

# Reimagining Child-Parent Research

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## Abstract

How can child-parent research be reimagined? This introductory chapter offers a historical context of children doing research and develops a conceptual framework for understanding facets of child-parent research. The premise of this line of inquiry includes authenticity, empowerment, and insight. The authors contemplate the range of involvement and partnership and provide a wheel metaphor to capture the dynamic and nuanced interplay of dialogue, critical reflection, ethics, tension, and participation. There are ethical concerns addressed through a critical discussion about hierarchies, power, and voice in child-parent research, which hinges on a shared purpose and requires an approach that is carefully cultivated to be egalitarian, inclusive, dialogic, and reciprocal.

## 1 Introduction

In an era when education research underscores the need to connect family and school (Edwards et al., 2019), there is a distinct interest in, and attention to, what happens in the home and the relationship among child,<sup>1</sup> parent, and meaning making. Couple this extant interest with a relatively new social norm—the advent of “sharenting” (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017) that has included parents/caregivers sharing information about their children (e.g., accomplishments, milestones, frustrations, images) on social media—and the boundaries of home or family literacies and practices also expand and, often, become blurred. There is a third factor that also plays an important role, and that is the researcher, who also is a parent interested in learning *with* his/her child and, likewise, the child who is interested in co-researching with his/her parent.

Sometimes researchers, who also are parents, informally express an interest in understanding their children's meaning making, asking questions similar to, “I wonder why my child prefers to draw on the iPad instead of paper?” or “Isn't it interesting that my teen plays one type of videogame with one friend and reserves other games for other friends?” or “Today, I was looking up information on my

phone, and my child asked me, ‘Why do that if you can just ask Siri instead?’” These types of questions have surfaced in “watercooler” conversations wherein colleagues, when discussing their home lives, apply their researcher lens and begin pondering “why” or “how” instead of only stating what transpired.

Other times, the researcher-parent will post similar wonderings on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or another social media platform, but these posts often are accompanied by images of the child, what the child was doing, and/or artifacts of the child’s meaning making. These posts often initiate a documented conversation among social media followers (who may or may not be researchers) regarding the activity. Although posts can be “liked” or re-posted, sometimes, the discussion of the child’s meaning making and the parent’s role—as observer, participant, or participant observer—has surfaced. These and other examples highlight the growing interest in parent-researchers addressing what and how they learn from their children (cf. Kabuto & Martens, 2014) and suggest that the field is ready to re-investigate what Piaget (1936/1952) and even Dewey (Dyehouse & Manke, 2017) started years ago—explorations of and insights into child meaning making by parent-researchers. We contend that the field also is ready to explore the child-as-co-researcher *with* his/her parent.

This edited collection offers the field a range of research that involves the child and parent in the investigation. In line with the call to shift away from objectifying the researched (be it a teacher or student, adult or child) toward embracing the participant-as-researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013), we recognize youth as researchers, thereby supporting an empowerment of young people and research as their mouthpiece, and adding another layer of authenticity to the research process. Thus, through this edited collection—which features a variety of ways youth are an integral part of the research process—we re-initiate the discussion of child-parent research, with a focus on the learning experiences that come to the fore, as well as the methodological and ethical implications of engaging in such research.

## 2 Why Child-Parent Research

The premise of this line of inquiry includes authenticity, empowerment, and insight. After all, if we remove the filter of the adult researcher and the child is partaking in every step of the research process—from ideation to data collection to analysis to presentation—then the field can hear what the youth *actually* have to say.

In their seminal text *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1993) introduced the then radical notion

that knowledge built by classroom teachers through thoughtful work on their own practice was not only “real” research, but research worth knowing and sharing. The objective of their edited book was to argue for teacher research as “a form of social change...[with] potential to redefine the notion of a knowledge base for teaching and to challenge the university’s hegemony in the generation of expert knowledge for the field” (p. xiv). We took inspiration and heart from this text that challenged traditional notions of epistemology. Our explicit goals for this book derive from a similar critical and democratic ethos: we, too, argue for an upending of beliefs in what counts as research and knowledge. New knowledge and understanding can come from researchers examining meaning making in their own homes with their children or grandchildren (cf. Kabuto & Martens, 2014). Likewise, it can occur with children-as-researchers examining their own learning with their parents or grandparents, who also are researchers. By blurring the lines of traditional research relationships in and out of home contexts while underscoring ethical awareness, purpose, intent, and mindfulness, we aim to legitimize and promote research conducted and accomplished with and by children in formal and informal spaces.

This book is meant to be provocative. Indeed, not all members of academia will embrace the notion that children can and will do research. We hope this edited collection will prompt scholars to rethink ways in which children are researchers and to value careful, ethical child-parent scholarship.<sup>2</sup> We are not asking readers to cast cautionary thoughts aside. Rather, we recognize that *all* research has limitations and ethical considerations, and we advocate for lines of child-parent explorations that help to inform the field methodologically, conceptually, and practically.

Our objectives, then, are to: (1) stake a claim for the legitimacy and power of child-parent research; (2) build a conceptual framework for engaging in child-parent research; (3) create an epistemological framework built on understanding how researching *with* children is radically different from research *on* children; and (4) open spaces for new ways to think about how we go about creating and valuing knowledge. In what follows, we address each of these objectives and offer the field a working language to support and further child-parent inquiries.

### 3 Legitimizing Child-Parent Research

In this chapter, we address the historical context of the “taboo” nature of research with and on one’s own children, we focus on ethical considerations, and we flesh out the concept of participatory research with children. We continue to

struggle with language that denotes power and, thus, purposefully have chosen the placement of “child” before “parent” in this volume’s title, *Child-Parent Research Reimagined*, and throughout this chapter, so as to not privilege the dominant adult narrative. We also recognize that struggling with language is important because it can raise a sensitivity and openness to social change.

Fitzgerald, Graham, Smith, and Taylor (2010) discussed children’s participation in research as a *struggle over recognition* (p. 293, emphasis in original), which accentuates “participation as a negotiated space that is dialogical rather than monological in nature, which, in turn, more adequately captures the mutual and interconnected layering of children’s participation” (p. 293). The authors explained that there needs to be mutual recognition to achieve equality, and they cautioned that misrecognition can lead to subordination and injustice. Legitimizing child-parent research cannot be tokenistic; to do so would defy the very authenticity that is at the heart of such research. To achieve equal recognition, and for children to “participate meaningfully,” there needs to be a familiarity between the child and the adult:

Adults’ awareness of children’s understanding and experience in their daily lives is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement with children. Close relationships between adult and child are necessary to establish intersubjectivity (a shared focus of understanding and purpose), which is essential for a dialogic approach to participation. (Fitzgerald et al., 2010, p. 300)

Such insights into child participation also reinforce the value of *knowing* the child and building—or building upon—close relationships to engage together in research that is authentic and mutual in nature.

As we stake a claim for child-parent research, we underscore the affordances of collaborative research wherein (a) the child is the agent of study, (b) the child’s voice is valued, not objectified, and (c) there is deep introspection and self-awareness. We do this while understanding well that positionality and power are inherent tensions in such research. Whereas we cannot undo the child-parent relationship or connection (nor are we suggesting otherwise), we emphasize the importance of remaining acutely aware of the social, political, and authoritative tensions that exist when children and adults, who otherwise co-exist in some form of hierarchical structure, engage in research that attempts to flatten hierarchies. It is through such sensitivity that all involved can have their voices heard and valued.

Legitimizing any type of new approach or practice typically involves a paradigmatic shift that unveils new ways of perceiving the word and the world. We

provide examples of important practices and revelations that have challenged and advanced the field as a means to make a case for research that needs to be a widely accepted practice.

### 3.1 *Paradigm Shifts: From Taboo to Accepted Practice*

In almost all instances, novel discoveries yield criticisms at best and downright mockery and even humiliation at worst. When the latter happens, a latent discovery is initially considered to be bizarre, irrelevant, or taboo among a particular field's community of scholars. Given that there are occasional instances of parent-researchers studying their children (cf. Bissex, 1980; Dezuanni, 2018; Hackett, 2017; Halliday, 1975; Kabuto & Martens, 2014; Piaget 1936/1952) or, in even rarer instances, with their adult children (Long & Long, 2014), we see this collection as part of a latent movement in educational research that, we hope, gains greater traction, legitimacy, and growth.

