

# **Working Papers Series**

## International and Global Issues for Research

To what extent do internationally mobile Primary School aged children experience significant negative emotions when translocating?

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## Thailand

## No. 2015/11 June 2015

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To be alive is to have problems; to stay alive is continuously to find resources to solve problems.

(Useem, 1966)

### **Abstract**

The number of children living outside their 'home' countries and attending International Schools around the world is ever-increasing. Many of these children will translocate several times during their school years. Examining the literature in this area, the writer identifies a dearth of research on the emotional effects of these relatively frequent moves on children of Primary School age. Consequently, this essay sets out the planning for an in-depth study of how children feel when they move between different schools and cultures. The epistemology and methodology which supports research promoting the voices of the children themselves is discussed and leads to the decision to use case study and interview as the primary means of data collection, with presentation of the data being in the narrative form. The importance of the relationship between participant and researcher is highlighted along with the ethics involved when working with children. The strengths of the research are perceived to be that it will fill an identified gap in our knowledge regarding how children feel about their translocations, and that children themselves will be at the heart of the study.

### Introduction

Internationally mobile children move schools with a regularity generally not experienced by children who are educated in their home country. In literature on 'third culture kids' and 'global nomads' - terms often used to describe children who move between international schools as their families relocate to different countries, for example, within transnational organisations - it has been suggested that the experience of moving schools can impact negatively on children's emotions to the extent that words such as 'grief' and 'loss' are employed to describe the feelings prompted by such moves. However, this runs counter to my personal observations and experience in international Primary Schools where children who were translocating consistently displayed excitement and positive emotions at the idea of 'a new adventure.' This triggered a desire to undertake my own research into the emotional effects of international translocation, specifically on Primary School aged children, in order to get a clearer picture of how these children genuinely feel when going through this process. In addition to satisfying my own need to better understand the emotional effects on children, the outcome of this research will allow International School teachers to improve their own understanding of how children feel when moving and thus develop or adapt policy and practice within their schools. Parents, along with the international organisations which employ them, may also benefit from an improved understanding of how moving schools may impact children's emotions.

This essay therefore represents the planning for my research project, along with the theory that supports it. My essay will start with a review of the literature in the area to set the context of my study and to highlight any lacunae in current research on how children feel when translocating. As I move on to my methodology, I will visit additional literature which will guide me in terms of the philosophy supporting my research, and the epistemological and methodological decisions I will make in order to ensure the research is meaningful. I will then look at how best to collect the data which will respond to my research question. After highlighting the ethical aspects of my research, I will address any potential strengths and limitations of my study and consider likely pitfalls which may be encountered on my research journey.

For the purposes of this essay, the term 'Primary school aged children,' is taken to be those children aged between six and twelve years.

### **Literature Review**

In reviewing literature which employs the labels 'third culture kids' (TCKs) and 'global nomads' to describe those children who will be the focus of this study, it would be helpful to consider their origins. Useem et al (1963: 169) introduced the term 'third culture' when studying professional American families living and working in India and named the complex patterns at the intersection of societies the 'third culture,' which they broadly defined as the behaviour patterns created, shared and learned by men of different societies who are in the process of relating their societies to each other. In a later work, Useem (1966: 135) explains that the third culture is not a stable culture which generates only 'problems of adjustment' for its members but is a changing, protean culture within a firm outline. Later, Useem (1976), cited in Langford (1998: 29), applies the term 'third-culture' to those young people who return to their 'home' country after a significant time overseas:

When they come to their country of citizenship (some for the first time), they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others – especially of those their own age. Where they feel most like themselves is in that interstitial culture, the third culture...

Where Useem used the term 'third culture kid' to describe 'returnees', McCaig and Schaetti (1993), cited in Langford (1998: 30), apply the term 'global nomad' to anyone who has spent a significant part of their developmental years living in one or more countries outside their passport country because of a parent's occupation. They describe global nomads as members of a world-wide community who share a unique cultural heritage and typically share similar responses to the benefits and challenges of a childhood abroad. Sears (2011: 74) develops the theme when she uses the term 'third spaces' in the context of international schools which she believes offer a viable, or third, community whose culture lies between that of 'home' and 'abroad' and where the issues of constant transition and adaptation are addressed by policy and practice. The terms 'TCK' and 'global nomad' now tend to be used interchangeably and are broadly applied to those non-host country national children attending international schools around the world.

More than twenty years ago, Gerner et al (1992: 199) estimated that the number of children living outside their home countries and those who had lived abroad at some point during their childhood exceeded one million worldwide. It is not unrealistic to believe that this number has since grown exponentially. In addition, the nature of the children attending international schools has also changed as Deveney (2012: 85) explains:

'The children found in international schools are no longer only the offspring of what might be described as the transnational capitalist classes (Sklair 2001) ... The children we are now teaching in international school classrooms are more diverse than ever: they may be funded by scholarships from around the world, they may be children of host-country nationals who are investing heavily in their children's future, or children whose parents are from developing countries and have been lucky enough to have experienced an education that allows them to enter the international job market.'

