LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

The Possibilities and Problematics of Research with LESLLA

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Abstract

This paper will explore some of the unique methodological, theoretical, and ethical issues we have confronted when doing research on topics related to the teaching of adolescents and adult language learners with little formal schooling. By sharing narratives of our research process, we hope to demystify research with LESLLA, inspire others to learn about how research changes across contexts and populations, and inspire discussion about promising research practices. This paper is about the possibilities and problematics of the ways of knowing about LESLLA and the decisions and experiences researchers make as they carry out their work.

Introduction

Researching LESLLA in the United States is like and unlike doing research with other immigrants or on language learning among other types of learners. The main challenge is that we do not have a deep tradition of LESLLA research, and we have even less about doing this within engaged, reciprocal, feminist, and activist frames. This paper

[18] For once, we use reverse alphabetical order to signal equal contributions from all authors and not disadvantage authors whose last names begin with letters at the end of the alphabet.

presents narratives from three researchers working with LESLLA. Vinogradov, Pettitt, and Bigelow explore ethical issues that arose in their research in an effort to open up dialogue about doing research with LESLLA.

Even with rigorous training in a wide range of methodologies and epistemologies, many researchers are surprised by what they learn when carrying out work with LESLLA. There is a frequent feeling of not knowing exactly how the research process will unfold, and what emotional, intellectual, and logistical skills we need in order to produce knowledge that is relevant to LESLLA learners and their teachers. While researchers want to be useful to stakeholders, they also want to contribute to academic research in teacher education, language learning pedagogy, and second-language acquisition, among other things. In addition, LESLLA researchers must take on a high degree of social and ethical responsibility in their research processes. While we all must submit to a high level of institutional scrutiny, the nature of that responsibility in LESLLA contexts is framed in many different and in-the-moment ways (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1993).

Ethics

If we begin with issues of access and ethics, then we find that LESLLA learners present unique challenges. Many LESLLA researchers worldwide have been instrumental in helping Internal Review Boards (IRBs) understand our populations of learners. A simple example is the fact that many IRBs have refined rigid practices of obtaining assent or consent to participate in research—from a signature on a consent form to confirmation in the oral modes. However, the principle of obtaining informed consent in any modality suitable to the participant does not necessarily guarantee that consent is obtained ethically. This "macroethical" principle of respect for individuals (Kubanyiova, 2008) by accounting for low print literacy does not take into account the complexities of consent with respect to the context and relationships with the researcher. Even the most careful multilingual conversation around consent could result in coercion, because the participant doesn't want to disappoint the researcher (who likely worked very hard to negotiate access and earn trust). The research process of consent, in this example, could create or intensify an unequal relationship between researcher and participants (Cameron et al., 1993). Therefore, this scenario would call for on-the-spot research decisions about the ethics of informed consent rather than comfort in knowing that the macroethical, or overarching, principle was met. These ambiguous moments make up the microethics of our work—layers of daily decisions about how to engage with participants and others in the research context, as well as issues of representation and dissemination of findings.

What LESLLA researchers often encounter in their work, despite following macroethical principles, are what Kubanyiova (2008) calls *ethically important moments* in which the principles of ethical research may prove to be ambiguous or contradictory. Kubanyiova turns to ethics of care (similar to Noddings, 1996) to understand the premise that research is a relational activity demanding researcher sensitivity to, and emotional identification and solidarity with, participants (2008, p. 506). This premise can be seen in the narratives that follow.

It is essential to attend to the relational nature of research with LESLLA in order to carefully bring this unique population into what we know about language learning (Ortega, 2005; Bigelow & Tarone, 2004), cultural adaptation, and teacher learning. To do this, however, means rethinking macroethical principles at all stages of the research process and realizing that caring for participants includes a process of backing off from certain procedures, questions, or even research methods if they seem to compromise participants' comfort, trust, or dignity.

