Abstract
This paper considers the influence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (the Convention) on research about, with and by children. Drawing on an international literature, ways in which children are involved as researchers through research stages, levels of participation, and methods are described, with a review of some of the problems and advantages of children doing research.

Introduction: three kinds of rights
This review paper draws on a rapidly growing international literature about research by children. 'Children' is an awkward word to cover teenagers, but is used to emphasise how young children can also be involved. Three main areas will be discussed: *stages* of the research process at which children can be involved as actors; *levels* of children's participation; and the use of *methods* which can increase children's informed involvement in research, thereby respecting their rights. The idea of seeing the previously 'researched' adult as a co-researcher or co-producer of data, and equally involved in the analysis, is already widely acknowledged. All the arguments proposed by feminist and Black researchers for research about their own group can also apply to children. Research about a group by members of the same group is usually justified in terms of control and of addressing power imbalances in the research relationship. Such research is also justified in terms of efficiency, as opening the way to closer intimacy and fuller discussion between researchers and researched, as well as making possible a potentially broader range of collection methods and fuller understanding of the data.

   An explicit and implicit theme within this co-research is respect for the researched group and for their own views and abilities. Respect links closely to rights, and rights Conventions offer a principled yet flexible means of justifying and extending respectful practices (Spencer, 1998). Rights Conventions which have near-universal support and quasi-legal status provide formal justification for observing ethical standards in research. Growing awareness of the rights of children, and other 'minority' groups including women has paved the way for involving children as researchers.

   Internationally, children's rights have taken on a new dimension in the past decade with the so-called *participation* rights. Traditionally, international declarations have stressed children's rights to *protection* from neglect and abuse and for *provision* of goods and services. Until recently, research about children has reflected these priorities, by measuring the effects of health or education interventions in their lives, or exploring children's needs as assessed by adults, or by investigating children's gradual development and socialisation towards adult competence.

   However, the new dimension of children's participation rights, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, involves moderate versions of adult autonomy rights. The participation rights concern children taking part, in activities and decisions which affect them, and include especially three of the Convention's 54 articles. Firstly, State parties should assure: 'to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (article 12). Secondly, there is the right 'to freedom of expression [including] freedom to seek, review and impart information and

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ideas of all kind... through any other media of the child's choice' (article 13). Thirdly there is the right of the child 'to rest and leisure, to engage in play and ... cultural life and the arts' (article 31).

The rights are qualified in important ways. Some, for example, are aspirational, not yet fully realisable, but only 'to the maximum extent of [each nation's] available resources' (4). The rights are also not absolute but conditional, affected by the 'evolving capacities of the child', the 'responsibilities, rights and duties of parents'(5) and the national law. 'The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration'(1, 21). Children's rights cannot be exercised in ways which would harm the child or other people. They must 'respect the rights and reputations of others', as well as 'national security and public order, health and morals' (13). The rights are not about selfish individualism but about solidarity, social justice and fair distribution. To claim a right is to acknowledge that everyone else has an equal claim to it. The claim affirms the worth and dignity of every person. Respect for children's rights promotes 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom' (preamble of the Convention).

Every government except the United States and Somalia (which has no government) has ratified the Convention, undertaking to publicise it 'to adults and children alike', to bring state laws and services to accord with it, and to report regularly to the UN on progress in doing so. There are extensive debates about the problematic nature of children's rights, and how participation rights can complement yet also conflict with provision and protection rights (Alderson and Goodwin, 1993). The status of children in research has changed during the 1990s through several influences. These include: the aftermath of the Gillick ruling in 1985 that competent children aged under 16 can give valid consent (for a review see Alderson and Montgomery, 1996); new approaches in the sociology of childhood to children as competent social actors, no longer simply subsumed under adult-dominated headings like the family (Qvortrup et al, 1994; James and Prout, 1997); and the well-publicised eloquence of young children, for example, on television and in other arenas (Alderson, 1999). Importantly, there is also research by children themselves, largely sponsored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in accordance with the UN Convention. Respect for children's participation recognises them as subjects rather than objects of research, who can 'speak' in their own right and report valid views and experiences. ('Speaking' may involve sign language when children cannot hear or talk, and other expressive body language and sounds, such as those made by children with autism and severe learning difficulties during our research in special and mainstream schools (Alderson and Goodey, 1998).) To involve children more directly in research can rescue them from silence and exclusion, and from being represented, by default, as passive objects, while respect for their informed and voluntary consent can help to protect them from covert, invasive, exploitative or abusive research.