In view of this, I would argue that international translocation can no longer be regarded as the domain of a privileged minority who require specialist labels, and would suggest that terms such as 'globally mobile' or 'internationally mobile' are unambiguous and, thus, more useful.

Having looked at the commonly used terminology, I will now focus on the literature which relates to the effects of translocation on children. The tenor of this literature tends to fall into two categories with one viewing the effect of global mobility as problematic, and the other taking a more positive stance, although there are researchers who straddle the areas in between. I will deal first with the former category.

While Useem places internationally mobile children within a third culture, Gilbert (2008: 94) places these children in a perpetual liminal state, existing on the threshold of the culture of their parents' home country (or countries) and that of the country in which they learn to live life. Gilbert (2008: 94) states that TCKs face unique challenges, in part because the expatriate experience has not been designed around the needs of children, and because mobility leads to an almost perpetual state of psychological transition. Gilbert's belief regarding the needs of expatriate children is in conflict with my personal experience of such children who generally lead a privileged expatriate

life-style and have excellent educational opportunities in International Schools. Nevertheless, Gilbert goes on to say that these children may be expected to deal with culture shock, transitioning difficulties, feeling without cultural anchors and losing friends when they or someone else moves, although he does allow for the fact that some TCKs may come to embrace their liminality. Gilbert believes all of these challenges involve loss and therefore grief as he echoes the thoughts of Pollock & Van Reken (2009: 74):

'The reality is that with every transition, there is loss even when there is ultimate gain. No matter how much we anticipate the future as good, we almost always leave something of value behind as well. In loss, there is grief.'

While Pollock & Van Reken agree that not all TCKs exhibit negative behaviours towards transitions and manage to deal with them in basically positive ways throughout life (p160), they maintain a strong focus on those who feel they have suffered negative experiences and recount their stories of loss and grief. McKillop-Ostrom (2000: 76) continues the negative theme explaining that immaturity may make young people more vulnerable to the psychological impact of transition. She states that, just like adults, children who move feel a sense of loss. Their loss will be related to, for example, familiar surroundings such as school and community and, more specifically, close friends, and these losses can result in various forms of grieving. McKillop-Ostrom also highlights the fact that change and adaptation are constant features of the lives of internationally mobile individuals and every physical move forces them to face the challenges of transition (p75). The potential affective reactions to transition are described by Ezra (2003: 125) as feelings of frustration, depression and even aggression as the family slowly comes to terms with their new environment. Ezra further explains that, even though the child may be excited about the prospect of living in a different country, he or she may be too young or unequipped emotionally to fully comprehend the losses that he or she will suffer (p128).

McLachlan (2007: 239) found that parents spoke about the stress and emotional pain their children experienced when they relocated:

'Many parents described episodes where their guilt intensified when child grief was acute. At other times, some parents reported feeling some level of guilt all of the time, especially in families who experienced high levels of transience. There was acceptance by families that parental guilt and child grief were inescapable aspects of living a mobile lifestyle.'

Although McLachlan states that transience can be difficult to deal with, she acknowledges that it can offer social and emotional advantages and opportunities for growth (p245). In addition, McLachlan (2007: 246) found that internationally mobile families were not simply 'passive' agents who were moved about the globe by their employer. Instead, these families demonstrated awareness of the dilemmas which can occur as a consequence of transience and displayed good resilience. Kim (2008: 363) offers an explanation as to why complex emotions may be experienced when moving between countries and cultures:

'As the interplay of acculturation and deculturation continues, each experience of adaptive change inevitably accompanies stress in the individual psyche—a kind of identity conflict rooted in resistance to change, the desire to retain old customs in keeping with the original identity, on the one hand, and the desire to change behavior in seeking harmony with the new milieu, on the other. This conflict is essentially between the need for acculturation and the resistance to deculturation, that is, the 'push' of the new culture and the 'pull' of the old. The internal disequilibrium created by such conflicting forces can be manifested in intense emotional 'lows' of uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety.'

