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## **Multiple Methods and Research Relations with Children in Rural Bolivia**

*Samantha Punch*

### **Introduction**

Doing research is a messy affair, as dependent on negotiation, adjustment, personal choices and serendipity as on careful and meticulous preparation. (James et al. 1998: 169)

This chapter is based on ethnographic research carried out in a rural community, Churquiales, in southern Bolivia (Punch 1998). The study focused on children's negotiation of their autonomy at home, at school, at work and at play (Punch 2000; Punch Forthcoming). During the fieldwork, I lived for two extended periods in the rural community (consisting of regular short visits over two years and a six months intensive period of fieldwork<sup>1</sup>). I used a range of qualitative methods including informal and semi-structured interviews and semi-participant observation with most members of a sample of eighteen households. Full participant observation with children is impossible for adults mainly because of their physical size (Fine and Sandstrom 1988) and it has been suggested that a semi-participant observer role is more suitable (James et al. 1998). It is this role which I pursued in Bolivia, as it enables the researcher to participate in children's activities to a certain extent whilst recognising that there are limits to such participation. For instance, I could join in their games and ask them to teach me how to play, but I was a 'different' player who was given special attention by the children since adults do not usually play with them.

In addition, I spent three months carrying out classroom observation and task-based methods at the community school with children aged between 6 and 14. The school-based research consisted of children writing diaries, taking photographs, drawing pictures, completing worksheets and creating spider diagrams and activity tables. These last two methods were adapted from Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques (see PLA Notes 1996; Slocum et al. 1995). For example, the aim of the activity tables was to discover the range of activities and work that children do. They filled in a list of all the agricultural, animal-related and domestic tasks that they knew how to do, indicating whether they enjoyed doing that particular activity or not, and whether the activity was seasonal or year-round.

This chapter focuses on the building and negotiation of research relations, particularly with children, and on the use of multiple methods, particularly integrating semi-participant observation and informal interviewing. The first part looks at the development of relationships in the field, and considers the difficulties and implications of not only being an adult researching children, but also being an outsider studying a different culture. It also explores the reflexivity and negotiation of the researcher's role. The second part of this chapter discusses the advantages of combining methods for this kind of research with children and adults in a different cultural environment, including a discussion of how such data was recorded.

### **Being an adult *and* an outsider: an ethnographic and reflexive approach**

This study needed to address the implications of doing research with children, not only as an adult, but also as an outsider. A particular difficulty of conducting research with children of a different culture to the researcher's own is that a Minority World<sup>2</sup> experience of childhood may cause childhood to be thought about in a particular way. The model of childhood in the Minority World is as a time devoted to play and school, free from many of the responsibilities of adult life. In order to understand rural childhoods in a country of the Majority World biases concerning personal experience needed to be minimised, along with a preconceived vision of how childhood is or should be. Nevertheless, studying the childhoods of a different culture can in some ways be easier than studying the childhoods of one's own culture. This is because assumptions about that particular childhood may not be so strong and the distance between the two cultures may facilitate the reflexive process: 'sometimes a familiar setting is too familiar, and the researcher takes events for granted, leaving important data unnoticed and unrecorded' (Fetterman 1989: 46).

Ethnography was the most appropriate research strategy for such a study for several reasons. As a white, middle-class female brought up in an urban environment in the Minority World my background differed significantly from those who I was studying. Naturally my background has created biases which can never totally be abandoned and perhaps should not be:

Despite best efforts to suspend judgement and disbelief, who one is, what one believes and does, implicitly and ineluctably shapes the process and products of research.  
(James 1993: 8)

Despite the cultural, social and economic differences between myself and the participants of the research, by living in the community for an extended period of time, I could become closer to their lives and closer to an adequate understanding of their culture and lifestyle.

The ethnographic approach accepts that the researcher may influence the research context since researchers become part of the social world they study (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Reflexivity is a vital part of ethnographic research as participation in the social world being studied requires constant reflection on the social processes and personal characteristics and values of the researcher which inform the data generated as well as the subsequent interpretation and data analysis. It was important to maintain a record of observations throughout the research process, especially of the context and how the children reacted. The process of how the data are produced plays a vital part in interpretation (see Mason 1996). By analysing the ways in which the participants respond to the researcher's presence, possible distortions can be recognised and minimised though not totally eliminated (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). A reflexive approach is especially important in research with children: as an adult researcher I needed to confront my own attitudes towards children as well as my role as an adult in a research process with child subjects.

