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Our work, our voice: Children’s work experiences in Alberta, Canada

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Research

The purpose of this research study was to explore with a selected sample of working Alberta children (nine to sixteen years of age), their views on meaningful work and work environments for children. Through the use of critical ethnography and visual ethnography methodologies, this research inquiry gives voice to a purposefully selected group of participants who are currently working or have recently completed work in Alberta and who represent a range of employment situations throughout the province.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the context and background that frames this study. This is followed by the problem statement, statement of purpose, research questions and sub questions. The chapter continues with a discussion on researcher approach, perspective and assumptions. The concluding portion of this chapter discusses the rationale and significance of this research and definitions of the terminology used in the study.

Context and Background

As the world has moved towards the integration of global economies and a more accelerated form of capitalism, short term profit demand is quickening and significant deskilling of work and exploitation of workers is occurring. (Finger & Asun, 2001, Sennett, 2006) To meet this demand for enhanced profits and lower labour costs, temporary, contractual and more disposable workers are in higher demand (Sennett, 2006). An available and low cost workforce that has historically and is currently exploited is children. Children are generally considered to be “a reserve army of labour to be drawn upon when required, and their employment is typically poorly paid and void of benefits” (Eisler & Schissel, 2008, p.181).
Worldwide children are involved in many different forms of work in both paid and unpaid contexts. Children work in manufacturing, agriculture, domestic and personal service work, building and construction. They also work in sweatshops, as bonded labour and in the sex trade. The labour/work of children contributes to families and economies and benefits major corporations as well as small and mid-sized businesses (Polakoff, 2007).

Children are often expected to assist in supporting their families through providing their labour-paid or unpaid. Clear data exist worldwide that indicate that most often children’s contributions to family economies are necessary to reduce the effects of poverty (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). While there are exceptions to these data in North America and Europe, the data consistently note that reducing poverty or increasing family income is the most likely solution to reducing child labour that interferes with development, schooling, growth and well-being of children (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005, Polakoff, 2007).

There are significant logistical difficulties in trying to accurately capture the number of children who are employed throughout the world. One international body, The International Labour Organization (ILO) collects data only on children involved in work that focuses on child labour that is hazardous to children’s health, education, safety, development or well-being and exceeds permissible levels by law. The ILO estimates that 168 million children worldwide are involved in child labour, representing 11 percent of the world’s population of children (ILO, 2013). Statistically the largest number of children involved in labour activities is “in the Asia and the Pacific region while Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest rate of Child Labour” (ILO, 2013, p.23). Combined with statistics of children labouring in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, these regions total over 149 million child labourers (ILO, 2013).
Estimates on children involved worldwide in this and additional forms of work are confusing and incomplete. Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) undertook a comprehensive review on UNICEF working children data from over 36 countries in 2000 and found that data did not often report domestic work that children engaged in with or without pay and did not completely look at children’s activities if they were not working or attending school.

Details on children working in North America and Europe encounter similar difficulties in both estimating and reporting numbers of children. Inconsistent federal, state and provincial definitions of child work and clarity on appropriate ages and types of work for children add to inconsistent or non-reported data. The deficiencies in collecting data must also be seen as a lack of political will to review and determine the extent of child workers in North America labouring in any capacity. The Understanding Children’s Work project co-sponsored by UNICEF, The International Labour Organization and the World Bank is gathering comprehensive information on child labour in over 54 countries in an attempt to gather a better database on some forms of child labour. North American data at this point are not included in the project (“Joining forces against child labour”, 2010).

The difficulties in understanding and legislating work or labour for children that is permissible and acceptable is a significant global challenge. Children and youth engaged in labour do so amidst many ideological contradictions and deliberations on what constitutes childhood and what purpose work or labour serves in guiding, controlling, actively using and/ or abusing additional labour to increase output in some form or another. Western societies have different conceptions of childhood than other world societies do and part of the struggle for understanding what labour is or is not appropriate for children and youth stems from these conceptual and sociopolitical differences on childhood. Increasingly children’s work is coming
into sharper focus as the markets and economies in the world become more globalized and interconnected.

**Legal Protection Challenges**

Legal protection for children in employment situations worldwide appears to be inconsistent and haphazard. “Children can be exploited easily because they are less aware of their rights, less troublesome, more compliant, more trustworthy and less likely to absent themselves from work” (Polakoff, 2007, p.264). Because of age, inexperience and social status children are frequently caught in difficult or dangerous work environments and this appears to be consistent worldwide. Organizations such as the International Labour Organization have been working to ban the most hazardous forms of child labour worldwide and through a number of initiatives are working to collect data, institute policies and regulations in a number of countries worldwide that include: Africa, Americas (Latin), Asia and the Pacific and central Asia, Eastern Europe and Arab States (ILO, 2013).


The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1990 set as a key assertion the rights a child has as an individual with social agency (United Nations, 1990). These rights
include those of inclusion, participation and economic rights. The development of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of the Child in 1990 was based upon recognition of the lack of agency children have in their own lives and the need for children to be protected. The Declaration in its entirety contains 54 articles designed to guide, protect and ensure inclusion of children into the fabric of societal life. It covers a wide spectrum of rights and protections including basic health, education, family rights and legal, civil, political and economic rights. While the United Nations has no authority to require or sanction countries to respect the articles of the Declaration, it can exert moral and "peer" pressure on countries to adhere to acceptable standards for children as citizens (United Nations, 2013).

A key assertion of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child is that a child is an individual or exists as an entity of its own with all the rights and privileges afforded to an individual. The responsibility of parents and states is to ensure these rights are realized by children. The Declaration recognizes the role of states and parents to assist in determining these rights when maturity presents difficulties of comprehension for children. The Declaration however is clear that children are owners of individual rights, in a rights-based society. The Declaration is particularly compelling in its assertion of children's economic rights in Article 32 which states:

1. State parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous, or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2. State parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, State parties shall in particular:

a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;

b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;

c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article (Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 2012, Article 32).

The Declaration draws particular attention to recognizing that children cannot be economically exploited and that work they are involved in must be in their own best interests. Sanctions and penalties are advocated for those who fail to protect the health, safety and well-being of children. Nonetheless, a child’s right to social agency, while articulated in the Declaration, is vague and somewhat undefined. The contents of the Declaration however constitute an important framework for investigating current economic pressures to exploit the most vulnerable of society's workers: children.

The Canadian Context

Historical

Since the colonisation of Canada, first by the French and then subsequently by the British, Canada has a long history of children providing various forms of labour. While numerous laws and legislation have sought to prohibit and restrict the use of children in providing their labours,
The reality of children’s work contributions is that it played an important role in the development and growth of the country.

The settlement of Canada in the late 19th century attracted vast numbers of immigrants interested in obtaining free land and building a new life. While the promotion of Canada as a land of plenty with countless agricultural opportunities was heavily marketed to immigrants, the reality of pioneer life in Canada was quite different. Farming and settlement in Canada was harsh, “filled with misunderstandings, disappointments and back breaking labour for which many were ill prepared” (Rollings & Magnusson, 2009, p.2).

For immigrants settling in Canada, children provided labour power with a variety of tasks to increase a farm’s production and to ensure family survival. Children’s contributions included domestic and agricultural work, generally divided by gender roles wherein girls performed more domestic cooking, cleaning and childcare roles, and boys worked most often in agricultural and livestock production. “Children received no monetary compensation for their efforts, possessed only assets given to them, had no right to control their own money and could even be sent to relatives if the father died, as at law it was the fathers right to determine the fate of the family offspring” (Rollings & Magnusson, 2009, p.2). Legally children had no rights and control of their lives was in the hands of their fathers. Recorded Canadian history rarely acknowledges the contributions of children in the establishment and development of the Canadian agricultural industry.

As industrialization began to occur in Canada in the late 19th century, urbanization was occurring at an increased rate. As populations moved from rural living to urban living, so too did the routines of children participating in labour to assist with family survival. Work contributions
of children included work in domestics, manufacturing, commercial environments and in urban centers on the streets. Children were involved in home labour in working class homes generally before the age of eight and usually revolving around domestic chores of cleaning, childcare, cooking, errands and repair work (Bullen, 1986). Again children’s work was assigned by gender with girls most frequently doing internal/household duties while boys more often were involved in work outside of the home.

Children’s labour was actively involved in sweat shop operations. The origin of sweat shops in Canadian manufacturing came from small workrooms or spare rooms attached to or situated in residences where contract piece work (most often clothing) was completed at low cost piece rates. Frequently this was done through the work of children, some working in excess of 60 hours per week (Bullen, 1986). Children also provided a variety of street services as well including shoe polishing, fruit selling, and pencil or newspaper sales. Newsboys were a specialized class of child/youth laborers and well established in a number of major Canadian cities as well (Bullen, 1986).

Foster/orphan children were also significant sources of labour in Canada. While many child labour agencies existed in the late 19th and early 20th century, societal belief systems supported the belief that “early exposure to work and discipline would guarantee the development of an upstanding and industrious citizenship” (Bullen, 1986, p.180). Orphaned and neglected children worked long hours of bondage under the pretext of citizenship education. Indigenous children also provided forced free labour in both domestic and agricultural settings while enrolled in residential schools (Axelrod, 2003).

As Canada continued its industrialization, children could be found working in the early 20th century in textile mills, cigar making, forestry, rope making, biscuit factories, prostitution,
entertainers, begging and in the coal mines of eastern and western Canada. Wherever there was money to be made in industrialized Canada and where limited skills or strength was required, children could serve as labourers (McIntosh, 2000).

Working class children attended school less frequently in the late 19th century because of the need of their labour—school was an expensive loss of labour for many families. This began to change as school curriculums reflected the need for new skills in a changing economic era in Canada. Where social legislation to attend school had minimal impact, the building of a new economic era began to shape some change in the need of skills and education (Bullen, 1986, Axelrod, 2003). Societal standards and conceptions of childhood also began to change and with it, legislation began to appear restricting some of the worst forms of child labour in Canada.

Canadian legislation

In Canada, federally no formal records or databases are maintained that record the number of working children in the country and as such, gaining a full understanding of the scope of work children are involved in and the numbers of child workers in Canada is fraught with difficulties. In Canada, there are 14 jurisdictions (10 provincial, 3 territorial and the federal jurisdictions) that enact various statutes that regulate employment, including the employment of minors. Statistics are collected and forecasted both federally and provincially on working adults in Canadian society. There are important and valid questions to ask here on why these statistics are not collected on working children.

Alberta Context

In Alberta, employment is regulated through employment standards legislation. The age of majority is recognised as 18 years in Alberta (Government of Alberta, Justice, 2012). Within
Alberta there are two specific work categories for individuals under the age of 18. Adolescents are defined as those ranging in age from 12-14 years of age. Young persons are defined as those ranging in age from 15-17 (Government of Alberta, Employment Standards, 2012).

Adolescents have broad categories of work options in Alberta including: newspaper or flyer delivery, small goods or merchandise delivery, clerks in offices or retail stores and some jobs within the restaurant industry (with restrictions). For those jobs not listed in the “approved jobs category”, permits must be obtained from the province prior to an employer hiring an adolescent. Adolescents must provide parental consent to work and the onus of providing a safe and restricted work environment to the adolescent rests with the employer. Safety checklists must be completed by the employer and the duty of assessment, interpretation and supervision of hazardous conditions is also left with the employer. Adolescents are restricted in their work hours, although again the responsibility for adhering to these standards is left with employers. There is no requirement of the employer to advise the adolescent of her/his rights or entitlements under the employments standards regulations (Government of Alberta, Employment Standards, 2012).

Young persons in Alberta (those 15-17 years of age) may work at almost all types of job but some working conditions require the presence of an adult 18 or older and there are some restrictions on hours of work between 12:00 am and 6:00am. The requirements for a safety checklist and assessment do not appear to be a necessity for a young person. The current minimum wage in Alberta is $11.20 per hour. There are a number of exemptions to this minimum wage in Alberta; for example, child farm workers can be paid by piece work (contract) rates such as kilos of good picked rather than minimum wage. Domestics and others may also fall under such exemptions. Children under the age of 12 are permitted to be employed and do
work in special situations with approval by the ministry representative (Government of Alberta Employment Standards, 2015).

The numbers of adolescents and children employed in Alberta is not recorded in any provincial or federal database. In Alberta, research results suggest that over 11,000 children under the age of 12 were employed in the province in 2007-2008 (Barnetson, 2010). Extensive research and literature reviews I have conducted have not yielded any information on research or studies conducted in Alberta that are based on children’s input into their work or defining ideal workplaces for themselves.

Children in Alberta do not define, offer perspective, or have any inclusive or meaningful method of participating in designing the economic realms they are a part of. I contend in my research that without the full participation of children into the design and development of appropriate work environments suitable for both their development and supportive of their human rights, significant risk and exploitation exists.

**Problem Statement**

So why does this matter? Children are under the guardianship of parents or other legal bodies who have responsibility to them. Children are governed by policies and a regulation enacted by adults and where situations and circumstances involve a body of workers who have limited status and no position at the “negotiating” table, conflicts of interest can and do occur. Where labour activism for adults may be a response, the lack of social agency, legal and democratic rights of children and youth put them at a distinct disadvantage in advocating for their own protection and rights with regards to employment. Legislation in Alberta is vague enough to rely on self-education of employment rights by children themselves (navigating through complex web based
access) and parents or left in the hands of employers who are in conflict of interest positions. While schools may perhaps offer a legitimate potential role in some of this education, my research has some interesting findings with regards to children or youth receiving or accessing information here.

Barnetson (2009) discusses at length regulatory mechanisms in Alberta that further exacerbate precarious employment situations for children and youth by relying on a complaints based, minimally staffed approach to regulation and monitoring of employed children and youth. Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010) discuss as well the lack of meaningful participation opportunities for children in structuring or determining their own work involvement throughout the world. “Working children's voices have been heard primarily through ad hoc events and local projects but they need to be heard regularly and continuously through proper channels for that purpose” (p.216). Inclusion at the regulatory, policy and program level is not the only limitation children face when it comes to determining their economic involvement; they also face challenges as social agents in research.

Mason and Hood (2011) note that the inclusion of children as active societal members continues to be a problem as “dominant traditions of social research, in which children's views and experiences were largely absent” (p.490). Research continues to problematize children's participation and instead regards that research situated in families should suffice for providing children's voice. The inequality in relationships between children's and adults’ participation in research reflects ongoing oppression of children in society. Bessell (2011) discusses at length a number of the competing interests that face researchers attempting to include the voice of children in determining appropriate roles for them in the economic realm. These include
balancing competing viewpoints of protection of children, representations of agency, power, decision and political structures. Mason and Hood (2011) suggest that with heightened awareness of children's status today in the world, supporting old traditions of inequality is no longer acceptable in any policy making. The continued subrogation of children’s rights to adults’ rights is coming under increasing scrutiny by researchers and society.

Children aged nine to sixteen years of age are actively participating in employment in Alberta yet there is no input from children themselves into the guidelines, work arrangements or policies that govern their employment. While children are active members of the economic realm, they are invisible in determining meaningful work and workplaces for themselves. This is particularly true in Alberta a province long governed and entrenched in neoliberal ideology and politics. Alberta’s focus on market driven economies and politics have produced some of the greatest disparities in income, equality, intensification of poverty, gender inequality, social stratification and meagre minimum wages in one of Canada’s wealthiest provinces (Parkland Institute, 2012). Recent political changes in Alberta may see some future change here but Alberta is also adjusting to a staggering economic downturn which may further hinder change for children’s work.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this critical and visual ethnography study was to explore, with working Alberta children, their work experiences and workplaces. In providing the opportunity for children to articulate their work, ideal work and work places, this research creates better understandings of children’s appropriate participation in and desire for meaningful involvement in the economic realm of work.
Through developing workplace narratives with children, my research can assist policy makers and employers to gain a better understanding of the needs of children who are employed in Alberta and what constitutes a meaningful and safe work environment for them. Ultimately my hope is that this research opens the door to involving children as more active agents in determining their work environments in general. I hope as well that this research will provide useful examples for other jurisdictions interested in the inclusion of children as active policy contributing members of the work realm they are involved in.

**Research Questions**

My doctoral research discussed workplace experiences with working children that detail their own work as well as their future hopes for meaningful work experiences in Alberta.

Through the use of critical and visual ethnography methodologies, the research questions I investigated were:

1. What is “good work” for children in Alberta based on children’s experiences? (Defined as nine to sixteen years of age).

2. What is “bad work” for children in Alberta based on their experiences?

3. Does this (good and bad work) vary between male and female children, among different age groups, among different socio-economic status groups and among geographic areas?

4. What constitutes a good work place for children, according to children?

5. What constitutes a bad workplace for children, according to children?

6. How did you (child) learn to do your work?
7. Describe your (child) day at work?

8. Would you (child) like to be involved in developing appropriate work for children in Alberta? If yes, how?

**Sub questions: Politics and Policy Focus**

1. How does current Alberta work legislation for youth/children support or hinder the availability of good work for children?

2. What support/changes need to be in place in workplaces to support good work environments for children?

3. Do children want to be involved in developing workplaces beyond providing their labour? If yes how?

**Research Approach**

With ethics approval from Royal Roads University, I studied the experiences and perceptions of 28 child/youth research participants who have employment experience in Alberta. I purposively selected participants who provided a wide range of age, geographic locations, gender and cultural balance to participate in the research.