In what follows, we offer a wide-angle view of historical shifts in normative practices across various disciplines. Doing so calls attention to discoveries and practices that have defied convention and underscores how these shifts helped to situate new ways of making meaning. The field of child-parent research is much like these exemplars in that it challenges or extends what is known and introduces a new paradigm and, with it, offers new epistemological understandings. Historical examples abound. Here are a few:

In 1842, Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace, invented what we now know to be the first algorithm for an analytical engine, which is, in contemporary parlance, the first computer program. Unfortunately, her work was overshadowed by that of her male colleagues, particularly Charles Babbage. It is important to note, however, that the research community at the time was unaware that Ada King documented her synthesis and development of the first algorithm for an analytical engine in a series of notes from 1842 to 1843. With few exceptions among her mathematician peers, her work was considered irrelevant in her day because the utility of her algorithm was unclear. Fortunately, these notes were resurrected and republished by Bertram Bowden in 1953 as an appendix.

That is but one of many examples in mathematics and computer science. Moving to linguistics, in 1879, Ferdinand de Saussure posited the existence of a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) language, the original language that developed into what we know today as a system of 448 languages, which can be hypothesized through the study of laryngeal phonemic reconstructions. In his own day, Saussure was derided for even suggesting the existence of PIE—let alone the use of laryngeal theory to support the notion of a PIE language. It wasn't until the 1930s, through the findings of mid-twentieth-century linguists, most

notably Jerzy Kuryłowicz (1935), that Saussure was recognized for this significant discovery.

Moving from linguistics to physics, Albert Einstein is a novel case in that the world-renowned physicist's theory of relativity, particularly general relativity, gained little, if any, recognition until about 50 years later in the 1960s when astrophysics blossomed as a field in the natural sciences. Mostly known during the early twentieth century for the law of the photoelectric effect, Einstein is most celebrated today for the theory of relativity, one that was challenged in his day for two major reasons: (1) a putative lack of usefulness in both academic and lay circles; and (2) an overall lack of acceptance among most European physicists prior to World War II (Wazeck, 2014).

Like King, Saussure, and Einstein, Alfred Wegener, a German meteorologist, was met with skepticism from the community of geologists who argued that his notion of continental drift, first posited in the early 1900s, did not conform to the findings of leading researchers in geology of the day. But, fortunately, Wegener's reputation as an "outsider" in geology was short-lived; by the early 1950s, his contributions served as the primary foundation of the theory of plate tectonics (Frankel, 1987).

In addition to researchers whose ideas have been met with derision, momentous discoveries have at least another thing in common: As soon as they are discovered, they seem self-evident. An example of this is problem-solving methodology that was developed by the famous twentieth-century mathematician, George Pólya. Prior to the publication of Pólya's *How to Solve It* (1957), the notion of a stepwise progression of solving problems, particularly in mathematics, was inconceivable and not often seen as obvious (Alexanderson, 2000). This is also true with novel ways to think about *who can do* research.

In his foreword to *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*, Frederick Erickson (1993) acknowledged the newness of Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle's conception of teacher research. Erickson stated thus: "Cochran-Smith and Lytle have not only provided here a fresh and incisive review of a developing field, they have been active in helping that field to develop" (p. vii). Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1993) sentiment about an unfolding field—especially one in its nascency—is, at once, inspirational for researchers in the fields of education and human development, as well as the subfields of research methods and measurement, and, at the same time, apt from the perspective of the need to ensure the dynamism of methodological approaches. Cochran-Smith and Lytle stated the problem succinctly in the opening chapter of their book:

Although current educational research has placed considerable emphasis on developing a systematic and rigorous body of knowledge about

teaching, little attention has been given to the roles that teachers might play in generating a knowledge base. Lack of significant teacher participation in codifying what we know about teaching, identifying research agendas, and creating new knowledge is problematic. Those who have daily access, extensive expertise, and a clear stake in improving classroom practice have no formal ways for their knowledge of classroom teaching and learning to become part of the literature on teaching. (p. 5)

Those who live the experience, therefore, should have a voice in the research. Cochran-Smith and Lytle noted the subjugation of the teacher's expertise to that of the university researcher when the authors argued that "efforts to construct and codify a knowledge base for teaching have relied primarily on university-based research and have ignored the significant contributions that teacher knowledge can make to both the academic research community and the community of school-based teachers." Like children in traditional research, teachers who are "most directly responsible for the education of children have been disenfranchised" (p. 5).

Research, regardless of field of inquiry, is in flux. From an ontological perspective, it has to be; that is the nature of research—the *élan vital* of the scientific method. But the extent to which research in a particular field changes seems to be greatly influenced by how the academic community accepts, or rejects, that change. Therefore, our experiences as contributors to a burgeoning concept in terms of both who does research and how it is conducted might face opposition, and we remain confident that child-parent research will gain normativity. We believe a paradigm shift is needed both methodologically and structurally in terms of who can engage in the process of researching. For too long, research was conceived of, almost exclusively, as a white lab-coat, mostly male endeavor, especially from the mid-nineteenth century through most of the twentieth century. Only since the last third of the twentieth century to the present has it included a wider scope of adult participation—namely, those who made it their goal to engage in research (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009). Rarely, if at all, has it included young people in its pool.

And we call attention to an inherent (and possibly unintentional) elitism that exists in the boundary-making between those who are deemed "researchers" and those who are not. It seems ironic that, in a field that looks to empower the otherwise voiceless, there is the relative absence of youth-as-researchers in the literature and at presentations; for the latter, even if raw data are presented and recordings of youth voices or images are played or shown, the adult researcher remains the filter when presenting the study. Long and Long (2014) pointed out, "Rarely is the question asked: What does it mean *to the child* when researchers interpret his or her words and actions to the broader educational



community through articles, books, and conference presentations” (p. 124, emphasis in original). Budd Hall (2005) noted that, despite movements to create participatory practices in research that would counter “the monopoly over knowledge production by universities” (p. 22), there are still deeply rooted power structures that support the status quo: “While the university world explodes with new discourses on power in all its forms, the faces in the universities in my part of the world, the resumes of scholars we hire, the forms of sharing knowledge we use, and the structures of learning and knowledge production have changed but little” (p. 22). When it comes to including children, the traditional forms of research do not include them as researchers, but, instead, “they [children] tend to be excluded from educational policy-making and the ‘rarefied world’ of the academic: a hegemonic ‘score-keeping’ world where professional adult researchers separate themselves from others” (Murray, 2016, p. 705).

Although the idea of children and teens as co-researchers may seem novel in academia, the general undercurrent of child study, whether children have participated as equals or not, has been an important area of inquiry for over a century. *To be sure, then, child-parent research is neither taboo nor new to education research.* Although Dewey’s formal writing did not identify his own children specifically, Dyehouse and Manke (2017) explained how Dewey’s children were a source of inspiration: “Dewey’s parenting experiences affected his thinking about language and communication...[and] helped him see language activity as primarily concerned with agreement in action” (p. 22). Dewey, however, is not known for his role as a parent-researcher, and only recently has his engagement in child-parent research received attention.

When researchers were overt about their work with their children, they faced scrutiny. As Kabuto (2008) noted, the linguist Leopold (1939) who examined his daughter’s bilingualism, “felt his work went unappreciated” (p. 179). Likewise, when Piaget (1936/1952) developed theories of cognition based on his own observation of his infant children and his one-on-one clinical interviews with children and teens, his work was challenged by some of his peers (Braine, 1962; Graue, Walsh, & Ceglowski, 1998). Nonetheless, Piaget’s investigation of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of intellectual development<sup>3</sup> by creating and engaging in the Piagetian clinical interview—that is, *with the participation of children*—has helped to pave the way for future research. Piaget’s novelty was not so much his newness of method as it was the nature by which children and teens exhibited their intellectual and cognitive abilities. In their research on everyday mathematical knowledge of preschool children, Ginsburg, Pappas, and Seo (2001) emphasized the idea of “asking



young children what is developmentally appropriate" (p. 181), a Piagetian concept that we are incorporating and fostering in our research.