Ethnography is a practical approach to employ when, as in this case, the research setting is in a fairly remote, not easily accessible rural area where daily visits to carry out interviews or observation would not be possible. The relative geographical isolation of the rural community also meant that many of the participants, especially the children, had experienced limited contact with outsiders. The children particularly tended to be very timid and unaccustomed to social interaction with people from outside their community. Many of the children had never seen a white European before my arrival at their community. Consequently, at the start of the research they reacted with stares and nervous giggles. When I tried to talk to them, they would run away or hide behind their parents. Initial conversations involved single word answers on their part until they became accustomed to my presence. The children only started to feel able to talk to me after having seen me visit their household several times during which I began to form a relationship of trust with their parents. Living in the community and taking part in some of the participants' daily activities meant I could form a relationship of trust vital for the gathering of detailed data which was sensitive to their perceptions of their lives.

### **Building Relationships**

The nature of the researcher's relationship with participants must be acknowledged throughout the research period, especially because researchers frequently worry about the appropriateness of their behaviour in the field, particularly their: 'methodology, personality and morality' (Devereux 1992: 43). Over time immersion into the local culture and the formation of closer relationships with research subjects can result in the researcher becoming so absorbed with their lifestyles and particular anecdotal details of their lives that it can become difficult to detach oneself and observe as an outsider. A

conscious effort must be made to record emerging ideas, difficulties and changing relationships with participants. This section examines my field relations with research subjects, particularly with children, how they developed and changed over time, acknowledging some of the difficulties which had to be overcome.

I encountered a variety of practical problems in the field including: having to adapt to the regional vocabulary; learning how to deal with vicious dogs; health problems; rising rivers in the rainy season and transport difficulties. Some of my personal attributes could be used to my advantage: that I was a young female alone meant that many older women wanted to look after me. Nobody seemed to feel too threatened by me, which they might have done if I had been an older, male researcher, since people might regard such a person as a government worker asking about land for tax purposes. However, an initial dilemma which had to be overcome was the rumour that foreign females stole Bolivian babies to take back and sell in their own countries. Once, when a four year old girl was sitting on my lap, a neighbour warned the mother of the household to take her from me or one day I would steal her. Fortunately my relationship was sufficiently good with that household that they could laugh off her suggestions.

My constant questioning would occasionally frustrate a few of the participants, and I felt a need to 'give something back' as a token of appreciation for their time and patience (see also Francis 1992). For example, on my trips to the town I brought back requested items such as a bag of rice or coffee, or recharged batteries used for cassette recorders, or replaced used gas bottles. When I visited migrants in Argentina, I took letters to relatives and brought back their replies. Some unrealistic requests had to be refused such as financial help to build defences in the river to protect nearby cultivated fields from flooding. Caution had to be taken never to promise to do something that I would not be able to fulfil, since many rural people have experienced disillusion with outsiders whose promises to improve their lives never materialised. From the beginning I emphasised that the project and my research were to be studies with no direct material benefits, although copies of the project findings, reports, maps, booklets and photographs would be left with the teachers and community leaders. Despite having formed relationships of trust they were still pleasantly surprised when I did keep this promise since it was the first time they had received written documents about their own community. As Dolores<sup>3</sup>, one respondent said: "many people have come here to ask questions but then they disappear and we never see them again, and we never find out why they asked us those questions."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout most of the fieldwork, I lived with two households: the families of Marianela (10 years) and Dionicio (12 years). During my initial visits to the community I had been particularly welcomed and befriended by these families and when I returned

to stay for a longer period, they both asked me to stay with them. I would stay for about two weeks with Dionicio's family and then one week with Marianela's as they lived nearly an hour's walk from the village square which meant that other household visits were more difficult to carry out. Neither family would accept payment for rent so I repaid their hospitality by bringing food or other gifts from my town visits. In both of these households, I slept in the same room as the family, preparing and eating meals with them, becoming more like a member of the household rather than a privileged guest as I had been at the beginning of the fieldwork. This meant I could observe and participate to a great extent in their lives, often observing the children's activities from the moment they woke up until they went to bed. Staying with two different families was ideal as it gave me access to observe their family life.