This study employed a critical ethnographic and visual ethnographic qualitative research approach. I used in depth interviews as my primary source of data collection. I also provided options for those participants who wished to provide visual contributions to do so through the use of photography and then a second interview to discuss this photography.
Participants for the research were a purposive sample chosen through a snowball network approach. Participants are identified through a pseudonym, interviews tape recorded and all recordings transcribed verbatim. Interview data analysis was triangulated through the use of tape, transcript and where applicable photos provided by the research participants. Analysis of data was conducted through thematic strategies and comparisons. I looked for key meaning units in both the transcripts of interviews and the photographs completed by the children. From these meaning units, I developed central themes to group together common findings or interpretations in the research.

Dissemination of Results

With the completion of the research, I will present the research to conferences, meetings with government, academic and other potential stakeholders and will follow through with appropriate publications while respecting all standards of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. I will also explore the possibility of media presentations of the research including the possibility of photographic exhibits, social media or film possibilities and review possibilities for social media dissemination. Again all standards of confidentiality will be fully respected.

Assumptions

My research and interest in working with children comes from over twenty-five years of experience in working with social issues, community engagement and policy development. Throughout these many years of research and community experiences, I have frequently worked with marginalised populations. Marginalisation comes in many forms. It can be based on income, race, culture, gender, ability and age, among others. In work I have done with children, I have found them to be articulate, insightful, valuable contributors to societal life and capable
and interested in democratic participation. Their age and position in society though have relegated them to observer or silent participant in many realms of life. They are rarely involved in policy or governing decisions, and meaningful inclusion for children in this realm is often coopted to guardians or parents of children.

I begin therefore with my first assumption in this research: I believe that children want to be involved in discussing, defining and determining appropriate work for themselves. My assumption is based on personal experience in working with children in workplace settings, listening to children discuss their work experiences and reading about and viewing children’s involvement in work.

Secondly, I believe that the contributions of children in some form of economic work can be valuable and useful experiences for children themselves as well as for society provided it is reasonably safe. My assumption is supported by the volume of children worldwide who are involved in work arrangements, some by choice, and/or some by economic necessity.

My third assumption is based on the belief that children’s articulations of meaningful work for them will be a valuable contribution to policy, law, workplaces and societal life. Silencing of a significant portion of the population through non-inclusion at the regulation or policy level is discriminatory and not acceptable in today’s world.

**Situating the Researcher**

I locate myself as an educator and a community engagement specialist with a critical perspective. As a critical theorist I recognize that in societies and cultures, dominance of some leads to oppression of others and this cannot be ignored. Freire (1997) speaks persuasively in his assertion of “humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization not only as an
ontological possibility but as an historical reality” (p.25). Constructivism is a perspective that recognizes that knowledge is primarily socially created by individuals and as such research best captures this knowledge by confirming multiple perspectives and influences (McMillan, 2000).

I recognize the role of constructivism as I analyze alternate voices and the awareness of the necessity of “all voices justifiably contributing (sic) to the dialogues on which our futures depend” (Gergen, 2007, p.466). This emancipatory stance is heavily embedded in my being; as such I locate myself as a researcher who speaks beside the contributions of the research participants I am working with.

**Reflexivity**

The use of reflexivity becomes very critical in working with children, because any researcher working with children must have an awareness of children's lack of power and representation in society (Levey, 2009, Mason and Hood, 2011). The recognition of the socially constructed workplace reality, the role of the researcher and the lack of agency of children are important aspects of the reflexivity process in any critical ethnographic research and especially poignant in research with children. As an adult researcher I acknowledge the necessity of and awareness of my own position in society.

I also acknowledge the perspective and experiences I have had with marginalised individuals can provide tremendous insight and could also prove to be a liability if my judgment or interpretation of research is in any way biased. I am committed to ongoing strategies to ensure credibility of the research and reduce subjectivity. I do this through ongoing critical self-reflection in ethnographic notes and journaling, through dialogue and in discussion with professional colleagues and advisors. To add to the strength and credibility of my research I
employ a variety of triangulation methods in the collection of data, analysis of data, through ongoing member checks with participants and again through discussion with my advisory committee and supervisor and with policy makers.

**Rationale and Significance of this Research**

The rationale for my research study is predicated on the awareness of the necessity of the involvement of children in social research with their “own voice” as a fundamental aspect of full inclusion. I argue, as a foundational premise of critical research, that society must include all voices and perspectives in the construction of policies, laws and structures as a moral and ethical issue and a pragmatic democratic issue.

Within a critical paradigm, there are four key factors involved in the growing inclusion of children as a force for social change according to Mason and Hood (2011). Firstly, through the use of various social media applications, children themselves are frequently involved in expressing opinion and voice. Secondly the recognition of children as a minority group and the ensuing status this gives to their expression of voice and agency are changing for the better. Mason and Hood note that with a focus on populations marginalized in society, it is difficult to ignore that children have been frequently relegated to the sidelines by those more powerful in society through “the rationale of their [children's] immaturity and ignorance” (p.491).

Thirdly, children’s legal rights to participate, while somewhat ambiguous, are also becoming a more frequent focal point through children's rights movements and the courts (Mason and Hood 2011). Lastly, competing discussions on the structures and limitations of some conceptions of childhood are under challenge (Bessell, 2011; Mason & Hood, 2011; Bourdillon, M., & Levison, D. & Myers, W., & White, B., 2010). In a modern world, theorising children as
somewhat incapable due to their biological and emotional maturation is now contentious. The potential for collaboration in research between adults and children suggest that notions of childhood are changing as children offer their own unique expertise on their life-worlds.

Conducting research with adults and children collaboratively can create empowerment for both the researcher and the research participant (Levey, 2009). Ethnographic research with children provides researchers access to information they might never gain otherwise. And through conducting this form of research with children; “a child can let the researcher know if the findings correspond to his or her understandings of the social world” (Levey, 2009, p.324).

Ultimately the rationale for my research study is to provide an oeuvre- opening into the inclusion of children’s understandings of meaningful work and workplaces for both policy makers and for the children themselves. Increasing understanding for the children, researchers and policy makers who review or are involved in this study can demonstrate the value of participation as a means for providing voice, fair representation and inclusion into the research and policy and regulation realm in society.
Definitions of Terminology

Child-an individual up to sixteen years of age

Constructivism- an ideological perspective that recognizes that knowledge is primarily socially created by individuals and as such is highly unique and relevant to the individual (social constructivism)

Critical Ethnography- a form of qualitative research that gathers descriptions, and interpretations of behavior and social life within a culture or social group of participants. Critical ethnography collects information while recognizing power imbalances and the necessity for change to address these imbalances.

Neoliberalism- a political philosophy operating from a market based focus of free trade, minimal governance, privatization, minimal taxation and deregulation.

Visual Ethnography- a form of ethnography that seeks to provide insight into social life through the use of visual images such as photography and drawings.

Note: Children’s labour and Children’s work are used interchangeably throughout this document. Any changes in definition are explained as needed throughout.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to discuss work experiences with a group of Alberta children (nine to sixteen years of age) and understand their views on meaningful work and workplace environments. Through the use of critical ethnography and visual ethnography methodology, this research inquiry sought to give voice to a purposefully selected group of participants who were currently working or had recently completed work in Alberta, during the period of this research in 2014. The children involved in this research represent both genders, a variety of ages and cultural backgrounds, urban, rural and suburban settings and a wide range of paid employment situations throughout the province.

This chapter presents themes in child labour and work as they relate to my completed research. To conduct my literature review I accessed a variety of information sources including journal articles, books, websites, government regulations and other articles. I looked for important gaps in the literature with respect to children’s labour and involvement in defining their labour in societies. I have grouped the literature into four central areas. These are:

1. Defining and understanding children’s labour and work

2. The historical context of children’s work in Canada

3. Childhood and societal perceptions

4. Children’s inclusion and rights in society

I discuss a number of the central points in each of these discussion areas as they relate to my research. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion on how the literature has informed my understandings and the need for the research work I completed as well as future research.
I. Defining and understanding children’s labour and work

Children are involved worldwide in many different forms of labour/work in both paid and unpaid contexts. Children work in manufacturing, agriculture, domestic and personal service work, leisure and entertainment, mining, building and construction. They also work in sweatshops, as bonded labour and in the sex trade. Determining the depth and breadth of child labour numbers throughout the world is a difficult exercise with reporting numbers and sources often inconsistent and definitions of child labour and work varying significantly by country and local jurisdictions (Polakoff, 2007, Contreras, 2008). The International Labour Organization (ILO) for example estimates that over 200 million children worldwide are involved in child labour and of this over 115 million are involved in hazardous work (ILO, 2012).

Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) studied child work patterns from 36 different countries and found that approximately 68 percent of children were involved in some form of work although not all of the work was paid. In North America, child and youth labour estimates suggest that over 50% of 13-14 year olds work in Canada, and that by the age of 15 approximately 75 % of youth are working (Schissel, 2011). In Alberta, Barnetson (2009) estimates approximately 11, 000 children under 12 and over 39,000 adolescents were employed in the province in 2007-2008.

The labour/work of children provides financial resources for children themselves, for families and economies and benefits major corporations, small business, government and non-profit organizations. Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010) categorize children’s work in four categories:
1. Productive work: work seen in the home caring for the home or other siblings or the elderly (often unpaid),

2. Work outside the family: caring for elderly relatives or neighbours, completing light chores such as shopping (may or may not be paid),

3. Productive work in the family: gathering food, agricultural work such as harvesting assistance or animal care, assisting with family businesses, home based manufacturing or migratory agricultural work (may be paid or unpaid),

4. Employment outside of the family: this is work in manufacturing, domestic or service work, and self-employment (generally paid work).

Children historically and currently have been active contributing members in the employment realm of most societies. But understanding the scope of children’s work and labour involvement is fraught with many policy concerns. To begin with there is much consternation over defining what constitutes children's work and what constitutes children's labour. Both terms are heavily laden with political, economic and emotional overtones. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines labour as activity that “deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development” (ILO, 2012). The ILO established a mandate to eliminate what it considers to be the worst forms of child labour and is very clear on what constitutes the worst forms of child labour. The ILO is less clear on what constitutes good labour/work for children. Liborio, Ungar (2010); Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010); Polakoff (2007) also recognize exploitive labour of children as that which can cause physical or emotional harm to children.
Definitions of harm and exploitation in child labour are also fraught with political and social controversies. Within these controversies of defining harm are layered issues of economics. The benefits to economies and to adult’s financial welfare are considerations that are not weighed from a child’s perspective. What return in investment of work are children themselves seeing? Is this return equitable and reasonable according to the children? These are important questions within the research I conducted.

In western countries the term “child labour” has been frequently associated with boycotts against consumer goods produced by child labour. In the late 1990s, images of child soldiers, child slavery and child bondage became increasingly visible internationally and, interestingly, the language of child labour and child work became more convoluted (Bessell 2011). The debate with defining the employment activity of children continues and is influenced by discussions of harm. Bourdillon (2006) discusses the dilemma that several researchers have had in determining harmful or beneficial child labour. Part of the difficulty in coming to terms with the construct of labour and harm, is how harm is determined. Bourdillon provides a thoughtful example of the contradictions and dilemmas involved in addressing harm using the example of children involved in sports: some sports can cause children harm but arguably, the benefit of the activity outweighs the harm, so parents, children and government bodies are supportive of children's involvement in the activity.

School and education are also fraught with dilemmas because school is debated at times as being potentially beneficial and harmful. If we were to subscribe to both benefits and harms in schooling, then the hidden curriculum of teaching children to practice and embrace certain societal values and standards of conduct while denying others could be seen as harmful. Labour likewise as a term associated with children cannot be banned outright when the term is
open to relative interpretation. To Bourdillon (2006) the key to addressing part of the dilemma with the language of the work of children or labour of children is in recognizing that “children have a right to protection by removing or mitigating harm, without denying benefits” (p.12).

The research on injury in child labour and work is also fraught with dilemmas. Obtaining information on injury of children while they are working is difficult. Without legal legislation or requirements recording the number of children labouring, there is difficulty in gathering detailed information on children who are injured while working (Rauscher, K. J., & Runyan, C. W., & Schulman, M. (2010). Studies done in Canada indicate that younger workers have a higher risk of physical injuries than other workers in Canada. Barnetson (2009); Breslin, F.C., & Koehoorn, M., & Cole, D. C. (2008); McCloskey, (2008); Breslin, C. & Koehoorn, M. & Smith, P., & Manno, M. (2003) note higher incidences of injuries among young workers, and lower levels of safety training completion and safety regulation enforcement for young people.

The lack of safety training children and youth receive from employers or from schools is extensively documented as well in the research (Raykov, M., & Taylor, A. 2013; Barnetson, 2010). While the rate of injury among youth workers is often rationalized as immaturity, the research on workplace injuries indicates a very different picture. Children are injured most often at workplaces because of unsafe work conditions or practices at worksites, and lack of knowledge and lack of skills. Laberge, MacEachen, & Calvet (2014) note that a key factor in injury for young people may also be tied to how they do learn to work with equipment and practices. They argue a situated learning approach –learning while doing on the job from a trained mentor holds much more success in learning and much lower injury. Quite frequently this is not the type of learning young people have while on the job. They often learn by themselves or have short demonstrations without follow-up training where they demonstrate skills.
Laberge, MacEachen and Calvet (2014) note that a margin of manoeuvre—or the space to learn—is highly influenced by time and conditions a worker has in place to self-regulate. For example, if a worker has to complete a great deal of work in a short time frame, they may try to accomplish this and sacrifice safety. This is particularly a concern for young people who may have minimal safety knowledge to begin with and then feel pressure to perform tasks they are unfamiliar with or don’t have time to complete adequately or safely. An additional factor to consider is the types of low wage- high risk jobs that tend to be heavily populated with young workers with minimal skills (Breslin, C., & Smith, P. 2010).

There is considerable research discussing the vulnerability of children in employment situations, as well as their lack of knowledge on safe work practices. Children do not report unsafe or questionable work practices. They fear repercussion and are acutely aware of the difference in power between them and their boss. The greater the inequality workers face, the less likely they are to report any conditions that might appear unsafe (Barnetson, 2010, Tucker, 2013). Further the reliance on employers to report unsafe work conditions or practices is against protecting self-interests at best. Barnetson (2010) discusses at length the lack of reporting of safety problems or injuries by employers and a government system that does not adequately enforce the minimal regulations it does have in place for child workers.

Injury is not limited to physical harm for child workers. Developmental issues and, psychosocial harm are other forms of injury requiring consideration. Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010) note that definitions and regulations of psycho-social and developmental issues in this area are complicated by political, social and cultural factors. Furthermore, a society’s laws and values and economic conditions add to complications. For example, children who do caregiving take on more than the physical responsibility of caring for another. Does this added
responsibility cause emotional or psycho social issues of harm for the worker child? Woodhead (2007) argues that before determining what constitutes psychological or social harm for labouring children, there must be recognition of children as social actors who have agency and opinion about what they consider to be of risk or beneficial.

**Children as Labourers and Workers: Globalized Issues**

While many argue that global capitalism’s impact worldwide is beneficial, I would suggest that it also results in poverty, debt, trade, war, lack of local productivity, non-sustainability and environmental degradation. Global capitalism has been responsible for both beneficial and detrimental effects for child workers worldwide. Abebe and Bessell (2011) discuss the implications of broader economic and political changes such as free trade. Trade issues can have severe impacts on children when poorer countries are required to engage in inequitable trade relationships. More unpaid work in these situations is required of both women and children in both the home and the community. The Alberta context is especially relevant in this regard because as income disparity is on the rise in Alberta, families begin to look for additional sources of income to “make ends meet” (Parkland Institute, 2012).

Globally, agricultural changes have impacts on child workers as well. Abebe (2007) notes how a change in crop production in the global market can have effects on the workload of children. In this vein, Katz (2004) discusses changes in detail in the area of material and social reproduction. When countries adjust production of local crops for globalized crops (cash crops that are intended for export), not only are agricultural crops changed genetically, but modes of production, sustainability levels and environmental issues change. The social and cultural practices imbedded in the production of local crops can be lost and can therefore have dire
effects on communities. The skills that adults and children have in the context of sustainability can be lost or no longer have much value; social practices that were an important fabric of the community can disappear as crops and harvest patterns change. Local small farm subsistence can disappear as global corporations’ purchasing power develops mass corporate farming operations. These are issues that continue to impact children throughout the globalized world.

Changes in education needs also have an impact on children and their work. Abebe and Bessell (2011) discuss examples in Africa and India where formal education cannot keep up with the deskilling going on in the globalized world. Children and youth who are supported by families for education can soon find their education no longer relevant in this new world. This is a trend that is found in both Northern and Southern economies (Jeffrey, 2009, Bourdillon et al., 2010) where early career adults find skill sets they developed in formal education in childhood no longer fit the new globalized world of work. In the end, deskilling creates poorly paid, precarious and relatively dangerous work.

Changes in manufacturing approaches have also had an impact on the use of child work in the globalized economy. Large scale transfers of manufacturing particularly in the garment industry in the 1990’s have led to the employment of many children and adolescents as corporations looked for cheaper labour and manufacturing options. A case in point: a British led political backlash against Sicome garment factory practices in the 1990s led to massive firings of children employed in these fields. This loss of income for children has led to other dire consequences for these children and families (Bourdillon, M., & Levison, D., & Myers, W., & White, B., 2010). The Sicome garment factory in Morocco had a number of 12-15-year-old girls working in this factory example. British Granada’s Work in Action television investigation led to the firing of a number of these girls by the Marks and Spencer Company prior to the airing of
this investigative film. The contributions of these girls were vital for their families and for their own futures. As manufacturing and child labour and work practices continue to be a concern, there seems to be no easy answer in this multifaceted issue.