As we develop a conceptual framework and work towards a new epistemology, we do so acknowledging that just as "parent-research has held an ambiguous place in research designs, paradigms, and frameworks...[and] has often been marginalized" (Kabuto, 2008, p. 177), so, too, is child-parent research a nascent field that has yet to develop the exposure and development of established lines of inquiry. In the last forty-five years, there have been occasional parent-researcher investigations of (or inspirations from) their own child(ren)'s or grandchild's meaning making (Baghban, 1984, 2014; Bissex, 1980; Dezuanni, 2018; Gee, 2003; Goodman, 2014; Goodman & Goodman, 2013; Hackett, 2017; Halliday, 1975; Kabuto, 2008, 2014; Kress, 1982; Long, 2004; Maderazo, 2014; Martens, 1996, 2014; McCarty, 2012; Miller, 2014; O'Mara & Laidlaw, 2011; Shannon & Shannon, 2014; Wolf, 1992; Yoon, 2012) or of their own role as parent-researchers and advocates of their child(ren) (Haddix, 2014; Lopez-Robertson, 2014). There also have been limited examples of the child or, in the case of Long and Long (2014) the adult child, in a co-research or co-authorship role, privileging the child's voice and challenging traditional paradigms.

Even though parent-researcher investigations challenge the norm, the language of convention perpetuates hierarchies. Perhaps without realizing it, parent or grandparent-researchers have discussed "research on them [the children]" and learning from "studying" their children or grandchildren in some instances "by carefully examining specific features of [the child's] writing over time" (Goodman & Goodman, 2013, p. 518; Kabuto, 2014; Shannon & Shannon, 2014). As Kelli Long retrospectively considered her mother's role as a parent-researcher, she explained that her mother "studied my experiences learning Icelandic culture, my acquisition of the language in particular" (Long & Long, 2014, p. 123). We wonder how this research might have looked had the childhood or adolescent Kelli been studying her own practices and writing *with* her mother about her experiences.

Just as parent-researchers have offered important discoveries of child learning by situating the child as the object of study, they also have showcased the continued struggle to situate the child in parent research. Such a challenge is critical to explore in the child-parent research dynamic and is part of the methodological transparency needed to substantiate the line of inquiry (Kabuto, 2008). Likewise, these examinations are important to the genesis of this field of study, which has had sporadic pockets of research production, but no cohesive and steady growth. We hope this book will serve as fodder for the field to develop and refine child-parent research.

## 4 Creating a Conceptual Framework

Engaging in child-parent research involves conceptually understanding *how* or *in what ways* the collaborative and participatory scholarship transpires. Yet it is no easy feat to develop a conceptual framework that aptly captures the nuances and rigor of research. First, we have found ourselves confronted with and by traditional notions of research that are laden with hierarchical structures. Take, for instance, the metaphor of the umbrella (Figure 1.1). We began with the overall concept of researching and envisioned (and still envision) co-researching subsumed into that larger construct. Qualitative research, by its very traditional notion, involves people with a particular skillset or expertise examining others' behavior; thus, there is an inherent researcher versus participant dichotomy. To mitigate this bifurcation of roles, we focus on co-researching and the collaborative and participatory aspects of it. However, much to our chagrin, the umbrella concept of traditional research continued to preserve the adult researcher as the one with authority. We also had difficulty identifying the degrees of participation or collaboration and the role of the child in the research. Thus, we turned to ways the field has begun to resist traditional hierarchies and account for participatory roles in research. In what follows is a discussion of participatory research and engaging youth as researchers. Thereafter, we present a re-imagined conceptual framework for children-as-researchers.

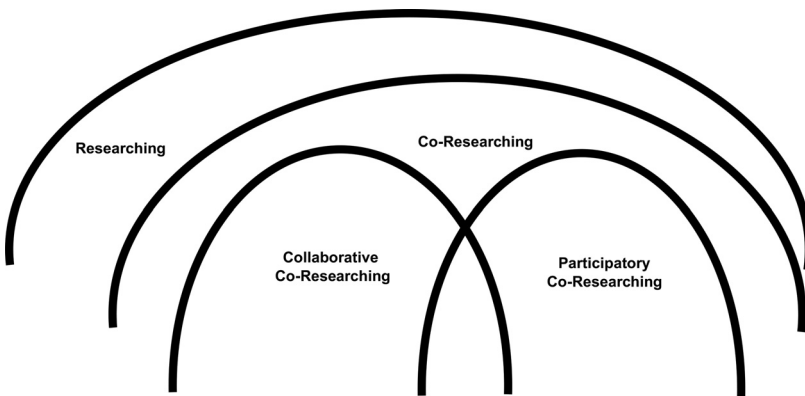


FIGURE 1.1 An initial perception of child-parent co-research that unintentionally preserves traditional constructs

### 4.1 *Participatory Research*

Over the course of time, the field has pushed against the hierarchies of research to make room for participants *in* the research in varying degrees. Speaking for oneself has tremendous power and authenticity, and research has proven

discrepancies between adult reporting and child self-reporting. For instance, Theunissen and colleagues (1998) found inconsistencies between the way parents and their children reported the “children’s health-related quality of life” (p. 387). In the study of 1,105 Dutch children between the ages of 8–11 years old, Theunissen and colleagues found that there was a difference in agreement between child and parent reporting, suggesting “that parent reports cannot be substituted for child reports” (p. 395). If this is the case, why then are children’s voices often presented through the adult mouthpiece? Counters to these concerns are addressed in participatory research, which is rooted in the understanding that knowledge can be created and presented in multiple ways and it is most authentic when the meaning maker is the researcher of his/her/their practices.

Participatory research stemmed from an international effort and was “first articulated in Tanzania in the early 1970s to describe a variety of community-based approaches to the creation of knowledge” (Hall, 1981, 2005, p. 5). Essentially, participatory research began as a concerted effort to mitigate the privilege and possible myopia of traditional research and moved towards empowering the otherwise silenced or less heard. Hall (2005) identified seven key components of participatory research: (1) it involves “powerless groups of people”; (2) it “involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process”; (3) the community—not the outside researcher—identifies the problem to be researched and then actively engages in analyzing and solving the problem; (4) the community directly benefits from the “ultimate goal” of the research, which is “radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves”; (5) there is an increase in self-awareness: “the process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development”; (6) the approach yields an “authentic analysis of social reality”; and (7) there is a direct, not peripheral, involvement of the researcher (p. 12). These seven tenets of participatory research underscore the inherent involvement, personal investment, self-reflection, and overall empowerment of the learners involved in such research.

Similar to participatory research, but having roots in social psychology and management theory, action research typically focuses on “individual, interpersonal, and group levels of analysis” in an effort to support effective social systems (Khanlou & Peter, 2005, p. 2335). In an offshoot of action research, Participatory Action Research (PAR), wherein “Participants are enabled to contribute their physical and/or intellectual resources to the research,” (Khanlou & Peter, 2005, p. 2336), there is a combination of action research and participatory research features:

the action research component provides an ongoing, spiral framework where the participants themselves evaluate the validity and the relevance of the research process. The participatory research component incorporates equity and resistance to societal oppression. (Khanlou & Peter, 2005, p. 2335)

Although PAR combines two empowering frameworks (participatory research and action research), and the “process itself can facilitate learning among community members regarding resources for self-determination and research methods” (Khanlou & Peter, 2005, p. 2336), there are ethical issues that can arise. If researchers are not sensitive to social, cultural, and political implications, those involved might be vulnerable to related consequences and unanticipated exposure. Additionally, given that the “knowledge gained from PAR is focused upon action, not understanding alone” (p. 2335), “researchers and ethical reviewers must consider whether a protocol truly has such emancipatory potential” (Khanlou & Peter, 2005, p. 2336).

Furthermore, because forms of participatory research involve co-researchers creating agreements pertaining to each step of the research process—from the design, to each researcher’s responsibilities, to data analysis, dissemination, and ownership—there are concerns about equity in the partnership. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which supports “collaboration and equal partnership between researchers and participants,” might have ethical and methodological issues if positioning and power structures are not acknowledged: “there is the potential of tokenistic partnerships and ‘false equalitarianism’ that can emerge, and as such can cause further harm to participants and the community” (Kwan & Walsh, 2018, p. 374).

Another arm of participatory research is one that includes a critical dialectical pluralist approach. Put simply, critical dialectical pluralism (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013) underscores the integral involvement of the participant-as-co-researcher and helps to flatten conventional hierarchies associated with researcher-driven decisions related to a study’s design, data collection and analysis, and dissemination of findings. Critical dialectical pluralism, therefore, specifically works toward

empowering the participants to make research-based decisions at the various stages of the research process (i.e., research conceptualization, research planning, research implementation, research utilization)... [and] either perform or present the findings themselves (e.g., using Web 2.0 applications such as YouTube) or...with the research-facilitator(s). (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013, p. 15)

This methodological and conceptual frame helps to mitigate “token” partnerships and confront existing hierarchical structures. In the case of child-parent research, two are inherently present—the authority of the adults as parents *and* as education researchers.

