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## **Children as researchers: participation rights and research methods**

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### **Introduction**

Increasingly across the world, children are working as researchers and evaluators (UNICEF 2006). In Britain, for example, every Government department is committed to involving children in planning, delivery and evaluation of policies and services. This chapter considers matters raised by child researchers, illustrated through a review of an international literature. Three main areas will be discussed: the stages of the research process, the levels of participation, and the types of research methods in which young researchers are involved. The idea of seeing the 'researched' adult as a co-researcher and co-producer of data, equally involved in the analysis, is already widely acknowledged. This idea is usually argued for in terms of respect and shared control, and of addressing power imbalances in the research relationship. It can also be justified in terms of efficiency, as opening the way to a broader range of collection methods and fuller understanding of the data. The same advantages can occur when children conduct research with more or less help from adults.

An explicit and implicit theme within this type of co-research is respect for the researched group and for their own views and abilities. Respect links closely to rights, and international treaties such as the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) offer principled yet flexible means of justifying and extending respectful practices. With its near-universal support and quasi-legal status, the UNCRC formally justifies ethical standards of respect for rights within research. Growing awareness of the rights of children, and other 'minority' groups including women, has paved the way for involving children as researchers.

Until recently, research about children has concentrated on adults' efforts to protect children and provide for them, mainly by measuring the effects of health, education or welfare interventions in their lives, or their needs as assessed by adults, or by investigating their gradual development and socialisation towards adult competence. However, the newer dimension of children's participation rights, enshrined in the UNCRC, involves moderate versions of adult autonomy rights. These concern children taking part in activities and decisions that affect them. Participation rights include especially three of the UNCRC's 54 articles. 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 (12); (figures in brackets refer to relevant article of the UNCRC)

the right to freedom of expression [including] freedom to seek, review and impart information and ideas of all kind... through any other media of the child's choice (13);

the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and ... cultural life and the arts' (31).

The rights are qualified in several 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' (UNCRC Preamble). Every government except the United States and Somalia has ratified the UNCRC, 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. Yet children's rights are still frequently challenged, for example, in how participation rights can complement yet also conflict with provision and protection rights.

Other influences, which have raised the status of children in research and as researchers, include the aftermath of the Gillick ruling in 1985 that children aged under 16 can give valid consent (for a review see Alderson and Montgomery 1996); new respect in the sociology of childhood for children as competent social actors, who are no longer seen as simply subsumed under the adult-dominated headings of 'family' or 'school' (Qvortrup et.al.1994; James and Prout 1997); and the well-publicised eloquence of young children, for example, on television. Central to this chapter, there is also research by children themselves, initially largely sponsored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in accordance with the UNCRC, to be considered in the rest of this chapter.

### **Child researchers and their rights**

Children's participation involves changing emphases in research methods and topics. Recognising children as subjects rather than objects of research entails accepting that children can 'speak' in their own right and report valid views and experiences. Such '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 (Alderson and Goodey 1998), or children on mechanical ventilation (Noyes 1999). To involve all children more directly

in research can therefore rescue them from silence and exclusion, and from being represented, by default, as passive objects, while respect for their informed and voluntary consent helps to protect them from covert, invasive, exploitative or abusive research.

This latter point relates to a major obstacle in conducting research with children: 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 by 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 more informed responses. When the views are collected of children aged 3, 4 and 5 years about long term illness or disability they have deeply experienced, they are seen to have far more mature understanding and moral responsibility than is usually thought possible at these ages (Alderson, *et al.* 2006). Alternatively, researchers' over-complicated or poorly explained terms, topics and methods can also misleadingly make children (and many adults) appear to be ignorant or incapable. Children may, however, help adult researchers to set more appropriate levels of talk (O'Kane this volume).

Another obstacle for children is the common assumption by adults that the permission of parents or teachers will suffice, and that children need not or cannot express their own consent or refusal to take part in research. Social research can inform debates about young children's consent by providing evidence of their competence in their daily life and in research (Alderson 2000; Alderson and Morrow 2004), confirming the now commonplace assertion that children are social actors who influence their own lives, their societies and environments. Two related questions therefore arise. Firstly, if children's social relations and culture are worthy of study in their own right, then who is better qualified to research some aspects of their lives than children themselves? Secondly, if children can be active participants, as this chapter considers, can they also be active researchers?

### **Children as researchers**

Children begin to be researchers in their everyday school projects. In schools that I have visited, for example, 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 involved him in checking local authority records and observing 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 examples, learning, the main occupation for everyone at school, overlaps with research, but this wealth of research in schools is almost entirely unpublished, and tends to be seen as 'practising' rather than as worthwhile in its own right. In

contrast, comparable activities may be highly valued in other societies, as shown in the next example. Through Child-to-Child peer education, 600 Ugandan children at a village school became concerned that animals used the main well-pond. The children spoke with the village leader who called a meeting at which 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 (ISCA 1995:236).

