RESEARCHING YOUNG LIVES: METHODOLOGIES, METHODS, PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN YOUTH STUDIES

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RESEARCHING YOUNG LIVES: METHODOLOGIES, METHODS, PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN YOUTH STUDIES

The Youth Research Centre (YRC) plays an integral role in the development of research projects, research publications and researcher training in the fields of sociology of youth and sociology of education and within the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE), at the University of Melbourne. Our team includes PhD candidates, early career researchers, mid-career researchers, professors and emeritus professors.

The aim of this series of reports is to showcase the variety of research methodologies, methods and perspectives that our researchers engage with. Each report includes three case studies. Our aim is to cover a range of methodologies and topics that may be of interest to students and early career researchers in the disciplines of education and sociology and, particularly, within the field of youth studies.

Within each report, each case study is a snapshot of an actual research project currently being conducted in the YRC. Our researchers are sharing their experiences and offering their advice for conducting social research in an increasingly complex and diverse societal environment. The practices presented in this series of research reports reflect the innovative and contemporary research methodologies and methods undertaken by YRC staff and students. Some of the methods illustrated here are traditional but employed in new ways; while other methodologies and methods depart from conventional research practices to cover more innovative practices to investigate and understand the multidimensional ways of being young in the twenty-first century.

This report includes contributions from Eric Fu, Margaret Coady and Pheaktra Pich. Eric Fu takes the reader on a step by step journey researching young people's online activities in relation to practices of citizenship in China. After briefly describing the process of sample construction, Eric carefully explains the methodological challenges and opportunities that online observation and internet-mediated audio interviews offer researchers who wish to explore the physical and virtual world of youth. This includes making sense of online data, research-subject relationships and issues around researcher's positionality in the research process. In the second piece, Margaret Coady delves into ethical concerns around researching on or with children. Margaret is particularly interested on the process of informed consent and the power relationships that this process unearths. She does this by examining the different dynamics opened up by informed consent, such as: pressures on children and parents to agree to consent to the research; what do we mean by "free and informed consent"; risks and harms in the research process; and issues of participation that revolve around the subject and researcher relationship. Finally, in the third piece, Pheaktra Pich explores the challenges of researching a concept and practice, in his case citizenship, in a setting where it is rarely discussed. Pheaktra presents some powerful considerations arising from his PhD on citizenship education in Cambodian schools, including the need for researchers to be culturally sensitive to participants' places, culture and practices. He also considers how researchers can respectfully and ethically navigate this research process.

Overall, these three chapters on researching young lives are a significant addition to the vibrant field of youth studies. They represent the Youth Research Centre's continuous support, contribution and engagement with high quality research and practice for, with and by young people.

Hernan Cuervo and Jenny Chesters

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CONTEXTUALIZING CHINESE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ONLINE CITIZENSHIP PRACTICES INTO THE MIXED REALITY OF VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL

Dr Eric Fu

RESEARCH CONTEXT

My research explores how citizenship is practised online by Chinese young people in their everyday lives, and what these online activities mean to them as citizens. In this study, I extend citizenship beyond its traditional legal/political framework and understand it as the social and cultural practices shaped by people's engagement with different forms of communities (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Lister, 2007). By doing so, I draw attention to young people's everyday online social interactions in generating social and cultural practices, and the citizenships constituted by these practices (Weller, 2007; Wood, 2014).

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. After receiving university ethics approval, I sent an invitation to participate in my research and a plain language statement to four frequent Sina Weibo[1] (Weibo hereafter) users I knew in mainland China. I asked them to introduce their friends who are Weibo users to me. I was able to recruit 31 participants aged between 19 and 33 years. Each potential participant was given a plain language statement which outlined the study and their rights as participants. All of the potential participants agreed and completed consent forms. The rights of the participants were also explained at the start of each interview. They were clear about their right to withdraw at any time or to refuse to answer any of the questions.