#### 4.2 *Youth Engaged as Researchers*

The concept of participation becomes a bit muddled when youth are part of the equation, especially because there is a “distinct risk that activities are only labelled ‘participation’ when they fit comfortably into the agendas of the organising adults” (Tisdall, 2008, p. 422). Therefore, the question of *who* may participate in research as researchers becomes important to address. According to the British Educational Research Association’s (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, “children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity” (p. 15). Although research suggests that the focus should be on developmental appropriateness instead of age (Chabot et al., 2012; Murray, 2016), there is an important distinction here, namely that children should be able to participate freely as long as, when appropriate, there is consent from a parent or guardian.

Research also suggests that participation, often defined as “taking part in,” varies according to country, region, and culture (Mason & Bolzon, 2010, p. 128). For instance, in Asian countries, youth participation typically was associated with obligation, especially given the cultural emphasis on family and community instead of individual right (Mason & Bolzon, 2010). This perspective of participation contrasts with Western, individualistic understandings of “taking part in” activities often designed and orchestrated by adults; ironically, according to Mason and Bolzon, the children in Australia (i.e. Western-based culture) perceived a sense of obligation to participate. What is more, the Western “understanding of participation as investment in the future contrasts with majority-world conceptions of participation as making an active contribution in the present” (Mason & Bolzon, 2010, p. 128). In other words, simply noting that youth are participating in research does not automatically mean that there is equity in the research. If there is a sense of obligation to participate, then hierarchies persist.

Such threads of authority, however, can be mitigated if participation is viewed as decision making, which involves the transference of power between adults and children that can be “potentially transformative of adult-child relations” (Mason & Bolzon, 2010, p. 129). Decision-making based participation does not remove the tensions of authority. Rather, it involves “a commitment to the self understanding and reflexivity of children” in a dialogic, negotiated

space of “reciprocal interaction” (Mason & Bolzon, 2010, p. 302). We suggest this inherently involves trusting in the child’s forms of contribution regardless of age. As Landsdown (2010) explained, children form and express their views at an early age, and participation should not be limited to age or to the “expression of views in ‘adult’ language” (p. 12). Furthermore, children are capable of self-reflection and making evidence-based decisions. In Murray’s (2016) study of 138 children aged four to eight, children made evidenced-based decisions as a “rational underpinning for forming epistemology—philosophies concerning what they counted as truth and knowledge” (p. 706). In other words, child participation is feasible, relevant, and noteworthy.

More specifically, for Murray’s (2016) *Young Children As Researchers (YCAR)* project, three principles supported the research, which also involved reflexivity: (1) an emancipatory principle rooted in “collectivity, reciprocity, and respect”; (2) a participatory principle based on shared responsibilities and action; and (3) an inductive principle that supported the collaborative construction and interpretation of data (p. 708). Murray discovered that, as the youth partook in co-research with adult researchers, the youth engaged in four overarching research behaviors—“exploration, finding solutions, conceptualisation and basing decisions on evidence” (p. 711). These findings suggest that being a researcher need not be relegated only to those over 18 years of age or with an advanced degree.

Unfortunately, research that reveals children thinking like a researcher from a psychosocial perspective is relatively scant, and investigations that either directly or tangentially consider this area often fall within the realm of creativity studies. Nonetheless, one such line of research considers the young child as scientist and mathematician by exploring the architectural implications in young children’s Lego™ and block constructions (Ness & Farenga, 2007). An expert’s close analysis of children’s constructions demonstrated that when children are engaged in spatially related constructions, they test their ideas, estimate lengths, consider options and alternatives, and even base their actions on previous constructions that might (not) have succeeded. In sum, young children’s everyday mathematical and scientific thinking is inextricably linked to that of professional mathematicians and scientists. In a parallel manner, children have the potential to research topics in which they are motivated or inclined to investigate. These results strongly suggest, then, that young people’s motivation to engage in research is not only common, but also potentially accessible. This accessibility advances the point that children are key constituents—equal to parents and other adults—within the concept of researcher.

## 5 Refining the Conceptual Framework for Child-Parent Research

Given the literature supporting youth research behavior (cf. Chabot et al., 2012; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Landsdown, 2010; Mason & Bolzon, 2010; Murray, 2016), coupled with our own research (Abrams, Schaefer, & Ness, 2019; Ness, Schaefer, & Abrams, 2018; Schaefer, Abrams, & Ness, 2018), we continued to flesh out how we conceptualized child-parent research wherein the parent also is a researcher. We soon realized that the role of the child-as-researcher is a continuum (Figure 1.2). On the one end, the child is involved in the research as one who offers or clarifies information, and the adult is the one primarily in charge of designing and conducting the research. Although this may be reminiscent of the research that children are “taking part in” rather than serving as a co-researcher, the child remains central to the study without becoming objectified because the child is, in some way, instrumental in data collection and/or offers insights into the analyses. Thus, the child is a co-creator of knowledge. Qualitative research that includes the child’s words *and* analyses, yet is told through the adult mouthpiece or with an adult filter, would be an example of the child-as-researcher “involved” in the study.

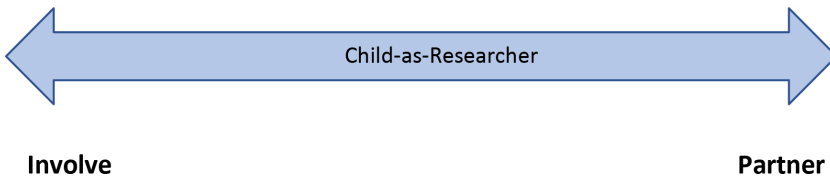


FIGURE 1.2 The role of child-as-researcher understood as a continuum

On the other end of the spectrum is the child-as-researcher who “partners” with another researcher (adult or child) and, like any valuable member of a research team, is part of the research process from the study’s design through data analysis and forms of presentation. The child-as-researcher is a co-creator of knowledge *and* of research. A methodology, such as critical dialectical pluralism, in which youth are “intricately and inherently central to conducting and analyzing the data at all phases of inquiry (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013)” (Abrams, Schaefer, & Ness, 2019, p. 82), would fall in this range because the ethos of partnering is embedded in the methodological approach. In terms of child-parent research—unlike other forms of critical dialectical pluralistic research—there is a distinct familiarity among the researchers, and such a familiarity and “close relationship” between the child and parent is key



to fostering and sustaining dialogue and working towards a shared purpose (Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

By envisioning the child-as-researcher continuum, we also suggest that there are variations and gradations of involvement and partnership. There is no dichotomy of the verbs, *involve* versus *partner*. Rather, depending on the situation and the child's developmental abilities, the degree of partnership might vary. Also, it is possible that a child might begin as a partner—as part of the team designing the research and collecting and analyzing data, but, due to one or more constraints, including, but not limited to, waning interest or scheduling conflicts, the child remains involved in the study but not as a partner researcher. Likewise, a study might begin with adults structuring the examination and the children involved in the data collection. As time passes and the children become more familiar with the research, their degree of partnership increases, and they might begin to lead the next steps of the investigation or presentation of data (Abrams, Schaefer, & Ness, 2019). The continuum acknowledges the dynamic nature of research and the shifts in involvement and partnership that can occur at any point during the study.

The child-as-researcher continuum also calls attention to the elements we see as inherent in such investigations and discoveries: dialogue, critical reflection, ethics, tension, and participation. Thus, we also envision the continuum to appear more cyclical than linear. As Figure 1.3 exemplifies, we embrace the metaphor of a wheel because the spokes—or the five elements (e.g., dialogue, critical reflection, ethics, tension, and participation)—provide structural integrity for research in which the child is involved or partners with the adult. Without any one of these elements, the participatory nature of the research would begin to falter and give way to traditional, hierarchical research structures.