One major obstacle in conducting research with children concerns infantilising them, perceiving and treating them as immature and, in so doing, producing evidence to reinforce notions of their incompetence. This can include `talking down' to children, using over-simple words and concepts, restricting them into making only superficial responses, and involving only inexperienced children and not those with intense relevant experience who could give much deeper responses. For example, children's views about illness and medical treatments are frequently collected from average samples of mainly healthy children (Wilkinson, 1988) who are relatively ignorant, despite information from television. Children who have chronic illness have far greater knowledge about the nature and purpose of medical treatments; 2-year-olds with cancer can talk with great understanding that challenges beliefs about their inability to understand (Kendrick 1986). Alternatively, researchers' over-complicated or poorly explained terms, topics and methods can also misleadingly make children (and some adults) appear to be

ignorant or incapable. Children may help adult researchers to set more appropriate levels of talk. During research about children's consent to surgery, I asked a 10-year-old, `So you are having your legs made longer?' and she replied, `I suffer from achondroplasia and I am having my femurs lengthened,' politely showing me her sophisticated level of talk and insight (Alderson, 1993). Ann Solberg makes a similar point about 4-year-olds (Solberg, 1997). Child researchers may be better able to think of appropriate topics, questions and terms for child interviewees.

Another obstacle for children is the common assumption that the consent of parents or teachers will suffice, and that children need not or cannot express their own consent or refusal to take part in research. The British Education Research Association (BERA, 1992) does not even mention children's consent in its ethical guidelines. Social research contributes to the extensive debate about children's consent (for a review see Alderson, 1995), by providing evidence of children's competence in their daily life and in research (for example, in Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). When children are seen as actors in the social construction and determination of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of their society (James and Prout, 1997), they may be more conscious of the importance of respecting the other children who help with their research. Children are now *seen as* active researchers, and 'Who is better qualified to research some aspects of their lives than children themselves?' seems a timely question to raise. The rest of this paper considers how they *can be* active researchers.

Children as researchers
Research is part of everyday life in the projects every school child does. In schools I have visited, Adam aged 5 made a graph about pets owned by children in his class, and Helen aged 16 tape-recorded interviews with her friends about their parents' divorce for her A level psychology project. Tariq's geography GCSE project was about the local allotments threatened with closure and he checked local authority records and observed a council meeting. Classes of 9- to 11-year-olds watched a video about ponds, then had a brain-storming circle time and small group discussions to plan and draw a pond for their school playground. They worked to a budget and with adults' help created and stocked the pond. In these kinds of examples, learning, the main occupation for everyone at school or college, overlaps with research, but the wealth of research in schools is almost entirely unpublished and so cannot be reviewed in this paper.

Research in schools tends to be seen as practising rather than worthwhile in its own right, but sometimes it is linked to highly valued activities. In Uganda, many children are the first generation to attend school and they become health educators for the community. Through the Child-to-Child Trust which promotes peer education, the 600 children at a village primary school became concerned that animals used the main well-pond. They spoke with the village leader who called a meeting where the children presented poems and dramas about the value of clean water. As a result, children and adults worked together on cleaning the well-pond and building fence to keep out the animals, then they celebrated with food and music (ISCA 1995:236).

The second most usual way in which children are involved in research is in projects designed and conducted by adults. However, besides providing data in their traditional role as research subjects, increasingly, children help to plan questions, and collect, analyse or report evidence, or publicise the findings. For example, on an accident-prone estate,

> teenagers had little to say about the kinds of events we [the researchers] had thought of as accidents. Nor did they respond well to the notion of safety or safe-keeping. In the

end we asked them what our opening question should be. 'Ask us about our scars', they replied. So we did, and it resulted in animated and detailed information about a number of accident events (Roberts et al, 1995).

