

‘Was this an interview?’ Breaking the power barrier in adult-child interviews in an African context

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There is growing emphasis, especially within the ‘New Sociology of Childhood’ movement on the importance of exploring children’s perspectives about different aspects of their life. However, in the area of second language education this shift from research on and about children to research with children has not yet been fully embraced. In this paper we document how far it is possible to involve children as active participants despite the various limitations and difficulties inherent in the local context. In particular we focus on how group interviews facilitated the development of a mutually negotiated, safe space between the adult researcher and some 10-11 year old children. We describe the conditions that allowed these children’s views to emerge, and reflect on the process of eliciting and interpreting the data from and with them. Drawing examples from an ongoing study by one of the authors, we show how a researcher manages to break the power gap in an adult-child interaction by negotiating a mutually respectful relationship with learners which eventually provides insights that challenge adult perspectives and influence the main study in a significant way.

Introduction

More recently within the ‘New Sociology of Childhood’ movement different authors have emphasised the importance of accessing children’s views and unique perspectives about different aspects of their lives (Christensen & Prout, 2002; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Maybin, 2006). To facilitate this process, it is essential that in research projects with child participants a new type of relationship is established between adults and children, one that relies on mutuality and the continuous monitoring of each other’s understandings and interpretations. However, such relationships are arguably difficult to establish because of the generational power barrier between adults and children. In this paper we aim to document that it is possible to develop such a relationship even in difficult contexts like Cameroon where the researcher is an inspector representing an extreme power distance. Drawing from a research encounter with children in a context where decisions on pedagogic matters have never taken learners’ perspectives into consideration and where children are most often perceived as recipients, not generators of knowledge, this paper demonstrates that by investing into identity and relationship building adult outsiders can create conditions that allow the children’s views to emerge.

Context and background

This article draws from a larger study by one of the authors (Kuchah in progress) which aimed at exploring different conceptions of what counted as ‘good’ teaching for teachers and pupils in the context of state primary education in Cameroon. The larger study was

conducted in two phases, from 4 October to 18 December 2010 and from 25 March to 29 April 2011 in Yaounde and Buea, Cameroon. Data was collected through interviews, classroom observation and stimulated recall with selected teachers and through focus group interviews with children from the classes of these teachers. The potential role of child interviews was to provide insights into learners' perspectives of good teaching so as to ascertain shared but also divergent perspectives which could eventually be incorporated into teacher development programmes within the context. Our focus in this paper is not to explore these perspectives, but to highlight some interactional processes that can help dissipate power barriers between adults and young learners especially in a context where children's perspectives are rarely sought.

State primary schools in Cameroon are typically characterised by large classes, a multiplicity of L1 backgrounds, the lack of prescribed textbooks and other learning resources (see also Kuchah & Smith, 2011) as well as a strong exam-oriented culture. This particular class had 103 children, mainly from middle class families. Like in most state schools, the teachers had undergone training for a minimum of one year. At a pedagogical level, attempts to implement the New Pedagogic Approach (MOE, 1999) – a one-size-fits-all methodology designed to be used in teaching all subjects of the curriculum (see Kuchah, in progress) - have met with resistance from teachers. This is as a result of many factors such as, conflicting representations of the approach by different pedagogic authorities, the multiplicity of parallel forms of pedagogy developed over the last decade as well as the contextual constraints listed above. Such a situation has left teachers with no other solution than to employ their own pragmatic responses to the realities of their immediate classroom context, which realities are most often different from the scenarios of their initial training.

Children as research participants

Children's voices bring unique perspectives and indeed, one of the main advantages of research with children as active participants is that adult researchers gain new perspectives, and these insights not only complement but may also challenge adult views (e.g. Johnson 2008; Coppock ,2010). We will argue that group interviews with children can provide a space where mutual understandings can be negotiated, and as a consequence, the children's views can emerge. Although focus group interviews were originally designed for adults, they have been used successfully with children (e.g. Hill, Laybourn & Borland, 1996; Jones, Atkin & Ahmad, 2001). The focus group interviews in this study are conceptualised as active meaning-making co-constructed events (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) where the emerging data are collaboratively produced among all participants and where interviewers' contributions and influences are acknowledged and reflected on. While interviewing adults is far from unproblematic, interviewing children is even more challenging because of the issues surrounding the effect of the generational power gap.