Furthermore, the metaphor of the wheel serves two purposes: (1) It represents how this research is dynamic and that the child-researcher's role need not be static or relegated to one end of the spectrum. Like a wheel, the research process and level of involvement and partnership can move forward and backward, can spin or turn in different ways, and can rotate with various momenta. The interplay of the five elements can present options for the youth to partner in some ways and be involved in others. (2) It reinforces the importance of each of the five elements. In line with participatory research, the degree of participation is key to the child's role as a researcher. If there is only partial dialogue, then the child may only be involved in that part of the research. However, if there is an ongoing, dialogic relationship among the researchers regardless of their age, then the child becomes a partner in the research. Similarly, when there is deep, critical reflection, the child partners in the research rather than simply responding to prompts. Furthermore, identifying and accounting for tension will be important for any research in which the

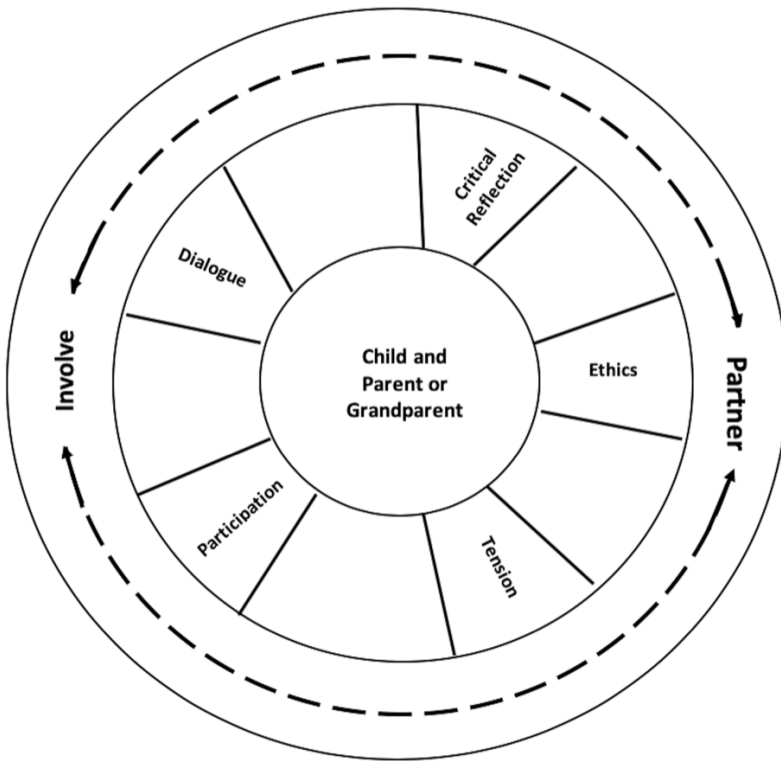


FIGURE 1.3 A conceptual framework for understanding the child as researcher

child is a researcher. An important part of the partnership is when the child-researcher addresses the tension (as opposed to the adult identifying whatever tension is perceived). Finally, as with any study, ethics are essential. However, for child-parent research, the ethical dimensions *must be addressed overtly*. Not only will doing so address concerns about beneficence (i.e., do no harm), but also it will help the field understand how individual studies have ethically and soundly engaged the child-as-researcher.

Because ethics are critical to any research and especially child-parent research, we have developed an ethical framework for research relationships with children-as-researchers. This next section specifically pertains to such a framework.

## 6 An Ethical Framework for Child-Parent Research

“Children’s participation has been one of the most debated and examined aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child since it was adopted by the UN in 1989” (Landsdown, 2010, p. 11), and the ethical tensions that surface

in research with children might arise because of “a lack of understanding that children have the capacities to contribute to decision making” (Landsdown, 2010, p. 15). In an effort to clarify and build upon the understandings that children can develop and contribute, we offer important definitions of terms and trace discussions of ethics and child participation. We also present an ethical framework for child-parent research.

In accordance with the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an internationally ratified set of standards that explicate children’s rights (United Nations, 1989), we define a child as a person under the age of 18. However, in certain contexts, we also use the word “youth” to indicate an older child. We, three education researchers from the United States, should also mention that, while we refer to the CRC throughout this chapter, specifically to Articles 12 and 13, the document itself was ratified by all members of the United Nations with the exception of the United States (Bartholet, 2011). It is our hope that the United States will join the international effort to support youths’ rights to seek information and speak freely.

To help communicate the role of children engaged in child-parent research, we take up Christensen and Prout’s (2002) definitions of ways children might be positioned in research: They argued that in research with and on children, the child has been perceived in four ways: as an object; as a subject; as a social actor; and “as participants and co-researchers” (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480). The first two positions are common and traditional whereby the child is understood as an object or subject—a being to be acted upon or understood. The third positioning—the child as social actor—understands children as active, social beings who both change and are changed by their social/cultural world. Extant research of parent-researcher examinations of their children or of their own roles as parents acknowledge this standpoint (cf. Kabuto & Martens, 2014). Following work by Alderson (2000) and Woodhead and Faulkner (2000), which recognizes the child as agentive, the fourth perspective “constitutes children as active participants in the research process” with the idea that “children should increasingly become involved as co-researchers” (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481). The third and fourth perspectives reflect a growing body of research that recognizes children’s rights and abilities to actively engage in research as knowledgeable and contributing participants (Bell, 2008; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). As the field of child-parent research moves forward, we recognize the rights of the child as inhering in the latter two positions; in this chapter, indeed in this book, children are recognized as social actors, active citizens, and sentient beings who help bring and create knowledge when participating as researchers and co-researchers. The implications of this stance, specifically the ethical implications, will be taken up next.

### 6.1 *Engaging in Ethical Activity*

Understanding children's position in research as participants and co-researchers necessitates that we identify and contextualize ways that children authentically might be involved in knowledge building and creating. For this discussion, we draw on the literature from the wider field of researchers who conduct research "with" children. To date, there is a dearth of literature on child-parent research, so we look to research that positions children as participants and co-researchers (Christensen & Prout, 2002) to help build a theoretical and ethical space for parents engaging in research with their children in formal and informal spaces. The more traditional approaches that position children as research objects and subjects do not reflect the vision of research that we are presenting here: First, a parent who sees his or her child as a research object or subject potentially squanders rich opportunities that may present themselves when the child is an involved participant or partner in the research context. Additionally, like Murray (2016), we recognize that "when adults deny children opportunities to make decisions in matters affecting them, they subjugate them" (p. 708), and we take issue with that point on an ethical level as well. Hence, we take up Christensen and Prout's definitions of non-traditional research with children as most helpful and relevant to child-parent research. Children are: (1) social actors who "take part in, change and become changed by the social and cultural world that they live in," where children are given "autonomous conceptual status" (p. 481); and (2) "active participants in the research process [promoting] the idea that children be involved, informed, consulted and heard" (p. 481). In this second conception, the child partners with the parent as a co-researcher—but in both conceptions, children's voices, interests, routines, values and desires are foregrounded in the research activity and become the key pieces of a framework for ethical practice.

Ethical research with children moves from a view of research that desires to avoid harm/damage<sup>4</sup> to one that "invites potential positive experiential possibilities" in ways that brings a "positive research experience" to children (Mortari & Harcourt, 2012, p. 236). Accordingly, it is helpful to examine some of the ways that researchers have ensured that the research activities they engage in with children do, indeed, manifest in such a positive experience. Generally, researchers try to promote what Christensen and Prout (2002) call "Ethical symmetry," an a priori assumption whereby "the researcher takes as his or her *starting* point the view that the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether he or she conducts research with adults or with children" (p. 482, emphasis in original). In practice, this means that the activities involved in research must be drawn from children's "experiences, interests, values and everyday routines" (p. 482). Ethical symmetry means that research activities not only are interesting to the child (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011), but also

hinge on listening to children carefully and encouraging verbal interactions (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2011).

It also is ethically important, in involved and partner child-parent research, that children exercise choice in research directions and activities—this includes choice of expression (e.g. oral, written, digital representations) and voice in research concerns and agendas (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Mortari & Harcourt, 2012; Pinter & Zandian, 2014). This responsibility is, of course, related to the idea that children are active, agentive cornerstones of the research. Striving for ethical symmetry means that the agency of the child is valued, respected and attended to as an ongoing and integral process of the research (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009). Attentiveness to the process of consent and the willingness of children to continue in research activities is a critical researcher responsibility and ethical imperative (Bell, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2010). Engaging in quality research with children requires an ethical symmetry that is based on a working relationship built around trust, respect, and reflexivity. Nowhere in the world of research is that special, trusting, valued, respectful relationship more self-evident and important than in formal and informal contexts wherein child/ren and parent/s research together.