In North America, global changes have impacted children’s labour in other ways as well. Children in North America make up the largest sector of employees in the fast food service sector and frequently work long hours in questionable conditions with little or no supervision or training (Allan, C., & Bamber, G., & Timo, N., 2005, Schlosser, 2001). As this industry continues to grow globally there are legitimate employment issues and concerns for these children. They, like their global counterparts, are minimally paid and endure questionable work conditions.

Poverty impacts children and their families in all world economies and while not all children work because of impoverished conditions, it is a dominant factor in many situations (Polakoff, 2007, Schissel, 2011). There are complex issues here that need to be considered with children’s work.

2. Historical children’s work in Canada

As noted in chapter one of this research, Canada has a long history of children providing various forms of labour in the settlement of the country. Laws and regulations have been passed in Canada restricting the use of child labour in some capacities but the role of children in providing their labour in the ongoing development of Canada is extensive.

Rural settlement of Canada in the late 19th century attracted vast numbers of immigrants interested in farming. Canada was promoted heavily as a country with vast lands and superb agricultural possibilities. Settlement and farming in Canada was however quite different.
Limitations on access to land, and coping with a vast wild landscape and climate challenges were not reflected in the marketing of building a life in Canada (Rollings & Magnusson, 2009).

The reality of agricultural work was the necessity of utilizing as much free labour as possible to ensure survival, and children’s contributions to the family were a critical necessity. In agricultural production children’s work generally fell along gender assigned roles. Boys were “set to work at age seven or eight, and would help with the sowing and reaping and graduate when they were older to heavier jobs such as driving horses, ploughing and construction” (Axelrod, 2003, p.12). Girls took on more domestic roles including “feeding animals and caring for siblings. They would learn from mothers how to make clothes, prepare meals and clean the farmhouse” (Axelrod, 2003, p.12). Little time, money or effort was available for schooling or education for children. Laws at the time viewed fathers as owning both property and children and the determination of the work of children was at the discretion of the father (Rollings & Magnusson, 2009).

Rapid urbanization began in Canada in the late 19th century and the demographic change of diminishing rural communities because of urbanization did not decrease the role of children as labourers. Children’s work in more urbanized settings included domestic and manufacturing work. Girls were involved in cleaning, childcare, cooking, repairs and could begin this work as early as eight years of age (Bullen, 1986). Boys most often were involved in work outside of the home. They often provided a variety of street services including shoe polishing, fruit selling, and pencil or newspaper sales. Newsboys were another class of child labour and were active in newspaper sales in Canadian cities. Children were also involved in the raising and butchering of animals, garden production, collecting coal, wood and water. Children also survived as beggars and prostitutes (Bullen, 1986).
Increased manufacturing in Canada also meant the development of work in factories where girls and boys produced clothing, ropes, matches, biscuits and other retail products (McIntosh, 2000). Children’s labour was actively used in home sweat shop operations to increase the manufacturing of goods. Homework centers were attached to or situated in residences where contract piece work (most often clothing) was completed at lower cost piece rates. Often this sweatshop work by children required working in excess of 60 hours per week by children as young as eight or nine years of age (Bullen, 1986).

Children, most often boys, were also heavily involved in mining operations. Coal mining as an example was the fuel that supported the industrialization of Canada and from the 1850’s on it was used for heating homes and other buildings, constructing and operating railways, steam engines, shipping and other industrial uses. As the need for coal grew and mining expanded, so did the need for a larger workforce. Coal mines were present in five Canadian provinces. By the first decade of the 20th century over 1200 boys provided labour in the coal mines. Some began this work as early as eight or nine years of age, often working 12-14 hour days in dark and dangerous conditions (McIntosh, 2000).

Foster and orphan children were also significant sources of labor in Canada. Several Canadian agencies existed that placed children who were orphaned or no longer cared for by their parents into domestic work arrangements. British children exported to Canada also fulfilled the need for domestic workers across Canada. Children worked in both rural and urban homes in conditions of servitude with little inspection or monitoring by the agencies that had made the placements. Orphaned and neglected children worked long hours of bondage under the pretext of citizenship education. Indian children also provided free labour in both domestic and agricultural settings while enrolled in residential schools often under the pretext of learning skills for future
employment (Axelrod, 2003). A predominant societal belief that children were in need of discipline and exposure to labour at an early age heartily supported the inclusion of children into the work force (Bullen, 1986).

There are many reasons for the changes to some of the most exploitive forms of child labour in the early 20th century. As Canada moved towards becoming a more industrialized nation, skills needed to work in the new economy changed and children’s need for education became an important driver in the new society. Curriculum and public education began to reflect the need for new skills. Education became a legislated necessity for all children in Canada with interesting hidden curriculum purposes which I discuss further in this chapter. I discuss at length in the next section of this literature review the role of societal attitudes of childhood influencing change in some of the worst working conditions for children in Canada.

3. Childhood and Societal Perceptions

In western societies, the public, political, and scientific perception of childhood is that it is a period of innocence and vulnerability. The presumption is that children are in need of special attention because of their nature and helplessness (Liebel, 2003, Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1993). This notion of childhood is premised on a social expectation that adults will provide protection and nurturance for children. The protection and nurturing of children can be seen in many of the public institutions and policies in place in western society including social welfare policy, and employment arrangements. In the province of Alberta for example, parental permission is required for children working at the age of 12 years (Government of Alberta, Employment Standards, 2012). These societal requirements of parental permission appear to be based on the cultural perception that children require constant oversight in the workforce and some control
over the activities in which they are engaged. Yet this same oversight in Alberta does not extend to provisions to ensure safe working conditions for children (Barnetson, 2010). The role of parental oversight of their working child/children does not account or consider conflicts of interest, lack of knowledge or lack of time by parents.

The public perception of children in western societies also includes issues of childhood and development deficits, the implication being that immaturity is associated with reduced faculties (Strike and Soltis, 2009) and that adults need to guide and direct children to function in society. We can see this reflected in our education systems, childcare systems and health policy. This conception of children as developmentally deficient and in need of protection is articulated in detail in conventional medical research with children. For example, the Medical Research Council of Canada supported by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons and Health and Welfare Canada emphasizes the special attention that must be paid to children due to their vulnerability and lack of maturation (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1993).

To address some of what is also considered deficient in children, the public education system in Canada established a clear mandate and approach to shape young lives into appropriate roles and attitudes through mandatory education. Contenta (1993) writes of the establishment of Canada’s public education system for children and its clear intentions to not only socialize children to appropriate social and moral values of society but also to clearly establish a work ethic and conformity to work authorities. The Canadian public education system is set up with classroom/schooling hours that mimic work hours and work breaks. Children are required to follow established orderly procedures that imitate work environments and acceptance of hierarchal work structures with sharp lines of authority and power. Rewards and punishment follow similar patterns with school and work. This “hidden curriculum” within children’s
education serves as very effective shaping and molding of children into subservient workers today. While there may be longer periods of childhood in today’s western nations, a key purpose of shaping deficient children into ‘acceptable adults’ is a firmly established practice.

In globalized developing nations the conception of childhood is arguably equally unclear and inconsistent. The western concept of childhood as a developmental state is not shared universally. What is considered to be a particular stage of childhood not only varies with age but also with social class, social constructs, gender, age, birth order, culture and geographic area (Polakoff, 2007). For example, children’s labour in countries in Africa and Asia is often seen as critical in contributing to household production (Abebe, 2011). To complicate matters, in the globalizing world, nations encountering value shifts, difficult or worsening economic conditions, poverty, labour strife and environmental change may experience changes in conceptions of childhood. Furthermore, structural or government change can also influence how a state of childhood is marked or perceived. For example, during western colonisation of Africa, missionaries frequently used children as a minimally-paid or non-paid workforce (Abebe, 2011). Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries used native, immigrant and minority children to serve the needs of missionaries in various paid and unpaid work arrangements (Axelrod, 1997). The perception of children in Canadian society has undergone fundamental change over time, yet the continued subrogation of this population demographic for service to adults is still evident today.

Prout (2003) discusses the adult gaze or adult interpretation of childhood which vacillates between needs for protection and fearing the potential danger children are to society. The demonization of children is common in the literature as a means to assert the necessity of social control over children (Eisler, & Schissel, 2008; Prout, 2003; Axelrod, 1997). This control
is asserted over many of the key facets of children’s lives in both western and non-western economies including schooling, labour, and crime control and justice. I contend that regulating and standardizing the labour of children without their input continues to leave them in jeopardy under the control of adults.

Children face significant challenges in societies worldwide. They are universally disenfranchised members of global society and have little or no input into constructing meaningful participation for themselves in a variety of societal sectors ultimately “children are not free agents” (Cigno, & Rosati, 2005, p.3).

**Voice and Children’s Inclusion Rights in Society**

I argue that mainstream research continues to problematize children's participation in work and instead fosters the belief that adults should suffice for providing children's voice. I contend, on the contrary, that inequality in relationships between children's and adult’s participation in research, in a family-based paradigm reflects ongoing oppression of children in society. Bessell (2011) discusses at length a number of the competing interests that face researchers attempting to include the voice of children in determining appropriate roles for them in the employment realm. These include balancing competing viewpoints of protection of children, representations of agency, power, decision and political structures. Mason and Hood (2011) suggest that with heightened awareness of children's status today in the world, supporting old traditions of inequality is no longer acceptable in any policy making. While the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child offers guidelines and standards for ensuring children’s rights are noted and protected, there are criticisms of this document as well that centre on lack of meaningful input from children (Pedraza-Gomez, 2007; Liebel, 2003; Proust, 2003).
Children themselves have recognized the importance of employment-related activities as important for status in society, inclusion as participating members of society and in access to resources. Working children have in numerous studies articulated the need for inclusion in designing both their work environments and in the legislation and regulations governing them (Bessell, 2011; Bourdillon, & Levison & Myers, & White, 2010; Liborio & Ungar, 2010; Liebel, 2003; Prout 2003). For many working children in both western and southern economies, the lack of voice and inclusion in their own contributions within the employment realm creates a double marginalization. “On one side the worker, whose work power may be claimed by society, but whose effort is not recognized, but rather devalued and negated; and on the other side, the children who solely because they have not reached (from an adult’s perspective) a certain age have their ability to judge questioned and are denied (political) participation in the organization of society” (Liebel, 2003, p.270).

The need for children’s voice in determining their own work inclusion and regulation in society is an important one, voice itself however must be specified for effectiveness. Discussion on worker voice is well established in labour relations journals such as those of the Osgoode Hall Law Journal. Researchers (Slinn & Tucker, 2013) seem to unanimously agree that worker voice is critical. Three key rationales in terms of workers having voice with regards to their labour contributions in society seem to surface frequently.

1. There are economic justifications; living and employment standards change when workers collectively have voice,

2. There is democratic purpose to workers having voice in that it moves workers from being seen strictly as commodities and are instead treated with more dignity and
The voice of workers moves them more acutely into engaged citizenry as active members of society.

For children this becomes an acutely critical issue. Children are rarely collectively organized or protected as workers in active practice (Bourdillon, M & Levison, D. & Myers, W. & White, B. (2010). Children are precarious and disposable workers placing them in greater positions of powerlessness. Voice is critical but that voice must have power.

Tucker (2013) and Lewchuk (2013) argue further that for voice to be effective in today’s work realm, it must be present not only in raising concerns regarding work conditions, but also in protective monitoring of adherence to workplace concerns. Voice is critical but that voice must be an active component of legislating, monitoring and developing work that is appropriate for workers. Children need the protection of the state to have their inclusion rights enshrined in active voice regarding their participation in work.

Conclusion

In my literature review, I have explored numerous perspectives on the involvement of children in labour throughout the world and rationales for why their involvement does not include meaningful participation in developing the terms and scope of their labour contributions. The literature provides a variety of interpretations but there is no conclusive evidence in any of the literature I reviewed indicating that children are not capable of providing meaningful contributions. I have reviewed examples of children’s active involvement in defining the terms of their contributions and those examples have clearly demonstrated that children are indeed capable and interested in meaningful inclusion into society. My conclusion is that the rationale for the non-inclusion of children is weak and antiquated for this day and age.
My research findings clearly demonstrate the desire by children for voice into their work worlds.
Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology I have used for this study and includes information on the following: rationale for the research approach, a brief description of the research sample, an overview of the research design and methods utilized for data collection and interpretation, discussion on ethics, trustworthiness and limitations of the study and concluding comments.

**Rationale for research approach**

At the heart of phenomenology-based or hermeneutic qualitative research is the desire for a researcher to understand the meanings research participants make of their own lives. The goal or focus in such research is “on the meaning of events and actions as expressed by the participants from their point of view” (McMillan, 2000, p.254). Research has the capacity to recognize the social construction of lived realities. How experiences shape our ideas of the world and what is good or bad within that world are important facets of any good research approach. Qualitative research is designed to provide perspective or insight into social life and not to represent it fully. Understanding children’s experiences of work through the use of qualitative research allows for rich description, flexibility and reflection. Recognition of the lack of social agency children have in society also necessities research approaches that bring to the forefront the lived experiences that children are having.

Children as well as adults are shaped by the interactions around them and the learnings and cultures they are a part of. This social construction of reality is unique to all of us. Vgotsky (1978) described this social constructivism by acknowledging that what we as human beings are and believe are not fashioned independently. We are a part of families, communities, cultures
and interactions. The learnings and experiences we encounter throughout our lives will influence our perceptions and understandings of the world. Societally, children may not have been viewed as having informative useful input to add to the development and regulation of work realities they are a part of but this does not mean they do not have thoughts, views, experiences and opinions of what constitutes useful and effective work. These understandings are as valuable a consideration as are those of adult workers.

Children’s involvement in social research with their 'own voice' is undergoing fundamental change. The recognition of children as a minority group and the ensuing status this gives to their expression of voice and agency is more apparent now than in the past. Children’s legal rights and children’s political movements are also gaining more prominence (Bessell, 2011; Mason and Hood, 2011). This inclusion of children’s experiences and perspectives of the world must also include their interpretations and experiences of the work world.

**Ethnography and Children**

In this research I used critical ethnography and visual ethnography approaches. As a research tool, ethnography uses “in depth analytical description and interpretation of naturally occurring behaviour within a culture or social group” (McMillan, 2000, p.255). Ethnography uses interviews, field notes and observations along with analysis to gather and understand the lived realities of its participants in a cultural context. A recognized strength of ethnography lies in its capacity to be rich in the descriptions of cultures or lived realities of individuals, groups or communities. “The job of the ethnographer then becomes the description and interpretations of the meanings particular groups of people (cultures) make from their interactions with the world around them” (Mitchell, 2007, p.61).
I used a series of interviews, discussions and provided photography opportunities for children to understand their work lives. In all, 28 children from ages 9-16 years of age were interviewed (a chart follows later in this chapter). From those 28 interviews, 15 children also completed photo images and an additional interview to discuss their images.

The use of critical ethnography in this research study is important. “Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (Madison, 2012, p.7). Critical ethnography is trans-disciplinary in nature. It is informed by the disciplines of anthropology, history, philosophy, education, political science, and sociology, among others (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography differs from ethnography is in its stance or purpose. “Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it” (Thomas, 1993, p.4).

I recognize various forms of oppression and exclusion of children’s meaningful input into many realms of their social lives. My recognition of this oppression is interconnected to a belief that this marginalization of children is unjust and requires change.

In bringing to light the meanings and interpretations of groups of marginalized people, critical ethnography plays a role in bringing forth “emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice”(Madison, 2012, p.5). “By providing deeper understandings of injustice, critical ethnography can force attention to issues that have been previously ignored or silenced; consequently, we unsettle another layer of complicity” (Madison, 2012, p.6). As a methodology, critical ethnography is also frequently lauded for its pedagogical or educational nature (Berry, 2011). I believe there is much for society to learn about just and equitable work places for children from children and, through my research, children have unequivocally voiced this desire
to provide input and commentary on workplace involvement and design from both a practical and policy perspective.

**Visual ethnography**

Visual ethnography or visual accounts seek to provide additional forms of insight into a culture being studied over and above conventional methods. Visual ethnography is based on pictorial representations of an individual’s interpretations of her/his experiences or life events. “Images can provide researchers with a different order of data and more important, an alternative to the way we have perceived data in the past” (Prosser, 1998, p.1). Visual ethnography seeks to provide insight into social life through the use of visual images. Forms of visual ethnography include films, and photography (Pink, 2005).

In previous research work I have completed with children using photography (Williams, 2003), I have found the capacity of photos to elicit rich and descriptive data from children a tremendously effective research tool. Photography allows an individual to choose what is of value, importance, and relevance. The use of photography as a form of visual ethnography especially with children can provide researchers visual opportunities into a world they are no longer a part of as an adult. Mizen (2005) discusses the value of photography as a means to “generate new forms of evidence which add to, complement and perhaps challenges existing sources of knowledge of children’s working lives” (p.125).

Since the 1990s, researchers have recognized that “photographic and video images can act as a force that has a transformative potential for modern thought, culture and society, self-identity, memory and social science itself” (Pink, 2007, p.17).
Photography can support discussions in which words and descriptions may or may not come easy. Photography as a research tool with children is an effective and rewarding experience for both the children and the research approach. Review of the photographs taken by children in this study provides rich and descriptive insight not only about the photos children took but also about their general thoughts on work and the meaning of work in their lives.

Overview of research design

In qualitative research, researchers “begin the study with some idea about what data will be collected and the procedures that will be employed, but a full account of the methods is given retrospectively after all the data has been collected” (McMillan, 2000, p.255). Recognizing the evolving nature of qualitative ethnographic research, I provide a brief overview of this research design steps. I follow this with more comprehensive details on each step.