Children are aware that adults are in control of all aspects of their lives, and this expectation will naturally extend to research content and procedures as well. However, it is argued that in friendship groups (Lewis, 1992) children can be more confident and more relaxed with adults than during individual interviews. Being at ease with each other in a

group naturally decreases the power the adult may have and gives children at least some control over the adult agenda.

At ease with each other, and thereby, perhaps, more confident with the third, adult participant, children could follow on each other's leads, pick up points and confirm, comment or move on (Mayall, 2008, p.112).

Hill, Layboun and Borland (1996) comment that children are more likely to give their opinions in group interviews when they hear others do so, and their memory can be jogged by the contributions of their peers. In the process of participating in group talk children have the opportunity to explore their own and others' ideas, and they need to clarify, defend, re-count and paraphrase their half-formed utterances.

When seeking children's views in focus group interviews it is the researcher's responsibility to negotiate all participants' interpretations of the research in an ongoing dialogue. In such dialogues both the content of the research project and the processes and procedures of the research are revisited and renegotiated between interviewers and interviewees on a regular basis. The adult's task is to adopt the child's point of view regarding the task at hand and to attempt to understand their goals and frame of reference as opposed to relying on automatic adult assumptions:

Research should not simply focus on the 'outcome' of the interview, but need to focus on the moment-to-moment co-constructive processes through which meaning is negotiated, renegotiated and contested. (Wescott & Littleton, 2005, p.144).

The interview study

For the larger study, 10 and 11 year-old pupils, 10 from each of six classes were selected on the basis of the researcher's observation of their ability to express themselves freely in class and with their peers during recreational breaks. The observations and final selection of pupils was further guided by recommendations in the existing literature on interviewing children in friendship groups (Lewis, 1992). The researcher was fully familiar with the educational and linguistic context. As a highly educated Cameroonian with a sound mastery of English and French as well as a considerable number of local languages and cultures, mediating the interview from a language perspective was not a challenge. Rather, the main challenge came from the fact that as a male researcher with a high status, there could be a risk of intimidating the children into silence. This was further exacerbated by the fact that prior to arriving in the school, children had been informed of his job in the ministry thus widening even further the generational power gap between researcher and children.

In order to reduce this power distance therefore, the researcher explained that he was also a teacher trainer and at the same time a research student and that the purpose of his research was to find out what children thought were good ways of teaching so that he could use their ideas to train other teachers in the future. Because the children in this

context had no prior experience as research participants and considering that they were not used to being asked to comment on their teachers' practices, it was important to employ rapport building strategies that will not only dissipate the power gap between the researcher and the children, but also encourage the children to transcend any cultural inhibitions. To achieve this, confidence-building activities were used, like the researcher participating in recreational and sporting periods playing or refereeing different games, such as football, hopscotch, tug-of-war, jump rope, dodge ball, Chinese jump rope, or clapping/singing game, and also chatting with them on the way to and from school or whenever the opportunity arose. On the whole, a minimum of three weeks was spent socialising with pupils before the actual data collection started. The fact that the researcher was involved with them in these socialisation activities was important in establishing confidence and a favourable interview atmosphere. The children were interviewed in separate groups of boys and girls. This is in line with Scott (2008) who argued that boys' and girls' communication styles are so different. The interviews were conducted in a setting determined by the children. Each group of pupils was encouraged to decide within one to two days on the day, time and venue of the 'conversation' although these were restricted within the school environment and timetable.

This decision from the children was considered an important aspect in the process of obtaining their consent. If children are to be active and aware participants, it is crucial that their consents are sought in addition to teachers' and parents' consent. Alderson (2000) argues that the ability to give consent is not tied to a specific age but is related to the children's ability to understand what the project entails and to understand their own roles and rights within it. Many argue that children need to be allowed to rethink their consent as a project progresses even if they enthusiastically sign the consent form at the beginning (Hurley & Underwood, 2002; Lewis, 2010). In the case of this study, although the position of the researcher as National Pedagogic Inspector gave him free access to schools, verbal consent from gatekeepers at national, regional and local levels including head teachers was sought before proceeding to negotiate entry into classrooms with teachers. As far as pupil participants are concerned, verbal consent was sought and obtained over the three weeks of socialising and personal relationship building activities explained above. It is only after explaining the purpose of the study in the process of identifying 'friendship' groups, obtaining verbal consent and negotiating interview sessions with children that, with the help of head teachers, parental consent was sought. In addition, efforts were made during the interview process to revisit children's understanding of the purpose of the study and to verify continual consent from the children.