Advocacy and Engaged Research

Most LESLLA researchers have, or acquire, a strong advocacy component to their work. The way we have seen this in our own work strongly aligns with the way feminist theorists (e.g., Sullivan, 1992) have pushed the boundaries of research by calling for reciprocal, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationships among researchers and their participants (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003). This may occur as researchers learn how LESLLA populations are often underserved and how, commonly, teachers lack the necessary training to teach them. It most likely occurs through close personal relationships, which often lead to reciprocal learning/humanizing of all involved (e.g., Bigelow, 2010; Ibrahim, 2014; Watson, 2010). In this paradigm, researchers and participants have the potential to experience empowerment, and research processes can lead to action or advocacy. Other times, advocacy informs research, turning research to new directions with new purposes. For us, research is an engaged experience, meaning that it is *with* and *for* LESLLA rather than *about* or *on* LESLLA (Ngo, Bigelow, & Lee, 2014). This stance brings certain commitments. For example, we reject framing LESLLA learners as passive or incapable, as superheroes or naïve. We reject essentializing individuals into ethnic categories, and we reject the notion that LESLLA learners are a monolithic group with predictable goals and needs. Like Cushman (1998), we reject "missionary activism" as an often uninvited and paternalistic way of being in relationship with an individual/community. In this humanizing process, the experience of carrying out research is a constant inquiry into self and the limits of our own professional and personal assets.

Collaborative Research with LESLLA Teachers across Teaching Contexts

by Patsy Vinogradov

Who knows more about this than we do, and how could we work together? This rich question shaped a recent and unique research study of LESLLA. Driven by curiosity and a priority of collaborating throughout, four LESLLA colleagues and I engaged in this study of adult ESL teachers, which took me and four LESLLA colleagues into a new and colorful space (quite literally). After I share the premise of the inquiry, I raise two key issues for our discussion of LESLLA problematics and possibilities: reciprocity and usefulness in teacher research, and professional development as an intellectual activity.

LESLLA learners face a double challenge: acquiring English (in the U.S. context) while learning to read an alphabetic print language for the first time. However, within our communities, right down the street from many adult ESL programs, early elementary teachers teach literacy and language to young new readers every day. Kindergarteners and first and second graders (K–2) are also discovering the alphabetic principle, acquiring the components of reading, and building their identities as readers and writers. While adult ESL and K–2 are strikingly different contexts, there is much overlap.

Could the deep scholarship and highly professionalized standards focused on initial print literacy development for *children* somehow inform this newer, under-developed field of LESLLA teaching and learning? Until there is a substantial body of scholarship and standards for LESLLA teaching, can teachers use their knowledge of adult language and literacy acquisition to explore classroom literacy practices from a neighboring context? These two groups of educators, LESLLA and K–2, are united by a common goal: teaching initial literacy. From a position of curiosity and collaboration, this study ventured to learn what happens when these teachers connect.

Four LESLLA teachers in Minnesota, USA, along with me as researcher and teacher educator, formed a study circle to research connections between literacy instruction in K–2 and LESLLA. Of course, LESLLA students are *adult* learners, a fact we held close as we observed K–2 instruction, worked individually with young learners, read research together, and engaged in discussions and reflective journaling over several weeks in fall 2012. Walking through hallways of macaroni art and finger paintings, we entered a very foreign space—one full of tiny desks and colorful carpet squares. Our stance was one of curiosity, of wanting to know what might be useful for our own LESLLA contexts. However, for me as researcher, it was also critical that the project be useful to all parties.

Reciprocity and Usefulness

Reciprocity in research—to give back, to leave the research sites and those involved better off—was a priority in this inquiry. Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) assert that qualitative researchers must recognize and act on their social responsibilities; they must keep forefront in their minds for whom their research exists. Not all research is immediately and directly useful to those researched, of course. As Ortega states, "The integration of knowledge and utilization is not an impossibility. To be sure, the link between the two can be indirect and remote for some … but it can also be intimate and natural for others" (2005, p. 430). While I entered as researcher with a disposition of usefulness, I fully recognized that this work was disruptive to my participants and their schedules. In an effort to provide some reciprocity for the work, I took a number of steps. Some of these steps were more tangible than others, as described below.