Young people's engagement in virtual spaces is deeply embedded in their physical context (boyd, 2014). Their online activities can be viewed as their engagement with the virtual communities on the internet and their internet-mediated engagement with their social networks and communities in physical life. Therefore, I see young people's lives in virtual and physical spaces as mutually constituted (Valentine & Holloway, 2002). The reality experienced by them is a "hybrid and fluid mixture" of actuality and virtuality (Ensslin & Muse, 2011, p. 4). The virtual is equally real, though not actual (Deleuze, 1994). This position is of great help to unravel the duality of the physical and the virtual, but also poses methodological challenges as to how the understanding of young people's online activities can be contextualized into the mixed reality of virtual and physical.

CONTEXTUALIZATION THROUGH INTEGRATING ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Recent virtual ethnographical studies tend to understand the generation and circulation of online content as socially and contextually bounded practices (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). Researchers have also found that some phenomena such as biographical process are difficult to observe and need to be supplemented by other forms of data collected from participants in order to reconstruct the contextual knowledge of observable practices (Flick, 2009). Therefore, an online-offline combined ethnographical approach is employed by ethnographers to produce "holistic and situated studies out of the internet in people's lived reality" (Dong, 2016, p. 4). Drawing upon this approach, I employed online observations and interviews to explore and interpret participants' citizenship practices.

ONLINE OBSERVATION

Online observation is a method in virtual ethnography which studies the Internet "as a place or as a way of being" (Flick, 2009, p. 272). It studies "specific online communities through the observation and analysis of online dialogue and other online artefacts" (Prior & Miller, 2012, p. 503), aiming to understand people's sense of self and the meanings they attach to online activities (Kendall, 1999). The emphasis of online observation is on the ways in which people's online behaviour arises out of their everyday experiences of interacting in a virtual world. The data collected by online observation enables researchers to understand the nexus of shared community practice, culture, and the meanings people derive from engaging in this community (Boellstorff et al., 2012). In this study, I use online observation to collect online content generated by participants on Weibo. This content includes their profile settings, posts, reposts, and their participation in discussions through commenting. Throughout the research process, the researcher takes the position of an outside observer and interpreter of participants' online activities. I followed my participants on Weibo but did not interact with them.

User-generated information collected through online observation can also be deemed as documents or archives. As a result, the boundary between the method of virtual ethnography and online document analysis becomes blurred. The method I use to collect data from the logs of participants' social media pages is termed online observation for two reasons. First, the content that participants post on their Weibo page is a record of their engagement with dynamic and changing virtual communities. It is part of an ongoing process rather than a batch of static and unchanged media content produced merely for information dissemination (Hewson, 2007). Secondly, unlike document analysis which solely focuses on the "end products" of participants' online activities, online observation allows more space for me to understand the records of participants' online activities in the specific community in which they occurred. As the traces of participants' engagement with online communities, these data are part of their dynamic online practice, reflecting the dynamic interaction between individual activity, community practices and culture.

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1   A Twitter like microblogging service in China, a more detailed introduction is provided in the latter part of this chapter.

CONTEXTUALIZING CHINESE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ONLINE CITIZENSHIP PRACTICES INTO THE MIXED REALITY OF VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL

INTERNET-MEDIATED INTERVIEW

Due to the absence of extra-linguistic cues and specific social contexts in online communication, some information which is crucial for understanding the nuances of participants' online communication are missed (Hewson, 2014). Interviews with participants can compensate for this lack of information, allowing me to explore the ways through which young Chinese practise their citizenship and offering insights into why their citizenship is practised in these ways. In one instance, a participant once posted a sentence on Weibo that said, "thought I could bring this world a bit difference". From the expression, I read a sense of frustration and disappointment. However, from the rich background information and stories behind this post that were discussed during the interview, I was able to understand the change that the participant wanted to effect and why she felt frustrated. The answer to these questions shed precious light on how her engagement with society and her understanding of her relationship with that society changed over time, that is, it revealed her practice and understanding of citizenship. In addition to this, interviewing participants about their situations in physical life to get background information about their online communication records can work as a way to triangulate the online data to help in ensuring its validity (Prior & Miller, 2012).