While it is understandable that some feelings of loss may be experienced by those who are translocating, the extent to which it results in grief and guilt is countered by the second category of research literature which reports more positive outcomes to translocation. Haour-Knipe (1989: 197) recognizes that, for adults, the consequences of leaving one country and going to live in another, a process which might be repeated several times throughout a career, can usually be anticipated fairly well. However, while she admits that the possible effects on children are less well-known, she posits that:

'Classical studies of migration and mental health were based, until around 1970, on a conservative model of the human being. The individual was seen as essentially sedentary, the dominant paradigm was that of homeostasis. In psychiatry ... change was seen as disruptive, the individual, as the family system, in constant search of equilibrium. It is little wonder, then, that studies invariably found a link between the major disruption of migration and troubles such as mental illness.' (p198)

Haour-Knipe (1989: 201/2) focuses on parental attitudes towards the moves a family may undertake and suggests these family attitudes may be transmitted to children. Indeed, she mentions studies that directly link childhood disturbance after a move to parents' negative attitudes about it. This is supported by McKillop-Ostrom (2000: 77) who points out that adults who are not motivated to adapt to the new culture may have a negative effect on their children's overall adjustment process. Zetzel Nathanson & Marcenko (1995: 415) add that research shows mobility itself has relatively little effect on children, but among those children showing signs of distress, the distinguishing factor is most frequently related to family life; studies suggest that as long as parents are well-adjusted and the family is stable, then mobility alone is unlikely to have a profound negative effect on children's adjustment. Gerner et al (1992: 208) observe that young people who make successful cultural adjustments when moving to different countries come from families that are more culturally accepting, since they choose to live in countries that require considerable flexibility for Western expatriates to make a successful adjustment. Haour-Knipe (1989: 201) adds that those for whom a move is unquestionably disruptive are those for whom an already precarious balance is upset ... those children who are already anxious about relations with parents, for example, or who interpret the move as an indicator of family dysfunction, instability, and possible disintegration. On the other hand, she argues that overcoming the problems caused by moving can lead to feelings of increased mastery and improved mental health. Haour-Knipe observes that the evidence would seem to point toward the conclusion that for a basically healthy child the risks [of numerous translocations] are minimal and the opportunities great (p203).

Moore & Barker (2012: 559) conducted in-depth interviews with nineteen participants from six different countries in a study which explored, *inter alia*, internationally mobile lives, and found

that their participants did not express feelings of grief caused by a loss of security, trust, and identity, as reported by Gilbert (2008) above. On the contrary, they found that many of their participants believed their intercultural experiences enhanced their childhood and enrich their lives today as adults. Moore & Barker found that the main benefits of the TCI (Third Culture Individuals) lifestyle articulated by the TCIs include adaptability, cultural awareness, fluency in multiple languages and open-mindedness:

"... participants in this study were very aware of how their experiences have impacted them. They spoke with clarity and assertiveness about both the benefits and detriments of a life on the move; however, they all agreed that the positives far outweigh the negatives, particularly the ability to understand, adapt to, speak with, being aware of, and open toward people from different cultures." (p558)

Murphy (2003: 28/29) focuses her attention more specifically on young children when she explains that these children experience the burden of moving schools and trying to cope with a new language and new culture before having completed the integration of those of their home country. Despite believing that this can prove too great a burden for many young children, she questions: 'if this is true, why do these children appear happy, as they almost invariably do, in their international school environment?' Murphy answers her own question by explaining that children are wonderfully adaptable to new environments and thinks this is so because the younger a child is, the fainter on the psyche is his or her own culture's imprint, so the less it stands in the way of acquiring new cultural knowledge and attitudes.

Research which focuses exclusively on the translocation experiences of Primary School aged children is hard to find so is not well represented in this literature review. While Sears (2011) and Murphy (2003) specify the ages of the children in their studies, other researchers have focused on adolescents and young adults, on internationally mobile children in general with no age specified, or on adults who were asked to consider their earlier lives as internationally mobile children. As for the opinions of children, Grimshaw and Sears (2008: 272) highlight the fact that research has allowed little space for the voices of global nomads themselves. They point out that when empirical research is cited, it tends to be of the 'etic' kind where the researchers seek to study

people from an objective distance and to quantify them. Two studies which do focus on Primary school aged children are Nette & Hayden (2007) who looked at what it means to 'belong' to a home country, and Dixon & Hayden (2008), who researched children's views of the translocation process using an on-line questionnaire. Nette & Hayden (2007: 437) state that they had set out to 'strengthen the voice of the primary-age child in the context of childhood global mobility' while Dixon & Hayden (2008: 488) believe that the voices of younger children are too infrequently heard and, too often, adults visit on children views and perceptions based on their own understanding of the world. Hayden (2006: 56) has noted that:

'In the growing, if still relatively limited, research and literature on the effects of global mobility on children...one voice is infrequently heard. While it is essential to draw on the experience of teachers and administrators and to listen to the views of parents, it is rarely the case that the thoughts of the children themselves are actively sought in any systematic way.'