First, I was able to volunteer at Logan Elementary, the site of our K–2 explorations, regularly during the two months of our study circle, for a total of roughly 12 hours. My duties varied, but I worked in small reading groups with learners, helped with required assessments, pinned artwork to hallway bulletin boards, fetched fallen pencils, tied a lot of shoes, and listened to students read me their writing. The two classroom teachers at Logan Elementary who opened their classrooms to us each received gift cards and handwritten notes from the four participants and me expressing our gratitude.

Second, my four LESLLA teaching participants received stipends and Continuing Education Units (for re-licensure requirements) for their time, but I wanted to do something that would more directly benefit their learners and programs that had been so generous. I used some of the grant money[19] I had received for this study to purchase low-level reading books and other materials for their classrooms. I had the

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19 This research project was partially funded by grants from TIRF, the International Research Foundation, and MinneTESOL, Minnesota Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

pleasure of seeing these books in action during my final observations. Third, I used grant money to pay the LESLLA programs for substitute instructors they needed while participants attended our in-person meetings. My hope is that while it was at times inconvenient, this study was not a burden to any of the individuals and programs involved.

A fourth and final way that this study "paid forward" was in the scholarly engagement of the participants during and following the study. This study took the form of professional development. Judging from participants' reflective writing, I am assured that they learned a great deal. More tangibly, the participants and I have presented this work at local, regional, and international conferences. From briefly sharing new insights at staff meetings for one participant, to three of the participants' joining me at LESLLA 2013 in San Francisco, we have been able to re-package our learning from this experience as advice for teachers. Excitingly, this initial work in K–2 literacy and its insight for LESLLA has sparked another cross-context encounter. In 2013, one of the participants and I replicated this model of professional development by connecting LESLLA teachers to another related field for LESLLA: dyslexia education. Together, we designed a new study circle, recruited participants, and carried out a multimonth collaborative inquiry around this new context, with extraordinary implications for LESLLA teaching and learning. This follow-up project was possible because we had "taken the leap" once in asking, "Who knows more about this than we do?" and because there are, of course, multiple answers.

Professional Development (PD) as an Intellectual Activity

The LESLLA and K–2 study circle provided a facilitated space for observing a new context and identifying practices that may have merit for LESLLA, transforming practices for the participants' own teaching contexts, and reflecting on learning, both alone and with colleagues. This sequence of guided thinking and action to widen one's perspective and make meaningful connections to improve practice relates to scholarship in teacher development as an *intellectual activity*. Roskos and Bain propose that when teacher PD is intellectually challenging, it can move teachers toward a "pedagogy of thoughtfulness," one that values inquiry and is student-centered (1998, p. 91). They write that "if instruction is to keep pace with new advances in learning theory, technology, and communications, then professional development activity must shift its emphasis from narrowly construed techniques to the expansion of teachers' thinking and intellect" (1998, p. 92). Hence, teachers are viewed as scholars, learners, and inquirers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I propose that this study circle was an example of such PD. In our final written reflection, participants were asked directly if this study circle sparked their curiosity and if they felt challenged and stretched by the experience. Two excerpts are particularly revealing about the nature of intellectual activity in the study circle:

> The study circle was a great way to ask questions, share issues, problems, concerns but more importantly it gave me a support system for trying out new activities in my class and gave me a way to reflect on why, how, and what I am doing to provide the most respectful learning/teaching situation. Made me take pause … something I'm often too hurried to do. Reminded me what was important and why. Great opportunity to take teaching risks.

> Absolutely! Having been in ABE [adult basic education] for 7 years I sometimes feel like there aren't new and interesting presentations for teachers at my level. This opened my eyes to a whole new world of classroom ideas to explore.