I conducted internet-mediated audio interviews via WeChat[2] for several reasons. Firstly, it is available and familiar enough to both researcher and participants. Secondly, my participants are geographically dispersed. Thirdly, audio interviews can minimise the loss of information from lack of physical proximity and the absence of extra-linguistic cues which can lead to ambiguities and misunderstandings (Hewson, 2014). Fourthly, synchronous audio interviews entail real-time interaction between interviewer and interviewee. By not allowing respondents time to prepare each answer, I was less concerned that their responses would be socially desirable (Gaiser, 2008). Moreover, the flow of a conversation enables researchers to ask follow-up questions by picking up on any interesting comments; such follow-up questions are a crucial tool for exploring the meanings participants attach to their online activities.

Finally, audio interviews mediated by the internet can maintain the sense of anonymity or privacy that participants experience when they express themselves online. My participants were introduced by friends, I have not met them, and I am not in their social circle. In this sense, I could be in the social category of "the stranger" (Simmel, 1950). My role as a stranger makes me an intimate information receiver with whom participants' thoughts and opinions can be more comfortably shared. This relationship can also produce a feeling of trust that enables a more in-depth disclosure of events and experiences by the participants. On top of this, internet-mediated audio interviews can reduce the intrusiveness of the researcher into the interviewee's personal space (Hanna, 2012). These factors help to enhance candour in the disclosures of the participants in interviews (Hewson, 2014).

Although an audio interview is incapable of catching non-verbal information, such as body movements and facial expressions which may be helpful in understanding the meaning and assessing the authenticity of the verbal content recorded, something similar can be gained through carefully listening to the intonation in verbal expressions. Moreover, the benefit of synchronous online audio interviews in generating rich interview data far outweigh the value of non-verbal information in developing better understanding of interview data.

After conducting two pilot interviews, I adjusted the sequence and narration of some questions and deleted others to improve the flow of the interview. This process made the interviews more effective in yielding rich and detailed qualitative data. I also acquired a better sense of how to maintain the balance of narrative between the interviewees and myself. The pilot interviews helped to prepare my instrument and myself for the interview.

In acquiring participants' perspectives on their motivations for, and the meanings they ascribed to their activities on Weibo, I used my observation of their Weibo account as the entry point. Before every interview, I extensively reviewed the posts collected from their Weibo page. Within an inclusive notion of citizenship which examines people's daily engagement with social communities, I categorized these posts according to the communities with which they engaged. I chose typical posts from each category and asked them for background information about these posts, the motivations behind them and the meanings they attach to their online activities.

This kind of preparation ensures every interview question has a clear purpose. It also throws up specific material for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss and reflect upon. This way of designing interview questions turned out to be effective in generating rich and reflective qualitative data. My research of their Weibo page as preparation for the interview showed my respect for participants and facilitated the establishment of a good rapport between us, enhancing self-disclosure and generating high quality interview data.

REFLEXIVITY

Although this study benefitted hugely from the online-offline integrated approach, I am aware of my role in filtering the collection and interpretation of empirical data through my personal biography situated in a specific socio-political and historical context (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). My Chinese background, and my competence in using the Chinese internet and understanding its culture, enabled me to locate myself in the field (Hine, 2008) in which the activities I intended to investigate occurred. It gave me an edge in understanding the double meanings, metaphors, and slang in people's daily speaking and online expressions. This capability enabled me to understand

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2   The most popular mobile text and voice messaging service in China.

their comments in the interview and their online expressions allowing me to develop "empathetic understanding" of the online practices of Chinese young people (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, p. 13).