## 6.2 *Ethical Relationships and Responsibilities*

In Figure 1.4, we build on the idea that ethical research with one's own children has different levels and forms of collaboration. We denote positions on a continuum from “involved” to “partner” in order to reflect the idea that there can be degrees of children's participation in research. For example, there might

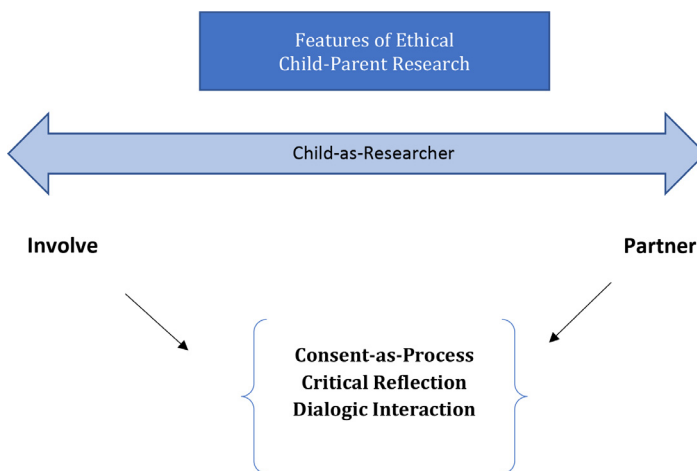


FIGURE 1.4 A conceptual framework for ethics of child-parent research

be developmental reasons to begin research with one's child with different, perhaps minimal levels of involvement, and then as the child becomes more developmentally ready, it can be a mutual decision to move towards a partnering position. In the context of child-parent research, both positions are ethical and imperative. In the involved stance, the "child-as-researcher" participates not as an object to be studied, but as a social actor with his or her own experiences and understandings that require research methods and activities that reflect his or her interests, values and everyday routines (Christensen & Prout, 2002). An ethical child-parent research position, then, commits to drawing research questions from the child's everyday world and adding a layer of communication to that world so that the social actions of children can be carefully understood. Sometimes that might mean just sitting with one's child and observing everyday play activities and interactions. Other times it might be a combination of observation and question—but the ethical position privileges the idea that the research draws from the child's world and his or her interests. On the partner end of the child-parent research continuum, the child desires to participate as a fully engaged co-researcher of his/her everyday activities or experiences. In this position, the child becomes a fully vested partner in the research relationship; this means, among other things, that the child-researcher creates and analyzes data, determines next steps for the research project, and participates in formalizing and reporting findings.

Striving for ethical symmetry in child-parent research means that the child and the parent must confront and negotiate new positions—new ways of looking at power and privilege, new ways of speaking and collaborating, and new ways and opportunities for the child to direct his or her degrees of participation. Engaging in child-parent research involves communicating, and hence listening, in (potentially) new ways. In turn, the nature of the child and parent relationship likely will evolve beyond the confines of an otherwise hierarchical structure. As some of the researchers in this volume can attest, issues of power, authority, boundaries, bias, balance and privacy come to the fore in sometimes disconcerting, discomfoting ways. Those moments of disequilibrium can also present rich opportunities for further understanding and inquiry.

The three facets of ethical research that we present here—consent-as-process, critical reflection, and dialogic interaction—are drawn from ethical issues experienced by researchers in this book and designed to help child-parent researchers maintain an ethical stance while enhancing research methods and findings. As such, the ethical framework offers the field opportunities to envision child-parent research while understanding that there remains an openness to update and customize each of these facets as child-parent research evolves.

### 6.3 *Consent-as-Process*

In order to engage in research activity with children in the United States, the researcher must obtain “assent” from the child and “consent” from the adult. Differentiating “assent” from “consent” builds a negative connotation for the former word; because “consent” must be given by the adult guardian, “assent” implies a lack of full understanding of the research, with children needing an authority’s “consent” to compensate for that lack of understanding. In this section, we prefer to draw upon the British Educational Research Association’s (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* and use the word “consent” to describe the child’s role in child-parent research.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on consent instead of assent helps to illustrate parent-researchers’ ongoing commitment to leading their children in full knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. Consent implies knowledge. Consent implies power. Seeking *ongoing* consent from the child-researcher is a continuous process and ethical burden of the parent-researcher.

In her research on adults reflecting on childhood trauma, Etherington (2005) recommended obtaining “process consent,” as a way of “ensuring at each stage that participants are still willing to be involved in the project and reminding them of their right to withdraw at any time” (p. 305). In child-parent research, making consent an ongoing part of the research process is essential (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Kabuto, 2008), especially in light of some of the issues that can come to the fore, including bias, balance, power, and boundaries. Take, for instance, issues of ethical symmetry that might arise when a parent-researcher enters into new and perhaps secret spaces of their child’s world—perhaps the inner world of thought, or the world of private play. Although the child has chosen to disclose this information, a veil has been lifted to some degree. Both the child- and parent-researcher need to consider the boundaries of ethical participation, asking questions, such as: What is kept private? What kind of surveillance is an inherent part of play (*vis-à-vis* videogame play)? How, if at all, is ongoing observation allowable? Even with a child’s ongoing consent, is it okay to shift the context and adjust play in service of some research agenda? While we revisit these kinds of questions later when we talk about critical reflection, they are also germane to issues of consent.

One way to obtain and secure ongoing consent is to develop a strategy of asking children, before each planned or spontaneous research session, questions such as: Do you want to participate in this session? How do you want to participate? Here the parent is in a privileged position of familiarity: the parent-researcher might notice that her/his child’s body language suggests the need for privacy. The parent-researcher might also know that her/his child did not sleep well that night or had an argument with a best friend. These



contextual influences matter. It may be argued that parents are in the best position to “read” their child’s willingness to consent. An awareness of power imbalances and a commitment to ongoing discussions of the research itself (Dockett & Perry, 2011) help support children in their decisions about consent. In ongoing and frank discussions about consent, it always should be made clear to children that any kind of participation—long term or short term—is their choice (Dockett & Perry, 2011). Additionally, over time, the child-researcher will develop the language and routine for discussing ongoing consent, and, although the parent-researcher will need to remain continuously vigilant of ethics, the child-researcher will become instrumental in creating and adjusting degrees of participation and offering boundary-setting and boundary-extending language and designs for research. Critical reflection is essential for achieving such agentic ethical work.

#### 6.4 *Critical Reflection*

Although engaging in thoughtful reflection about one’s own biases and assumptions is an important element of most research methods, when engaging in child-parent research, this element is crucial. Here both child and parent can foreground particular issues and tensions that arise during the course of their research together, including, but not limited to, relationships, boundaries, power, surveillance, control, privacy and trust. The fact that these components are not static adds another layer of complexity and underscores the importance of ongoing critical reflection. Each researcher has an ethical responsibility to consider and discuss the intended or unintended consequences of participating in research together (Dockett & Perry, 2011). In research that claims a level of ethical symmetry, both the child’s and the parent’s reflections inform the research processes and findings.

Critical reflection can appear in formal and informal capacities. For instance, child- and parent-researchers alike might keep research memos in which they record how they feel that day about the dynamic of the research team, the direction the research is taking, the role(s) each researcher is playing, and what, if any, assumptions the child is making about the parent or the parent is making about the child. For the latter, it is essential for the child- and parent-researcher to remain cognizant of how, when, and why they use their knowledge of the other to provide context. Take, for instance, a child discussing his/her favorite music. The parent might unintentionally insert his/her knowledge that the child has enjoyed listening to Ed Sheeran. Yet, the child might be thinking about a new artist or genre that the parent did not consider or is unaware of at that point in time. Moments like these—when thoughts run parallel—must be accounted for in any research, but especially in child-parent research because

of the inherent hierarchy that accompanies conventional family structures. We are not saying that critical reflection will mitigate assumptions although that might be possible over time. Rather, we advocate for ongoing critical reflection that accounts for in-the-moment and retrospective constructs of how each of the researchers, regardless of age, has (a) presented oneself to the research team and to the data collection process—this can include a range of behaviors revealing levels of openness, trust, or (dis)interest; (b) inserted internal dialogue to make sense of the data; (c) interpreted and understood the data and developed analyses; and (d) built upon previous experiences. Hence, critical reflection is central to securing trustworthiness in (and of) the data, as well as advancing the inquiry's shared objectives.