In the first excerpt, the participant mentions taking risks and taking time to reflect with others. The opportunity to investigate with colleagues is an intellectual undertaking that can lead to changes in practice. As the second excerpt mentions, seasoned teachers who are mid-career can benefit from inquiries that open them up to new areas of knowledge. Too often, I believe, we assume that teachers don't want to work any harder than they already do, that PD should be quick and painless and not ask too much of the participants. However, I submit that if PD is well planned, embraces a "pedagogy of thoughtfulness," and treats participants as scholars and investigators, then it is more engaging and beneficial.

In addition to the intellectual activity of our work, this study circle for LESLLA PD provided a way of building *adaptive expertise* in LESLLA teachers. By taking part in this challenging work, participants were asked to be both innovative and efficient, which are qualities of an adaptive expert (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). They were innovative in that they tried practices typically reserved for young people, and they were efficient in that we were crafting the practice for LESLLA for a specific program and classroom and then reflecting on its usefulness. Participants added to their teaching repertoires and deepened their understanding of their own classrooms. In fact, we noticed a fundamental shift in thinking about our LESLLA classrooms; by the end of our time together, we saw our classrooms as places where learners can be (and should be) independent problem-solvers. For example, participants began implementing independent learning during their reading and writing instruction, such as morning sign-ins and a growing repertoire of literacy learning stations.

Unlike professional development activities that are transmission in style and provide new information on policies or techniques, a study circle, like a professional learning community, moves participants to think more deeply. They are provided the space and time to engage meaningfully with colleagues around a specific content focus. This type of PD honors and relies on the previous experiences and expertise of participants as they work though an intellectually challenging, worthwhile project together.

LESLLA teaching and learning is complex and unwieldy, and researching in this context is anything but easy. However, from challenges emerge innovation, and, as this study shows, there are gems waiting to be found for learners, teachers, and researchers. In this work, usefulness for all involved was a high priority, and collaboration was a common thread. If we hold the stance that professional development for LESLLA should be intellectually challenging, useful, and collaborative, then the possibilities for learning are boundless.

Ethics of Representation in LESLLA Research

by Nicole Pettitt

What counts as "competency"? In what ways are we, as researchers, limited in our knowing? In this section, I share two narratives that describe "crises of representation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3) and that I experienced while carrying out case study research with "Roba," an adult English learner who attended classes at a community-based school for adult immigrants and refugees in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The narratives focus on questions related to data analysis and researcher and participant identity while highlighting the unpredictable and complex nature of research carried out in contexts in which many methodological and ethical questions remain unprobed. They further foreground the need for "reflexivity that pushes toward [the] unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable" (Pillow, 2003, p. 192) at all stages of the research process.

Context

In fall 2011, I carried out a small research study of a graduate course in second language acquisition (SLA).[20] A former co-worker connected me with Roba as a participant, who agreed to one-on-one reading tutoring in exchange for SLA data collection. Roba shared that he was in his late

[20] I would like to thank Elaine Tarone, my Master of Arts co-advisor and the professor of the class in which I began research with Roba, and Martha Bigelow, my Master of Arts co-advisor and the professor for the class in which I continued that work.

twenties, had been in the United States for about seven years, and began English classes for the first time approximately two months prior. His school placed him in English 1 (i.e., National Reporting System level "Low Beginning ESL") due to his score on the CASAS reading test. However, his listening and speaking abilities were far higher, as he had learned a great deal of English naturalistically in community contexts—on the job, with friends, by watching movies, and by "listening and trying things out" (Pettitt and Tarone, 2015). He had not learned to read in any of his seven languages and had enrolled in English classes specifically to learn how to read.

Thus, Roba and I began to meet each week for an hour of reading tutoring. At the same time, I collected data for my SLA class project. Overall, our tutoring relationship lasted for nine months, six of which involved data collection.