This cultural adjacency can also be a disadvantage. As Bourdieu (1998) notes, people often fail to reflect on the habitual role played by culture in their account of their behaviour, therefore it is crucial to take into consideration the culture of the field in which informants reside. My similar cultural background and experience of being a user of the Chinese internet may jeopardize my sensitivity in reflecting on the taken-for-granted roles of culture (both Chinese culture and the online culture) as I interpret participants' accounts of their online behaviours in interviews. I am aware of the possible impact this adjacency could bring to my role as a researcher. During the process of this study, I did every interview with fresh curiosity and an open mind. The effect of my personal assumptions was minimised by my asking every interview question with humility and by consciously avoiding imposing my perspective on participants.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the approach I used to reconstruct the contextual knowledge of young people's online activities and the considerations in adopting specific methods. Online observation and audio interview can be used in a mutually constitutive way to yield rich contextual data on which our understanding of young people's experiences of citizenship in the mixed reality of virtual and physical can be based. Overall, the researcher needs to be aware of the impact of their personal biography on their role as a research tool in screening and interpreting empirical data.

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BEYOND THE ETHICS APPLICATION: THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON INFORMED CONSENT IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Margaret Coady

One of my guides on the subject of research with those under 18, has been the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Partly in order to explore how far this Convention had penetrated the community of researchers working with children, Dr Kylie Smith and I (Smith and Coady forthcoming) undertook research funded by an Ethics and Integrity grant. We aimed to explore which research methodologies and protocols are being used by researchers from a variety of disciplines to support ethical engagement with children under 5 years of age in research. The participants came from a number of countries, including the U.S.A. England, Ireland and Australia and a number of disciplines, including medicine, education, arts, law, psychology, philosophy, social policy and urban planning. This paper looks at one of the most complex concepts in the ethics of research, namely informed consent.

> Informed consent is a fundamental component of moral justification. It distinguishes love-making from rape, employment from servitude, and life-saving surgery from felonious assault with a deadly weapon, to mention just a few examples. (MacLean 2006).

MacLean's words show the ubiquity and fundamental importance of consent in all human relationships, not just in research. This article will look at how consent should operate in research which involves children. The Nuremberg Code of Research Ethics states: "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential" (Nuremberg Code 1947). This stark statement is problematic for those who are researching on or with those who cannot give a legally binding consent, such as those, including children who do not have the mental capacity to completely understand the nature of the research. Taken literally it would seem to ban all research on or with children. This difficulty is usually "solved" by having a parent, or other recognised substitute, sign for the child. However, this solution is not always entirely satisfactory in ethical terms for two reasons. First the substitute's consent may not be completely voluntary; we found in our research instances where the parents signed their children up to a research project in order to get their children into or remain in a good school or childcare centre, or where the researchers were held in such esteem that the parents dared not refuse. In both of these cases the parents were informed but not entirely free. The second reason is that as the research continues, the child may well have more information than the parents about the nature of the research. As a result of this increased knowledge the child may want to withdraw from the research. Good practice would put no obstacle in the way of withdrawing even if the parent continues to give consent.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "FREE" IN THE PHRASE "FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT"?

This is often a contested idea. Clearly it would be unethical to compel either adults or children to be part of a research project. Nor can you give the participants rewards so great that they would not be part of the research if you did not offer them such rewards. This can be difficult with children since often very small rewards, such as food, or sweets, or time out of the schoolroom will convince them to take part. In this regard it is important that those who choose not to take part are not penalized in any way for refusing consent or for withdrawing part way through the research.

THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF RESEARCH

Behind almost every question on the ethics application for submission to a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) lies the concept of consent. The concern with consent is a guiding thought throughout the conduct of the research and into publication of the results. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p.272) say

> informed consent is at heart an interpersonal process between researcher and participant where the prospective participant comes to an understanding of what the research project is about and what participation would involve and makes his or her own decision about whether, and on what terms, to participate.

Part of the dynamic nature of research means that unforeseen changes may occur. Legal and institutional rules vary on the issue of whether researchers have a duty, mandated or otherwise, to report .[3] These may need to be checked before the researcher gives a promise of confidentiality to the child and the parents, and the plain language statement may indicate that the promise cannot be kept in all circumstances.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN RESEARCH