My relationship with both the mothers, Felicia and Dolores, in these two households became stronger as the fieldwork progressed. Both of these women were key informants<sup>5</sup> on whom I could rely to cross-check information given to me by others, to ask them about others, ask them for advice and ask about sensitive issues. They were a vital source of rich information, and they were also used to my persistent questioning. Our best conversations were in the kitchen while I helped them prepare food, or by the river as we washed clothes. Since these were female domains, it was where they felt most comfortable and in control.

Felicia's and Dolores' children also became important key informants as they gradually let me inside their private world. It took longer to form a good relationship of mutual trust with the children than with the adults, because of the unequal power relationship between an adult researcher and a child participant. I spent much time with these children: accompanying them on their daily tasks, playing with them, walking to school with them, observing what jobs they did, what songs they sang, what games they played and how they negotiated their relationships with their parents and siblings. Finally they began to be more relaxed with me, and open up to me about their social world. Dionicio is a good example of how our relationship changed with time.

### **Dionicio**

Dionicio is twelve years old and is Felicia's youngest son. At first he was very shy with me. He used to hide behind a tree or hover in the doorway but would not say anything in my presence. Gradually he felt able to be in the same room as me but his responses to my questions remained monosyllabic. A successful ice-breaker was the laughter over a game I had brought with me, 'Pass the Piggies', which I played in the evenings with Dionicio, his two brothers and sister. I then began to accompany them on their daily tasks, such as fetching water from the river and milking the goats. I found it difficult to keep up with Dionicio as he nimbly ran up the mountainside to round up the goats. He laughed at me as the 'amusingly inept adult' (Ennew and Morrow 1994: 64) because I did not know how to milk the goats.

When I began doing the school-based research I walked to and from school with him. At first he tried to embarrass me in class because he was more confident with me and knew me better than the rest of the pupils. He pushed and tested me in our new roles as teacher and pupil. Children often test adults (Fine and Sandstrom 1988) and:

When children think you are a listener, they will initiate conversations with you. If they know you are slow to criticize or difficult to shock, they will talk to you about anything and everything. (Houghton and McColgan 1995: 69)

I do not agree that children will necessarily talk about anything once a researcher has gained their trust, but gradually they will allow greater access to their secrets and their worlds as the social distance between adult researcher and child subject is lessened (Thorne 1993). In time Dionicio became more co-operative with me in the classroom and he was keen to openly demonstrate our relationship at school. He started buying me chewing gum or an ice lolly at breaktime and giving them to me in front of the other children. At first I felt awkward, as I was not used to children giving me things, especially when I knew that they had so little money, and I was unsure whether to return the gesture. Initially I did nothing, but then I decided that, if when he bought himself something at break he got two and gave me one, then I could do the same. Consequently, on the days when I bought myself something, I bought two and gave him one in the same open way as he did with me. The other children (whom I worried about at first) did not seem surprised by this as they knew I was living in his house and seemed to presume the link to be fairly natural.

I finally knew that our relationship had progressed sufficiently when he looked at me one day and said: "Don't they have combs in your country?" I responded that they did and asked him why he wanted to know, and he replied: "Well, why don't you use one then?" This confident, rather cheeky, remark amused me by its frankness (my fringe tended to be backcombed rather than brushed) and surprised me by its boldness. I was pleased that he felt confident enough with me to say what he thought. Once our trust relationship developed he began to give me a variety of information, especially on the way to and from school when we were alone. For example, he confided in me that several times he had taken some eggs which he had conveniently 'found' and sold them so he could buy himself some sweets. I often asked him about the other children at school, in much the same way that I used to ask his mother about other people in the community. Access to such information was only possible after having built up a relationship of trust over a period of time.

However, caution had to be taken over revealing the hidden aspects of children's lives to adults. When children told me things in confidence and asked me not to tell their parents I had to be careful not to mention it to their parents or teachers. For example, once I saw two children going fishing and they told me that they were supposed to be looking after their mother's cows. They asked me not to say anything to their mother if I saw her. Consequently, when I saw their mother and she asked if I had seen the children, I chose to lie and say I had not.