What Counts as "Competency"?

For the research I briefly described above, I conducted a number of traditional SLA pre- and post-tasks with Roba in November 2011 and May 2012; see Pettitt and Tarone (2015) for a full description of data collection strategies.

As I began analyzing Roba's oral language for accuracy and complexity (i.e., past-tense marking, syntactic complexity, etc.), a few dilemmas emerged. First, I encountered a disconnect between the traditional SLA analyses I was employing and my perception of Roba's communicative competence. The data indicated that Roba's spoken language was marked by low morpho-syntactic complexity and accuracy, yet I knew him to be a skilled communicator, based on our weekly tutoring sessions. He was an adept conversationalist, expressing sympathy, humor, and comments that drew on knowledge of historical figures and pop culture. For example, during a conversation about immigration in the United States, he referenced the movie *Scarface,* as well as historical relations between the United States and Cuba, to discuss differences between asylee and refugee status in the United States. Our complex conversations surrounding historical, social, political, and cultural concerns were evidence of Roba's communicative competence, I thought.

Similarly, at many points in my analysis, I could not tell which of Roba's speech forms might be "errors" and which might be considered fluent, vernacular speech. For example, as reported in Pettitt and Tarone (2015), Roba asked the following questions during data collection: "So, what kinda car you drive?" "Oh, what kinda language you speak?" According to traditional conventions of English question formation, the operator *do* was missing from these utterances. However, as stated above, up until the two months prior to the beginning of our research relationship, Roba had learned English in community contexts, and the naturalistic nature of his initial language learning was not to be overlooked: if his questions were produced in social contexts that privilege "informal" speech, then the forms he used would be considered appropriate. Further, I did not know what Roba's target language variety might be; perhaps these question forms were "evidence of [Roba's] success in acquiring a form in the English dialect that provides the bulk of the input" (Bayley and Tarone, 2011, p. 60).

So, was I to code Roba's questions as reflective of a language learner in early developmental stages of question formation (Pienemann, Johnston, & Brindley, 1988) or, rather, as the speech of a sociolinguistically sophisticated language user? I also wondered: if Roba had been using English since childhood, how might researchers code his questions? In other words, as Ortega (2005) stresses, the choices that SLA researchers make have ethical implications. I had the opportunity to disrupt monolingual norms (Cook, 2002), which required putting aside singular notions of "accuracy" and "complexity," and considering what CAF measures (i.e., complexity, accuracy, and fluency) communicate—and do not communicate—about linguistic and communicative competencies with different learners.

Some limits of knowing. During my tutoring with Roba, critical incidents occurred that caused me to (re)examine my knowledge, and to consider the limitations of what may be available for me to know. The following excerpt describes one of those incidents. It is drawn from a reflection written in April 2012.

> Last week, I discovered that Roba actually speaks seven languages, not six. I momentarily left the room and when I came back, he was on his cell phone, speaking a language I didn't recognize. He said it was Harari—that he spoke Harari and Oromo at home growing up, and still uses Harari with his uncle who lives in town and other family members. … I subtly asked why he had originally told me he was Oromo. He said he identifies as Harari-Oromo ethnically, and he'd told me he was Oromo because he knew *I* would know what that was. He said he thought that saying he was Harari to me would be like asking an African person to distinguish between Ecuador and Mexico—if they've never heard of those places, how are they going to know?

That morning, I discovered part of myself through Roba's explanation. He assessed one of my limitations correctly: I had not previously heard of the Harari language or people. I thought back to the day we met and pondered the internal decision-making Roba may have engaged in when I asked about his background, as well as how it mirrors and differs from my own self-identification(s), since, like Roba, I (re)present myself differently according to audience and circumstance. I wondered: What is gained and what is lost when Roba, I, and others identify according to how (we perceive that) an interlocutor will comprehend the identities we present? How might my answers to that question change if I faced the dilemma Roba faced when he met me and upon meeting others who are limited in the ways that I am (and was)—specifically, the dilemma that an interlocutor (or many different interlocutors over the course of several years) had not heard of my home country, my ethnic identities, or the languages I speak? The privilege that I experience as a white, fourth-generation, middle-class woman in the United States protects and prohibits me from knowing the answers to that question.