Conflicts of interest occur in almost all research in that the interests of the researcher, the participants and/or the sponsor may clash. The important thing is to admit the different interests and manage them if possible. Examples of major conflicts of interest are pharmaceutical companies sponsoring research on medicines. Conflicts of interest in the research have the potential to vitiate the consent process where either researchers or those consenting on behalf of the child consciously or unconsciously may be less willing to think about the child's right to withdraw. In Smith and Coady (forthcoming), participants were asked whether, as a way of mitigating the effects of unrecognised or unadmitted conflicts of interest, they would be happy with

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BEYOND THE ETHICS APPLICATION: THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON INFORMED CONSENT IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

the presence during the research of a person not connected with the research. Such a person would not have a stake in the research continuing but could recognise the cues in the young child of a desire to withdraw and support the child continuing or withdrawing from the research. This person would represent the interests of the child and make sure their voices were heard.

The dynamic nature of research means that ethical issues, as well as other issues, arise unexpectedly during the course of the research. Generally Human Research Ethics Committees are not set up with a hotline to give help in these circumstances. Research students can appeal to their supervisors for advice and/or choose an ethically sensitive critical friend who has no stake in the research to give a view on whether she/he thinks the researcher is subconsciously putting their interests ahead of those of the research participants.

CONSENT FROM CHILDREN

Regarding consent from children to research, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018) Section 4.2 gives more detailed guidance. This guidance includes the statement that:

> specific consent to a child's or young person's participation in each research project should be obtained from: (a) the child or young person whenever he or she has the capacity to make this decision; and (emphasis added) (b) either (i) one parent, except when, in the opinion of the review body, the risks involved in a child's participation require the consent of both parents; or where applicable (ii) the guardian or other primary care giver, or any organisation or person required by law.

Note that they require consent from both the child and the parent. It is important to point out that the statement includes the clause, "whenever he or she has the capacity to make this decision". There are many arguments about the word "capacity" in this context, but in keeping with the UNCRC we would say that the child of whatever age has an interest in the research and so should have a say in whether he or she consents to take part. As Article 12 of the UNCRC put it, "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". Research ethics committees have given approval for research where only the older child or youth, and not the parent, is giving consent, for example in cases of research on homeless children and youth. But committees would take into account such factors as whether the youth fully understands the nature and purpose of the research, the degree of risk of the research and whether the point of the research was to bring benefit to the child/youth.

HARM IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Risk is relevant to informed consent because, as Alderson and Morrow (2011, p 23) state, informed consent is the legal means of transferring responsibility for risk-taking from the researcher to the participant. But in order to make this transference successful the risk must be spelt out very clearly in the plain language statement. Social scientists often complain that official ethical guidelines for research are based on medical research and that social science should not be so tightly controlled, since potential harms are not as great. One medical researcher (in Smith and Coady, forthcoming), when asked about possible harms that could result from her research, replied "death or anaphylaxis", thus trumping any possibilities the social scientists in the research group could think of. But it is possible that social scientists underestimate the harms which their research can cause.

> Social researchers can intrude into people's lives and cause them great distress and embarrassment during the research. Afterwards, reports in books, journals and in news media may also cause great and long-term harm to individuals who are identified, and also potentially to large groups if, for example, the researchers recommend policies that are actually ineffective and damaging (Alderson & Morrow 2011 p.23).

We can add to this view that educational research can lead children to have lower self-esteem, and to having other long lasting psychological, social and educational problems. It is possible that researchers in education overlook the harms they can cause, especially since these harms are less immediately obvious than those in medical research.

ETHICS IN PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Much research with children in the last two decades has been participatory in nature. This is partly the influence of the view of childhood in the UNCRC where children are seen as agentic. In such research children are more likely to be seen as participants or even co-researchers rather than subjects in the research. Much valuable knowledge has been gained through such research, for surely only children themselves can tell us how they experience their school, childcare centre, playground and so on. Their personally related experiences and preferences can add much to work on gender and class. But Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) express doubts about some participatory research while still supporting the concept. They give a good account of the epistemological problems faced by participatory research. The ethical problems raised by participatory research can be just as great. We may be deceiving ourselves and the children when we describe children as co-researchers. A reflexive view may reveal that the issues of power in the research are such that the researcher is making all the major decisions and is gaining the most from the research. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008 p.506) go further, suggesting that, in using certain classroom activities in the research, researchers are expressly taking advantage of children's schooled docility towards such activities. This is

BEYOND THE ETHICS APPLICATION: THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON INFORMED CONSENT IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

somewhat at odds with claims that such activities promote children's participation on the basis of active, informed decisions. Are we using the same processes of which we may at other times be critical?