The teenagers' initial responses could easily have been used to confirm assumptions about their ignorance and incompetence. In contrast, the partnership approach helped to develop new theories and methods for research about accidents and their prevention, and produced conclusions, and further projects with younger children. Children tend to be used to enquiring, scrutinising, accepting unexpected results, revising their ideas, and assuming that their knowledge is incomplete and provisional. Pre-school children frequently ask basic questions about philosophy and method and by five years have worked out basic understandings which last a life-time (Lipman, 1993; Tizzard and Hughes; 1984; Gardner, 1993). Very young children can share in making group decisions and agreeing on priorities (Miller, 1997).

   The third area is research which is mainly initiated and directed by children and teenagers (West, 1997; PEG 1998a, 1998b). Methods of involving unschooled adults as researchers, such as through participatory rural appraisal (Pratt and Loizos, 1992), are also used effectively with and by children (Johnson and Ivan-Smith 1996).The following sections review the stages, levels and methods through which children are involved as researchers.

Stages of research when children are involved
Research by children tends to expand the research process through paying great attention to the initial and follow up stages, as well as the central stages of collecting, reporting and analysing data. The early stages include selecting and setting up the research team and sample groups, avoiding tokenism, working out team and power relationships and ways of resolving problems as they arise, jointly deciding the agenda, aims, methods and payments in cash or in kind (for example, Cockburn et al, 1997). Follow up stages include publicity, and efforts to links the findings into policy and practice to change the world. 'We want to show this to the social workers/ planning officers/ Department for Education,' may be explicit initial aims (PEG). The national movement of street children in Brazil, for example, during the late 1980s, influenced the drafting of federal and municipal laws which enshrine children's rights based on research they had conducted (SCF, 1995). The following examples illustrate work at various stages of research.   The Participation and Education Group (PEG 1998a) researched how unhealthy schools can be. The replies to the 14 questions, from 187 young people aged from 5 to 25, vividly combine physical with mental health: 'If you can't do the work you get picked on and called thick. You feel sick and bad.' The lively research report includes graphs and pie charts, poems, quotations and strong recommendations. PEG made dramatic presentations about their research to health professionals, which they were asked to repeat at the Department for Education. They use the equal opportunity methods promoted in assertion training and by rights workers (Treseder 1997), which challenges assumptions that children are inevitably vulnerable. For example, 11-year-old boys wrote the agenda and chaired a meeting of people aged from eight years upwards, to plan a conference. They stated the rules of listening with respect, and the adults were politely reminded not to interrupt or talk down to children, and everyone had a turn to speak to questions such as: Why are we having this meeting? What did you get out of the meeting? (PEG 1998b).
   Bangladeshi young people researched the play and leisure needs of Bangladeshi children in Camden, London, taking account literally of a low-down child's eye view (Howarth, 1997). They discovered why so few children used public play facilities and recommended how make them more safe and attractive. In another project, children aged 3- to 8-years used cameras and

did surveys and interviews about children's views on improving their housing estate. They published an illustrated report, which they discussed with local authority officers who used some of their recommendations, like having the playground in the centre of the estate, not on the edge and beyond busy peripheral roads as the adults had planned (Miller 1997).

Young people also help to disseminate research memorably. At a Barnardo's conference to launch a research report on *Listening to children* (Alderson, 1995), five teenagers, dressed all in black, presented a short play to a conference about listening to children. They wove the Hansel and Gretel story and French mime techniques into a sombre, poignant depiction of children's despair at not being heard, and a passionate desire to affect the hearts as well as the minds of policy makers. After prolonged applause, the director of Barnardo's thanked them and then invited questions about earlier sessions. After a long silence, a senior Department of Health official said he thought everyone was too deeply impressed by the play to think about questions. Although I wrote the report and spoke at the conference, my nervousness concentrated on the actors. Would they actually turn up? What were they going to do? Would it be an appalling flop? Would we hurt the young people, and the whole message of the day, by entrusting so much responsibility to them? It is risky to ask traditionally seldom heard groups to appear at daunting public meetings. However, I felt that the hardest part was to overcome my adult prejudices.