Roba revealed his Harari identity to me over four months *after* our tutoring and research relationship had begun—and then perhaps only because I heard him speaking a language I did not recognize and asked about it. Was it by chance that I was allowed this window into Roba's identity? If not for the unremarkable events of that morning, I might now be representing Roba in academic journals as an English learner who ethnically identifies as Oromo (not Harari-Oromo) and speaks six (not seven) languages.

This incident underscored for me the importance of interrogating the representations I craft of myself, as well as those of my students and participants—a reminder that echoes calls for reflexivity and awareness of researcher subjectivity. However, I also wonder what is accomplished through ongoing "monitoring" of my researcher subjectivity (Peshkin, 1991, pp. 293–294), since, as Patai (1994) writes, "We do not escape our positions by writing about them endlessly" (p. 70). Pillow (2003) encourages researchers to set aside narcissistic or simplistic reflexivities and subject positions for "reflexivities of discomfort," which she describes as "practices of confounding disruptions—at times even a failure of our language and practices" (p. 192). She further cautions against uncomplicated "success-in-failure" narratives: "What I am advocating is the necessity of an ongoing critique of all of our research attempts, a recognition that none of our attempts can claim the innocence of success (even in failure)" (p. 192).

With this in mind, I offer the following uncomfortable reflexive note: neither Roba nor I is a fully knowable subject. There are limitations surrounding what is available for me to know about myself: no matter how much I reflect on my subjectivity, I may never know the ways in which participants and students know me and position me, or how this affects my research and representations of it. However, this does not release me from interrogating my subjectivity and problematizing my performance as researcher. Similarly, what is available for me to know about others is bounded; even my reports of participant age, ethnicity, country of origin, years of education, language(s) spoken, etc., are not mundane and should acknowledge the fluidity and permeability of the personal histories and identities that inform the reports.

As researchers, we must regularly decide how we will represent in print those who participate in our research and, by extension, ourselves. Dávila (2014) reminds researchers that we are limited, especially when we do not share similar histories with our students/participants. She encourages us to pursue "representations that have meaning, albeit temporary, or partial to those that use them" and to engage in "representation as an act of caring" (p. 30). At this juncture in LESLLA research, that path may still be somewhat fuzzy; thus, I encourage more LESLLA researchers from a variety of research traditions to join this dialogue, shedding light on those aspects of our research that are frequently hidden so that we may constructively question ourselves and one another in our efforts to co-assemble a more robust base of LESLLA research ethics.

Informed Consent and Data Sources in Classroom-Based Research with LESLLA

by Martha Bigelow

In an ethnographic study focusing on LESLLA strategies for acquiring print literacy, Kendall King, my co-researcher, and I chose data sources which are typical for classroom-based research—class observation notes, interviews, copies of student work, video, and literacy assessments. In this section, I will outline how these methods worked with LESLLA. However, I will begin with the process of gaining access, which is often a barrier to doing research in public school settings in general, and which is different when hoping to gather data from LESLLA learners. For specific examples of the results of this research, see Bigelow and King (2014) and King and Bigelow (2012).