In viewing the literature, it can be seen that lacunae in current research on how children feel about their translocation experiences have, indeed, been identified. The literature indicates that research outcomes in this area, to date, remain largely polarized at either end of the emotionally negative/positive continuum, where, on the one hand, parents feel guilty for their children's abject grief and, on the other hand, children feel positively enriched and privileged by their intercultural opportunities. Few studies straddle the middle ground. In addition, the opinions of the children themselves are essentially unrepresented. My research will, therefore, seek to fill this void in two ways: by targeting the investigation on the emotional impacts of translocation explicitly at Primary School aged children, and by placing children themselves at the heart of the study by engaging them as dynamic participants in the process and giving them an active voice.

## Methodology

Having set the context for my research, I must ensure that the methodology will support my intention to work closely with children and allow their voices to be heard. In making the decision to listen to children talking about their emotions, my primary data gathering must be through dialogue rather than through the use of formal instruments such as questionnaires or surveys. Thus,

the data gathered will need to be interpreted and not measured. My study is therefore more closely aligned with qualitative rather than quantitative enquiry, as Greig et al (2007: 136) tell us:

'Qualitative research strives for depth of understanding in natural settings. Unlike the positivist, quantitative tradition it does not focus on a world in which reality is fixed and measurable but one in which the experiences and perspectives of individuals are socially constructed.'

Denzin & Lincoln (2000: 3) explain that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Labaree (2003: 14) adds that qualitative research is well suited to the task of making sense of the socially complex, variable rich, and context-specific character of education, while Sarantakos (2005: 50) explains:

'Some of the main criteria of qualitative methods are lack of strict structure, loosely planned designs geared to capture reality in action, expressive language, collection of thick descriptions, presentation of data in the form of words and pictures, close contact with the respondent, and context sensitivity.'

Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 4) use the term *bricoleur* to describe a qualitative researcher. They suggest that the interpretive *bricoleur* produces a *bricolage* which is a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. They explain that the interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting (p5). The *bricoleur* is likened to a quilt maker who stitches together pieces from different sources to make a whole. While this metaphor gives a strong image of how information may be crafted with various shapes and textures, a quilt, if complete, is fixed, so the metaphor needs to allow for alteration and enhancement as further knowledge is built around what is already known, and so changes over time. The notion of change is discussed by Guba (1992: 19) who believes that the history of inquiry teaches us that knowledge does not converge onto objective reality, but diverges as more and more is known. He suggests that all constructions may be refined, or even totally

abandoned, in the light of new information or heightened sophistication (p20). An alternative metaphor is offered by Shank & Villella (2004: 48) who liken qualitative research to a lantern which can be used to allow light to illuminate dark areas so that we can see things that previously were obscure, although this image is limited by its two-dimensionality and the suggestion that researchers are merely lantern holders, placed at a distance rather than actively engaging in research.

Merely identifying research as qualitative is insufficient to inform planning, as the researcher must also be placed within the context of the study. Shank and Villella (2004: 51) point out that qualitative researchers enter into some form of partnership with the participants in their studies, while Mantzoukas (2004: 1000/1001) adds that the researcher is an inextricable part of the research endeavour:

'...nonrepresentation of the researcher in the research text is not only insincere but fundamentally out of line with the rules, convictions, and models commonly agreed within these paradigms. Therefore, any qualitative research adhering to nonpositivist paradigms, if it does not overtly include the researcher, violates in principle what is viewed as valid for these paradigms.' (p1002)

The importance of the individual researcher is underlined by Cohen et al (2011: 17) who suggest that to retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts must be made to get inside the person and to understand from within. They state that the imposition of external form and structure is resisted, since this reflects the viewpoint of the observer as opposed to that of the actor directly involved. Context and culture are also of relevance. Angen (2000: 385/6) argues that understanding cannot be separated from context, while Scott & Usher (2011: 28) state that researchers must recognise not only the complexity of their practice but also, more importantly, its location in culture and history. They suggest that understanding something is always prejudiced in the sense that it is a process of requiring an initial projection that anticipates meaning and which orients the process. This initial projection or pre-understanding is part of the subject's situatedness; the subject's location and standpoint in history, society and culture (p29). Usher (1996: 21) believes that our 'pre-understandings' are a vital part of the research process:

"... one's pre-understandings, far from being closed prejudices or biases ... actually make one more open-minded because, in the process of interpretation and understanding, they are put at risk, tested and modified through the encounter with what one is trying to understand. So rather than bracketing or 'suspending' them we should use them as the essential starting-point for acquiring knowledge.'