Forming relationships of trust can take a long time and varies with different people. Some people only began to take me into their confidence when they realised that others had done so. Some people never lost their suspicions of me as the foreign visitor to their community and made it obvious that they would rather I did not visit them; I respected their preferences. Various signs indicated when I began to be more accepted by

particular individuals. For example, some would switch to referring to me in the Spanish '*tu*' familiar form of 'you' rather than in the more formal '*usted*'.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, I knew our relationship was improving when I was invited inside the house for the first time or when I was invited to eat a meal with household members rather than separately at the 'guest' table.

Field relations were strengthened over time and as I learnt more about the lives of both the children and adults in the sample of eighteen households, they too learnt more about me. This shared knowledge enhanced a mutual, if unequal, relationship. In some respects it proved to be ethically uncomfortable for me because as I gained their trust, they would open up to me more, enabling me to get richer data about their lives. Sometimes I felt I was manipulating our friendship in order to get good data (see also Punch 1986) and these feelings remain with me as communication with them diminishes over time and distance. Such close contact could also prove problematic as I found it increasingly hard to switch a very informal conversation to a more formal semi-structured interview situation to talk about particular issues, even though in most cases my unease seemed to be unnecessary. I wanted to carry out semi-structured interviews with the parents in order to cover the same kind of questions which I asked the children on their worksheets at school so that I could compare children's and parents' perceptions of rural childhoods. In order to compare their responses effectively, I had to write notes which I felt sometimes disrupted the flow of a more informal interview which would be recorded afterwards.

### **Negotiation of the Researcher's Role**

Before going to Bolivia, I hoped to do some classroom observation in the community school because it would be an opportunity to get to know many children and I could observe them in a child-centred environment away from their parents. However, the teachers' reaction to such a request was uncertain and I was worried that they might feel uncomfortable. The small size of classrooms, the little desks and chairs might mean that my physical presence would disrupt the classes, causing the children to stare and giggle. After several weeks I asked if I could sit in on a few lessons, and found that, despite my worries, the teachers were eager to have an extra pair of hands. I quickly assumed the role of teacher's assistant and found myself colouring in pictures, making decorations and sweeping the classroom floor. On my first morning, I was left in charge of the pupils while the teacher went home to finish preparing lunch and before long I was being left in charge of the pupils for whole mornings. When I suggested that I might prepare something for them to do, rather than rely on work set by the teacher, this was well received and I began devising research tasks (such as worksheets, drawings and

diaries). This is an example of how ethnographic research relies upon opportunity and requires a high level of flexibility.

I began by asking the pupils to draw pictures of their lives in the community and taught them how to write a diary, recording what they had done on the previous day, from when they got up to when they went to bed. I did not expect the children to want to continue writing these diaries as many of them wrote slowly and were not familiar with such a task. I was therefore surprised when all of the children in that class (twenty-two of them) said that they would like to continue with the exercise. Over time some children wrote less and less, but over half continued their diary writing for more than two months. I collected the diaries each morning and sat at the back of the class reading them, which also proved to be an ideal observation opportunity as I could observe the class at the same time. The diaries provided a wealth of information about the everyday, routine aspects of children's lives.

I also prepared worksheets for the school children to complete on different aspects of their lives, some of which were closely related to issues explored in the other task-based methods. For example, questions on one worksheet about aspects of children's lives in the community, complemented the drawings and photographs they had taken. Another worksheet was drawn up as a result of the activity table which children had completed. All the activities that they had mentioned were listed, and further columns were drawn up so that children could include who usually did that task in their household, who helped, who never did it, and at what age they learnt or could learn to do it. The worksheets allowed for more detailed information to be obtained on the issues which had been identified by the children as important in their lives.

From the town I brought paper, coloured pens, pencils, exercise books and a camera to enable them to undertake different task-based activities. I always carried a range of different materials so that I could replace teachers if they were absent, as I was regularly asked to do. The opportunities were many: one teacher was due to retire soon and welcomed a lighter teaching load, another was often absent as he lived some distance away and sometimes the roads were bad and all the teachers took a day off each month to collect their wages from the town. When the teachers were present I resumed my role as teacher's assistant and read the children's diaries whilst observing the class. I spent time playing or talking with the children during break and lunch time. When I joined in their games both adults and children thought it was amusing, but some adults seemed to frown on such strange behaviour as adults in Churquiales would almost never play with children.