IRB and Access

The context for this study was two sections of a beginning reading class in an all-immigrant alternative high school in a large urban school district in Minnesota. We were granted permission early in the academic year to sit in on classes and the school's weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) time, in which teachers work together on curriculum, instruction, and assessment data. However, obtaining permission to begin data collection took about five months because we needed to work through the district permission process, which was much more difficult than our university IRB process. The first thing the district justifiably asked us to address was how our research would advance district initiatives and benefit students. Because of the engaged nature of our study, these questions were easy to answer. Our presence would give students more help with their English language skills through one-on-one interaction during class time and after school. The teacher often said she was glad to have us in her classroom because we served as aides during instructional moments when students were working alone or in groups, or we made accommodations during a quiz. The district IRB, however, conflated the role of teacher as a mandatory reporter with our role as researchers. In other words, in our assent/consent process, we needed to promise the district that we would report anything the students told us that suggested that they may be in danger of abuse, just like any educator or counselor. This language was very difficult to navigate in the consent process because we were very concerned that this topic, framed legalistically, would needlessly worry participants. In the end, we were allowed to eliminate this topic from our consent process. The negotiation helped clarify for the district what the purpose of our study was and what our role as researchers was in the project. That said, we did end up in a situation where we needed to contact the school social worker because of what one of our participants told us about the abuse she was experiencing in her home. We did this with her permission and, therefore, behaved as mandatory reporters. This is one instance where the consent process became murky and we needed to work very hard to represent ourselves and our roles as clearly as possible to participants but, at the same time, act in the best interests of the participants if a situation arose.

Our experiences with consent continued after finally we obtained official access and were reminded of the ongoing nature of consent. We were given the opportunity to present our project to the class with the help of educational assistants (EAs) from the school, who together spoke Swahili, Oromo, Amharic, and Somali. Because we spoke Spanish, most students in the two classes we approached had the opportunity to ask questions in their home language(s), and we could answer questions collectively and multilingually with the help of the EAs. The Laotian students seemed to understand the conversation in English, an observation we based on their non-verbal responses, questions, and subsequent willingness to participate. We used simple colloquial language to talk about consent. For example, we said things such as the following: "Remember, this is up to you, and no one will be upset with you if you don't want to do it. You can change your mind later."

Most of the students in the class were 18 or over and could give their own consent. Those who were minors needed to get permission from a parent or guardian, again with the offer of school interpreters to help with questions. There was a memorable question that one of the Somali students asked: "What will you do for us?" Clearly, she had a high level of awareness that we were asking for a favor and that she was in a position to ask for something in return. (We offered tutoring and the chance to practice English.) Not all of the students in both classes agreed to participate, and they expressed this decision explicitly or by not saying anything. We felt that the immigration/legal status of some of the participants was a factor in participation, although they didn't say so (e.g., once they found out about the video, they were unwilling to participate). Others who agreed but would not show up for scheduled interviews seemed to be implicitly telling us that they were not in the study, and we removed their data from the corpus. There were also instances when a participant would move the video recorder such that it would not focus on them that day, but on other days they verified continued consent by participating in interviews, sharing schoolwork, etc. All of these examples are illustrations of how informed consent (as a macroethical principle) is an ongoing process that is highly relational and contextual, involving microethical decisions.

Data Sources and Lessons Learned

Our main data source for this classroom-based research project ended up being our video recordings of normal classroom activities. We recommend using video with this age group, in this context, despite the additional hurdles necessary to obtain permission. While we anticipated some opposition to the cameras for religious reasons, we learned that the video recorders[21] were unproblematic for most students, most of the time. They quickly became acclimated to the cameras—at first playing with them by filming themselves or their friends, and later just ignoring them. It was impossible to avoid capturing video recordings of some of the students who did not consent to participate because we typically set the camera in a single location through the class period and went about our business taking field notes and working with students while the camera recorded. Our solution was not to analyze recordings from students who did not agree to participate.

Being a participant-observer entails a constant negotiation of roles. This concept has been explored extensively in books about classroom research (e.g., Hammersley, 1986; Schachter & Gass, 1996; Nunan & Bailey, 2008). For example, researchers in our field have been concerned about the impact of our presence on the data in terms of replication of findings. We knew that participating was non-negotiable for us, given the fact that the class was large and multi-leveled, with new students arriving weekly. It was best when we were both present in the classroom, because we could the share roles of field-note gatherer and class helper.