The five child participants referred to in this article (by pseudonyms) were all between the ages of 10 and 11 years. Three of the girls (Lydia, Jemia and Rachel) came from homes where, in addition to their different mother tongues, French was the language of communication. Chioma's parents were Nigerian and they spoke Ibo and English at home, while Shirley lived with her grandmother and spoke English at home. There were two teachers in this class. The first teacher (Mr T) had been selected for the study through a combination of criteria including recommendations from pedagogic inspectors, head teachers and peers as well as an assessment of his confidence in teaching English and previous experience in presenting model lessons in school and local workshops. He was in

charge of teaching arts related subjects while the second teacher (Mr I), recommended by the children, was in charge of teaching mainly science subjects but occasionally taught English as well. The researcher had not been previously informed about the distribution of subjects between teachers in this class and was therefore convinced that, to use the head teacher's words, he had made 'the best choice of a teacher' in selecting Mr T, but the child interview, held prior to formal classroom observation revealed something else. It is this revelation and the process that facilitated it as well as the resultant addition of another teacher (Mr I) in the larger study that is central to our analysis in this paper.

Approach to analysis

In the larger study, a total of 12 child group interviews of 45-60 minutes, seven 50-60 minute pre-observation interviews and seven 90 minute stimulated recalls with individual recommended teachers as well as 14 hours of workshop discussion with two groups of 30 teachers each in the two research sites were collected and analysed alongside observation field notes from a minimum of five 45 minute lessons taught by each of the seven teachers. The data have been analysed thematically taking into consideration the interrelatedness of the different perspectives with the aim of proposing a bottom-up approach to defining, developing and disseminating contextually appropriate principles and practices in English language teaching.

In this paper we focus on the analysis of just one focus group interview with five children, illustrating how the researcher's identity was negotiated and re-negotiated, how the purpose of the whole project was revisited, how the children found the group interview format a fruitful way to construct a consensus view, how they found ways of taking control of the agenda, how they were able to challenge adult views and conceptions of good teaching and good teachers. This group interview was selected both as an illustration of the interview processes in all the other child interviews but more importantly because it is the only group interview in which the children explicitly influenced the inclusion of an additional teacher participant. In this sense the focus of the analysis is on documenting the process of building a relationship and mutual understanding between the researcher and the children which opened up a metaphorical 'space' for the children to promote their own ideas of good teaching and their own candidate for a good teacher.

The analysis of the data will therefore focus on both the 'product' of the focus group interviews in terms of what the children's thoughts and views about good teaching and teachers were and also on the 'process' of 'how' the interview unfolded. Rather than just focussing on the 'what', exploring the 'how,' and tracing how the children and the researcher together co-constructed and negotiated a mutual understanding of who they were and what their understanding of the research process was, seem to be crucially important in terms of making sense of the outcome of the research. This, we feel, is a data-led account of how the interview was constructed (Mann, 2011: 21).

Outcomes of the group interview

Although during the socialisation period preceding the actual interview the researcher had explained his role and the purpose of the study, in the course of the actual interview, this research purpose had to be revisited in different ways, to negotiate the children's understanding and to sustain their confidence and consent.

(Re)negotiating identity

Here, at the beginning of the interview the researcher reminded the children about what had been discussed during the socialisation period. The discussion started with a focus on the purpose of the study and the identity of the researcher.

- Kuchah: Remember last week when I asked you what you thought my job was some people said I was a journalist.
- Shirley: No sir,
- Kuchah: That's what you said.
- Shirley: No sir, it was the boys who said so.
- Kuchah: I see. Okay but I told you what my job is. What did I say I do?
- Rachel: You are a teacher in the ministry of basic education.
- Kuchah: I told you too what I was doing, why I was coming to your class and why I was going to have a discussion with you, can you remember?
- All: Yes
- Kuchah: What did I say?
- Shirley: You said that you're coming to our school to have a discussion because you want that the teachers from different schools and universities should learn from us what they are supposed to do.
- Kuchah: Can you remember any other thing?
- Jemia: You said that you came to ask us to tell you what we like when our teacher is teaching and when he is not teaching so that you can teach the teacher and other teachers to do better than before.