Research design steps:

1. Comprehensive selected review of literature prior to the collection of research data from participants. The literature review consists of: children and labour practices/inclusion globally, nationally and provincially, inclusion of research perspectives of children in policy and governance as it pertains to child labour.

2. Completion of Royal Roads Ethics Review regarding research involving human subjects.

3. Contact and discussions with select child and youth centered organizations, government departments, schools and other recreational organizations serving children regarding distribution of invitation to children to participate in this research study.
4. Potential research participants contacted by phone or email, consent forms and discussion with participants and guardians (in person wherever possible).

5. Conduct semi-structured interview with participants. Member checking occurred throughout. Cameras provided to children wishing to partake in visual ethnography component of research. Timeline detailed along with providing information on privacy limitations on photos.

6. Collection of cameras from children participating in visual ethnography study. Informal discussions regarding the process and experience of using the camera and obtaining photos.

7. Develop photos, conduct second interview with research participants who engaged in photography work for photo elicitation interview.

8. Initial data analysis.

9. Research participants provided with an update and access to research information is posted on a website. At the conclusion of the study another update will be forwarded to participants and if interest is noted, a meeting will be held with research participants to discuss the outcomes of the research.

10. Dissemination of research results through conferences, non-profit and government presentations, media releases, and academic publishing venues.

Data/Literature review

I have conducted a selective and ongoing review of literature throughout this research with a focus on: children’s employment and legal and safety issues, the lack of inclusion of children in
work research and the lack of children’s opportunity for democratic inclusion in some sectors of
daily life—namely employment.

**Ethics review completion**

Royal Roads University has in place principles, practices and procedures that must be followed
to conduct research involving human subjects. An ethics application was completed prior to the
start of this research project and all ethical practices and procedures were followed in gathering
this information.

**Data Collection: Interviews**

In this research study I used individual interviews as the primary source of data collection. I
asked children for permissions to audio tape them while going through a series of questions. As
noted earlier, the interviews were held in recreation centres, coffee shops or school offices.
Interviews provide the opportunity for “greater depth and richness of information. In face to face
interviews, the interviewer can observe nonverbal responses and behaviors which may indicate
the need for further questioning to clarify verbal answers” (McMillan, 2000, p.166). I used semi
structured questions and had the option of reformulating open-ended questions that had a specific
intent and purpose with regards to learning more about children’s work experiences.

A good interview requires several skills on the part of the interviewer. These include
good listening skills, empathy, objectivity, flexibility and others but interviewing children adds a
number of additional dimensions to the interview. Trust, appropriate location, effective
communication, creativity and diversity are also necessities (Fargas-Malet, & McSherry, &
Larkin & Robinson, 2010). An awareness of power dynamics and adult centric approaches must
also be considered when interviewing children. Children’s competence and understanding of
childhood are different than adults’ and attention to and inclusion of their perspectives in effective interviewing is crucial.

In this research, a general discussion of why research was being gathered was necessary with the research participants. There was a high degree of surprise by the children in this study regarding being asked to contribute to the research. The majority of the participants in the study had never been formally involved in research before. A number of the children offered to do additional interviews and take part in additional research if I needed them to. Many commented on enjoying the experience. Children, who chose to take part in second interviews after completing photos of “work understandings” were also audio taped.

The children’s interest in talking about the photographs they took when taking part in this second set of interviews appeared to be an easier discussion for some. Children could focus and discuss their photography and tell me the stories and reasons for why they took the photos and what these meant to them. This was also their second interview so they had experience of what the interview process was like and appeared more relaxed with the taping and questions.

I did find that time was an issue for many children both in coming to the interviews and in agreeing to take part in the second part of the research. I comment more on challenges with commitment and accessing research participants in a further section in this chapter.

In qualitative research, interviews serve as a key component in best trying to understand participants and in some capacity our own reactions and understandings as researchers. Ongoing reflexivity and member checking with research participants is vital in ethnography and must be extra carefully attended to when interviewing children. Challenges with interviewing include; interviewee articulation and involvement, researcher bias, researcher skill, location and recording
of the interview. Additionally, while interviews can be extraordinary sources of information they are also “inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically and contextually bound” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p.695). It is imperative that interviewers act as a “neutral medium through which information is transmitted” (McMillan, 2000, p.167).

The issue of informed consent also has influence on the interview. Informing children of rights and participation options can empower children with understanding their own choices. Ethical research practices also require consent of parents or guardians for children’s involvement. These consents can influence children’s choices in research, the degree of participation and discussion they choose to engage in and numerous other power imbalance issues (Harwood, 2010, Kellett, 2010). Therefore, clearly articulated understandings of consent had to be conveyed and were confirmed with children and guardians/parents.

Children’s opinions on research and interviews, like adults’ opinions, are varied. Malcolm Hill (2006) describes children’s perspectives on research and their involvement in an extensive study he conducted in 2006 in the United Kingdom. Hill found children expressed no set preference for the form of research used with them but did have some consistent comments regarding research approaches.

These approaches centred on:

1. fairness (as many children and viewpoints possible are solicited)
2. effectiveness (research of beneficial use to children);
3. choice (allowing alternate forms of expression and choice for children involved in the research);
4. openness (ensuring clarity to children about the effects of the research and the limitations of the research;)

5. satisfaction (comfortable experiences and if possible fun;)

6. respect (commitment to children’s rights and opinions and awareness of and minimization of the power dynamic of adults).

Visual ethnography: Photography

Traditional ethnography involves interviewing and the use of oral communication. This approach may work well with older children or with children who are particularly articulate but alternate methods need to be considered when working with all children. In my research approach photography served as an alternate method in accessing meaning making from children in addition to oral interviews. The importance of creative and alternate ways to enable children to share their knowledge is crucial in doing any research with children (Mason, & Hood, 2011).

There are a number of ways to approach using photography with children in visual ethnography. In this research, I provided children with their own disposable cameras and thus put children into the role of both “windows to the world” and “windows to identity,” two frames of reference discussed by Yates (2010) in her work with children and photography. Putting children into a frame of “windows to the world” provides children with the opportunity to selectively choose the knowledge or information they wish to convey about their involvement in the work realm. The social settings, things or events that hold meaning for them in their lives, visual descriptions of good and bad work are all options within this “windows to the world” approach.
At the same time as expressing their view of their work worlds through photography, children receive from “windows to identity” an understanding of themselves. Yates (2010) recognizes this as “means of accessing the inner life and perspectives of the participants” (p.283). This approach acknowledges as well the value of participants in discussing why they have chosen certain images to photograph and of what value and what meaning these images have to them. I believe this formed a significant and thoughtful addition to understanding children’s work experiences.

Ultimately the inclusion of a second methodological approach in this research can serve not only as a creative means of engaging with children’s visual articulations of work but also serve as an additional method of triangulation in the research. Mizen (2010) explains in his photography work with working children that “through their photographs the children had not only given us graphic confirmation of what they had already told us, but their photographs served to advance significantly our appreciation of what they were actually doing” (p.128).

Previous research work I have done with both children and adults has certainly demonstrated the value in using photography as another research window to better understand perspectives from research participants. I completed research with children to gauge their meanings of place and connection within a neighborhood community (Williams, 2003).

This research project utilized action research and photography to document places that had significance for children in a lower income neighborhood in western Canada. The children identified through interviews and photographic images, community attributes that respected the environment, encouraged security and safety, supported healthy development and were attuned to the physical as well as affective senses. Research confirmed the value of the photography
inclusion in accessing additional appreciation of children’s viewpoints on the world they are a part of. This is most certainly evident as well in this work research completed with children.

The challenges with visual ethnography include: recognizing some ethics requirements must also be met here including what can and cannot be photographed (Harper, 2005); lack of researcher control over what actually is captured on film by the children; anonymity; no harm or risk to children; and obtaining permission to use photos produced by the children (Mizen, 2010). Children in this research were advised and committed to not taking photos of individual’s faces and doing their best to remove any specific identifiable information about their location.

**Research sample**

In this research study, I selected participants based on purposive sampling. “Purposive sampling is used to select individuals who will be most informative. It is not intended to be representative of a larger population” (McMillan, 2000, p. 258). I encountered some significant difficulty in accessing children for this research study. I contacted via telephone and email over 75 youth and child serving agencies in Alberta. These contacts included: non-profit groups, church groups, government departments, schools, municipal recreation programs, sports organizations, federally funded youth programs and others.

What became an ongoing issue was the lack of interest and follow up from the adults who worked within these youth serving organizations to return phone calls, to follow through on commitments, to provide even the least amount of opportunity to receive and/or provide information brochures with contact information for children and their parents about the research. What was particularly disturbing in this was the number of direct child and youth serving organizations who distinguish themselves in the “market” of services as providers with active
connections to children and youth, who could find no children to contact. This was an incredibly time consuming and distressing component of my research.

Children and youth on the other hand were very straightforward with wanting to become involved or not in this research. If I could cross the hurdles of adults wishing to support or promote the research at all, children were quick to accept or decline. Children encountered time issues as well in getting to the interviews; many relied on adults transporting them and on a number of occasions, adults had more pressing issues and cancelled interviews for their children. One of the most trying occasions of this occurred with a child who was employed in an operation managed by her parent and was required to work a shift at the last minute by her parent. The child’s inability to come to an interview I had travelled six hours to get to was disappointing. A tearful participant called me on my cellphone to advise me of this recent event/decision. It was for me a reflection of many conversations on lack of interest or commitment I had encountered from so many adults regarding the importance of children’s perspectives and contributions.

**Purposive sampling in research**

The use of purposive sampling in this study allowed for participants from all sectors and geographic areas of Alberta to contribute to this research. I was fortunate enough to have twenty-eight children from all over Alberta representing a wide diversity of ages, gender, and cultural, economic and geographic diversity contributing to this research.

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Participant selection criteria were based on:

- Working child in Alberta between the ages of nine to sixteen years.

- A minimum of four months of work experience—did not have to be continuous with one employer.

**Considerations in data analysis**

“Ethnographic researchers describe and analyze the culture sharing group and make an interpretation about the pattern seen and heard” (Creswell, 2002, p.491). I transcribed interviews from participants and initially looked for key meanings through the interview transcripts and then developed central themes related to behavior, beliefs and attitudes. I printed the first set of transcripts and cut participant quotations out and grouped them into the key themes on flip charts. I decreased and amalgamated themes and moved quotations over a period of a number of weeks while I continued to review the transcripts and went back and listened to interview
excerpts. My intent was to come up with patterns or themes that were linked together. I printed a
second set of transcripts and began coding them alpha numerically to more specific themes. I
prepared frequency charts and compared the coding frequency charts with my flip chart theme
coding. I looked for linkages similarly or divergently. I considered respectfully broader themes
related to this research that had been raised in my literature review.

With the photographic images, I had reviewed the photographs with the research
participants who had taken them. I looked for themes and reviewed recordings of the individual
interviews as well as the photography interviews to cross check for themes. I had member
checked frequently within the research to ensure children’s perspectives were accurately
observed and that their insights were fully expressed.

At the same time as I began analysis on the work interview transcripts, I also began
working with the photographic images. I used the printed copies of the photographs from
participants and looked for themes and consistencies between the discussions, themes and
images. Photographs were not coded but were grouped into themes on the flipcharts along with
quotation excerpts from the transcripts. I listened to the interviews from the photographs again
while placing/sorting the photos into themes.

My analysis and synthesis in this multi-step process allowed me to move forward in
considering the larger implications of this research. I developed a number of conclusions and
recommendations both practical and research related which I discuss in my recommendation
chapter.
Ethical considerations

In all research studies, ethical policies and procedures are vital to ensure respect, minimization of harm and maximization of benefits to the participants involved in the research. Royal Roads University follows principles set out in the Tri-Council Policy statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. My research complied with these principles and was approved by the ethics review board of the University prior to beginning my work.

Three additional considerations need to be addressed with the use of ethnography in this study. First, recognizing the adult centric view of research is an important consideration in conducting research with children. As has been discussed in this chapter, several strategies were employed to ensure meaningful inclusion of children. Accessing and inviting contributions from children in research requires researchers “tailoring … methods of research to children's cultures of communication” (Mason and Hood, 2011, p.493). My primary and follow up questions were tailored to individual children’s comprehension.

Secondly, how we hear and speak about data is an important consideration in any research but particularly in critical ethnography. Because critical ethnography approaches research from an emancipatory stance, the language of data and in its interpretation is crucially important in not further alienating marginalized populations. “How we translate what we have heard into a set of messages for an audience, gives the researcher the power to define and transmit reality” (Thomas, 1993, p.45). Reflexivity, flexibility and researcher awareness are important strategies here that I continuously employed. “Critical ethnography is especially susceptible to the need for flexibility, because the questions that are most interesting may not be revealed until considerable background data emerges” (Thomas, 1993, p.35). Thomas advocates
a number of approaches to address issues of reflexivity in critical ethnography. To begin with, role distance between researcher and research participant is important as is an awareness of my subjectivity, my objectivity, and my deep personal attachment to critical research.

Thomas (1993) further suggests the use of two primary reflective techniques: a truth quotient in the research which is an examination of your own value systems and how this can influence the study; and an examination of how the research study addresses social injustices and implications for action. I believe these are sound and useful approaches that I incorporated throughout my research. I do this through considering my own value systems and my concerns regarding children’s opportunity for voice in society to address their non-inclusion in democratic life. I listened and paid very close attention to all of the questions and responses in my research and I was very aware of children’s expressions and comments regarding voice and desire for inclusion in society. I am also acutely aware of the difficulty I encountered in actually accessing children for this study through adults lack of time, interest and support for children to be included in research. I believe this was active display of one of my central concerns about giving children meaningful input into democratic daily life.

Madison (2012) reiterates the strength of reflexivity by noting “when we turn back reflexively we are accountable for [our] own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation” (p.7). The strength in reflexivity is in acknowledging that research and its inherent opinions and biases must be open to scrutiny; we researchers must be held accountable for our work and our research relationships. The recognition of the social construct of the research, the role of the researcher and the lack of agency of children are important aspects of the reflexivity process in any critical ethnographic research and especially poignant in research with children. I believe communication and
discussion have all played an important role in ensuring reflexivity throughout this research. Further, I believe the design and approaches proposed in this research were both flexible and reflexive.

Finally, informed consent, while also a requirement in all ethically approved research, also takes on additional dimensions in critical ethnography and research with children. Ensuring that children understand the context of informed consent and their freedom to withdraw from research at any point is important (Mason and Hood, 2011). I ensured this information was conveyed to the research participants throughout the research study.

**Limitations of the study**

Critical ethnography is not value free; reflexivity and positionality are crucial epistemological features of this research methodology. Reflexivity as noted by Berry is “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal the deep connections between the writer and her or his subject” Goodall (as cited in Berry, 2011, p.166). This ability to turn back and re-think and re-evaluate perspectives, actions, theories, self, is vitally important in ethnography as the method frequently comes under criticism here (Smith and Pangspa, 2007, Berry, 2011). While I have discussed this at length in this chapter, I feel ongoing conscious attention and the various checks I have noted in this study helped to ensure a high degree of reflexivity for myself as a researcher.

Other challenges to the critical ethnography methodological approach include authenticity and power dynamics when representing participants (Mitchell, 2007, Smith and Pangspa, 2007), and the perception of static social systems or people. Advocates of critical ethnography again turn to reflexivity and positionality (discussed earlier) as a guiding force in
authentic research and representation (Thomas, 1993, Madison, 2012). Furthermore, access to the field in both participant observation and interviewing can be a challenge in ethnographic research and, in addition to permissions, permits and approval, working with children will require additional consent and safety considerations. I believe my planning here addressed any challenges in this area. Children were interviewed in public, easily accessible interview sites that allowed for private discussion.

**Dissemination of results**

I will present research findings to appropriate conferences, in journal articles, with government bodies and meetings, school or community meetings to advance the dissemination of the research findings. Where appropriate I will consider releases of general information from the research, always protecting the identity of the research participants and adhering to ethical guidelines and requirements.

**Concluding comments**

Thomas (1993, p.71) notes “If critical ethnography is about anything, it is about freedom from social repression and a vision of a better society”. Ultimately I hope this research project provides deep insights into the work experiences of children in Alberta. Research empowers children to consider what they want from any experience and I found this particularly true with respect to work done by children. They were interested, engaged and thoughtful participants in the research and proud to talk about their work.

I hope that the juxtaposition of critical theory and critical ethnography with inquiry into children's work raises thoughtful questions for other children, parents, researchers and policy makers about inclusion and voice in progressive societies.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings obtained from interviews with 28 children aged 9-16 years of age regarding their work experiences. From those 28 interviews, 15 children also completed photo images and an additional interview to discuss their images. Results from interviews and excerpts from visual ethnography work completed by the children are included in this chapter.

**Key contexts to consider when reviewing the findings.**

Many of the children in this research have had or currently have multiple jobs. Jobs that these children identified having done during or prior to this research are noted in the visual ethnography findings of this chapter.

Reimbursement or pay for jobs these children have done varies widely from minimum or better wage, to being paid under the table, occasionally helping out without pay or receiving a good or service instead of cash (e.g. free riding lessons or lunch). Internships (e.g., ski instructors, and camp counsellors) usually had a period of time where children were learning and helping out and they were not paid until they had achieved some form of certification in the job. This certification period varied widely from a few days to a year or several seasons. The length of time of this internship period was determined by the employer, not the children themselves.

All of the children’s comments in this research are identified under pseudonyms- most often chosen by the children themselves. The ages and genders of the children identified in the research have not been changed. All of the research interviews were conducted in recreation centres, coffee shops or school offices.
And a final small note, one of the 28 participants in this research was called away before completing his interview with me. I have included his limited responses and comments in the research where his answers were complete.