Levels of children's involvement
'Child-centred research' is a term that can loosely cover methods, stages or levels of children's involvement (Connolly and Ennew, 1996). A crucial element is how adults share or hold back knowledge and control. The different levels of control-sharing and of children's participation have been compared with rungs on a ladder (Arnstein, 1979; Hart, 1992). The lowest levels are the pretence of shared work: manipulation, decoration and tokenism. The next levels which involve actual participation are: children being assigned to tasks but at least also being informed about them; children being consulted and informed; and adults imitating but also sharing decisions with children. The top two levels are projects more fully initiated and directed by children. The ladder image can help to reveal how far children are or could be participating. Yet involving them is complicated by inevitable structures in research. Funders seldom fund the important initial stages of selecting and contacting young people and sharing initial planning with them. And even after all this work, a project might not be funded.

Children's participation in research and policy has been extensively reported (Lorenzo, 1992; Hart, 1996; Miller, 1997; Wellard et al, 1997, Willow, 1997). Levels of participation are affected, for example, by children's capacities to understand theories. Can they understand critical analysis, or the politics of racism? A report of a class of 7-year-olds demonstrates that some can (Butler 1998). Their teacher describes how conscious these black children in down-town Chicago became of racial, economic and political oppressions, as they discussed their own experiences intensely in class. If someone wanted to talk about rocks or ants or something not obviously related to justice, they would say, 'That's nice, but what does that have to do with peace and power?' 'How you gonna help your Brothers and Sisters by talking about that?' They analysed contradictions between the rhetoric and reality in their lives, the social pressures that restrict individual agency, and how they can work for social justice, power, unity and community change. They suggest that, with help, young children are able to participate fully even in the more complex aspects of research like planning and analysis.

Methods used by young researchers
Child researchers use a wide range of methods, from selecting topics, questions, samples and

observation sites through to data analysis and reporting, dissemination and policy discussions (for example, SCF 1996, 1997; Ash et al 1997; Beresford 1997; Kenny and Cockburn, 1997; Wellard et al 1997; PEG 1998a, 1998b). Research reports by young groups range from long typed reports (West, 1997) to a simple poster or wall newspaper, a video or photographic exhibition, with reports and drawings by the whole team or from smaller groups (Howarth, 1997; Johnson et al 1996) or to work on anti-poverty measures (Willow, 1997) or anti-racist work (CCSE, nd). They may use complex methods, like Emily Rosa, aged 9, who designed an elegant randomised trial of 21 therapeutic touch healers who took part in 280 tests. The healers put their hands through holes in a screen, and Emily spun a coin to determine whether she held her hands just about their left or right hand, to see if the healers felt the energy fields through which they claimed to heal. Accuracy would have to be well above 50% to demonstrate sensitivity, but was under 50%. Experts praised this simple design that casts strong doubt on the healers' claims; previously, complicated expensive trials had compared patients' healing rates after therapeutic touch and orthodox treatments (Rosa 1998).

Young researchers around England used Open College training materials to conduct ambitious projects. School girls investigating children's participation rights decided to interview in six North-East local authorities the Directors of Education, Social and Leisure Services, the Chief Executives and Council Leaders and some Assistant Chief Constables. They had only one refusal. They piloted interviews with a senior researcher who thought they 'were brilliant' and that he would not have been able to arrange the access which they achieved (Allan Siddall, personal communication). The girls discussed the merits of qualitative and quantitative methods when analysing their interviews, and considered how their evidence clearly showed that the officers' rhetoric did not fit the reality.

Another example of methods is text analysis. On the Children's Express, the reporters, aged 8-13, conduct penetrating interviews, and the editors are aged 14-18. Most of them come `from backgrounds which offer little opportunity', and they publish reports in many newspapers and magazines. Recently, 27 of them monitored 400 stories in the national press to find that every article stereotyped children - as victims, cute, evil, exceptionally excelling, corrupted, as accessories to adults or as `brave little angels'. They held a conference in 1998 *Kids these days* to publicise their research (Neustatter, 1998).