The researcher's purpose here is to elicit from the children their understanding and interpretation of what was going to happen based on their previous discussions. Although at the beginning the use of 'sir' seems to suggest that the researcher is seen as a 'regular teacher', it is clear from the rest of the extract that the children have the confidence to argue with him, rejecting his suggestion and even correcting him (it was the boys who said 'journalist'), something they would not attempt to do with their regular teachers. The children possess specific knowledge that the researcher needs and they show awareness that their input is considered beneficial to train future teachers. Shirley and Jemia together can reconstruct the original purpose of the interview and the adult researcher emphasises that their opinions matter. The word 'discussion' is used instead of an interview, suggesting that all are equal participants and the point made by Shirley that the teachers can 'learn from us' puts the children firmly in control of the content of this discussion. The researcher's hybrid identity is established by listing all his different roles.

The researcher is ready to move on but Jemia suddenly returns to the issue of the researcher's identity, and she questions how it is possible for someone to be a student as well as being engaged in training teachers. She interrupts the researcher questioning his unusual, hybrid identity:

Jemia: But how can you be teaching teachers when you are also a student?

In response, the researcher resorts to explaining to the children about the processes of doctoral research, including how data for his thesis will be collected and then analysed. Here, the children interrupt again when they do not understand a key word in the explanation.

Jemia: You said you will do your anasis...

Lydia: A-na-ly-sis!

Jemia: Yes, analysis alone. How will you do that? I don't understand.

Kuchah: Good question. What I mean is that I will try to understand all that you say and what other children in other schools in Yaounde and Buea will say, then I will combine everything and try to explain how you like your teachers to teach you. Then I will use this to write my project and to train other teachers in the future. Are you happy for me to do that?

All: Yes sir.

Jemia tentatively repeats the word 'analysis' but does not get it right, and even though Lydia can say the word correctly, Jemia does not mind admitting that she does not understand what 'analysis' really means. Such willingness to question the researcher reflects the fact that they are at ease with the situation and the adult researcher, they are keen to participate fully, and they are interested in following the discussion closely. This extract also underlines the importance of building prior respectful relationships with pupils which allow them the liberty to express their concerns, and the right for these concerns to be addressed in a way that satisfies them.

Establishing guidelines: Language

Having revisited the purpose of the focus group interview, some warm-up questions follow about the children's favourite subjects at school, their backgrounds, homes, families, and importantly, about the languages they use at home. In the middle of this warm-up the children challenge and interrupt the researcher several times. The most unexpected challenge from the children comes regarding the researchers' suggestion that Pidgin should be used as the language of the interview. The researcher approached the children with the assumption that the best way to attain insights into their thoughts and perceptions was to use a language most familiar to them. As the majority of the children came from French speaking homes and as a consequence may have had proficiency problems in English, the researcher expected them to use French or indeed Pidgin.

Kuchah: You can speak in French or even in pidgin. (General laughter).

Rachel: Do you want to disgrace our school?

- Kuchah: What is the problem?
 Lydia: We only speak English or French, not pidgin. But the teacher speaks in Pidgin (laughter).
 Jemia: No, it is when he wants us to laugh.
 Lydia: Even the headmistress, sometimes she speaks in Pidgin.
 Chioma: No, that was only one day, because she was funny.

The general laughter after the researcher's suggestion that Pidgin should be used suggests that the children thought this was not a serious proposal. They explain that Pidgin should not be used for serious discussions and comment that their teachers only use it when they want to joke or chat amongst themselves. This indicates that they take pride in their contribution to this interview and consider it an 'official' and an important event. The researcher allows pupils to explore their own agenda by extending the subject and talking about lived experiences with their teachers. This allowance for digression from the researcher's agenda is important in the process of establishing and sustaining mutuality between the adult researcher and child-participants because such mutuality inspires pupils' confidence in the researcher and as such provides a generative impact on the interview process as a whole. The children chat amongst themselves in the group, contrasting views about Pidgin and how it can be confusing, and the researcher is careful not to overrule their views. He simply asks, so "what language do you want to speak?" and the answer is 'English'.

Dealing with a delicate issue

Once the language of the interview was decided, the researcher asks the children to get their pictures ready which they had been asked to prepare before the interview. These pictures depicting their English teacher were intended as visual support to trigger initial discussions within the context of the focus group interviews (e.g. Johnson, 2008). Lydia starts by showing her picture which depicts a very angry Mr T and while everyone laughs, a serious discussion emerges about this teacher being 'very angry'.