The challenge was not to behave like a typical domineering 'adult', which was difficult at times. Children often tried to provoke me to see how I would react, but an attempt was made to understand them on their terms, and from their point of view, withholding judgement from an adult perspective. However, that was not always possible in a classroom situation where to a certain extent some order had to be maintained as the teachers were relying on me. The disadvantage of adopting the role of assistant teacher was that this reinforced the power inequalities between myself and the children, which was precisely what I had been trying to minimise (see also Morrow 1999). A balance had to be struck between being their friend, a teacher, a teacher's assistant, an adult and a researcher. I had to be flexible to switch between these different identities, but where possible I let the children decide what role they wanted me to play. For example, when they asked me to play with them at breaktime I would become their friend, but when during class they would ask me how to spell a certain word I would be more like a teacher.

However, not all children wanted me to play the same role in certain situations. The following extract shows how my relationship with ten year old Marianela not only changed over time but was negotiated and adapted to different situations.

### **Marianela**

The first time I met Marianela, she hid behind her mother when I arrived at their house, giggling in an embarrassed manner. She is the eldest daughter of one of the households where I stayed. With time, she became more relaxed as she taught me her games and asked me riddles. I accompanied her to feed the pigs, milk the goats, round up the cows, fetch water and wash clothes in the river. One evening when it was getting dark, I went with her to round up the cows. She suggested we climb a nearby hill to see where the cows were. At the top she immediately spotted them on their neighbour's land, but I could not see them until she pointed them out to me.

She took me up a steep slippery hill which had sharp drops that had to be jumped over. I was getting more and more nervous, thinking I could hardly see where I was going in the darkness, and I was afraid of falling down one of the holes. Marianela, on the other hand, was able to find her way in the dark without hesitation and fearlessly climbed the steep, slippery mountainside. "Come on," she said, "You're not going to fall."<sup>7</sup> I was not so convinced. She took charge; holding tightly onto my hand, telling me not to worry, that I would be all right. I felt she slipped neatly into an adult protective role while I was being the nervous child edging my way along tentatively. Holding her hand, and telling myself not to look down, I kept going despite knowing that if I did slip she would not be able to stop me and I would just have to let go. Somehow I felt better holding on to her hand. On reaching safety, I released her hand and realised I had been squeezing it quite tightly. She easily recognised which cows were theirs and which belonged to the neighbour's household. She went over to them, calling their names and throwing stones in their direction to make them move.

During this trip, she told me how she got on much better with her dad than with her mum. Her dad has told her to bring in the cows every day so she went without having to be reminded by her mum: "That's why my dad gives me money, 1.50 Bolivianos (equivalent to about twenty pence) in the morning to spend at school, and whatever I buy

I share with my brother and sister. He doesn't give them money because they don't help as much."<sup>8</sup> Marianela explained that her mum got annoyed because her dad spoiled her, but not the other children. She took her anger out on Marianela, shouting at her, and sometimes hitting her. It was sometimes difficult for me to accept that the people I had grown to respect, did not always behave in ways that I liked. Nevertheless, maintaining a certain professional attitude towards the research meant that I would have to try to remain impartial and maintain a certain distance. This however was not an easy process especially when latterly I considered some of them as my friends.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Marianela and I had progressed substantially and gradually she began to confide in me. However, despite enjoying my company at home, asking me to join her with chores or learn her songs and games, at school our relationship was remarkably different. At school she kept her distance, treating me as she treated the teachers: greeting me with a polite, but rather distant "Hello" in the morning. I respected her signals that she did not want her friends to witness our special relationship at school. Maybe her peers would have teased her for knowing the new 'teacher'. I let her define my role, and at school I responded to her formal "Good morning" in the same tone which she showed me.

It was interesting that Marianela treated me very differently from Dionicio when we were at school. In public she maintained her distance from me, whereas Dionicio was keen to demonstrate our friendship. These two different reactions made me realise how difficult it can be to know how to behave most appropriately with children. Being an adult, but wanting to do the right things in children's eyes, can be problematic. My solution was to follow the children's lead wherever possible, letting them decide how they preferred to negotiate our relationship in different contexts, and reacting to their behaviour towards me (such as with Marianela's aloofness at school and Dionicio's sweet-giving). The most appropriate way for an adult researcher to behave with children is to try to understand the situation from their viewpoint, by listening to them, observing and reacting to their behaviour.