**Eight central findings emerged from this study:**

1. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study have little or no knowledge regarding laws or safety regulations pertinent to their age (26 of 28 participants [93%]). Further to this, the vast majority of participants had not learned anything about safety or employment laws relevant to their age from either school [89%] or the workplace [93%].

2. Sixty-three percent of children involved in this research had been injured at their workplace. Forty-eight percent of these children classified their workplace injury as minor, and seven percent of these children injured at the workplace classified their injury as major. Twenty-six percent of the children interviewed in this research also noted they felt unsafe at work. The feeling of being unsafe at work was most often voiced by female workers.

3. The vast majority of children involved in this research believed that government should give them voice on their involvement in workplace conditions, laws, opportunities and options. (24 of 27 participants [89%]).

4. Most of the children in these jobs have primarily learned to do their jobs on their own. For those who have had assistance, most of this has come from coworkers or friends. A minority of the children employed in this research have had active mentorships or training provided from their employers.
5. For the majority of children in this research, a good job is defined as being respected, connected to your workplace and enjoying what you do. While money is important, it is not the most significant factor in having a good job.

6. Bad jobs for a number of the children in this research would have elements of inequity, been intimidating and had pay or hours issues. Safety was also noted as a concern in bad jobs.

7. Almost all of the children involved in this research had also been active volunteers by contributing back to their communities in volunteer work of some kind.

8. One hundred of the children involved in this research study had advice and information they felt was valuable to mentor other children starting work.

The following is my detailing of the findings in this research on the work experiences of children involved in this study. The emphasis on rich descriptions (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005) and the use of expressive quotations from the interviews conducted with the children is intended to provide you with the opportunity to understand the work world realities and concerns of these children in Alberta from their perspectives. Visual ethnographic images are presented in the latter part of this chapter.

Finding 1: The overwhelming majority of participants have little or no knowledge regarding laws or safety regulations pertinent to their age (26 of 28 participants [93%]). Further to this, the vast majority of participants did not learn anything about safety or employment laws relevant to their age from either school [89%] or the workplace [93%].

A significant and prevailing finding from this research study is that children had little to no knowledge of laws or safety as it pertained to their involvement in the workforce (26 of 28 participants [93%]). This finding was consistent with both younger research participants: 9-year-
olds as well as 16-year-olds and both male and female participants. This lack of knowledge from the children in this study was consistently expressed as: no, none, no idea. Other participants provided more content:

No not really. No one tells young people, not been told, not taught in school. They (school) tell you how to do resume, but not about law or safety, nothing practical (Hope, F-15).

I know equality, moral stuff but not law. Haven’t learned yet (Malcolm, M-15).

Nothing from school yet. I am in grade 9 (Adrian, M-14).

Safety (they) should be paying more attention. Teachers at school said suck it up…have seen unsafe conditions, school and people handled poorly (Kevin, M-16).

I rely on others who have hired me to make sure it is safe (Tom, M-13).

When children could not articulate any work or safety laws, they frequently came up with their own descriptions of safety or work laws relative to the context they were working in:

No not really. Told if I am babysitting, if kids don’t listen I can’t hit them or anything (Nicole, F-13).

Know I should be paid what I was promised that’s all (Carli, F-13).

I am watchful when out walking all the dogs to not be pulled onto the road. Fell bad once when dogs tried to take off on me, when I was weak. I manage dogs by treats and being boss (Nolan, M-12).

Know when out working land or livestock that neighbors use rifles a lot so when that happens we stay inside. Careful too with animals- bears and cougars (Tara, F-10).

Earrings etc. not allowed at kitchen, wash hands, use apron (Keowna, F-16).

Know not to talk to coaches alone—we go in pairs (Shannon, F-14).

Baseball parents not liking your calls, arguing, yelling at you- even coaches- better to be in a group (John, M-14).

Not to be in charge, when not supposed to if you don’t know what you are doing (Jeremy M-16).
While children were unsure about who should be helping them with learning about law and safety, they did know that someone should be helping them or teaching this to them. Concerns here were extensive and included pay, hours, supervision, type of work and safety. The “someone” who should address this frequently fell under the generic “government” umbrella:

If we were taught from the start it would be easier for us, wouldn’t be so many injuries at the workplace (Hope, F-15).

Kids our age, their body can’t always fix hurt body parts, make work environment safe (Nolan, M-12).

Hours should be reasonable, be more strict on this-no one checks, serving alcohol no one checks- abuse of this (Michaela F-16).

Fast food, not safe for kids to do-anyone could get sick from food. Kids should have to take food safety course, not thrown into work environments where they don’t know what they are doing (Shannon, F-14).

Make sure kids are not working too much so they can go to school. Should be paid based on the job, no difference in ages, pay fair based on quality of the work and be fair (Tom, M-13).

Make sure they pay you (Rob, M-11).

Finding 2. Sixty-three percent of children involved in this research have been injured at their workplace. Forty-eight percent of these children classified their workplace injury as minor, and seven percent of these children injured at the workplace classified their injury as major.

Movie theatre-slippery and thin stairs. Fell bad, bruised and fell off stairs. Other worker got concussion after slip on same stairs but no time off for us, no help (John, M-14).

Kid shot puck at my ankle and fractured it while I was on ice, got pulled off and taken to emergency. Shattered ankle and in cast for seven weeks. I lost about 600-700 dollars, no insurance or pay. Still scared (Shannon, F-14).

Cut self on blade at deli at work- got to leave early—not paid though. (Michaela, F-16)

Hauling big, heavy stuff, worried sometimes it’s too heavy. Have been burned from fuel, cuts, and aches (Dave, M-13).
Sometimes the horses got moody. Scar on elbow for when I had to jump off horse, toe stepped on but I had my cowgirl boots on-so not too bad (Lindsey, F-16).

Twenty-six percent of the children interviewed in this research also noted they felt unsafe at work. Girls in the study expressed this as scared and it was expressed more often. Boys in the study expressed these safety issues as concerns:

Weekends work till 1 or 2am. Work late at night- better when going home with my brother. Feel safer if I can stay longer (Hope, F-15).

Paper route in bad part of town….older guys scared me, seized up, and just kept walking hoping they wouldn’t talk to me (Samantha, F-15).

We did garbage runs at night in theatre down hallways in scary part of building. Homeless people sleeping in theatres so worried about seeing this-all of us felt the same way. Shifts late so to get to car late at night was scary too (Steph, F-15).

Have to know people you are working for...carry some protection on you, being safe (Bart, M-13).

Dangerous kids outside that aren’t being dealt with outside the building where you have to go to clean up (John, M-14).

**Finding 3: The vast majority of children involved in this research believe that government should give them voice on their involvement in workplace conditions, laws, opportunities and options (24 of 27 participants [89%]).**

Being asked to participate in this type of research was a new experience for many of the participants. Children were well aware of their contributions to the labour market. They were also acutely aware of the fact that they were not asked for their contributions and opinions in most sectors of their lives. For the children in this research study, listening to their voice and the belief that they have important contributions to make beyond just their labours was expressed by 24 of the 28 participants [89%]. They saw inequities not only in working conditions but also in providing meaningful input regarding conditions of their involvement in the work world.
Children rightly saw themselves as a workforce that needs input and experience and that government needs to act on this:

Listen to what young people have to say, ask young people where they want to work, if there are reasons we can’t work somewhere tell us, but we should do jobs that aren’t so limited and low down (Lindsey, F-16).

Cool sometimes to have jobs but sometimes can get bad experiences, hard to do it so advice would help (Bart, M-13).

Problems with no experience or too young but how do we get opportunity then? (Daphne, F-16)

Government should be asking; we are the future. Teenagers and kids are used a lot to help with work so future generations should have say. Government Education Minister came to our school just for pictures-don’t like that (Kaila, F-13).

We learn about the charter of rights to not discriminate based on age, religion, race or gender so why are they (government) doing that? (Tom, M-13)

Children spoke specifically about wanting learning or apprenticing opportunities that gave them real skills in the work world. They were acutely aware of the limitations of the experiences or opportunities they were receiving to advance their learnings about potential careers or work:

Offer jobs that build towards what people want to do in university. Need to get experience but hard to get job if no one will give you experience. More trades, sciences (Joe, M-16).

Jobs they think kids are old enough to do should be slowly introduced to them, to job and to work, slowly show kids what to do (Mike, M-14).

Stupid fast foods or grocery stores are all that’s available to us-should have more interesting work that we would actually like to do. Teenagers are impatient so why get the low end of the stick because we are young. We should have cool learning about things, jobs, apprenticing things. Don’t have to do the full job but even the small things you learn along the way e.g. mechanics. We don’t get to learn about stuff we would like to do (Lindsey, F-16).
Kids my age should be able to do more active stuff like helping with tradesmen, carpenter, and mechanics. Helping with these people while young e.g. changing oil so we learn while we are young (Dave, M-13).

Listen to kids and see what they want to work at, have time to experience work (Keowna, F-16).

Embedded in children’s requests for governments to build opportunities for their input, were also keenly felt concerns about understanding work life through a child’s perspective. Assuming an understanding of children’s needs or desires by adults without asking or listening to children limits adults’ opportunity to hear what children actually have to say about work:

Never asked me at all in high school about what we do or don’t want to do. No choice in work experiences- got put in places and had to stay. I could have had some choice (Kevin, M-16).

My school work experiences of helping out in the school’s business printing press- don’t get paid but get credits for this. Took time off of school to do extra printing stuff for school-they asked me to do this...they make money off of printing (Michaela, F-16).

Unfair that we don’t get safety, training. I would change that. Lots of kids don’t speak up for themselves cause afraid no one will listen. We don’t have a voice that matters (Hope, F-15).

Want to be part of it…excited if something would occur...hearing our voice, why we like workplaces, describing what is working (Malcom, M-15).

Give kids a second chance; kids try hard but if you aren’t kids you don’t know how they are feeling or how hard they are working. If you fire them they think they have lost everything, give kids second chances (Nicole, F-13).

Finding 4. Most of the children in these jobs have primarily learned to do their jobs on their own. Some have expressed this as “learning as they go along.” There have been mixed responses on whether or not this was a good experience or not.

I learned by doing it myself, helping, learn as I go along (Adrian, M-14).

At first learned by doing...getting experience helps you (Bart, M-13).
I learned some from watching others at ‘Fast Food place.’ Then I learned more once I had more hours there (Mike, M-14).

I learned from myself originally while volunteering. I’m good at computers so I set up the system on my own (Malcom, M-15).

Help people who have jobs get more comfortable with work assigned. Need help so not embarrassed (Jeremy, M-16).

Basically attended baby whenever he cried or needed something. Didn’t know when he was hungry so sometimes force fed him basically I gave him food and stuff whenever I wanted some (Samantha, F-15).

Just came to me. Kids have needs so you try to figure out what they need (Kaila, F-13).

For those children who have had assistance, most of this has often come from coworkers, friends or family.

Computer skills I learned from another girl. Horse riding was a long process. Learned about the horses by being around them and then from my friend’s family (Lindsey, F-16).

I learned from my brother. I basically just copied the stuff he used to do (Tara, F-10).

I knew how to ski so learned other stuff from coworkers. At the shop I learned from coworkers, sometimes little instructions along the way (Steph, F-15).

At the movie theatre- coworkers taught me how to do everything. (John, M-14)

Shoveling was natural; my dad taught me the rest (Tom, M-13).

A minority of the children employed in this research have had active mentorships or training provided from their employers and this has been a good experience for those children. It is important to note that, when children have been provided with training, it has not always been paid training.

At clinic, I had a 2-day long course but I was not paid for this (John, M-14).

I went to an entrepreneurship camp and then helped my mom (Keowna, F-16).

My boss taught me. I also learned from the customers (Daphne, F-16).
I went to a 2-day clinic, and then you go out with an experienced youth and are watched for a few games (Shannon, F-14).

One year of training by shadowing another instructor (not paid). At shop first month is training, lots of memorization and then training as merchandise comes in. And kept up to date. It’s very well put together (Joe, M-16).

Finding 5. For the majority of children in this research a good job is being respected, connected to your workplace and enjoying what you do. Keeping busy, being happy are very important elements as well of good work.

Like getting my hands dirty and doing stuff, like outdoors (Mike, M-14).

Good praise and you know you did it your hardest. Persons saying good job and working for them again (Bart, M-13).

Respectful, everyone cooperates well. You want to do good work and are appreciated. Boss knows what and how you are doing and appreciates it (Malcom, M-15).

It’s the people who make the job. I like working with kids, the welcoming workplace, happy, talk to each other, cozy, not dreary (Steph, F-15).

People you like to talk to, a clean work place, a happy place (Michaela, F-16).

You can be around people or friends, always talking to people so you are not feeling left out (Jeremy, M-16).

While money is important, it is not the most significant factor in having a good job. Mentorship, exercise, independence, helping out others is important too.

Good exercise! Nice to have some money that’s earned by me (Daphne, F-16).

I wanted to be helpful. I knew the mom who needed the babysitter and I wanted to help out (Nicole, F-13).

Love of the game. I stay connected- extra cash too. I love teaching kids and want to be a role model (Shannon, F-14).

I enjoy it and it’s a family business. I’m helping and pitching in (Keowna, F-16).

I would do work if not paid --not as much but would help my dad. I would walk less dogs and would only walk my favorites. I would probably deliver papers only to my favorite houses (Nolan, M-12).
I like working for other people, help people, help people get back on their feet. It’s not all about the money but I do like getting paid (Carrie, F-9).

**Finding 6. Bad jobs for a number of the children in this research would have elements of inequity, been intimidating and had pay or hours issues. Safety was also noted as a concern in bad jobs.**

If you are overworked, underpaid, mean boss. Rundown buildings, unclean, nasty neighborhood (Kaila, F-13).

No safety, bad pay, sweatshop conditions (Hope, F-15).

Bad jobs have reputations—other workers have said things. Harmful situations or scared of getting hurt mentally or physically (Shannon, F-14).

Too much work to do, people watching everything you do. Some people just want some things done certain ways but don’t always know what they want (Adrian, M-14).

If you are not paid the right amount or they take hours away from you or won’t let you have time off (Carli, F-14).

Offensive, sexist rude. Pushed into things you don’t want to do, working with someone you know hates their job (Malcom, M-15).

Children were very cognizant of favoritism or the existence of cliques at work. These translated into bad experiences for the children who personally experienced them in the workplaces and were key factors in these children leaving these workplaces.

Bad coworkers who don’t treaty you fairly or bad bosses who don’t do anything (John, M-14).

Cliques with who liked who determining what jobs you got (Steph, F-15).

Cliques where jobs are unfair and there is favoritism (Michaela, F-16).

**Finding 7. The majority of the children involved in this research have also been active volunteers by contributing back to their communities in volunteer work of some kind (23 of**
27 participants [85%]). Children saw value in being connected to community, helping others out and doing things that were valuable but not always connected to money:

- Like helping out, like doing it myself, want to be known as a good person (Bart, M-13).
- Work just to help out. Money doesn’t matter. Help lots of people, show new things to people (Sarah, F-12).
- Like working with kids, happy to be outside, cozy welcoming (Steph, F-15).
- I learn by helping others (Adrian, M-14).
- Help out at the library, dusting shelves, cleaning and sorting books (Brian, M-15).
- I volunteered here to help out. A place I can contribute to, making a difference (Malcom, M-15).

Children also saw that the inequities in life needed larger interventions beyond themselves and work provided an opportunity to learn more about life realities whether paid or not:

- Get early experiences of life and understand how hard your parents have to work (Daphne, F-16).
- I do it to help out my dad (Nolan, M-12).
- Wanted to help out at the church (with childcare) (Kaila, F-13).
- Clean the church to help out (Lindsey, F-16).
- Government should be taking better care of people so many food banks, homeless (Kaila, F-13).
- I work to help mom around the house. I live there, eat there- so should help out with rent and food (Hope, F-15).

Finding 8. 100% of the children involved in this research study had advice and information they felt was valuable to mentor other children starting work. Some key considerations from children here from some of the oldest to youngest children in the study:
Try to find a job in a smaller shop. People are nicer, closer work environment- feels like extended family. All of us are friends; managers are close with us too (Joe, M-16).

Keep calm, don’t stress out and if you don’t know something ask and be diligent and don’t take breaks (Lindsey, F-16).

Don’t be shy. I’d be there if you needed it, relax and do it (Jeremy, M-16).

Be professional but add a bit of yourself to it. Not a robot so smile, follow the chain of command. Make sure your uniform is clean and well pressed; better to look professional, clean and well groomed (Hope, F-15).

Do the best you can do. Don’t act like you know it if you don’t. Work hard; don’t slack off after being there for a few months (Mike, M-14).

Be strong and reliable. You have to get a lot of work done, have good stamina (Adrian, M-14).

Have fun doing it, learn from your mistakes. Don’t take it as a negative if someone tells you what you do wrong, take it as learning (Shannon, F-14).

Pace yourself, don’t try to do work too quickly cause that’s when you end up hurting self. If childcare, know that you have quick reflexes (Tom, M-13).

I love giving advice-it makes me feel big and important-- so introduce yourself, work hard (Nicole, F-13).

Work carefully, know what you are doing. Try to get along (Dave, M-13).

Don’t be sloppy, look nice, be professional not lazy and stuff and first job try dog walking (Nolan, M-12).

Make sure they pay you in your own bank account (Rob, M-11).

Do it good, so you don’t get fired (Tara, F-10).

Don’t be mean, don’t let anyone in the house, lock the doors and be nice (Carrie, F-9).