In recognizing the central part played by the researcher, we must also recognize the influence the researcher may have on the outcomes of the research. Angen (2000: 384/385) suggests that by our very being in the world, we are morally implicated and our values and beliefs will show themselves in our actions whether we stop to think about them or not. Eisener (1988: 19) argues that there is no such thing as a value-neutral approach to the world; language itself, whether the language of the arts or the sciences, is value-laden. Denzin & Lincoln (2013: 17) add that qualitative researchers stress the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry; such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. The importance of the relationship between researcher and subject is highlighted by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 100) who state that research data is created by the investigator and respondent together as each influences the other: 'There is the investigator-respondent dyad, a transitivity, a continuous unfolding, a series of iterations. Each shapes the other and is shaped by the other.'

Where researchers play such an integral role in their studies, there will be concerns regarding research integrity. Mertens (2010: 249) suggests that qualitative research texts recognize the importance of researchers reflecting on their own values, assumptions, beliefs and biases, and monitoring those as they progress through the study to determine their impact on the study's data and interpretation. Moss et al (2009: 502) argue that if you believe knowledge is unavoidably shaped by the preconceptions of the knowers, then you are likely to privilege as rigorous those methods that illuminate the nature of the bias and the social, cultural, and political forces that shaped it. The importance of reflexivity in research is promoted by Davies (1999: 3) who states that due to the close connection between researcher and the object of their research, questions will arise as to whether the results of research are artefacts of the researcher's presence and inevitable influence on the research process. For these reasons, Davies continues, considerations of

reflexivity are important for all forms of research. Rossman & Rallis (2010: 384) suggest that what makes an inquiry systematic and scholarly is the willingness and ability of the researcher to put forward the reasoning behind the decisions for critique among a community of scholars. The issue of truth in research is raised by Preissle (2006: 691) who offers a simple definition:

'How we know that we have got what we thought we were after, or something equally compelling, and that we got it all and got it right—this is my simplistic rendering of the truth and consistency issues. Of course we are never absolutely certain of what it is, we never get it all and any rightness of our reports is always subject to review.'

Cresswell & Miller (2000: 128) offer procedures for establishing credibility which include describing the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail. They add that using thick descriptions creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation (p128/9)

The literature discussed above indicates that my methodology will comprise an 'investigator-respondent dyadic' relationship with my participants in which we jointly construct meaning from their life experiences and which I will interpret according to my epistemological perspectives, so my research is likely to be ontologically and epistemologically interpretivist/constructivist in nature. In this way, it effectively supports my intention to work closely with children and allow them to give voice to their opinions and feelings. With this in mind, I must now consider those particular methods that align with my methodology and offer practical ways in which to gather the data from my young participants.

#### Methods

My methods for data gathering will need to allow for the development of researcher/participant relationships and must also result in thick descriptions. In constructing my understanding of the affective issues at play when children translocate and move schools, I must also make use of methods which are child-friendly and sensitive. In view of this, it is my intention to identify

children of the target age who have experienced recent translocation in the International School where I currently work, as well as in other international schools within the country, and to undertake comparative case studies on these children and their families. Greig et al (2007: 146) suggest that case study is an appropriate choice for doing research with children due to its lack of any sophisticated or distinctive methodology of its own, as well as its suitability for the real life settings in which most child practitioners work. While Yin (2014: 3) suggests that doing case study research is one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours, Mitchell (2009: 183) points out:

'The rich detail which emerges from the intimate knowledge the analyst must acquire in a case study provides the optimum conditions for the acquisition of those illuminating insights which make formerly opaque connections suddenly pellucid.'

To allow children's voices to be clearly heard, within each case study my principal method of data gathering will be through in-depth, recorded interviews. However, while children will be the primary focus of my study, the literature indicates that it is also necessary to explore familial context, and the attitudes of mothers in particular, so collecting data from family members will also be significant to the study, and will also be undertaken through recorded interviews. Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori (2011: 529) state that, by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. However, the interviews I intend to undertake will be formulated to produce individual narratives which, when brought together, will tell the translocation story (or stories) of each family. The narratives within each case study will ultimately be compared in order to investigate whether there are any identifiable themes, behaviours or circumstances which may either mitigate or exacerbate emotional effects on children when translocating.

In selecting interviews as the primary means for data gathering, questions arise in terms of organisation. An early decision must be made on where the interviews will be conducted, but this is not necessarily straightforward. An obvious choice would be at school as this represents 'familiar territory,' but this choice might reinforce the unequal power relationship where the adult holds a clear position of authority and the roles of teacher and researcher may become blurred. As

Greene & Hogan (2005: 148/9) point out, children have expectations regarding what is required of them when interacting with an adult in school contexts and their responses in interview may well reflect these expectations. An alternative choice would be in the participant's home, which would represent the participant's 'own' territory and where there would also be easy access to other family members. However, privacy while interviewing is vital so a quiet, undisturbed area must be available.

