

# Transforming Qualitative Methods with a Grade 5 & 6 Student Research Team

Dr. Bonnie Stelmach with Dr. Rae Ann Van Beers, Mrs. Dreann Wurban, and Student Researchers, Una C., Celeste D., Cydney F., Jace H., Armony H., Catharina K., Ellie O., & Jessica S.

**“Research ought to approach children not as social “becomings” but as social “beings”... and as active and diverse social participants in their own right” (Wall, 2022, p. 258)**

Wall, J. (2022). From childhood studies to childism: Reconstructing the scholarly and social imaginations. *Children's Geographies*, 20(3), 257 – 280.

## From one study more curiosities emerged...

New Humble Community School (NHCS), a K-6 rural public charter school near Calmar, AB, and 'Dr. Bonnie' partnered to study how NHCS' unique agriculture immersion program enhances students' learning, life skills development, and relationship with school.<sup>1</sup>

We quickly realized that students not only possessed the capacity to share their perspectives on learning in an agriculture-focused school but could also actively participate as **co-researchers in data collection**.

<sup>1</sup> "School is Such a Chore! Agricultural Literacy as a Lens for Enhancing Students' Learning and Life Skills Development" (2023-2025) is funded by Alberta Education's Research Partnerships Program.

## The Student Research Team was created...



Teachers Dr. VB and Mrs. Wurban created:

1. An application process:
  - students responded to a questionnaire about their interests and strengths
  - students answered questions in a face-to-face interview
2. A weekly research team meeting schedule
3. An "interview aid" that listed Dr. Bonnie's role and the student researcher's role in the interview, and the steps to conduct the interview

## Training to be researchers...

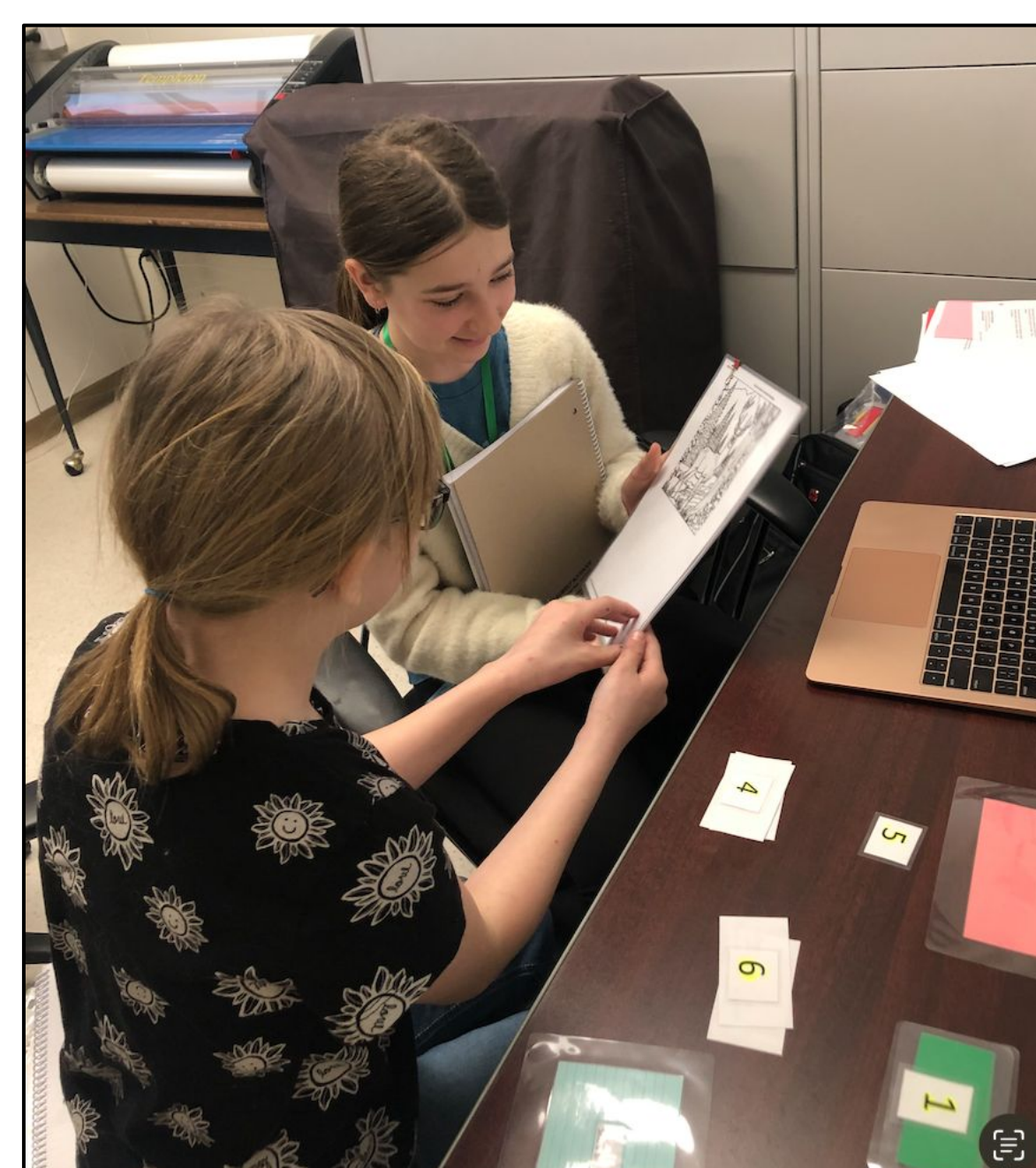
Training the students involved:

- Defining 'research study' and clarifying the purpose of our study
- Explaining the importance of confidentiality and ongoing assent
- Generating interview questions
- Practicing conducting an interview

The interview is designed as a game. Interviewees roll a dice to select from 6 pairs of cards.



Then the student researcher assists the interviewee by reading or rephrasing the question on the card, if necessary.



## Training to be videographers...

Walking interviews using a GoPro are also a data collection method. Some younger students may feel more comfortable showing the researchers their learning in "teach me" moments (e.g. *show me something you learned about animals or plants*) than in a sit-down interview.

Mr. Shane Klein, Media Team Lead in Technologies in Education, spent an afternoon with the student researchers teaching them GoPro basics and camera angles.



We anticipate the Student Research Team will have unique ideas for capturing students' learning on the GoPro. Our next step is learning about digital storytelling.

## What are the student researchers learning?

Each student has conducted an interview with a Grade 1 or 2 student. Afterwards, Dr. Bonnie asks them to reflect on:

- How clearly they explained the interview process and the steps to the interviewee
- Their questioning techniques, including probing
- Age appropriateness of interview questions - we have revised questions based on their observation
- How to make an interviewee feel comfortable by making eye contact while listening
- Their own researcher 'presence' – they are asked to self-assess their skills at the end of the interview by writing in their research journal

## What do the students say about being part of the Student Research Team?

"I like having a job in school...I like seeing what people's interests in the school are."

"I really like working with the GoPro because I feel I have a purpose. It feels good to be part of something."

"I feel like it's fun making up questions for people and finding the answers to things. I like working and learning in a big group."

"It's been pretty cool how we get to research and...interview other kids. The GoPro seems pretty cool!"

"I'm really excited for using the GoPro and learning from [another student researcher]."

"It's helped me learn more about job interviews, being a role model...Research has...helped me get to know my friends better."

**We see future researchers and filmmakers among these students!**