Research and play
A striking aspect of children's research is the combining of work and play (see UN Convention 1989 article 31). They use 'ice-breaking' sessions to help one another to feel confident and relaxed, more willing to listen and risk sharing ideas, with less fear of being dismissed (Johnson et al, 1996; Tresedar, 1997). They can enjoy *being* together as well as *working* together, which helps to sustain the enthusiasm of children who are usually volunteers. Play methods can enhance children's research imagination. Talking about 'let's pretend' can involve young children in planning improvements in playgrounds and nurseries (Miller, 1997). One well illustrated pack produced with children shows how to promote genuine participation, negotiation and power sharing through games, with details on promoting equal opportunities and 'chat space methods' (SCF and Kirklees, 1996). The play approaches help research teams Young children can be good at listening, questioning, challenging, keeping to the point, and helping each other to learn and develop ideas (McNamara and Moreton, 1997). Topics and ideas are selected and noted in words or pictures on large sheets and everyone has coloured sticky dots to put beside the most liked items. It is one of several democratic, quick and fun ways to assess opinions. Very young or illiterate children can contribute detailed data through their songs and dreams, by models, drawings or maps about their daily mobility and routines

(Johnson et al 1995; Boyden and Ennew, 1997) or about their local wild life (Hart, 1997). As play can be free and rather subversive is opens ways for children to contribute who might otherwise remain silent, hostile or bored during a project.

However, there are risks of play turning into a diversion which interrupts the serious research work which the children might want to do in `adult' ways. Play can also be confusing if an adult says to children `we're going to have fun and play these games so that you can find out from each other about bullying'. The children might take this introduction seriously and concentrate on the fun and play, and the adults might then conclude that the children are incapable of investigating bullying without informing the children and giving them practical opportunities to show and develop their research skills.

Research and work

Action research can involve learning from difficulties, planning projects, collecting and applying new knowledge, publicising the research products (like food and news in the next examples) and testing public responses. During their monthly meetings in New Delhi, the street boys realised that they spent 75% of their money on food. Twelve boys aged 7 to 17, took an intensive ten day course on cooking, nutrition, cleanliness, looking after customers and book-keeping, and had help with renting a space for a restaurant. They gave free food to some street children and learned Chinese cooking to expand the menu (ISCA, 1995:239). In Sarajevo in 1993, 18 editors aged 10-to 13-years ran a radio programme, Colourful Wall, with an estimate audience of 80% of all the citizens. They conducted polls of children's views and based their programme planning on the results. Children brought news items to 15 press centres through the city. Many schools were closed at the time, and many children were injured and bereaved. The programme carried education, entertainment and psychological support for them, with counsellors, a personal column section and a daily slot on children's rights. The young disc jockeys were especially popular and like the New Delhi boys, were keen to evaluate and expand their work.

Rights are sometimes criticised as a Western, Anglo-American concept, too individualistic and egoistical to fit, for example, Eastern communities. Yet Bangladeshi street children suggest that the people who are most conscious of rights to justice, to respect for the child's worth and dignity, to speak and to be heard are those who rights are least respected (Khan, 1997). Eleven researchers aged 10-15 years interviewed 51 street children aged 7-15 years and, being illiterate, they narrated all they could remember to adults transcribers. The young researchers were staying in a shelter and training to be tailors, carpenters, and rickshaw repairers; previously they had been rag pickers, sex workers and house servants. They planned the research methods and questions, data analysis and recommendations, and they listened to and checked every word of the research reports.

After much discussion the young researchers identified 11 issues they thought most important after comparing and synthesising many issues from their interview data. It is striking that only two issues are about material resources - food and education, and then they wanted only short part-time vocational training that would be practical and not scholastic. Their main concerns are for their civil or human rights. The main problems they want to stop are:

1. Torture by police
2. Torture by muscle men
   (also theft, and being forced to deal drugs, sex work)
3. Misbehaviour of adults:
   (name calling, never using child's own name, chasing children away)

4.	Dislike present job
5.	Cannot get job without a guardian
6.	Marriage problems of girls
	(even slum girls can get husband, even street boys would not marry bad dirty street girls)
7.	Uncertain future:
	(older girls cannot stay on street but no where else to go)
8.	Poor income, cheated by adult traders, dirty rotten food
9.	Street girls are hated as they are involved in bad things
	(adults force children to do bad things then punish and blame even innocent ones)
10.	Cannot protest against injustice without relatives' help
11	No education -
	(though they want vocational training rather than schooling)

It is rare for people intended to benefit from international aid programmes to be asked for their views, still rarer for them to help to survey their peers' views. These answers challenge global health care and education programmes by their requests for minimal help with making realistic improvements in the young people's present daily life. These replies show the importance of listening respectfully to children. Adults cannot know children's best interests without asking children first. Sometimes, as shown in this research, adults themselves are the worst problems for children, as well as being part of the potential solution. Individually and on the largest international scale, this small study shows that expertly devised, top-down health programmes are not necessarily effective.