Initially, I intend to interview each child in a one-to-one situation to enable the development of the researcher/participant relationship and to allow the child to speak freely, as well as to guarantee confidentiality. Likewise, I intend to interview other family members individually. However, follow-up interviews in which all appropriate family members are included might also be informative and give more depth to the study. However, where I perceive that children's (or parental) voices are found to be in conflict, then it would be inappropriate to conduct a family group interview. The creation of a rich collection of data will involve making several visits to each family.

Solberg (2014: 244) advises that there are three key elements when interviewing children: clarity about the purpose of the research, guidance in the co-production of the account, and careful listening on the part of the researcher. Clarity regarding the research purpose would be made available, in a detailed written format, at the outset when participant families have been identified and consent sought. Before the co-production of the account could begin, a positive relationship with the children to be interviewed must be established, which may take time. Greene & Hogan (2005: 152) point out the necessity of developing a positive rapport with child participants as an introductory phase to the interview and as a style of questioning so that the child is empowered rather than subjected to a list of commands or instructions. In terms of the interview process itself, initial broad questions for my child participants would revolve around the translocation process in general and may include:

- When did you find out that you were going to move?
- Was the move discussed as a family?
- Have you moved before? How many times?

- How long did you stay at your last school?
- Did you enjoy living in the country you have just come from?
- Did you enjoy going to your last school?
- How did you feel when you found out that you were moving?

## Further questions would attempt to generate more detail:

- Describe a particular event or experience that sticks in your mind regarding your move.
- Can you remember a time when you felt sad about moving?
- Can you think of any happy moments concerning your move?
- How do you think you might feel when or if you move again?
- How do you think your mother/father feels about moving?
- Do you have any photos of the places you have been and can you talk me through them?
- Was there a particular International School that you enjoyed attending and can you tell me why?
- Was there any International School that you didn't enjoy and can you tell me why?

The questions are deliberately neutral and bland in order to avoid leading the participant and, as Polkinghorne (2007: 482) states, because interview texts are co-created, interviewers need to guard against simply producing the texts they had expected. Solberg (2014: 244) offers advice on touchy issues explaining that particularly sensitive questions could be followed up by 'reminding both myself and my informants about the basis for our conversation: that I lacked knowledge that they possessed and that I needed to learn from their experiences.' Needless to say, if any participant were to feel uncomfortable with the questioning, they would have the right to immediately stop the interview.

The decision to select the narrative form in my research is based on a number of reasons. Mishler (1986: 68) states that there is a wide recognition of the special importance of narrative as a mode through which individuals express their understanding of events and experiences. Lieblich et al

(1998: 7) develop this idea by suggesting that people are storytellers by nature and one of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. Lieblich et al believe the use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations (p9). Bold (2012: 30) explains that human existence relies on narratives as they help us understand ourselves and others by describing, explaining and defining self and personal identity. The construction and use of participant narrative would, therefore, align with my research epistemology and methodology.

Although developing narratives through interviews will be my primary method of data collection, there are additional methods that I can employ. Creswell (2013: 71) explains that narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data, such as observations, documents, pictures, and other sources. As my primary participants are children, I can also employ such child-friendly methods as written narratives, poems and illustrated story-boards which, where my young respondents have a preference for either writing about or drawing about their experiences, would add breadth to my data. In addition, and to avoid my participants getting bored with all the talking, further written methods could include the creation of mind-maps around the translocation process, timelines of the moving process indicating times that were regarded as happy or unhappy, and the completion of sentences such as, 'I felt happy when......,' and 'I felt sad when.....' There are also activities such as, 'two stars and a wish' where children write two things they felt positive about when they moved schools and then a 'wish' which represents what they wished could have happened. In this way, I will create a collection of rich data which originates from the children themselves.

Narratives are 'stories' not hard facts, and in some cases the stories told in my study will be recalled after the passage of time and may be altered by hindsight. Indeed, it would be naïve to think that the narratives collected will represent factual truth. Lieblich et al (1998: 8) state that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these "remembered facts." Bold (2012: 30) reminds us that a personal narrative is not an exact record of what happened and cannot provide certainties because of its multilayered meanings - each

person brings to the narrative a different interpretation so the narrative re-presents experience rather than providing the reality. Thus, the narratives constructed with my participants will be a co-construction of what they believe they experienced at the time, prompted by my questions, and will be shared through dialogue, written or illustrative forms based on each individual's understanding and ability to articulate his or her experiences.

