

Co-Researching with Grade 5 & 6 Students as Reciprocal Act

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OF ALBERTA**

Study Context

Today's presentation arose out of a research study called *School is Such a Chore!* which focused on two questions:

1. How does experiential learning through agriculture foster curricular connections and life skills in K-6 students?
2. How does an agricultural learning environment shape students' relationship with school?

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Research Site

- *Where?* New Prairie Agriculture School - rural school in western Canada
- *What?* Focused on teaching provincial curriculum through an agricultural lens. Agricultural literacy, land stewardship, and experiential learning are all important to the school's philosophy
- *When?* Over 100 years old, closed in 2020 due to low enrollment, reopened in 2021 as public charter school
- *Who?* Was K-6 at the time of the study, barnyard animals that students are tasked with taking care of (goats, sheep, steers, ducks, chickens)
- *Why?* To counter the “cultural derogation of rural life” (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2016, p. 1)

Benefits of Researching with Children & Youth: A Brief Inventory

- Communication skills (Kirshner & O'Donoghue, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2023)
- Confidence (Kellett, 2005; Messiou & Lowe, 2023)
- Agency (Cuevas-Parra & Tisdall 2019; Sandoval & Messiou 2022)
- Understanding of research processes (Pinter & Zandian, 2015)
- Ethics (Fleming, 2013)
- Teamwork
- Perspective-taking
- Sense of purpose/belonging (Graham et al., 2014)

What are the benefits
to adults when they
work with young co-
researchers?

Analytical Approach

Sensitizing Concept:

- Non-restrictive guidance of analysis (Blumer, 1954)

Reciprocal Act:

- *“Children often have few formal opportunities to give something back to adults, to people they respect and care about who are not related to them”*
(Skelton, 2008, p. 25).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA):

- “Open and organic” coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 334)
- Using “researcher’s subjectivity as a resource” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 330)

Narratives of Insight

Leah's Perspective:

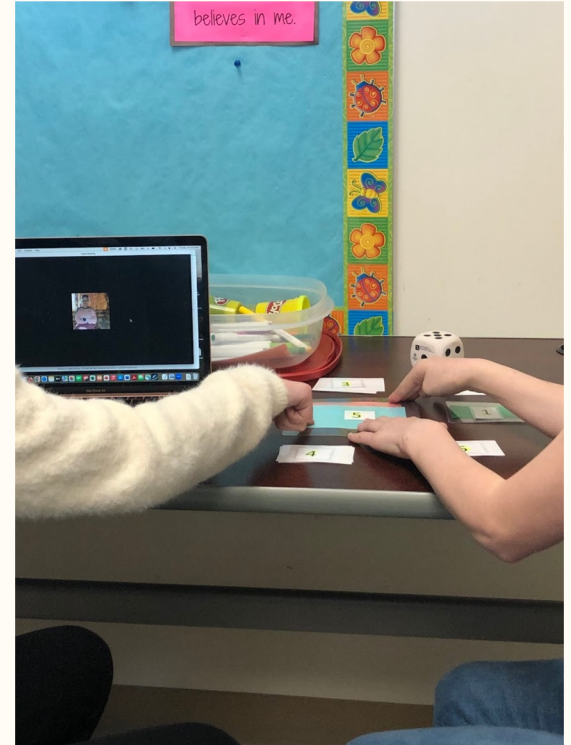
Driving the Narrative

- *Teaching Quality Standard: Fostering Effective Relationships* (Government of Alberta, 2023)
- Social-emotional side of research (e.g. Skelton, 2008; Pope, 2020)
- Research as a process where learning occurs (Skauge et al., 2021)
- Student Researchers as active “experts” in their social conditions (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015, p. 162).

Care for Participants

Student Co-Researchers demonstrated rigour in:

- Assessing participant comfort
- Adapting questions to participant age
- Expanding on questions and answers



Students conducting a mock interview.

Care for Co-Researchers

Student Co-Researchers

- Exhibited strong teamwork
- Celebrated learning and achievement
- Questioned fairness in the research process

Psychic Rewards (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 1999)

- Acceptance of adult researchers: respect for non-familial adults (Skelton, 2008)



Rae Ann's Perspective:

Driving the Narrative

- Confessions of a Rural Kid
 - Push back against the **deficit view of rural education** (Corbett, 2020)
 - **Reclaim rural roots** while still belonging in academic spaces (Dews & Law, 1995; Thiel, 2016)
- Kids as Capable (and Willing) Researchers
 - Able to witness students taking a larger role in the research process than I was able to accomplish during my dissertation work, including in **knowledge mobilization**
- Relinquishing Control
 - Facilitator rather than researcher

Key Takeaways

Reciprocal Act in Research: Care and Joy

- Care
 - Highlights research as a teaching/learning endeavour for all involved
- Joy
 - Witnessing the growth of students as researchers and community members/leaders
 - Joy plays a dual role as “metric and intervention tool” (Kravchenko. 2023, para. 10) which can redefine what success looks like in a study setting

Impact: “What *matters* in this research?”

We consider: How did the research shape connections, create meaning, and nurture growth for all involved?

- Research can look different than it is typically showcased in academia
- Making research accessible
- Research is intricately related to teaching and service
- Psychic rewards in research, just as in teaching
- Rural matters



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