**Findings from the Visual Ethnography**

Providing the option for children to take photos regarding their work offered an additional view and insight into their values, experiences and thoughts about their work. Fifteen of the twenty-eight research participants were involved in taking photos. Some of the children took only a few photos and some completed all 24 of the shots on their disposable cameras. Once the children finished taking their photos, I collected the cameras, had the photos developed and then did a
second interview with these children to discuss the photos. Any photos that identified individuals or workplaces were removed from the study. The photos represented a range of the children’s employment, ages and locations throughout Alberta.

Many of these second interviews with the children indicated that they were philosophical about why they thought these photos were important, what about work they liked, the tools they used, showing off things they had done and were proud of and a few of them showing me what work had allowed them to purchase for themselves. Most poignant about the interviews was the sense of pride from the children who had taken the photos, pride in their work and what they had accomplished. The photos supplement the research findings from the main study and supported the value children place in work and being respected and heard.
Visual Ethnography: Theme One: Work is Diverse

Many of the children in this research have had or currently have multiple jobs. Jobs that children in this research identified doing or have done include:

- Ski instructor, swim instructor, camp counsellor, horse wrangler,

- Hockey referee, baseball umpire, move concession staff, retail store staff,

- Waiter, waitress, cashier, cleaner, mechanics assistant, landscape assistant,

- Museum guide, bike repair, cook’s helper, bakery helper, playground leader,

- Rodeo grounds keeper, construction worker, moving assistant, farm workers,

- Youth centre staff, child care worker, babysitter, drama instructor,

- School bus attendant, snow shoveler, warehouse work, self-employed worker,

- Print assistant, newspaper/flyer carrier dog walkers, restaurant workers, tutor,

- Beauty salon assistant, produce grocery assistant, shelf stocker,

- Painting assistant, computer work
“Making friends with the dogs I walk” (Nolan, M-12).
“Main view of where I work. Family run business where everyone is treated as equals, as part of the family” (Joe, M-16).
“Taking care of the horses—feeding, water and catching him for the first time in a year!” (Tara, F-10).
“Going to the hay bales to feed the cows” (Mike, M-14).
“Kitchen I work in at youth centre” (Lindsey, F-16).
“Before the beginning of the game I have to check the nets for holes and make sure nets and pegs are in” (Shannon, F-14).
“Part of the route I do for papers...I do 42 houses 2x a week, use my bike” (Nolan, M-12).
“Vehicle repairs” (Mike, M-14).
“Preparing sandwiches for high tea” (Steph, F-15).
“The back of one of the boys I take care of... watching a movie together, we do fun things” (Carli, F-14).
“Checking on the calves.... when newly born we check on them every 3 hours” (Tara, F-10).
“The deli at night clean up...we keep it real clean” (Michaela, F-16).
“Getting ready for my landscape work” (Bart, M-13).
“Bringing in the cows” (Dave, M-13).
Visual Ethnography: Theme Two: Work requires the right tools

- From weed whackers, treats, aprons, wrenches, reflexes, stamina, patience,

- Fun, strong back, fitness, parks, cleaning stuff, shovels, good ingredients,

- Saddles, trucks, t shirts, black pants, good grooming, coworkers, bikes,

- Tractors, skates, whistles,

- And cowgirl boots
“Some of the tools we use for bikes. I have a lot of respect for small family businesses” (Joe, M-16).
“Second period at one of the games I refed, coaches arguing a call so we (refs) go over in pairs to talk to them—we have to have a witness, we always go in pairs” (Shannon, F-14).
“Working in the kitchen at the sink that is so low—hurts your back so much, we take turns” (Steph, F-15).
“One of the playgrounds I use for babysitting…like being outside with kids” (Nicole, F-13).
“You have to have the right tools; I take care of the tools” (Bart, M-13).
“Tractor I work with and on” (Dave, M-13).
“Some of the horses are teenagers—so bratty. You need good cowgirl boots...I love my boots” (Lindsey, F-16).
Visual Ethnography: Theme Three: Work is something I am proud of, important to me

- Work is often about those things you do that are important to you

- Work can be about working hard, being respected, being happy and feeling a sense of pride in what you have accomplished

- Oh and the rewards……. sometimes things; buying what you want or need… and many times about feelings; independent, taking care of myself, giving something back, doing things for friends, helping out my family
“Customer service pic from work locker room—it’s important to me too” (Michaela, F-16).
“The shed I helped to build” (Tom, M-13).
“The inside of the truck I bought with the money I made last summer” (Dave, M-13).
“Better view of truck I bought with summer earnings” (Dave, M-13).
“Making salad at youth centre with little kids...they follow me wherever I go - I see myself being involved with kids when I’m older” (Lindsey, F-16).
“Deli sandwich maker I scrubbed so hard, all this stuff stuck on it and I made it spotless—I wanted it spotless” (Michaela, F-16).
"Bikes I bought from my earnings" (Joe, M-16).
“I feel more confident this year, more practice, more games, the more yelled at....the more confident I have become” (Shannon, F-14).
“One of the first landscaping jobs I had was at this yard.... residents have changed a few times but I still have a job there” (Tom, M-13).
“The kids I take care of...we have fun” (Carrie, F-9).
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented key findings in this research study. Data from work interviews, photographic images and discussions of those images revealed research participants’ realities, enjoyment, concerns and hopes within their participation in the work world. By utilizing the participants’ own voices throughout this chapter, I hope to have accurately represented the realities and profoundly thoughtful insights of these children’s work experiences.

A key finding in this research was the willingness of children themselves to mentor and advise other children on how to fit into the work world. This is an important finding when so many of the children in this research have not been mentored or guided themselves. Children who were fortunate enough to have support and guidance in learning their work spoke strongly of how much they enjoyed their work and their jobs because of this.

A second finding in this research is the lack of knowledge children have regarding work or safety laws that pertain to them in their employment. Very few children had knowledge in this area. Children were unclear about where they should be learning this information (at school? at work? at home?). What is clear is that most of the children here have no idea what is considered safe, legal or responsible work for them and they are not receiving this information from anyone.

The third finding coincides with this lack of information on laws and safety as it pertained to their employment: a significant number of children have been injured at work and some seriously. Again children were unaware of and not provided with recourse when they were injured. Those sent home or unable to work were not compensated for their injury or lost time.

A fourth finding in this research was the desire for children to have their voices heard by government regarding the design, laws and conditions of their involvement in the work world.
Many of the children recognized their future power as voters and consumers and felt the
government should pay attention to this upcoming reality. Other children focused on equity and
fairness, with one participant specifically invoking charter rights and the hypocrisy of
government in not providing children with these rights. Many children also noted the poor
performance of schools in providing any practical support and not using work experience
programs well.

The fifth finding in this research noted that the majority of children have learned most of
how to do their job on their own or with secondary assistance being provided by friends or
coworkers. Guidance, support or training from workplace managers or bosses was infrequent and
inconsistent. Those children, who have had successful mentorship programs through their
workplace, spoke about the value of it to themselves and their understanding of work. A
cautions note here is that some of children who experienced internships are not paid during the
time they are learning. Many of the children reported very long internships where they assumed
the work of the job but were still considered in training and were not paid for a very long period
of time.

The sixth finding in this research was that for the majority of participants in this research,
good work and good jobs and workplaces were about being respected, being connected and
enjoying the work you did. Many of the children enjoyed keeping busy for a number of reasons
and while being paid was important, being respected (78%) and happy (74%) was of much more
importance to children than the wage (52%).
The seventh finding in this research recognized that bad jobs were about inequity in wages or hours, lack of respect, safety issues and unhappiness. Children also recognized and noted the damages of cliques and favoritism in workplaces.

The eighth finding in this research was that the majority of children involved in this research have also contributed time back to their communities in a volunteer capacity. The numbers are significant (85%) and reflect the desire of children to be active members of society.
Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to explore with a selected sample of working Alberta children (9-16 years of age), their views on meaningful work and work environments for children. Through the use of critical ethnography and visual ethnography methodologies, this research inquiry sought to give voice to a purposefully selected group of participants who were employed in Alberta. The children involved in this research included both genders, a variety of ages, cultural and economic backgrounds, urban, rural and suburban settings and a wide range of paid employment situations throughout the province.

Critical ethnography as a research approach comes with its own expectations and responsibilities. It begins “with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (Madison, 2012, p.5). I began this research with awareness from the literature and studies I had read, knowing that there were challenges for working children.

My research has provided insight into how a selected sampling of children in Alberta have described their work experiences and their concerns as a child worker. While this research has taken part in Alberta, Canada, I believe there are valuable insights here that might be applicable to other geographic locations.

Overview

In this research, I conducted interviews with 28 children on their work experiences and interpretations of meaningful work. For each of these interviews I met with the participants individually at a public place. I explained the format for the interview and the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point if they wanted to do so. I audio taped the interview. Interviews lasted from 20 to 60 minutes depending on the participant and the length of the
answers and discussion they had with me. Participants were offered opportunity to hear the audio recording back—some chose to do so, many did not.

I also offered the opportunity for participants to take part in the visual ethnography component of this research; fifteen children agreed to do so. Children used provided disposable cameras to photograph their work, tools or ideas around work. When the children completed their photographs they returned the cameras to me. I developed these photographs and then conducted an additional photo elicitation interview with each of these children.

All data in this research was coded, analyzed and organized first by research question, then by recurring themes. Themes identified in photograph interviews were cross referenced with themes identified in detailed work interviews of all participants.

This study was based on the following questions:

**Primary research questions:**

1. What is "good work" for children in Alberta based on children’s experiences? (Defined as nine to sixteen years of age).

2. What is “bad work” for children in Alberta based on their experiences?

3. Does this (good and bad work) vary between male and female children, among different age groups, among different socio-economic status groups and among geographic areas?

4. What constitutes a good work 'place' for children, according to children?

5. What constitutes a bad work ‘place’ for children, according to children?

6. How do children learn to do their work?

7. What is a typical workday for children?

8. Would children like to be involved in developing appropriate work for children in Alberta? If yes, how?
Sub questions: Politics and policy focus.

1. How does current Alberta work legislation for youth/children support or hinder the availability of good work for children?

2. What support/changes need to be in place in workplaces to support good work environments for children?

3. Do children want to be involved in developing workplaces beyond providing their labour? If yes how?

In the primary research questions, seven of the eight questions were largely satisfied by the findings presented in chapter four. Research question 7 on “what is a typical workday for children” had varied responses and comments from the children interviewed and there was no consistent theme outside of huge diversity in hours and tasks involved with performing their work. Elements of enjoying the work they do and good and bad work descriptions that came from this research question were combined with the findings from other similar research questions.

The sub questions in this research regarding good work environments and the interests of children in providing input into work contexts and legislation are addressed within the findings as well.

Within these research children did not disclose in any detail hazardous work they were performing. Certainly some of the work they were participating in raised safety concerns but hazardous work was not discussed.

Analysis and interpretations

In this chapter analysis, I describe and integrate findings from my research. My previous chapter organized data findings in narrative format to provide better access to children’s direct
responses throughout the research. In this chapter I provide analysis and interpretive understanding of these findings.

I have organized this chapter into three thematic sections. I have grouped interview responses from the work interviews as well as interview responses from the photography discussions into these sections. Data often move back and forth between these sections. For example, when a participant might talk about safety issues at their workplace, they also would talk about the need to belong and how hard it is to fit in when you don’t know what you are doing. Where it is possible, I break apart these comments into separate sections but I recognize the interrelationship of many of the discussions I had with the children and as such suggest some of the sections have some overlap.

Thematic sections

1. Safety and Employment Regulations.

Current legislation regarding employment conditions and safety for working children is not successful in preventing injury. Further, current distribution and sharing of existing employment information for children is not effective in providing knowledge to children about workplaces and workplace laws.


Mentorship, and menteeship are important aspects of children’s entry and success in the work world. There is currently not an effective mentorship system in Alberta for working children.

3. Voice and Inclusion.

Children’s voice and inclusion into the design, development and experience of work is of critical importance to children and is not occurring in Alberta. While adult workers have opportunity for
some voice and inclusion into employment arrangements through democratic representation-voting/electing, collective bargaining/union involvement, legislation input, and other community initiatives directed towards shaping some of the context of their work involvement, children do not have these opportunities.

My approach within the thematic sections is to provide a more layered synthesis of the research findings by looking for: a) connective pieces within interviews and photographs that reflect the lived experiences of the children in this research, b) literature consistencies, c) expected as well as unexpected relationships and connections, and d) findings that go beyond this initial research.

**Thematic Section 1: Safety and Employment Regulations**

Adequate information and education regarding safe work practices for child and teen workers is consistently a concern. Research studies on Canadian young workers have found the lack of knowledge for children and teens regarding safety and employment rights continues to be an issue (Schissel, 2011; Barnetson, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2009). This lack of knowledge was consistent with both younger children and older children in this study and reflected in both work and photographic interviews.

No none, nothing from school (Rob, M-11).

I know equality, moral stuff but not law. Haven’t learned yet (Malcom, M-15).

I rely on others who have hired me to make sure it is safe (Tom, M-13).

There is no mandatory requirement in employer orientation practices that require children receive an education advising them of their employment rights and the safety regulations that must be adhered to in their worksites. Safety checklists in Alberta must be completed by the
employer and the duty of assessment, disclosure and reporting of hazards, supervision and ongoing education is left at the discretion of the employer (Government of Alberta Employment 2015). The degree of actual information and knowledge children receive regarding their workplaces is unknown and unregulated. Children in this research indicated they had little training if any in this area.

And, consequently, children have one of the highest rates of work injuries while on the job. Numerous studies done in Canada discuss the higher rates and risks of injury for young workers. (Barnetson, 2009; Breslin, F.C., & Koehoorn, M., & Cole, D. C. 2008; McCloskey, 2008; Breslin, C. & Koehoorn, M., & Smith, P., & Manno, M.,2003. And, historically, Canadian children have faced long established patterns of injury or death at workplaces (Schissel, 2011; Rollings-Magnusson, 2009; McIntosh, 2000).

In this research, 63% of children noted they had been injured at the worksite. Major, minor and issues of safety in general were all discussed by children in this research.

Movie theatre-slippery and thin stairs. Fell bad, bruised and fell off stairs. Other worker got concussion after slip on same stairs but no time off for us, no help (John, M-14).

Kid shot puck at my ankle and fractured it while I was on ice, got pulled off and taken to emergency. Shattered ankle and in cast for seven weeks. I lost about 600-700 dollars, no insurance or pay. Still scared (Shannon, F-14).

Cut self on blade at deli at work- got to leave early—not paid though (Michaela, F-16).

Hauling big, heavy stuff, worried sometimes it’s too heavy. Have been burned from fuel, cuts, and aches (Dave, M-13).

We did garbage runs at night in theatre down hallways in scary part of building. Homeless people sleeping in theatres so worried about seeing this—all of us felt the same way. Shifts late so to get to car late at night was scary too (Steph, F-15).
So what’s going on?

Alberta has a long entrenched addiction to cheap labour sources. Alberta has been governed for over forty years by a neoliberal Conservative government intent on market-driven economics that have produced some of the highest disparities in income, increased social stratification and intensification of poverty (Parkland Institute, 2012). In May 2015, a New Democratic government was elected provincially and there is hope for change in both regulations and policies. But this hope for change is also coupled with a provincial economic decline amidst losses of natural resource revenue (Canadian Broadcasting News Calgary). Feedback from Alberta private industry on proposed increases to minimum wages have met resistance and increased discussion and lobbying from private industry for lower wages for youth (Canadian Broadcasting News Edmonton).

Barnetson (2009) believes government’s refusal to develop and enforce laws and regulations regarding child workers has served government’s and private industry’s best interests. Private industry has had an accessible and disposable labour force, and government can create the appearance of laws and regulations to protect children and youth, knowing resources and intent to protect are not enforced.

Schissel (2011) argues that, in addition to mixed conceptions of children as vulnerable needing protection or demons needing control, Canada has established an almost cultural norm of exploiting child labour. Children working for less, without adequate protection is a part of our historical cultural fabric that Canadians have not been willing to acknowledge or address.

Children in this research view themselves as integral components of the labour system. Children felt the responsibility of ensuring appropriate employment rights and the safety
regulations were in place rested with government. None of the children saw this as a responsibility of their parents or primarily with employers. And they saw the responsibility of educating children about their rights as a duty of the school/education system. In their opinions, neither government nor the education system was living up to its responsibilities.

Government valuing young people’s contributions and voice would be a great improvement, why we like workplaces, what is working or not, regulations that fit for young people (Malcom M-15).

We need better info, not knowing safety and stuff like that, don’t know where to get that...we pay EI, we get tax deductions so unfair that we don’t get training safety, care. Lots of kids don’t speak up for themselves cause they are afraid no one will listen (Hope, F-15).

As young people our opinion is quite important and if possible we should be part of the law making process (Daphne, F-16).

Pay should be the same as adult doing the job, shouldn’t be treated differently - same with hours and opportunity—no different from an adult (Samantha, F-15).

**School and work education**

In Alberta schools, children receive some education regarding healthy life choices and career and personal responsibility (Government of Alberta Heath and Calm Education). Elements of career and life style topics are covered in the health curriculum for younger children and within the CALM (career and life management) curriculum for high school children. Work experience opportunities in school also create potential for learning about work law and safety regulations.

Children in this research could not recall covering any of the employment law and safety regulation materials in elementary, junior or senior high school classes. And for many of the children in this research, work experience programs at school were not viewed positively.
No not really. No one tells young people, not been told, not taught in school. They (school) tell you how to do resume, but not about law or safety, nothing practical (Hope, F-15).