### **Combining Methods**

Rural children in particular tend to be shy with outsiders and not used to conversing with other people (except at school or at home). Semi-participant observation provides a way to get to know children better and build trust. It is also an ideal opportunity to carry out informal interviews and talk about issues as they occur, turning conversations to certain topics of interest. In addition, by semi-participating with the children, I learnt by doing and reached a greater understanding of children's activities. For example, I could feel how heavy the water is which they have to carry, or how back-breaking it can be to harvest peas for a long time. I could also witness the special skills that children have acquired in order to be able to do certain tasks, such as how they can nimbly climb up cliffs, find their way in the dark, identify individual animals and round them up. Active participation increased the depth of understanding through doing as well as observing.

Since I was living in the community, I was able to accompany children on their daily chores and observe aspects of their daily lifestyle which they may take for granted, and might not consider mentioning in an interview. For example, if I had only asked children about the work they do, many activities would have been omitted as they do not consider much of what they do to be 'work'. Observation was also useful for capturing the context of children's work and negotiations, as well as allowing for 'the recording of multiple task performance' (Reynolds 1991: 76) when children carry out several activities at the same time. Also, there are most likely some differences between what people say they do and what they actually do in practice which is why it was necessary to include observation methods.

However, one of the disadvantages of semi-participant observation is that it can only be carried out with limited numbers of children as it takes time to build rapport and a relationship of trust (Reynolds 1986). It is difficult to compare the different sorts of data obtained since each situation is different and not easily comparable. It relies heavily on flexibility, making the most of opportunistic moments in the field and cannot be easily planned. Consequently, I felt it was important to use semi-participant observation to complement the other methods I used, including the interviews and the written and visual methods. For example, one benefit of using task-based research activities at the school was that many children could complete them simultaneously, obtaining information more quickly and for a greater number of children than by using individual interviews or observation techniques (Boyden and Ennew 1997: 107).

During the fieldwork period I visited a sample of eighteen households regularly. The aim of repeated household visits was to monitor the household livelihood strategy, and carry out informal interviews about a variety of different topics, for which I had a checklist for discussion in my head. By regularly visiting the same sample households not only is a relationship of trust built up but accumulative interviewing (see Whatmore 1991) allows for a detailed history of the household to be formed. Repeat interviews over a long period of time also facilitate access to all household members some of whom may be absent during initial visits. This permits a multi-perspective of the household lifestyle and contributes to a fuller picture of their present and past situation. Household visits were also used to carry out semi-structured interviews with fifteen parents and eight grandparents about their own childhood and about their children's lives.

The main disadvantages of household visits were that they were time-consuming and imposed on participants' time and privacy. The visits lasted from half an hour to a whole day, depending on what the household members were doing and how well I was accepted into their home environment. Wherever possible I tried to accompany

household members on their tasks in order to carry out informal interviews whilst minimising disruption to their daily routine. For example, I would talk to the women in the kitchen while helping to peel potatoes, or to various household members while helping to harvest or peel maize, or while going to round up the livestock.

Most of the recording of data was carried out immediately after observation or informal interview to keep the interactions as unobtrusive as possible (see also Boyden and Ennew 1997: 149). During the semi-structured interviews notes were written to facilitate the more detailed writing up afterwards, which included observations of the interview setting and the reaction of the interviewee to the questions and to the researcher. Wherever possible verbatim quotations were recorded for use in the presentation of data so as not to lose the richness of the participants' own language and choice of words. However, during semi-participant observation it was difficult to record exact quotations, except in the two households where I was staying as there were more opportunities to write notes. Since my first university degree was in Spanish and Latin American Studies, my fluency in the language enabled me to design the research tools in Spanish. Language competency was also essential for carrying out ethnographic research of this kind in the first place, since rapport and research relations could not have developed in the same way via an interpreter. Yet despite fluency in Spanish, many local terms and farming vocabulary also had to be rapidly learnt. I translated all the quotations but it was not always an easy task to capture the exact meaning in English. Consequently, my translation was sometimes flexible to incorporate the flavour of the local language, which was why I decided to keep the original words in the footnotes.