### **Ethics and Research with Children**

This leads me to the issue of undertaking research with children, which represents a significant facet in my study. Although Thomas & O'Kane (1998: 337) suggest that research with children is not very different from research with adults, they point out that there are important ways in which issues present themselves more sharply when the subjects are children: in part due to children's understanding and experience of the world being different from that of adults, and in part due to the different ways in which they communicate. While it is imperative that parental consent be given before embarking on interviews with children, Kirk (2007: 1259) draws attention to the fact that it has been more recently recognized that it is unacceptable to only obtain consent from parents before conducting research. Children should be approached and their permission explicitly sought before research starts. However, a child agreeing to participate without understanding the nature of the research cannot be regarded as giving informed consent and may merely want to please parents or the researcher. Greene & Hogan (2005: 68) suggest that, ideally, consent should be obtained in person from the child following the presentation of written and verbal information about the research and its implications, and after opportunities to discuss queries and concerns of the child. Greene & Hogan (2005: 63) also explain that, due to their perceived incompetence, children are seen as particularly vulnerable to persuasion, adverse influence and harm, and therefore it is important that they are not pressurized into taking part in studies whose implications have not been clearly explained to them. Greene & Hogan add that children and adults have similar rights to be informed about the nature and purpose of the research, to understand researchers' intentions, to feel confident that the study is worthwhile and to know what will happen to the findings (p64). Greene & Hogan suggest that research which aims to appreciate children's experiences qualitatively should be guided by:

- 'Research welfare the purpose of the research should contribute to children's wellbeing, either directly or indirectly;
- protection methods should be designed to avoid stress and distress; contingency arrangements should be available in case children become upset or situations of risk or harm are revealed;
- provision children should whenever possible feel good about having contributed to research as a service which can inform society, individuals, policy and practice;
- choice and participation children should make informed choices about the following:
  - agreement or refusal to taking part;
  - opting out (at any stage);
  - determining the boundaries of public, network and third-party confidentiality;
  - contributing ideas to research agendas and processes, both for individual research projects and to the research enterprise as a whole.' (p80)

Smith (2011:14) raises the importance of researchers being aware of the power differentials between children and adults. Greene & Hogan (2005: 63) explain that power is closely linked with status and adults are ascribed authority over children, who often find it difficult to dissent, disagree or say things which they fear may be unacceptable. Greene & Hogan also tell us that, when interviewing children, the social demands may outweigh the ostensible demands of the interview itself. Thus, children may give answers that are determined more by their desire to please than their desire to be truthful (p9). Thomas & O'Kane (1998: 337) suggest the power imbalance should be redressed in order to enable children to participate on their own terms and explain that factors such as when and where interviews take place, who is present, and who will be told, are all likely to have an effect on what the young person will talk about (p341). Holstein & Gubrium (2003: 37) believe that the researcher's desire to gain information from child participants without giving something in return reflects an underlying sense of the adult researcher's privilege so, by giving something in return for receiving this information, researchers can reduce the potential power inequality. In this respect, Holstein & Gubrium (2003: 37/8) suggest that researchers can treat

respondents in such a way that they receive something from participating in the study, whether it be a greater sense of empowerment, a greater understanding of their own life experiences, or both.

Kirk (2007: 1253/4) reminds us that taking part in research may cause children distress and researchers have an ethical responsibility to contend with any negative emotions experienced as a result of participating such as conflict, guilt, threat to self-esteem, fear of failure or embarrassment. In addition, Morrison (2013: 322) stresses that the researcher has to keep uppermost in her or his mind the need to respect the welfare and the dignity of the child, and the recognition that children have equal rights to adults in having these principles respected. Ultimately, however, Kirk (2007: 1258) suggests that while there are differences and similarities between conducting qualitative research with children and with adults, often the similarities have been overlooked and the differences overstated.

## **Analysis**

My study will result in a sizeable collection of transcribed interview narratives. While it may be tempting to seek help with the transcription process, Rubin & Rubin (2005: 204) recommend that researchers should personally transcribe interviews as this forces them to pay attention to what interviewees said and helps prepare for the next interview. To maintain the integrity of each transcription, Reissman (1993: 4) underlines the importance of preserving narratives, rather than fracturing them, in order to respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning. In addition, she cautions that where one chooses to begin and end a narrative can profoundly alter its shape and meaning (p18). Nevertheless, once transcribed, my focus will switch from data construction to data interpretation.

Simons et al (2008: 120) cite Polkinghorne (1995) when highlighting the fact that literature on conducting qualitative research primarily focuses on data generation and much less on the procedures for analysing the data. They suggest this lack comes about because of the inherently intuitive process of researchers working intimately with their data and the difficulties in articulating this to others. James (2013: 563) adds that in comparison to the amount of words that have been dedicated to the 'how to' elements of the research process, relatively little recent attention has been given to considering what is actually involved in the interpretation processes.