Nothing from school yet. I am in grade 9 (Adrian, M-14).

Safety (they) should be paying more attention. Teachers at school said suck it up…have seen unsafe conditions, school and people handled poorly (Kevin, M-16).

The relationship and requirement of mandatory schooling for children offers many opportunities for practical learning. If the purpose of schooling is to provide children with skills and knowledge to transition into adult society, then surely appropriate education about their employment rights and safety protections must be a critical facet of their learning. Children in this research expressed much frustration with schools providing little to no knowledge regarding issues of employment and protection. Further to this, in a number of discussions, the work experience elements offered through schools had little to no useful experience for children and in some cases were themselves exploitative of children’s labours. As discussed in this research, children looked for opportunities to be involved in work related to future career development and work in fields of interest to them. Quite often school work experiences did not offer this.

Clearly a change in curriculum and the work experience structure is needed. This is discussed further in the mentorship theme.

**Thematic 1 Summary**

Children in this research have little knowledge about safety and employment regulations pertaining to their age and job. This information has not been provided to them or they cannot recall information received through their employers, schools or homes. Children felt it was the responsibility of both government and the education/school system to ensure they had adequate knowledge about safety and employment rights. Children also expressed concerns in this
research that school work experience programs did little to provide them with adequate knowledge or experience about the work world. Children are frequently injured at work and regulations and existing oversight is not protecting them. Children want opportunity for input, better knowledge and safe, equitable work experiences.

Thematic Section 2. Mentorship, Volunteering, Menteeship

Work mentorship for children was a strongly identified need and issue in this research. Adequate training, support or guidance for working children was not happening at the worksite, not happening at school, and not happening at home.

Many of the primary research questions found their way back to discussions on some form of assistance, guidance or support. When children were asked about what constitutes a good job, safety and support came up. In the research question about bad workplaces, most frequently discussions about not fitting in or safety came up. This came up as well in the how are you learning to do your work: most often children admitted they learned on their own, from friends or from watching family members when they had that option. Researchers (Laberge, MacEachen & Calvet, 2014) discuss at length that effective learning for young people is crucial to avoid injury. The researchers note that situated learning from experienced practitioners in a step by step graduated model is most effective and helps to prevent injury.

Children expressed over and over again that school did not prepare them either through classroom learning or in school-sponsored work experiences for the work world. And this is where children expected most of the knowledge about work to come from. This is an interesting contradiction in itself. I discuss in chapter six that perhaps a hidden curriculum of expectations is at play here too.
European countries that tackle work learning through apprenticeships are worthy of discussion and consideration to seek some direction. Switzerland has an apprenticeship program that is an active element of the secondary school system. The vocational education and training system (VET) is introduced once children have finished grade nine (Egg, & Renold, 2015). Children have options and choices within a formalized apprenticeship program where they attend 3-4 days of work under specifically trained experts in their fields and 1-2 days in school. The program is a full apprenticeship that is partnered with government and industry. Students are paid, continue to learn and leave the program with a marketable skill of their choice, as well as options to continue with post-secondary schooling or to directly enter the work world.

Germany offers a similar regulated program that focuses on experienced craftspeople with teaching qualifications delivering the teaching and building relationships of role modelling with children (Vazsonyi, & Snider, 2008). This building of relationships through mentoring in a higher quality job is a key to the success of these mentoring/apprenticeship programs at this particular stage of a child’s development. Children are exposed to unrelated adults modelling appropriate work skills and practices in a highly regulated and monitored program. This ties in well with situated learning and role modelling through social learning as best practices according to Laberge, MacEachen and Calvert (2014).

While both Alberta and Ontario have implemented a type of apprenticeship program into their high school programs for some students, the programs have had poor success/completion and high injury rates. Some of the difficulties the Alberta and Ontario programs have encountered have centred on poor safety training and knowledge for both the children involved in the program as well as the teachers instructing these programs. Employers as well are not consistently providing effective apprenticeship training and supervision here in these programs.
and government oversight is limited. The Alberta and Ontario programs also have less variety in occupation choices and tend to concentrate in very traditional rather than more modern trade occupation possibilities (Raykov, & Taylor, 2013).

Alberta Education career and life management courses and work experience programs discussed earlier in this research provide general information to children about career and lifestyle choices. They are not addressing work learning and work safety knowledge needs of children as evidenced in this and earlier cited research.

In both the interviews and photographs within these research children discussed what they felt was right and wrong about their work and how systems outside of their control (school or workplaces) had helped or hindered their work experiences. For example, photographs of workplaces or work duties were often accompanied with discussions on what children did or did not like about their jobs (current and past) and often things they could add or change about the workplace. Children also discussed how menial some of their work was and how they saw no links to this for future careers.

Offer jobs that build towards what people want to do in university. Need to get experience but hard to get job if no one will give you experience. More trades, sciences (Joe, M-16).

Stupid fast foods or grocery stores are all that’s available to us—should have more interesting work that we would actually like to do. Teenagers are impatient so why get the low end of the stick because we are young. We should have cool learning about things, jobs, apprenticing things. Don’t have to do the full job but even the small things you learn along the way e.g. mechanics. We don’t get to learn about stuff we would like to do (Lindsey, F-16).

Kids my age should be able to do more active stuff like helping with tradesmen, carpenter, and mechanics. Helping with these people while young e.g. changing oil so we learn while we are young (Dave, M-13).
Listen to kids and see what they want to work at, have time to experience work (Keowna, F-16).

Research interviews as well involved lengthy discussions about not knowing some elements of the work system they were involved in (e.g., how to work with customers, getting used to routines and requests, working with specific tools or equipment) and how more knowledge and background in these areas would have helped their familiarity with the work or to do their work better.

**Volunteer work**

A strong and surprising finding within this research was children’s contributions to volunteer work and their desire to mentor others. Eighty-five percent of children in this study had done volunteer work in their community or schools. This is a significant finding and ties in with comments made throughout the study in interviews and photographs about the need to belong and to feel your contributions were valued. Children volunteered both within and outside of work commitments. Sometimes work was done to help out (e.g., church babysitting with an awareness that no money would be involved as payment). Other times children intentionally sought out opportunities to contribute to needier members of their community or to become involved in projects they had an interest in.

In Canada, volunteering statistics do not capture the volunteer contributions of those under age 15. But of those 15 and over who are noted in the statistics (Vezina, & Compton, 2012, Marshall, 2007) younger people tend to volunteer more frequently in communities than do adults although they offer less hours.
Tied into volunteering questions must be a discussion about unpaid internships. Children in this research frequently were required to “volunteer” their time as unpaid interns in jobs they were interested in obtaining. In this research, these unpaid internships occurred in sports and recreation work. Children volunteered as camp counsellors, swim instructors, ski instructors and sports refereeing. The periods of time for these internships was mixed and set at the discretion of the potential employer. For example, ski instructors volunteered two seasons, swim instructors for several months, camp counsellors for one to two summers in junior positions and sports referees for selected times prior to being paid for their work once internship was considered complete. It is not within the scope of this research to examine the nature and context of these internship-volunteer hours of children but suffice it to say many of the children felt exploited during these experiences and noted they were doing the full job of paid instructors fairly early on in this internship and not paid for these efforts.

Menteeships

Children in this research also had many insights and advice they felt would be beneficial to other young people starting work or working. Most of this advice centred on fitting in and, having confidence in learning the job and the routines.

Watch everything your first few days or weeks to make sure you know how things are done, watch colleagues to see if they are nice or mean, take your job seriously (Kaila, F-13).

Find job you enjoy. Don’t take a job just because of pay (John, M-14).

Don’t take job till ready, know your abilities and what you can do, don’t take jobs you won’t finish or know you will quit. Be strong, think wisely (Carli, F-14).

Be cautious about who you are working for (Bart, M-13).

Don’t be shy, relax and do it. I’ll be there if you need it (Jeremy, M-16).
The advice children offered was empathetic and led to long discussions about how hard it was for them to fit in and how they would want to make things easier for others their age. This reflects many discussions about the trials and tribulations of work that children encountered.

Children’s input into mentorship program design is critical and reflects a desire consistently articulated in this research for inclusivity in all aspects pertaining to the development and structure of their work and work learning experiences.

**Thematic 2 Summary**

Children are seeking meaningful work mentorship and recognize when this is not occurring. Schools have failed in providing this and this is where children expect most learning about the work world should come from. This is a logical extension for children who look to schools as central authorities and support systems in their lives. Children in this research study felt school was not adequately preparing them for the work world.

Children are also looking for meaningful work that is tied to discussions throughout this research on belonging, respect, purpose and connection. Children have sought some of this connection and belonging from involvement in volunteer activities. Children in this research have also expressed valid concerns about internships, their content, their length of time and their purpose. Children report feeling exploited in many of these arrangements.

And finally children are looking to mentor themselves in some capacity with children their own age. They recognize many of the difficulties they have encountered in being engaged in the work world and would like to assist other children in some capacity in a supportive way.
Thematic Section 3: Voice and Inclusion

“Children’s work is obscured by the power that adults have over them” (Leison, 2007, p.21). Children’s experiences with work do not exist outside of what is going on in society. Their interpretations, actions, world views and particular comprehensions of the work world are developed by their interactions within it. And these comprehensions of work should be important in our understandings and knowledge of how work and society are defined, experienced and lived by all workers. What values, what perceptions, what lessons about equality, inequality, inclusion, exclusion, exploitation and justice are children learning through work? What are we teaching children about the world of work? What implications does this have for children today as child workers and in the future as adult workers?

Within my research, children spoke frequently about not having input into their work conditions, workplaces or the ability to determine any elements of the work they did. Children in this research also expressed frustration about not being asked about what work experiences, or opportunities they would like to experience through school sponsored work programs. Once inside jobs, children were rarely asked for input regarding how their work could be done, how tasks or productivity could be changed, or given opportunity to provide or display innovative or creative ideas or solutions to problems.

Usually told exactly what to do from boss (Malcolm, M-15).

No choice, no just put somewhere (Hope, F-15).

Never asked me at all in high school about what we do or don’t want to do. No choice in work experiences-got put in places and had to stay. I could have had some choice (Kevin, M-16).

No choices, always assigned work, staff meeting could speak up but no one ever did (John, M-14).
This lack of input from children in determining their own work or conditions/legislation surrounding their work is not unusual. Children’s exclusion of voice is deeply entrenched in a number of historic and current day barriers that include; conceptions of childhood, issues of power imbalances/ control over children, a perceived need for an economically expendable and exploitable cheap workforce and others. Children are especially vulnerable as workers because they are children in a society that does not recognize these conflictual issues of age and powerlessness. Issues of defining child work and labour are conflicted globally (Bessell, 2011) and are entrenched in economic arguments often overlaid with protectionism needs both for children and against defining/providing rights for this labour group. The idea of children contributing to policy and legislation contests an adult centric world.

Researchers, Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2011) however note that “children’s perspectives can be both informative and challenging. To understand any situation involving children, we need to ask how children perceive the situation and how they respond to it” (p.11). In my research, children described jobs in great detail, equipment used, co-workers, customers, and clients. A sense of importance of the work they were doing was conveyed in both their interview discussions as well as within the photos they took and subsequent discussions about these. Children valued being a part of the work world and saw their participation as important both today and for their future. American sociologist Richard Sennett (1993, 2008) writes extensively on the need for workers to feel proud of and invested in their craft, production and being respected and valued as individuals. This is evident for both adults and children. Knowledge about careers, work skills and interests, earning money and understanding the economics of everyday life in addition and wanting personal fulfillment were frequently cited by children in this research.
Get early experiences of life and understand how hard your parents have to work (Daphne, F-16).

See connections to career-gaining people skills as I move forward in my life (Joe, M-16).

Love of the game. I stay connected- extra cash too. I love teaching kids and want to be a role model (Shannon, F-14).

Children can benefit developmentally from work when it is an option that does not interfere with school hours or is forced or hazardous work dangerous to their health. This is a discussion point that is often lost in political discussions of children’s work conditions in anti-child work/labour movements. Woodhead (2007) argues that getting lost in discussions of hazardous work for children does not recognize good moderate work for children that can be positive for their own psychological development and social adjustment.

**Lack of input**

Children are active social actors within their workplaces and in this research they also recognized and expressed concerns about inequities. They saw work assignments of some jobs handled differently between adults and children, and had an acute awareness of being exploited at times for their contributions. Two telling examples of this came from very different work experiences of these children. In research discussions here, some of the children interviewed who refereed different sports games were aware of the differences in pay for their refereeing versus an adult refereeing games. Another telling illustration of this came from one girl working at her school for work experience credits. She was often asked to miss classes to “help out” with printing duties that were earning dollars for the school. Recognizing that her “boss” was also the teacher giving her a pass/credits for the course, she chose not to say anything, but expressed concerns over the rightness and wrongness of this. A number of the children in this research had disappointing experiences to share about high school work experience credit programs. Most
often these concerns centred on these work experiences having little to do with their own employment or career interests, poor monitoring and support and working for employers they had concerns about.

Children certainly see the injustices of workplaces and question why they have such limited voice and control. They know “they are in a submissive position not only because they are employees but also because they are children living in an adult world” (Schissel, 2011, p.74). The definition of what constitutes work is also problematic in this way. Levison (2007) argues that a definition of what is considered work is defined by an adult and this in itself does not acknowledge the power differential that exists in children’s work. Why is something considered to be work? Because an adult deems it to be? What is hard work? Who is doing the defining here? Much of children’s work can be hidden simply because it is not defined by an adult as work. This again illustrates the power issues children face every day in society.

The lack of input into defining work, work settings and work conditions is further exacerbated for children by the lack of inclusion of children into research on the actual work they do. Levison (2007) discusses at length how numerous research studies by international organizations neglects to actually formulate research that includes children’s direct opinions. Mason and Hood (2011) note the absence of children from research is “a dominant tradition of social research” (p. 490).

Researchers who do include children, often ask both children and parents to answer together research questions and can often not recognize there can be many issues with children’s comprehension of questions (Levison, 2007). There are also challenges when adults answer for
children assuming they can offer a child’s perspective. Levison (2007) presents an example of research done in 2002 that is a compelling illustration of how badly this lack of input from children themselves can occur. In this example parents were asked about their working children; how often were the children injured or hurt during the last 12 months? This would be an impossible question to answer for these adults as they do not live within the child’s body.

For Bourdillon, Levison, Myers and White (2010) it is an important issue this capacity to “allow children to be proactive in developing their lives rather than reactive” (p.134). If we wish for children to be active contributing members of society, we must allow for them to be active participants within that society as they develop and grow. And certainly children in this research expressed a desire to do so. Research interviews undertaken here were rich with detail and a number of children asked to be included in future research. In addition, the vast majority of children in this study noted they would be very interested in directly participating in some sort of government structure that would invite their thoughts, opinions and concerns about work.

Children are active and interested participants in the work/economic world and deserve the right for democratic inclusion. This inclusion and this recognition of agency however must not be tokenistic. Children are quick to recognize insincerity evidenced by participants in this research.

Government should be asking; we are the future. Teenagers and kids are used a lot to help with work so future generations should have say. Government Education Minister came to our school just for pictures-don’t like that (Kaila, F-13).

Listen to what young people have to say, ask young people where they want to work, if there are reasons we can’t work somewhere tell us, but we should do jobs that aren’t so limited and low down (Lindsey, F-16).
Independence and belonging

Income from work is a form of independence. In this research, not all of the children had full discretionary control over the allocation of their income but none of the children who spoke to me noted they were forced or required to work. This is an important distinction in this study. Not all children have this option and while children here appeared to have this freedom, many discussed the necessity of saving for post-secondary education (some by choice, some by parental decree). For other children in this research their income formed an important contribution to the family and helped to pay for food, rent, school and clothing costs. A minority of children interviewed here had the luxury of spending all of their income however they chose.

Work for children can have economic advantages but can also provide children with social status, access and entry into adult society as discussed earlier. This access and inclusion was frequently articulated in this research. Children spent a great deal of time talking about making contributions, that they were part of something, were gaining a better understanding of society, were able to tell friends you were employed, not bored and not being left out etc. Work for children in this research was a “third place”- not home and not school. The life you had in your workplace was separate and different. The roles and responsibilities you had, the work friends, coworkers, public you interacted with made you a part of another community. On many levels you were a different person. Children had responsibilities, roles and expectations that were often very different from the life you had at home or school.

Hungerland, Liebel, Milne, & Wihstutz (2007) discuss social recognition, sense of importance and respect and the right to participation as key benefits children can acquire through participation in the world of work. These are learnings that are of value to all democratic societies.
Like helping out, like doing it myself, want to be known as a good person (Bart, M-13).

I wanted to be helpful. I knew the mom who needed the babysitter and I wanted to help out (Nicole, F-13).

**Thematic 3 Summary**

In summary, children recognize that although they are active participants in performing work, their inclusion or voice into defining their involvement in the work realm is rarely recognized or sought. Further to this actual research on children’s work rarely includes children’s participation in any meaningful or significant way. An adult centric world has in place a number of barriers that exclude children’s voice from democratic inclusion.

Children learn and develop identities as workers and individuals through their participation in work. Inclusion, respect, agency and social recognition of workers’ contributions are a necessity for all workers.

**Conclusion of Interpretation of Findings**

This chapter described the experiences of a sample of working children in Alberta. This discussion reveals a number of the experiences, concerns and hopes of these children for meaningful work experiences and democratic inclusion into Alberta society. In analyzing the discussions and photographs children provided to me, I recognize the subjective nature of any interpretation of the voices of others and the ethical responsibility that accompanies this. I have done my best to mitigate this through constant cross checks and literature analysis and through ongoing discussions with critical colleagues regarding these interpretations.
I present this research as my understanding of the complex world of work that these children are encountering in Alberta today. I discuss my conclusions and recommendations in the following chapter.
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to explore through interviews with a group of working Alberta children, their views on meaningful work and work environments. Using critical ethnography and visual ethnography methodologies, I wanted to give voice to a selected group of child workers in Alberta on work experiences.