I chose not to use a tape recorder mainly because it was not a practical option since most of the informal interviews were carried out whilst accompanying the respondents during errands or tasks. During semi-structured interviews I did not want to make the respondents feel more self-conscious, especially since they are not used to being interviewed and are unfamiliar with tape recorders. Consequently, I developed my own form of short-hand, used scribbled notes to prompt memory and learnt to write quickly whilst maintaining eye contact and the flow of conversation (Boyden and Ennew 1997: 149).

Approximately every ten days I withdrew from the community to spend two days in the town of Tarija, to enable me to reflect on the data obtained and on my role as a researcher, to transfer field notes to a laptop computer and consider how my ideas were developing. Copies of detailed letters sent home regularly to family and friends were kept, describing the nature of field relationships, the cultural differences, the

uncertainties, joys and dilemmas of life in the field. These have proved useful in reconstructing the changing nature of the fieldwork and the intellectual process.

## **Summary**

This chapter has shown some of the advantages of combining a range of qualitative methods. Each method has particular advantages and disadvantages. To a certain extent, the questions and themes to be explored determined the methods chosen. For example, processes of negotiation between adults and children could not be depicted in a drawing, photograph or diagram, but needed to be observed, written or talked about. Practical issues also determined the choice of methods. Semi-participant observation and household visits were time-consuming and could only be used with small numbers of children, unlike the task-based methods, which could be carried out as classroom activities.

The visual methods of using drawings, photographs and PRA techniques were most useful in the initial exploratory stages of the research for the investigation of broad themes and seeking children's definitions of the important aspects of their lives. The written methods of diaries and worksheets were used to examine those issues which children had raised in more detail. The household visits were useful to provide a broader perspective to their social worlds. They were used with semi-participant observation as complementary to the other methods, to confirm whether children did in practice what they said they did, and to add greater depth to an understanding of children's rural lives in different contexts.

In addition, this chapter has explored some of the difficulties of developing research relations in the field, of which the key ingredients in building such relationships are sensitivity and flexibility to adapt to the particular research context. The chapter has also focused on the negotiation of the researcher's role and the importance of switching between different identities according to the requirements of the research setting and the preferences of the individual research subjects. The researcher should be prepared to invest time and make the most of opportunistic moments to give something back to participants, allowing a more mutual relationship to develop based on trust. Ethnographic researchers should also be ready to carry out informal interviews as and when opportunities arise as well as being willing to fit in with participants' activities and daily lives. However, in order to maintain an awareness of the developing nature of research field relations, a detailed record should be kept not only of the researcher's changing thoughts, feelings and observations but also the participants' reactions to the research process.

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<sup>1</sup> This doctoral research developed as a result of initially working for two years in the same region of southern Bolivia on an European Union funded project titled: *Farmer Strategies and Production Systems in Fragile Environments in Mountainous Areas of Latin America*. Both the EU project and the doctoral study (including a follow-up fieldwork period of six months) were based at the School of Geography, at the University of Leeds. Grateful acknowledgement goes to the School of Geography at Leeds and the British Federation of Women Graduates for their financial support of the doctoral research.

<sup>2</sup> I prefer to use the terms Majority World and Minority World to refer to the Developing and Developed World respectively. The Majority World has the most of the world's population and a greater land mass. Thus, it reflects the majority experience compared to the more privileged lifestyles of the Minority World. Although this unduly homogenises the 'Majority', by using the terms Minority and Majority World at least the reader may be caused to pause and reflect on the unequal relations between these two world areas.

<sup>3</sup> All the names of the respondents as well as the community have been changed in order to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality.

<sup>4</sup> *Mucha gente han venido aquí para hacernos preguntas, pero despues se desaparecen y no les vemos de nuevo. Asi no sabemos porque nos han hecho esas preguntas.* (Dolores, Churquiales 1993)

<sup>5</sup> 'Key informant' is used here as meaning respondents with whom close friendship was formed, much time was spent and their opinions were regularly sought (Boyden and Ennew 1997: 124-5).

<sup>6</sup> In southern Bolivia, people tend to use 'vos' instead of 'tu' for the familiar form 'you.'

<sup>7</sup> *Vamos, no te vas a caer.* (Marianela, 10 years, 18 October 1996)

<sup>8</sup> *Por eso mi papá me da plata, Bs.1.50 en la mañana, y de lo que compro doy a mis hermanos. Pero él no da a ellos porque ellos no lo ayudan tanto.* (Marianela, 10 years, 18 October 1996)

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