Nevertheless, Schreier (2012: 2) reminds us that data never 'speaks for itself', so it is the task of the researcher to construct meaning through interpretation of the data. Lieblich et al (1998: 10) explain that the work carried out on narratives is interpretive, and is always personal, partial, and dynamic. They add that while traditional research methods provide researchers with systematic inferential processes, narrative work requires self-awareness and self-discipline in the ongoing examination of text against interpretation, and vice versa (p10). Polkinghorne (2007: 479) explains that, in narrative research, the concern is clarification of what the storied text is intended to represent:

'Are the assembled texts understood to reflect their author's lifeworld? Are they the product of a researcher—author interaction and represent a co-construction? Are they distorted memories or projections about past events and happenings? For the reader to make an informed judgment about claims resting on the textual evidence, narrative researchers need to spell out their understandings of the nature of their collected evidence.'

It is important, therefore, that I not only interpret the meanings of my participants' narratives but also explain the reasoning behind my interpretations. Polkinghorne (2007: 477/8) suggests that the researcher can defend the appropriateness of the meaning attributed to the words and phrases of the text by providing the context in which they were made, or the researcher can describe ways in which his or her own background experiences produced understandings through interaction with the text.

While at the planning stage I cannot predict what my collection of data will offer in terms of content, my analysis and interpretations will focus comprehensively on those responses of the children and family members which relate specifically to the emotions they experienced through the translocation process. The transcriptions, along with the data collected through writing and illustration activities, will need to be painstakingly examined, sorted, organised and pieced together, as the afore-mentioned *bricolage*, to make sense of each participant's translocation story which can then be interpreted and presented in a way that remains faithful to my intention of allowing the voices of the children to shine through and be heard. The participants' stories in each

case study will be drawn together for further analysis and comparison to identify if any common themes or shared experiences emerge that can offer compelling answers to my research question.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

The main strengths of my research lie in the two aspects mentioned earlier in this essay, namely that it fills a void in an area where there is a dearth of up-to-date research, and that the voices of internationally mobile children themselves are at the heart of the study. Having worked with Primary School aged children for many years, I am optimistic that I will achieve some success in drawing out from children their genuine feelings on their translocation experiences, although I am not ignorant of the fact that it may prove difficult in some cases. Any further strengths are hard to predict while at this stage, and will depend on the overall success of the research project once completed. Nevertheless, Moss et al (2009: 504) explain:

'For qualitative research, well done means the study involved a substantial amount of time in fieldwork; careful, repeated sifting through information sources that were collected to identify "data" from them; careful, repeated analysis of data to identify patterns in them (using what some call analytic induction); and clear reporting on how the study was done and how conclusions followed from evidence.'

In terms of the limitations of the study, there may be concerns regarding the generalizability of the findings if no strong common themes or shared experiences emerge. However, in response to this, Schofield (2009: 71) argues:

'The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation.'

Issues that may weaken the outcome of my research may be some, or all, of the following:

• limited numbers of translocating children available for interview

- time constraints when interviewing children in schools further afield
- parents/children declining to be part of the research
- children may not have the fluency in English necessary to allow participation in the study
- cultural issues, such as power distance, face, conflicts of values, etc. may skew data

In addition, there may be other issues at play that are not necessarily perceived by the research participants themselves but may have a positive or negative effect on their emotions when moving schools, for example:

- The number of other internationally mobile children at the school
- The language policies of the school
- The culture of the new school: accepting/neutral
- The culture of the country moved to: alien/familiar

These, and other unidentified issues, may impact the strength or weakness of my research, but will not become apparent until the study is underway.

### Conclusion

This essay has described the theory and planning for what will be an in-depth study to further our understanding of how international mobility, and the consequent changing of schools, may impact Primary School aged children's emotions. The designing of this research plan has required me to take an extensive view of the literature on internationally mobile children, which has confirmed that very few studies have been undertaken in this area and which, in turn, validates my intention to fill this void with my own research. The detail required for planning my study through this essay has obliged me to consider epistemological issues so that my methodology aligns with my understanding regarding the nature and construction of knowledge. This understanding has underpinned my decision to engage the children who will be involved in my study as active participants with whom I will co-construct the data required to respond to my research question. The desire to listen to children's voices and locate them at the heart of my research makes the narration of their personal life-experiences fundamental to the study and has, thus, led directly to my decision to use case study and the narrative form as the primary method of data collection and

presentation. When analysing narratives, the general consensus appears to be that there is no set way to undertake this, but constant reflexivity and transparency are both vital for the integrity of the study. The need to work closely with children has highlighted the importance of observing strict ethical procedures and the literature offers clear guidelines to encourage mindfulness of appropriate practice. Ultimately, the theory is always easier than the practice. The reality of actually conducting my study may cause me to deviate from my research plan due to unforeseen circumstances or forces beyond my control, but the exercise of designing this plan will go a long way towards making my research meaningful, useful and worthwhile.

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