- Lydia: It will be difficult to talk about him.
 Kuchah: It will be difficult to talk about him?
 Lydia: Yes, to me.
 Kuchah: Why is it difficult?
 Lydia: Because if you see him, you can run and reach Bamenda (general laughter). I am not lying I am really serious (laughter). I am taking an example. If a child from another school just ... if he is walking around the road then if that child smashes him, ayaya, it will be catastrophic. He will run and reach even the European airport (laughter). He gets angry, very angry very fast, a small thing and he will be very angry.

While here there is a great deal of laughter generated by the group, and Lydia, no doubt, is entertaining everyone with this vivid description, a very serious point is made about Mr T. Lydia is determined that Mr T is always angry and he 'cannot change' and 'it is difficult to talk about him'. Before anyone else speaks or comments further, the researcher decides to

revisit the confidentiality issue with the children sensing that they may have sensitive information to share and observing Jemia's reluctance to speak.

- Kuchah: Do you remember what I told you last week and even today about our discussion?
- Shirley: Yes, that you will not tell our teachers, that you will use it to teach other teachers
- Kuchah: What else?
- Chioma: That you will use our discussion to write a book for teachers to learn how to teach in Britain.
- Kuchah: Okay then talk to me then, don't be afraid. I will not tell your teacher anything. I will use this discussion to train teachers all over Cameroon. If I go to Bamenda for example ... I also told you I will use this discussion for my research in the University of Warwick in Britain where I am studying now ... Right, can we come back to our discussion? ... Jemia you listened to Lydia talking about your teacher, she is your friend, was she afraid to speak?
- Jemia: No (laughs)
- Kuchah: Are you satisfied now?
- Jemia: Yes.
- Kuchah: Good. Tell me about him.

In fact it is Shirley and Chioma who together reconstruct the original confidentiality agreement to reassure their friend, Jemia. The researcher then emphasises again that he will not disclose any information to their teachers and that the data will be used only for the purposes of his study. When the confidentiality of the information is confirmed, Jemia reiterates Lydia's earlier point that Mr T was indeed 'angry.'

- Jemia: When you greet Mr T, he only nods his head, he does not answer. When it is early morning he looks at you with an angry look.

In the next sections of the interview this group of children together describe Mr T in some detail: 'he is angry, never answers, he is not good and he punishes'. While the researcher is listening attentively, he is keen to re-focus the children's discussion on positive aspects of their teacher and their English classes in view of his own research purposes. At this point Lydia suggests that if the topic of the discussion is good teachers, it would be better to talk about Mr I. When the researcher asks the children to talk about their best English lesson, Jemia describes a lesson taught by Mr T, however, in her commentary she is unable to say anything positive about this lesson, even though the researcher is trying to elicit positive features. Only a neutral description of the stages of the lesson is given. Others cannot comment positively on Mr T's lessons either. Finally, Jemia says: 'This was not my best lesson'. It is only here that the researcher understands that Mr T and Mr I are both English teachers in this class.

- Jemia: This was not my best lesson.
- Kuchah: Yes but I asked for your best lesson why did you show me one that was not your best lesson?

- Jemia: But because you asked for Mr T's lesson.
 Kuchah: I'm sorry; I did not know that your two teachers also teach you English language. I was going... I will be observing Mr T's lessons.
 Chioma: Will you also observe Mr I when he is teaching?
 Kuchah: Do you want me to observe him too?
 All: Yes sir.
 Kuchah: Okay, I will, I promise. Okay tell me about your best lesson now, it doesn't matter who taught the lesson.

The children explain to the researcher that Mr I also teaches English in the absence of Mr T. The girls justify their choice by describing Mr I and ask the researcher to observe him. In the next section of the interview they describe Mr I, building on each other's suggestions and ideas.

Building shared understanding

The researcher is giving the children the space to elaborate on their understandings and perceptions of good teaching, using Mr I as an example. Lydia suggests that Mr I is accepted by everybody for a number of reasons, such as his ability to 'explain well' and 'make things easy to understand'. She thinks Mr T should become the head teacher, removed from the classroom, and Mr I 'should take his place' in the English class.

- Kuchah: Lydia was talking, let's listen to her.
 Lydia: I think that it is Mr I that must... Mr T must take his place as headmaster. Mr I must take his role as teacher. I think that Mr I teaches English well because when you first look at him, when he explains, so when he explains, he explains very well and you can very well understand. He even asks you questions if you don't want to ask. He must ask you questions after the end of a lesson. But Mr T is not that kind; when he finishes he dashes the chalk everywhere he don't care if it is down or up he don't care, he will just clean his bag and go. So I don't think that it is a very good thing.