Discussion
Practical problems for child researchers
Child researchers share the problems which adult 'lay' researchers (Pratt and Poizos, 1992) and child subjects of research (Alderson, 1995) also have. How can they work with professional researchers on reasonably equal, informed and unpressured terms? How much should professional researchers intervene to support them or to control the research? How can adults avoid exploiting or manipulating children, as in the participation ladders mentioned earlier? How much time can children be expected to give to research beyond the work they may already do at school, at home or outside the home, or begging? Should they be paid and, if so, how much, and in cash or in kind? How can research expenses and access to research meetings for children who have to have an adult escort be arranged? When research is conducted through schools, teachers may need to be, or insist on being, involved which sets up new adult-child power imbalances to attend to. When child researchers seem to be over-impressed with, for example, the views of officials which they have collected, should adults encourage them to be more critical? And who should have final control over the data and any reports, the children or adult or both jointly? Journalists may be interested in the novelty of publicising research by children, but they may also mis-report child researchers, as they mis-report some adults' research.
   A few from many potential complications have been mentioned to show that working with child researchers does not simply resolve problems of power, exploitation or coercion. Working methods need to be planned, tested, evaluated and developed with the young researchers. The advantage of working in a research team with them is that there are is more time to talk, than there can be with child research subjects, to unravel the intricate operations of power that constitute subjectivity (Aziz, 1997), and to turn problems into opportunities for

children and adults to increase their skill and knowledge.

Practical advantages of working with child researchers
The growing literature on children as researchers suggests that children are an under-estimated, under-used resource. Just as research about women has become far more insightful because women are involved as researchers, the scope of research about children could be expanded by involving children as researchers in many methods, levels and stages of the process. Children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences. They can be a means of access to other children, including those who may be protected from access by strange adults, such as Muslim girls. The novelty and immediacy of children's research reports can attract greater publicity and interest in using the findings than much adult research does. Doing research helps children (perhaps disadvantaged ones especially) to gain more skills, confidence and possibly determination to overcome their disadvantages than adult researchers working on their behalf could give them. Adult researchers note their surprise at child researchers' competence, and describe plans to do more complicated work with children as well as to work with younger children in future. Adult researchers frequently emphasise the value of listening to children, a point that is made more effectively when children can express themselves through doing the relevant research.

   New political and funding pressures promote research by children. NGOs follow international guidance that their own research and services should be 'child-focussed', strongly and directly influenced by children, in accordance with the 1989 UN Convention. Governments, having ratified the Convention, should also be involving children and listening to them through all their agencies. As more children's research is published, the dangers of ignoring their views (Cooter, 1992), and the benefits of working with them become more obvious. Funding bodies like the ESRC and Rowntree expect researchers to work closely with user groups, from inception to the implementation stages of research. Involving users has potential disadvantages when powerful commercial or professional bodies prevent researchers from being adventurous, independent and critical. Consulting children as the largest 'user group' of research affecting them can redress inter-generation imbalances of power, open up new directions for research, and respect children's rights. Child researchers can demonstrate their competencies, ingenuity and originality, their unique and valid perspectives that can inform social policy and practice (SCF, 1997:2-5).

   Notions of childhood vary, and we can't easily transfer experiences, structures and attitudes across cultures. Child researchers tend to be more adventurously involved in poor and war-torn countries, in adult work as well as research; they cannot simply set up restaurants in the UK as they can in New Delhi. The limitations here for research by children seem to lie less in children's (in)competencies, than in Western adults' limiting attitudes, in constraints and concern for protection over participation rights. However, the evidence of child researchers' activities and achievements, as well as their research findings, are likely to promote more respectful and realistic appreciation of their abilities as social actors.

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