Informally, the child and parent can speak aloud or jot in the margins of transcripts of meeting minutes their assumptions and surprises. When reviewing research meeting transcripts, for instance, the child and parent separately (or together) might write questions that arise, note what surprised him/her, and admit assumptions circulating as an inner dialogue. It is especially important to reflect critically upon the inner dialogue—that which one thinks but does not necessarily speak aloud—because the integrity of child-parent research is upheld by the ongoing, dialogic relationship between the child and the parent.

The child new to the field of research might not immediately critically reflect upon the experience. Instead, the child might need prompts to help spur such reflection, and these prompts—preferably designed by the child and parent together, but possibly designed by the parent-researcher—also should guide the parent-researcher's critical reflection. The child might reflect upon (a) what was confusing and not confusing; (b) ideas that were articulated; (c) ideas that arose but were not said aloud and explain why the ideas were not voiced; (d) feelings of confidence or lack thereof; (e) discoveries about the parent; (f) concerns about and hopes for the research trajectory.

Additionally, the research team needs to engage in ongoing critical reflections about methods and ethics, including, but not limited to, the research agenda, personal discoveries, and the child-parent relationship in and beyond the roles as research team members. Furthermore, each member of the research team needs to remain sensitive to the inner workings of the child-parent research relationship. A dialogic partnership needs to include a discussion about how, when, what, where, and why data collection and analysis can and will take place. This means establishing and re-establishing the boundaries of the research. Critical reflection is at the heart of such an iterative approach and further develops the trustworthiness of the data and the ethics and the integrity of the research process.

### 6.5 *Dialogic Interaction*

As mentioned previously, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989) resulted in a series of articles related to the rights of children. Of particular interest to child-parent research are Articles 12 and 13. Article 12 stipulates the right of the child to form and express his or her views, and Article 13 claims, “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds...either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice” (UNCRC, 1989). Both of these claims address the responsibility of the adult researcher to build a research culture that cultivates and privileges dialogic interaction.

How do child- and parent-researchers know when the conversations and interactions they have with each other are dialogic? Recognizing the call for a dialogic research relationship with children (Fitzgerald et al., 2010), we also use the term “dialogic,” but through a Bakhtinian lens to signal conversations that are fluid, relational, and dynamic. Bakhtin (1984) talks about two speech concepts that are helpful to explore when thinking about discussions that represent an authentic co-construction of knowledge: dialogization and heteroglossia. Dialogization refers to interactions whereby language, culture, and discourse infuse in speech exchanges so that there is a negotiation of values and meaning. Its opposite, authoritative, monologic discourse, “permits no play with the context framing it” (p. 343). In authoritative, often adult-led discourse, there is only one meaning. Heteroglossia supports the dialogic approach because it embraces multiple meanings and the “centripetal forces of the life of language” (p. 271) that work against the norm—against the authoritative discourse, or what Bakhtin calls “official” language. Heteroglossia invites a multiplicity of ideas, voices and opinions. It challenges the authoritative discourse sometimes adopted by parents and many researchers. Infusing children’s voices in dialogue in, on, and about research creates opportunities for deeper understanding. Bakhtin suggests that “understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (p. 282). Affordances related to these active speech acts are exciting to think about in the context of child-parent research. As Bakhtin explains, “every utterance is oriented toward this apperceptive background of understanding, which is not a linguistic background but rather one composed of specific objects and emotional expressions” (p. 281). In research where new knowledge and understandings are enabled by dialogized interactions, having a child-researcher and parent-researcher who are already familiar with each other’s culture, values, and ideas can provide a context for dialogization that

produces stunning insights, new knowledge, and perhaps even a new kind of research discourse.

In dialogic, heteroglossic conversations with children researchers, the child participant is a full partner in any discussion (Ely, 1991/2003). Referring to our metaphor of the wheel (Figure 1.3), we contend that such a dialogic, heteroglossic relationship—and, thus, the level of involvement or partnership—is both discursive and recursive. Continued communication and re-evaluation help to build and sustain ethical strength and support the integrity of the research process.

Because the parent-researcher has the privilege of previous experience with scientific inquiry, the initial and ongoing onus is on the parent to ensure that the investigation is ethical and thoughtful. Furthermore, parent-researchers cannot expect their children to engage in research automatically. The child and the parent need to work in tandem as they begin and continue their investigation. Relatedly, in their discussion of engaging in meaningful research with children, Lundy and McEvoy (2011) argued that, although the research literature is “replete with efforts to ensure that practices are respectful and attend to a number of key children’s rights issues in critical, reflexive ways” (p. 130), there remains an issue with helping children to understand their own views and formulate a way to express those views. While Lundy and McEvoy (2011) developed strategies to help children build capacities for participating in discussions of research, in the child-parent relationship, those capacities can be understood and developed in very different ways given that parents and children can engage in research activities in a wide variety of contexts (i.e. cars, stores, home, playgroups) and a child’s understanding of her/his parent (and vice versa) can help facilitate discussions of research findings. In many cases, the parent can support the child when research discussions or activities falter. Clarifying questions and queries can be built around the child’s known interests and abilities. Furthermore, an ethical, dialectical position helps to create a safe space wherein the child can make spontaneous, perhaps “off-topic” remarks, asking questions, and moving the discussion (and research) in ways that the child finds interesting or important (Pinter & Zandian, 2014). In this way, heteroglossia is invited, dialogic interactions are courted, and new understandings are acquired.

## 7 Towards a New Epistemology

By staking a claim for child-parent research and offering a conceptual and ethical framework for such study, we work towards a new epistemology for research in which the child-researcher and parent-researcher work together to

co-construct knowledge. This requires an understanding and belief that children, even at a young age, have the ability and desire to communicate, explore, and explain. It also requires that adults resist applying their own values and language to understand and express what the child-researcher is communicating (Landsdown, 2010; Murray, 2016). In short, in ethically symmetrical child-parent research, the child's voice permeates every aspect of knowledge construction—from research activities, processes and findings to conclusions and ideas for future study.

The field of child-parent research is nascent indeed and not without epistemological challenges. The authoritative voice of the researcher is necessarily challenged and changed. In ethically symmetrical research, the parent-researcher and his or her child together create a different kind of discourse around research: It is dialogized, it is heteroglossic, and in some ways, it is rebellious. Child-parent research, as envisioned here, not only blurs the lines of traditional research and familial relationships, but also has the capacity to change those lines and shift boundaries. This blurring, bending, and shifting is enabled by an involved or partnering child whose voice is valued, discernable, and authentic, and whose interests and abilities are embedded in the processes and products of the research itself.

In ethically symmetrical child-parent research, research trajectories and activities are decided with children, based on their routines and interests. Parents who research their children as subjects or objects risk privileging hierarchical structures, invoking specious partnerships, and promoting undialogized findings. That is not what we are advocating here. Rather, the child-parent research we envision hinges on an ongoing, dialogic relationship between child-researcher and parent-researcher with the collaboration focused on a shared purpose (Fitzgerald et al., 2010) and requires a parent-child relationship that is carefully cultivated to be egalitarian, inclusive, dialogic, and reciprocal. The positioning of child as research partner becomes important to acknowledge and remain acutely aware of because child-parent research inherently confronts traditional, authoritative and hierarchical structures that typically privilege the adult researcher's values, voices, and viewpoints. As the wheel in Figure 1.3 suggests, power structures and ethical dimensions should be taken up overtly, with thoughtfulness, courage, and creativity. The continuum introduced in Figure 1.4 builds on these dimensions and offers ways to imagine, reimagine, and value degrees of child participation in research activities so that children are empowered not only as investigators of meaning making, but also as meaning makers themselves.

From the area at the far end of our continuum, where the child is a research partner, we expect that a new kind of academic discourse will be created. We understand that this new kind of discourse, born of child-parent research

collaboration, likely will challenge the norms of the academy. As Bakhtin (1984) warned, “linguistic norms” work within “an officially recognized literary language” in order to defend “an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia” (p. 271). Much as Kuhn (1977) described normalizing forces that resist paradigmatic shifts, so too does language seek to coalesce, centralize, and preserve the status quo. Academic writing has a distinct cadence and tone. Traditionally, when academic language includes children’s thoughts, words, and ideas, these child-focused pieces are put in their place—contextualized, as it were, within a larger framework—be it research findings, framework (i.e. narrative inquiry), methods, or conclusions. In child-parent research on the other hand, the child’s own words, thoughts, values and interests can be flung from the margins and into the academic work itself. After all, like an adult member of a research team, the child-researcher analyzes the data and offers interpretations that shape the research trajectory.