The researcher is keen to have deeper, further insights into the children's conceptions of 'good' teaching and encourages them to talk more about Mr I. Jemia here suggests that Mr I also has a good sense of humour, makes children laugh, and she also points out that Mr I is approachable. You can ask him questions, and he is keen for everybody to understand.

- Kuchah: Good. What are the things your teacher did, which made you like the lesson?
 Jemia: He first of all made us laugh a bit, when we were going to the table. Then he asked us our opinions so that he can take some and write on the board and make us laugh.
 Kuchah: What did he do to make you laugh?
 Jemia: He started ... when he asked a question and then a girl never stood up very well, so he told the girl to stand up very well. ... And also when he is teaching, he wants everybody to understand. If you don't understand, you put your hand up and ask him a question. Anytime he finishes teaching a lesson, he

must give an exercise to see whether everybody has understood what he has taught.

The children spontaneously continue to build on each other's ideas and thus a consensus in the group is emerging (Lewis, 1992). For example, Jemia talks about Mr I making children laugh first, then Rachel here adds that to make children laugh, Mr I mimes actions, and finally, Chioma remembers the actions of a footballer.

- Rachel: When he was teaching, he was making that we should laugh. When he is saying something, he is doing the action. He makes that we should understand well.
 Kuchah: Is it because of the action that you understand well?
 All: Yes sir.
 Kuchah: Which action, for example did he do that you can remember from this lesson?
 Rachel: He was making as if he is a football player...
 Chioma: He was dribbling and kicking the air and jumping like a mad man (laughter).

Several themes about good teaching emerge. The first one is 'making children laugh', the second one is 'making children understand' new content and a third one is taking an interest in individuals. It took the researcher a great deal of time and effort to arrive at this point, but finally here, the children are talking freely and with enthusiasm about their own ideas and conceptions of 'good' teaching. The researcher then asks them about other good teachers and finally summarises his own understanding of the children's views about good teachers in order to check that his interpretations of what the children said are correct. This move is also integral to the commitment on the researcher's part to build mutual reflexivity and shared understandings.

- Kuchah: So if I understand you very well the kind of teacher you like is one who is very funny, who makes you laugh? Is that true? (silence)
 Kuchah: But that is what you've all been saying.
 Lydia: No.
 Kuchah: So what are the things you want a good teacher to do?
 Lydia: Me, I don't like a teacher who will make us laugh when he will beat us after. I want a teacher who helps us concentrate on our book. Who can help us to learn.
 Kuchah: By doing what?
 Chioma: By asking us questions.
 Jemia: By explaining.
 Shirley: Giving us exercises.
 Rachel: Making us to understand very well.
 Kuchah: How will he make you to understand very well?
 Rachel: By explaining and doing the action and giving us exercises.
 Shirley: He should first give an example before giving an exercise.

The researcher suggests that the most important feature of a good teacher is making children laugh but the children reject this interpretation and offer here a more nuanced picture of a good teacher. Their definition is further confirmed in the final section of the

interview when the researcher asks them to complete a sentence: 'A good teacher.....'. They complete the sentence using the same ideas as above, 'making us understand well, helping us concentrate and explaining and doing actions'. Finally, the researcher opens the floor for comment and questions, and the children bombard him with questions such as 'Was this an interview?' 'Will you come again?'

Discussion

The children were able to challenge adult perceptions of 'good teachers' and 'good teaching' in a discussion with an inspector- researcher in a co-constructed dialogue. As a result of the researcher's investment in relationship and identity building, the children were able to orient to the identities constructed during the period of investment. Ground rules for the interview were mutually agreed and established and this provided a foundation for successfully establishing mutual understanding and negotiating delicate issues. The result of the mutual understanding in this case was an amendment to the original plan (including Mr I) and a discovery that might otherwise not have emerged so clearly, namely the importance of affective factors in children's conceptions of what counts as a 'good' teacher.