CONCLUSION

Conducting ethical research with those under eighteen goes far beyond the formalities of giving the right responses in the application for ethics approval. It involves being ethically sensitive to the needs of our participants and to our own needs and motives. It also involves listening to "critical friends" and being able to reflect ethically on the theories which are driving our research practice during the whole of the research process. Guillemin and Gillam (2004 p.277) sum up this sort of reflexive approach by urging researchers "to be reflexive in relation to interpersonal and ethical aspects of research practice, not just the epistemological aspects of rigorous research".

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OVERCOMING MULTIPLE CHALLENGES IN DOING RESEARCH IN CAMBODIA: A REFLECTION ON PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Pheaktra Pich

INTRODUCTION

In Cambodia, the discussion of politics-related issues and government policy and performance is often viewed as too political and rarely expressed in public; any criticisms or dissents are rarely, if ever, expressed openly. While Cambodia may be regarded as a stable nation, politics is a 'salient concern', with a single-party system reinforcing the 'patron-client tradition' (UNESCO, 2011). Against this backdrop, my study contributes to both the practices of active citizenship in Cambodia and to the current state of practices of active citizenship in the field of youth and citizenship in general.

My research is underpinned by Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice and aims to uncover the interconnectedness of spaces, aspirations and schooling. The underlying meanings of these concepts can be explained through Bourdieu's thinking tools. Bourdieu explains how the thinking tools work, creating an equation through which practice, when unpacked, is the result of the relation between one's disposition (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital) confined to the current state of play of a particular social field (field).

$$[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice \text{ (Bourdieu, 1986:101)}$$

My study aims to answer the following questions:

- What do young Cambodian students understand as active citizens, including their rights and responsibilities?
- What are young people's dispositions and aspirations for citizenship?
- What have schools in Cambodia done to make students informed and active citizens?
- What forms and contents of civics education are suitable for Cambodia's context?

PRE-FIELD WORK CHALLENGES

To answer my research questions, I employ Mixed Methods Research incorporating three methods of data collection: student survey; student focus group discussions; and interviews with teachers. My choice of a mixed methods study is influenced by the works of Creswell (2009) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, 2010).

Participants were selected using a two-stage sampling procedure. For the first stage, four schools from the 34 high schools located in Phnom Penh (MoEYS, 2015) were selected. I selected these four schools using education statistics and indicators from the Ministry of Education. For the second stage, the school principals from the four schools selected in stage 1 provided the class lists of students in grades 10, 11 and 12. From these lists, the students were selected on a random basis. Across

the four schools, 206 students completed the questionnaires. The four teachers for the interviews were nominated by the school principals upon my request for a teacher who was currently delivering Moral-Civics Education in any of the three target grades.

Before collecting my data, I prepared and lodged an Ethics application to gain approval from The University of Melbourne. This process can take three months, or longer, depending on the complexity of the research and the potential vulnerability of the participants. Given that all of the students were under 18 years of age, I needed to gain the consent of their parents/ guardian, their teachers and school principals as well as the participants. The primary aim of the Ethics application is to make sure that your research is in line with the university's research ethics guidelines and principles by addressing ethical concerns.

After gaining approval from the university's ethics committee, I was then able to approach the relevant authorities in Cambodia to seek permission to conduct the research on school campuses. I required approval from a range of key people, gatekeepers, including my workplace management, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the principals of the selected schools. The approval from my workplace serves as a guarantee that my project is appropriately overseen, whereas approval from the Ministry's officials helps to legitimize my research project. The above processes remind me of Bourdieu's notion of 'fish in water', a situation where we feel comfortable when our understanding of this so-called procedure is in concert with the logic of field. This happens when one's habitus matches the doxa or the underlying practices within that field (Maton, 2008). My understanding of the cultural context of the research is one of the enabling factors that makes this project a success.