[21] We each had a small digital video camera that we set on a small tripod and moved around the classroom very easily. It held more than two hours of video and was easy to download onto our computers with the built-in USB port.

But sometimes we were alone and had to make field notes after the class was over, or move between our computer and working with students. In this process of deciding where and how to be in the class, we found that we encountered many microethical decisions. Do we act like teachers by helping with, checking, and praising work? It was important to us to assist, and this was a way we could get physically closer to students' learning as well as give back to the students and the teacher for allowing us to do our research with them. With LESLLA populations, it seems that observing from a distance is not a luxury we have, unless we could bring more collaborators into the class to afford some the opportunity to do nothing but observe. Plus, it is important to interact with participants in order to understand what is occurring as they learn.

It is very difficult to track individual micro-level language and literacy learning over time in a classroom setting, even with numerous examples of student work and interactions with the students. Artifacts from the classroom are often produced collaboratively, and quality is often determined by the students' engagement and how much time they were allotted for the task. Classroom SLA research carried out naturalistically (without intervention) is extremely challenging.

In order to attempt to capture rough data on the participants' native language literacy, we asked them to complete the Native Language Screening Device (NYS, n.d.) in their most dominant home language as well as in English. We felt that it was essential to do these assessments with the participants in addition to talking with them about their prior schooling, because we wanted to have evidence, albeit limited, of their skills. The reality of what occurred was not so cut-and-dried. We administered these literacy assessments wherever we could, and this meant doing them in the library after school during a period of homework help. There were multiple times when a participant was working on the test and other students wandered over to see what was going on and inevitably assist. Because we were present, we could still see what the student could do in both languages, roughly. We know that learning among LESLLA is usually a collaborative and communal enterprise, and we want other researchers to consider including, in a systematic way, assessments carried out collaboratively. The decision to permit the seeming sabotage of the validity of this instrument was another microethical decision we made. There was no point in asking a participant to struggle alone, given the very broad and still-exploratory nature of the Native Language Screening Device. In fact, we may have learned more about the literacy level of the participant in this collaborative context than if we had strictly adhered to an individual administration protocol (e.g., that the learner performed better when she understood the instructions after hearing an explanation in Somali, that the learner performed better after becoming used to seeing Somali text, that the person assisting had more skills than she showed when she did the assessment before knowing us). We recommend, however, more and different literacy instruments to learn more about what participants *can* do in their home language(s) and in English. We also suggest devising more and better ways to monitor literacy development among participants. Perhaps some should be completed independently and others cooperatively and multilingually.

There is much to know about doing classroom-based research with LESLLA from a methodological standpoint. It is important for LESLLA researchers to share their experiences and strategies for gathering data with LESLLA learners, regardless of context. Microethical decisions are likely only made when contextual information (including relational information) is used.

Conclusion

We hope that these narratives are useful to other researchers as they explore their overlapping roles of researcher, teacher, and advocate. We urge researchers to be critical of research presumed ethical by IRBs without careful reflexivity on microethical decisions mediated by researchers who use a high level of reflexivity in their research process. We also welcome researchers of many different paradigms into research related to LESLLA. This is important when exploring learning and education with individuals who have vastly different backgrounds from our own. There is not one way of knowing, and different epistemologies may help counterbalance a heavily Western way of understanding LESLLA phenomena. There is a serious need to guarantee reciprocity in the research process, because LESLLA learners need allies like us. We have entailments of LESLLA concerns ranging from the personal (e.g., "I need a ride to the doctor") to the practical (e.g., "We need ideas for how to teach our students") to the political (e.g., "Our state needs legislation so LESLLA learners don't 'age out' of high school at 21"). Finally, our research community needs to continue to increase our repertoire about how to do LESLLA research. We don't know what best practices are in many cases, and when using typical research methods such as interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, etc., it's not always obvious how they should be adjusted for LESLLA.

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