMA, GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1964/2002). *Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects*, [on-line]. Retrieved December 25, 2002 from The World Medical Association web site: http://www.wma.net/e/policy/17-c_e.html

WOODHEAD, MARTIN & FAULKNER, DOROTHY (2000). Subjects, objects or participants? In P. CHRISTENSEN & A. JAMES (Eds) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices*. London: Falmer Press.