DATA COLLECTION

In the first phase of the data collection, students were invited to complete a survey questionnaire adapted from the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator, which comprises four fundamental components: democratic values, representative democracy, community life, and protest and social change (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

In the second phase of the data collection, five students from each of the four selected schools were recruited for focus group discussions. The students were given an information letter and consent form for themselves and a parental information letter and consent form for their parents to sign. The first five students in each school who agreed to participate in the project and complete the student survey were invited to participate in the focus groups. The aim of the focus group discussions was to tap into students' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the current practices of citizenship and the usefulness and preparedness of the current Moral-Civics Education curriculum.

OVERCOMING MULTIPLE CHALLENGES IN DOING RESEARCH IN CAMBODIA: A REFLECTION ON PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Focus group discussions encourage participants to talk about their experiences in their own terms (Yin, 2003) by providing opportunities for students to speak "in their own language" (Andolina et al., 2002) or "in their own voices" (Edwards, 2009). In the third phase of the data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews with one teacher from each of the four schools. These four teachers are delivering Moral-Civics Education within the Cambodian school curriculum.

THE NOTION OF 'FISH IN WATER'

In this section, I discuss the challenges that I encountered during my field work in Cambodia. I encountered a number of fieldwork-related issues including: (1) the perceived knowledge of 'active citizenship' among students and teachers; (2) cultural knowledge about the setting in which the research is conducted; and (3) the respondents' limited second language ability. In the first place, the indicators included in my questionnaire were originally developed and used in Europe; therefore, I had to adapt them to make them applicable in the Cambodian context. For example, questions related to engagement in political parties were reworded to probe students' knowledge about the roles of political parties in democratic societies because discussions about politics are prohibited on school campuses. All the questions included in the student questionnaire were checked for clarity so as not to be perceived as being politically biased. I made certain that the content of the questions for the survey and interviews were not interpreted as provoking dissent towards the schools' management or the government. Furthermore, given Cambodia's socio-political context, all the students and teachers and myself, the researcher, chose our words carefully when expressing opinions during the entire data collection period. For example, instead of asking students if they were empowered to make complaints about school, I asked if the students were allowed to raise any concerns about their schools.

When the research is conducted in a setting where everyday practices can be easily framed as politically-oriented, both the researcher and participants find themselves, to borrow Bourdieu's terminology, as 'fish out of water'. The notion of 'active citizenship' is quite alien to Cambodian students, at least in the Western sense of the concept, and may be perceived as being politically motivated. Therefore, some of the answer options may have seemed irrelevant or resulted in students and teachers being reluctant to express their views thereby affecting the data collection process as well as the data. Opinions may be easily labelled politically motivated, thus jeopardizing the salience of the research project. Thus, it is important that researchers are attentive to the sensibility of the field, space and place where they are conducting their work.

Finally, conducting research in a setting where English cannot be used as a medium poses another challenge. In the first place, every single document needs to be translated into the local language. This may delay the ethics application process and double, or even triple, the time allocated for the development of information letters, consent forms, and survey questions. Last, but not necessarily least, choosing the right words to translate the students' and teachers' responses and opinions into English was another challenge that required extra time for multiple readings of and coding the data as well as interpreting the results. Some researchers might address this issue by presenting the data in English and the native language of participants, while others might decide to translate it. Nonetheless, it is important to let readers, and participants, know the effect that language, and translation, can have on the data and on participants.

CONCLUSION

Research involves more than a mere systematic procedure. The pre-field work and the during-the-field work stages require flexibility and cultural understanding of the setting. More care is required when a project is conducted in a setting where dissent and criticism may potentially be labelled as politically motivated. Careful consideration of the layers of consent required to comply with the university's Ethics approval process can add considerable time to the planning of the project and delay entry into the field. However, being a 'fish in water' provides an advantage by ensuring that research is not compromised by misunderstandings due to cultural incompetence.

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