The conclusions from this research study adhere to the research questions and findings and focus on three areas:

1.) Safety and employment regulations and work construct understandings,

2.) Mentorship, menteeship, volunteering,

3.) Voice and inclusion.

I discuss the conclusions and recommendations I have drawn from this research. I conclude the chapter with my final reflections on this study.

Safety and Employment Regulations

Children working in Alberta today do not know or understand employment and safety regulations that have been designed for them. Children who took part in this research indicated strongly that they are not learning their rights adequately or at all from school, from home or from employers. Children do not have democratic rights in society and at present can do little to change how rights are developed, implemented or monitored for themselves. Children are active workers in this society but they have no agency to implement better working conditions, opportunities or safety regulations for themselves. The children who participated in this research
however indicated an overwhelming desire for change and opportunity for legitimate voice in society.

The children in this study expected that the majority of learning on how to fit into the workplace and how to ensure they were knowledgeable about their rights and safety should come from school education. The deemed responsibility of schools to fulfill learning needs on some level is understandable and on other levels somewhat surprising. For children, school is a key formal learning environment and this naturally fits: children spend a great deal of time in their childhood years at school learning the world. But within this school learning of work there is some cause for concerns as well. There are solid arguments and research regarding the teaching of subservience as workers and to authority within school curriculum—most often termed the hidden curriculum as discussed in my literature review. I would argue as well that somehow within this hidden curriculum, children have learned both from school and parents to hold schools most responsible for their work learning rather than parents or employers at workplaces. It is an ultimate neoliberal twist—to absolve the workplace, the employer from most responsibility for work learning and for providing a safe workplace.

A neoliberalism perspective much discussed in adult workplace learning sees workers in deficit. Children have picked up on this in their learning and assigned responsibility for learning work not only to themselves but also to schools. There may be a myriad of factors for this: media, learning from parents, and societal norms. This is disturbing on many levels and certainly raises subsequent questions on curriculum content, roles of the school and state, roles of the employer and roles of parents. Children in this research took on responsibility for learning simple to more complex tasks on their own to make up for not learning these things from employers or from schools. For example, many of the children involved in agricultural work, or
labour work learned how to use the equipment or work with animals themselves. Children working in the service sector might have learned basics on working with equipment such as deli meat cutters, computers or other equipment from a co-worker once and then assumed responsibility for the remainder of this learning. There are significant issues with this as I discussed in both my literature review and in this chapter regarding safety and injury.

I have discussed at length in this research concerns about parents having conflicted perspectives and contexts around children working. Some of these conflicts about protection, control and exploitation further support the need for children’s voice to be a legally mandated independent input in legislation and work parameters. Parents and adults cannot legitimately see the world from a child’s perspective—particularly when it comes to work and the many challenges and opportunities for children involved in work. Recent legislation changes in Alberta that provides safety regulation and coverage for farm workers does not address issues of children working for their parents or relatives on farms. This non-protection and minimal protection and rights cross over all work boundaries for children. Children in this research faced safety and rights issues in all types of work constructs and their lack of rights and subsequent lack of power to address this was a consistent concern.

Children must be a recognized voice at the policy and regulation tables and their rights and safety must be protected. This includes a recognition that these rights are not always best protected or even understood by parents or adults who have conflicted interests. This democratic recognition and voice however must have substance and not be an example of tokenism. While responsibility for designing appropriate work and workplace regulations was deemed a government duty, children in this research were very clear about wanting legitimate input into this process. Children know there is value in work and want their input respected. Children in
this research were aware that their inclusion must also be in age appropriate ways. They also expressed a strong sense of justice—a sense of what is right and wrong, fairness and inequity. There is a value in adults listening to this voice from children and acting on it to demonstrate social justice.

While not a primary intent within this research, a significant finding here that supports other research is that children continue to be hurt frequently at their workplaces. Children in this research discussed both minor and major injuries while at their workplaces. Research noted in this study recognizes the developmental needs of children to have specific education and instruction to assist them with safe practices at workplaces. I discuss this in more detail in mentorships arrangements as well.

Children in this research also discussed inappropriate and often illegal ways that employers were responding to injuries they encountered by ignoring concerns and not ensuring safety at the workplace. The fact that children did not have assistance from their employer when injured and that government was not involved in reviewing the injuries these children in the research experienced is further cause for concern. While certainly adult workers encounter safety and workplace hazards that are not enforced, the pretense by governments of putting in place specific legislation to protect children, while not investigating or providing protection is particularly duplicitous and troubling.

Mentorship, Menteeship, Volunteering

A further finding of this research touches on both mentorship and menteeship for children at work. Children expressed consistently the need for better work experiences. The guidance,
support and knowledge they felt they needed to productively learn about both current and future work were not being provided to them. They repeatedly expressed frustration and disappointment with this. There was an expectation from children that adults had a responsibility to teach children about the work world in a meaningful and practically useful way. This may also tie into children’s sense of justice and equity of those who have experience and knowledge sharing with those who do not.

In workplaces, children identified support, learning continuously and the opportunity to be involved in meaningful work as important to them. Those few children who had good mentoring experiences at work spoke very highly about their employers, their loyalty to the organizations and people they were working for and generally enjoyed their jobs a great deal more than children who did not have this mentorship. The fact that many of the children in this research learned their jobs on their own should be particularly troubling. Children have developmental learning needs that must recognize such things as the need for effective support, thorough instruction and practice and a culture that is open to continuous support and further learning.

Children in this research discussed current existing work training programs offered through schools and their frustrations with the limitations of this and the frequent lack of relevance to real life work. Children also discussed the exploitive nature of many of the school work experiences they encountered. They did not feel these school work experiences were generally of any value and could not recall any learning about practical issues or safety or legal issues regarding their work. Clearly children in this research felt existing work experience programs at school were not providing value to them.
Children also expressed continuously in another of the key findings in this research their own desire to help other children and to be involved in designing better work experiences for children. Advice, support and skills for navigating work environments were frequently discussed by children and they felt providing this mentorship to others was essential. While mentorship from adults was crucial, children also saw mentorship from their own peer group as important. I share particularly thoughtful comments from these children at the conclusion of this chapter on mentorship and inclusion. Children providing some mentorship to each other and respectful participatory inclusion with adults, could bridge some gaps in work understandings for both adults and children. There is much here that I believe adults could learn from children.

**Voice and Inclusion**

Children’s sense of social justice and equity was a consistent theme in this research. This surfaced not only in discussions about work experiences and inclusion in work constructs and regulations but also frequently in discussions about their volunteer work. Children here appeared to have a profound sense of justice as noted earlier. Children’s contributions back to society, seeing value in work contributions, seeing value in learning and mentorship in many forms and an acute sense of right and wrong were clearly visible in many of these discussions with children.

A major finding in this research was that children are actively engaged in volunteer work in their communities. Children spoke about giving back, helping others out, and wanting to be known as good people. Their sense of dedication to their various volunteer projects was significant, impressive, moving and an unexpected finding in this research. Children in this research demonstrated a striking commitment to civil inclusion in a philanthropic way. This
involvement should be recognized, applauded and significantly considered as a demonstration of active engagement from a population group not recognized democratically in society.

**Recommendations**

I put forward my recommendations based on the findings, analysis and conclusions of this research. These recommendations that follow are for: a) government and schools, b) employers, c) parents, d) children, e) further research.

Recommendations for Governments and Schools.

1. The provincial government ministries of education and labour must legislate a participatory process for child workers ongoing inclusion in both workplace policy and regulation. In developing this legislation, governments must recognize the varying ages, gender, geographic and inclusion capacities for children. Remuneration for children must be in accordance with the law and not discriminate based on age.

   As children grow and develop, their voices of inclusion will differ and this needs to be reflected in the legislation in a fair and respectful way. Children’s opinions and perspectives on work, their own personal development and safety must be a critical ongoing component of this inclusion. Children want to work and they see the value in working and they want to contribute those ideas and thoughts. Legislation needs to reflect this in a thoughtful and inclusive way.

   This inclusion must offer both grassroots opportunities for consultation with children as well as formal established councils. There is opportunity for municipal government to also be involved in establishing avenues of consultation with children in both grassroots and more formal capacities and this should be endorsed and supported by the provincial government.
2. Appropriate safety and work legislation for children must be developed with children and enforced. Children need adult advocates who will work with them and with communities, government, and industry and safety experts to contribute to the development of this legislation. Without strong advocates supporting children’s voice, little will change for them.

   Legislation regulating the work of children must focus on appropriate and safe work for children that recognizes safety, equitable remuneration and child development and education potential. Along with this legislation, must come a database documenting and gathering information on working children. This provides opportunity to develop appropriate work for children, to address learning and mentorship needs, and to track and address issues of safety or injury. Governments might consider options for recognizing good employers of children and additional enforcement measures for those who are not. Work advocates for children should be considered as an additional support as well. Adult advocates might be an effective and appropriate support for children to increase the potential for children to have voice and representation in a myriad of ways as children navigate through bureaucracies and adult centric policy and legislative structures.

3. School education curriculum and work experiences must reflect the reality of the working world and children’s rights and learning potential from work. To begin with, school curriculums must be revised to require mandatory, incremental and progressive learning on employment laws, rights and safety for workers of all ages.

4. School education curriculum must also reflect the potential of learning from work. Supporting and developing apprenticeship, mentorship, and internship programs for children must be updated and redesigned to reflect current and future work realities. There are several models in
Europe that might offer some potential here for offering effective work experience curriculum and partnerships with government oversight between industry, children and school work experiences. Current work experience programs are not meeting children’s needs for effective work experience, future career skills and support and transitions from school to work. This is a curriculum change that needs progressive change and development to prepare children for effective and significant inclusion into the work world.

5. There is opportunity to recognize and further develop children’s interests in voluntary work as a meaningful component of civil society building. Children in this research were heavily involved in voluntary activities and saw these contributions as an important connection between themselves and society. It would be worthwhile to consider how children’s interests in giving back and participating in community life could become a more recognized and encouraged development component of their lives. This could be through more active encouragement of volunteer work in schools, communities, non-profits and through governments. Children are interested, but their contributions are not recognized, developed and acknowledged here well.

6. It is critical as well for provincial and federal government to build and maintain a database that collects information on working children both provincially and nationally. This is an aspect of children’s lives that should be recorded into a database. Society cannot begin to fully recognize both the economic and social contributions children make to building Canadian society without information. This database should also include information on the volunteer work children are contributing to. Data on volunteer work is collected on adult participants through the government of Canada, it must also be collected on children who are contributing to communities.
7. Government must find a way to better educate parents about children’s work rights and safety. Current government websites for example, appear to be the only initiative governments are taking to provide information on work. A more effective social media and marketing campaign designed to educate parents on children’s working rights might be an option to address this lack of knowledge that parents have on children’s work, law and appropriate work conditions.

Recommendations for Employers.

1. Knowledge of and adherence to workplace legislation for children is a foundational and critical requirement for all employers. Work for children must be safe, monitored and include ongoing training that is responsive to the work they are doing and its particular challenges and required skills. In an era of social media, and a population group that heavily uses it, it would be wise practice for employers to be appealing to the child demographic rather than alienating it.

2. Children must be remunerated fairly for their work in accordance with the law.

3. Children’s voice and input into their work must be an ongoing and inclusive part of their workplace experience. Their involvement must be meaningful by including their perspectives and opinions in a respectful and democratic manner.

4. Work children are engaged in must be designed for their capabilities and provide the opportunity for them to learn and develop useful skills that can serve them well as they transition from child to adult.

5. Providing children with both adult mentors and senior child mentors is a crucial component of their development as adults and workers. It is incumbent on workplaces to at a minimum provide an active, ongoing adult mentor for children in workplaces.
Recommendations for Parents.

1. Parents must be knowledgeable of workplace safety and legislation on work pertaining to their children’s ages. Educating children on workplace law and safety is also a responsibility of parents. They must not rely on schools or workplaces to solely fulfill this responsibility. Mentoring children on responsible workplace behaviours should also come from parents. More accessible information from government specifically addressed to parents through marketing or social media as noted above might be an effective proactive option here to increase parent knowledge as well. Perhaps the ‘take your daughter or son to work’ campaigns might also be reconfigured to be more effective mentoring possibilities for children supported with education.

2. Parents must support the development of government initiatives to encompass independent inclusion of children’s voice into legislation and workplace environments. The inclusion of children as democratic citizens with legitimate perspective, opinions and rights is crucial for the development of a fair and civil society. Children learn from the practices and experiences they are involved in throughout their lives. Being respected as a democratic member of society is an incredibly valuable life learning for a child that translates into the adult worker they will one day become.

Recommendations for Children.

1. Become engaged in participant councils, legislation development and inclusion efforts developed by government, schools, communities, workplaces and children. Your voice is best heard when you are involved and actively present.
Recommendations for Further Research.

Through this research, some additional findings surfaced that warranted further research for better understandings.

1. This research was conducted with a small sample of children in Alberta and warrants further study with children working across Canada. There are many elements of this research that could be further developed to better understand the working lives of children in Canada and how we might best develop more comprehensive opportunities for their full participation in civil society and work environments. Many issues surfaced here in this research regarding working children’s safety, education, regulation, mentorship and inclusion. There may be regional differences that need to be explored nationally as well. A better understanding of children’s work experiences across the country might also provide opportunity for federal involvement in building appropriate work and enhanced education experiences for children. A clear picture on the extent and form of children’s work contributions in Canada also begins to recognize their role in the economic and social development of the country.

As governments chart and plan for economic development, it would be important to consider the type of work and worker needed to build Canada’s capabilities. Developing and implementing appropriate child and youth work education programs serves in the best interests of Canada. There are significant opportunities for developing pilot education and work projects provincially, regionally and nationally that include both paid and volunteer work components.

2. Many of the children in this research had experience with either current or past recreation or sports type jobs. These children working in camps, referees, or as instructors faced some unusual
work requirements. These children participated in different forms of unpaid internships of varying lengths. Children working in camps as instructors could face internships as long as 1-2 seasons where they participated as junior instructors or camp counsellors/leaders and were not paid while taking on these responsibilities. In some cases, they also paid to take part in these “training” opportunities. Children working as umpires or referees often also had unpaid internships/training experiences. Children did partial or full work but were not considered employees or paid for their work. All of these forms of internships need to be examined further for potential exploitation.

3. Children working as referees or umpires were hired on individual contract basis and did not receive vacation pay, any form of benefits and did not believe they were covered by any medical or worker’s compensation benefits when injured. The children’s exploitation here was very disconcerting. Package pay for games, when factored into hours actually worked out often to be less than the minimum wage. The conditions where these children were subjected to abuse by parents, coaches and other regulatory officials warrant some very serious research into the nature and context of work children are engaged in; as referees and umpires for organized juvenile sports. The literature review in this research discussed at length the need for safety both physically and psychologically in work environments for children. Children working as umpires or referees are subject to conditions that might well be impacting their psychological as well as physical health.

4. Farm, domestic or family work performed by children also warrants further research. The concerns I express here are not new or unique; there is potential for exploitation and significant conflict of interest between the adult/parent/ employers and their children. Legislation must be enacted that begins to address the issues here with children’s powerlessness in conflicted
relationship roles. Recent Alberta government farm worker safety legislation passed with much acrimony. Children who work for parents or relatives on farms are not covered by this legislation. Children’s deaths on family farms occur far too frequently. There is a need for legislation to protect child workers wherever they work regardless of who is the employer.

5. As discussed in recommendations for government and schools, school work experience programs need to be researched and revised in significant detail. The potential and actual cases of exploitation surfaced too many times in this research to view these as isolated events. There is need for reform, monitoring and further investigation into these school based programs.

6. Children’s roles in volunteer activities as discussed earlier also warrant further research. The significant number of children in this research who were engaged or had been engaged in numerous hours of volunteer work for communities justifies further consideration into the incredible efforts that children are expending into these sectors of society with little to no recognition or monitoring.

**Personal Reflections**

In any research I have conducted I am always struck by the inadequacy of words to capture emotions, depth, sincerity, courage and hopes of research participants. I find this to be especially true in talking with children. In both my masters’ research on community and place with children and here in my doctorate research on work and children, I have similar reflections.

A child’s world is very removed from that of an adult’s world. While I have been privileged enough to be granted some access to children’s lived realities, I am also struck by the reality and difficulty of having to explain and share children’s concerns and hopes for a mostly adult audience. Children in this research took time to voice the value they saw in contributing to
the society they live in. They discussed both their paid and unpaid contributions. Children discussed both good and bad experiences and their hopes for creating work experiences and environments that would support workers of all ages but would be particularly relevant for developing child workers who will be contributing their labours to society for many years.

Canadian children have and continue to have an important role in building our country and they do so without any democratic rights in Canada. It is time for change and time to listen and include the voice of children.

Government should be asking: we are the future. Teenagers and kids are used a lot to help with work so future generations should have a say (Kaila, F-13).

Unfair that we don’t get safety or training. I would change that. Lots of kids don’t speak up for themselves cause afraid no one will listen (Hope, F 15).

Want to be part of it…..excited if something would occur…hearing our voice, why we like workplaces, describing what is working (Malcom M 16).

We learn about charter of rights to not discriminate based on age, religion, race or gender, so why do that? (Tom, M-13)
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