In terms of the agenda related to research with and by children, ultimately advocating research projects where children are equal participants making important choices and taking responsibility (Kellett, 2010), this study may not go very far. However, it illustrates what may be realistically possible in many real world contexts where the researcher is an academic who has high status and power over the children, where the researcher has only a limited amount of time to gather the data and where the children are not used to being asked about their opinions and views. The data illustrates convincingly that it does not necessarily matter if the initial power gap between the adult researcher and the children is substantial; it is still possible to access children's views provided that the researcher is willing to invest in building relationships. Christensen (2004) argues that generational power issues imposed by society can be re-negotiated and re-distributed in research through building relationships, negotiating identities, agendas, motives and interpretations, and by monitoring and registering possible signs that participants may develop or change their views, interpretations or attitudes as the study progresses. Closely related to the concept of power is the concept of children's voices. Can children's real voices ever come to the surface and be made accessible to adult researchers? Discussions of children's voices (e.g. Komulainen 2007, Lundy 2007, Morris 1999) remind us that during any actual encounter with an adult, children's utterances are only partially theirs (Bakhtin 1986: 94) because their utterances are in a dialogical relationship with other voices that have been appropriated from previous discourses and social practices. Some of their responses therefore might echo official discourses in and outside the classroom, and some of what they say may be coloured by what they think the adult is expecting to hear. However, we argue that unsolicited, raw and emotional comments (such for example as those about challenging the adult's identity status, disagreeing with the adult and correcting his interpretations) are all examples which indicate that children were able to go beyond what the adult was asking and what he was perhaps 'expecting,' and the researcher was able to

listen to their voices and embrace their unsolicited comments rather than brush them aside in search of answers to his own questions.

These children were able to convince the researcher that their 'good' teacher, Mr I, should be included in the larger study. Inspectors and teachers in the larger study identified good teaching in terms of meeting the criteria of the 'New Pedagogic Approach' in Cameroon, which is supposedly meant to be essentially communicative, fostering an interactive way of teaching. However, it is clear that children had different priorities. Attitudinal, emotional and rapport/relationship issues were much more important. They appreciated that their good teacher, Mr I, made them laugh, entertained them with enjoyable activities such as mimes, songs and rhymes. The children felt he 'cared about' them, wanted the best for them. The children emphasised that he expected everybody to pass and was willing to help everyone. Including Mr I in the study enabled the researcher to explore differences between the two teachers from a perspective of pedagogic belief and practice. The pre-observation interviews with both teachers revealed significant differences in their beliefs about good teaching. For Mr T, a necessary condition for good teaching/learning is discipline:

To me, it is important to maintain a good amount of discipline, if you want children to learn. They easily get distracted in a large class like this one and the only way to bring them back to the lesson is to maintain strict discipline. But I also try to engage them as much as possible, by questioning and encouraging group work.

On the other hand, Mr I seemed to pay more attention to affective factors of learning:

When I teach, I want my children to feel free to express themselves. I have learnt a lot from children especially in English. In my English lessons, they are free to correct me; [...] I trained in a francophone training college, so my English, especially spellings, is not very good. I encourage my children to correct me and because I appreciate their help, they also appreciate what I do to them. [...] I cannot cope in a class where children look stressed up.

The observation of both teachers' English lessons and the appraisal of the larger group of 60 teachers showed that both teachers' practices responded to pupils' expressed perceptions of what a good teacher should do but the difference between them lay in the way their underlying beliefs influenced their attitudes towards pupils. The choice of Mr I over Mr T leads one to conclude that for these children, affective factors are at the centre of the pedagogic process and as such, are essential in their perceptions of a good teacher.

Conclusion

A growing body of literature shows that children's views and opinions, if taken seriously, can offer unique insights and can challenge adult perceptions in powerful ways (e.g. Alderson 2000). In this school, the children unanimously challenged adult perceptions of good teachers and convinced the researcher beyond doubt that the teacher selected for the

study was not a good teacher by their judgement. The unique contribution of this paper is that it provides evidence from the interview data that the adult researcher was able to access the children's views despite his high status and socially imposed power.

In terms of what the children said there are also some practical implications to draw. Teachers' and learners' views and understandings about aspects of 'teaching/learning' can be at odds and therefore to strive for a balance between the teaching agenda (teacher's perspective) and the learning agenda (learners' perspective) is important in all contexts, with implications for both teacher development and research involving children. In this study it was revealed that the children's views were profoundly different to adult stakeholders' views regarding good teaching in L2. The children's enthusiastic endorsement of the affective factors underlying good teaching is an important message that we as educators, language teachers and trainers must consider very seriously.

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