The dialogization of academic writing is not without risk—infusing children’s voices in knowledge building activities has the potential to disrupt norms while also challenging editors, review board members, and fellow researchers. The field should not cower from such a paradigmatic shift. Rather, with an openness to change and the excitement of developing new knowledge, the field needs to embrace the potentials of the child-researcher as partner and support inquiries led by child-parent research teams.

### 7.1 *Reimagining Research*

Over 25 years ago, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) forged an important path by calling for teachers as researchers. In the same way, our edited collection intends to open methodological, epistemological, and ontological arms to the child’s voice, especially at every facet of scientific inquiry. Although the contributing authors herein present a diversity of ways in which children engage in research—accounts that involve and partner with child-researchers, as well as feature retrospective methods—our goal is to elevate the roles that children play in the unfolding of research to one whereby children and other frequently alienated groups are demarginalized from the process. Indeed, child-parent research needs to be rigorous, methodical, ethical, and careful; we contend it needs to be all the more rigorous than conventional research in that children’s participation—whether it be one of involvement or one of partnership—demands a meting out of appropriate ethical practices that protect historically marginalized populations and extend otherwise traditional boundaries that separate the researcher from the researched. Although skepticism is a healthy counterpart to novelty, it is our hope to overcome obstacles that are often set by critics who are steadfast on keeping the status quo in terms of who does the researching. We argue that, instead of hermetically sealing research and

researcher boundaries and roles, scholars should engage in hermeneutical debates (Packer & Addison, 1989) to further consider the ethics and logistics of child-parent research.

To be sure, we anticipate the provocative disposition of this book. The overarching purpose, to call attention to the child-researcher working along with her/his parent-researcher—prompts the field to reimagine methods and approaches that challenge traditional, hierarchical constructs and embrace partnerships with ethical strength and integrity. This edited volume provides a robust account of what it means to do research within the broad continuum of child-parent investigations, with involvement on one side and partnership on the other. The community of scholars—in our context, the field of education research—already has witnessed metamorphoses with regard to who does research, with whom, when, and where. The field cannot be complacent and needs to consider the far-reaching implications of participatory research that reaches those otherwise silenced, be it because of race, ethnicity, or age (to name a few factors). The work in this volume pushes boundaries by offering a new epistemology for research with the child-as-researcher and the child-parent research team offering new dimensions for inquiries and understandings.

## 8 Opening Spaces for Future Directions

This edited volume is intended to be a vista for the *some of the ways* in which child-parent research can exist and what it can mean for research in general. Purposefully provocative and offering a variety of accounts of child-parent research, this collection also provides the field an entree to exploring and expanding what previous education researchers have started—learning from and, we contend, with their children. We use a continuum to represent a range of child-parent research, and a continuum is apt, for the arrows point in directions that may yet to be realized.

Consider, for example, the idea of dialogizing academic writing whereby children's conceptual, theoretical and/or methodological work is visibly partnered with that of their researcher parents. In dialogized writing we might see and hear children's voices working through problems of practice—and whether they write or have their thoughts transcribed, these voices might have a different tone from the parlance of senior researchers' published works. We contend that the field needs to hear youth voices raw, and no one should shy away from language or beliefs that push against established structures and ways of being. Critical participatory research with youth begins to break this barrier as well, opening even more possibilities to youth articulations and representations of meaning making.



Additionally, the youths' ideas, thoughts and musings are not just considered data. In partnered child-parent research, children's voices are authoritative, explanatory, and legitimate. One example of dialogized writing can be seen in the last chapter of this book, where the unadulterated thoughts and musings of our children, with whom we have partnered in research, give us inside knowledge of what it means to be adolescent researchers partnering with their parents. Given that this is an edited collection, we six as a child-parent research team agreed that honoring the child-researchers' unadulterated (and un-"adult"ed) voice would be essential. The child-researchers asked that no one "meddle with" their written work, and having their work featured separately is but one way to respect the partnership and offers another layer of integrity. Readers hear directly from the child-researchers. This is not to discredit a combined approach, which underscores a partnership across all facets of the research process (Abrams, Schaefer, & Ness, 2019). We challenge the field to contemplate a variety of permutations of partnership in writing, considering what these musings might look like in a research article where both child and parent muse, reflect, ruminate and investigate either in tandem or in a combined fashion.

We also call for a closer examination of two specific points of privilege. First, there are education researchers who might not have the "convenience" of co-researching with children or grandchildren. We contend that child-parent research is, in fact, inconvenient, because of the great lengths necessary to work against existing hierarchies. In fact, it is important for child- and parent-researchers to engage in the investigation at times separate from daily routines and household responsibilities. This is a difficult task given the child's school, social, and work activities coupled with the parent's work and home responsibilities. And, given the parent's research experience, at least initially, the task of carving out specific times for research is likely to fall on the parent, an action that risks undermining the flattening of hierarchies. Furthermore, there is the essential and difficult task to avoid assumptions that arise when there is familiarity among the research team. For example, the child might make a claim about limited screentime, and the parent, who has a different perception, must negotiate the boundaries of opinion and judgment. Child-parent research requires exquisite awareness of ways in which a research relationship influences and is influenced by the familial parent-child relationship. These kinds of reflections are a necessary responsibility and challenging component of child-parent research. Additionally, not all children of researchers will want to engage in co-research, and we encourage the field to recognize that child-parent research is neither easy nor quite accessible.

Second, there is the privilege of access to educational resources and research experiences. More specifically, the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2018) identifies a racial disparity among full-time faculty, which, in turn could perpetuate a similar privilege among child-researchers:

Of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2016, 41 percent were White males; 35 percent were White females; 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males; 4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females; 3 percent each were Black males, Black females, and Hispanic males; and 2 percent were Hispanic females. Those who were American Indian/Alaska Native and those who were of two or more races each made up 1 percent or less of full-time faculty in these institutions.

We acknowledge this racial disparity as problematic and call for child-parent research to include more families of underrepresented communities. This means not only seeing more equity within academia—something that is long overdue—but also extending the boundaries of *who can do research*. We call for the inclusion of child-parent research beyond the walls of academia and the exploration of child-parent research as part of school curricula; such curricula likely will be structured, but they cannot be scripted because there needs to be a flexibility and an ongoing conversation that evolves and develops over time. This also will require children and parents learning together, and support of child-parent research communities will be essential. Furthermore, the increase in critical examinations of research could support child- and parent-researcher consciousness of privilege and racial disparities. Such a raised consciousness is but one step in making important changes to achieve greater equity.

Future directions require bold research with children's voices. This might surprise, displease, and even offend those in the educational community, especially when the research pushes at the ends of the child-as-researcher continuum (see Figure 1.2). What is clear, however, is that this line of research needs to be addressed at greater length. We envision a time when children engaging in educational research becomes a normative practice. Thus, we call for greater conversations about methods and greater openness to hear what children are saying about research, about themselves as researchers, and about the child-parent research team dynamic. As we look to expand future child-parent research, interested children and their parents might consider forming research communities where support and collaboration can help to push crucial conversations about research issues such as methods and ethics. We also

call for academic journals to solicit child-parent research and consider special issues and collections. Working together, and especially with more longitudinal child-parent studies informing the field, we imagine ways that the aforementioned continuum might become clarified, challenged, or confirmed, and we support a line of research that promises to inform understandings of meaning making, to centralize the voice of the child, to underscore ethical research, and to strive for greater equity in educational research and practice.

### Notes

- 1 In this volume, the terms, “child” or “youth,” are used to indicate any person under the age of 18 years old. At times, distinctions are made among young child, young adolescent, and adolescent (or teen).
- 2 Grandchild-grandparent scholarship is subsumed into the child-parent scholarship paradigm.
- 3 We use the term “intellectual development” here in the same light as did Piaget and his predecessors, mainly Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, whereby “intellectual” refers not to “intelligence” (as early twentieth-century American psychologists and the developers of the IQ would have it), but to the notion of the knowledge of an individual—what the individual knows within a particular topic.
- 4 We are not suggesting that anyone should inflict harm. Rather, we suggest that ethical research can be about possibilities, as well as protection.
- 5 The British Educational Research Association’s (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* notes that there are instances when child assent and parental consent are necessary: “In the case of participants whose capacity, age or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate, researchers should fully explore ways in which they can be supported to participate with assent in the research. In such circumstances, researchers should also seek the collaboration and approval of those responsible for such participants” (p. 15).

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