The second most usual way in which children are involved in research is in projects designed and conducted by adults (see O’Kane; Davis *et al.*, Roberts, and Christensen and James in this volume). However, besides providing data in their traditional role as research subjects, increasingly, children help to plan questions, and collect, analyse and report evidence, and publicise the findings, as this chapter will review. Children are possibly more likely than adults to be interested in every stage of research. Many of them are used to enquiring, scrutinising, accepting unexpected results, revising their ideas, and assuming that their knowledge is incomplete and provisional. Children may have less to lose, and more to gain, by asking radical questions, such as: Why do we have school assembly? Adults, by contrast, can feel threatened by research, which might critically question their own expertise, authority or convenience.

The third and less common but expanding area is research mainly initiated and directed by children and young people. 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 (O’Kane and Christensen and James this volume). The following sections review the stages, levels and methods through which children are involved as researchers.

### **Stages of research when children are involved**

Research in schools and universities, which mainly aims to add to knowledge, tends to concentrate on the middle stages of projects: collecting and analysing data and writing reports. In contrast, young researchers are usually keen to produce findings that will achieve changes in, for example, provision of services, and respect for their rights. They therefore often emphasise the follow up stages of disseminating and implementing the findings. ‘We want to show this to the social workers/ Department for Education/Mayor of London,’ may be explicit initial aims. One main barrier is how rarely the initial and follow up stages of research are funded, although they are so important in children’s research (Wellard *et.al.*1997). The earliest stages may also be crucial: 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). Some of these important initial decisions may be taken for granted in hierarchical professional research teams. The following examples illustrate ways in which young people work through various stages of research.

Louise Hill planned research with children aged 8-12 years who had relevant experience about parents/carers being problem drinkers. They advised her on planning the research questions and methods, wording and posters. Given the potentially embarrassing and distressing nature of the research, she met small groups of children three times. They were in a Barnardo's support programme. She already knew some of them, and could count on the programme offering extra support to any child in need. The sessions were carefully planned with, fun and 'warm up' sessions, ending with 'cool down' activity (personal communication, 2007).

Natascha Klocker (2006) trained three former child domestic workers aged 14-18 in Tanzania in research skills. As a team they designed the research and conducted interviews and questionnaires with other child domestic workers, consulting them on ideas for improving regulation and law and introducing employment contracts. Working with legal experts, the research team is liaising with the Municipal Council to introduce a new bye-law, besides helping to set up an NGO 'Listen to the Child' to promote child workers' rights, and a weekly radio programme, which will employ young researchers.

Camille Warrington (2006) trained six young Gypsies and Travellers, aged 11-15 years, to interview their peers and families. While encouraging them to have as big a 'steer' as possible of the project, and regarding them as 'a key part of solutions to some of the problems they report', Camille felt that, given more time, the young people could have been more fully involved, although they actively disseminated their findings, which they presented at the House of Lords.

*Sort It Out!* (OCRCL 2001), a survey of the views of 3,000 Londoners aged 3-17 years on their priorities for life in their city, was planned, designed and conducted by young people with adults' help. The 1998 Greater London Authority (GLA) Act established eight initial Strategies for the new London Mayor, which did not mention children. The Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London (OCRCL) opened in 2000 and was run for, by and with children and young people, and the friendly welcoming office with full time staff was an ideal workplace for child researchers. A major aim was to persuade the Mayor to adopt a Strategy for Children and Young People and this was achieved. The survey, including thousands of postcards sent to Ken (the Mayor) informed the Strategy, by identifying children's eight priorities: poverty, health, education, play, transport, family and care, housing with neighbourhoods and environment; crime and justice. These priorities have since influenced numerous GLA policies, and laid the foundations for the *State of London's Children* reports (Hood 2002; 2004), which set a model for all capital cities by extrapolating from national and local (borough/ward) records to produce regional citywide statistics. The reports have opened up understanding about young Londoners' lives, including their very high levels of poverty. The reports also act as tools for review and change, when they are updated about every two years. The original survey promoted numerous local projects around London, such as the videos made by youth clubs of their very poor local facilities, which they presented to shocked and impressed members of the House of Lords (personal observation). OCRCL research methods combined play and work with equal opportunity methods and assertion training (for example, Treseder 1997).

Khan (1997) reported a project conducted by 11 Bangladeshi street girls and boys aged 10-15 years. They interviewed 51 other street children aged 7-15 years in Dhaka. The research team held 18 meetings to choose the topics and questions, the methods and the interviewees. They conducted one or two interviews each morning and, as they were unschooled, they dictated all they could remember to adult scribes in the afternoon. The team then listened to every transcript and argued about the priorities they wanted to report. After much debate, comparing and synthesising many matters, they identified 11 priorities. These included torture by police and muscle men (theft, being forced, for example, into smuggling arms, dealing drugs and sex work); misbehaving adults (name calling, never using the child's own name, chasing children, accusing them of being bad); dislike of present job; inability to get work without a guardian-advocate; street girls being hated and despised, their inability to find a husband and anxiety about the future when they could no longer stay on the street; low income (cheating by adult traders, having to find dirty rotten food); inability to protest against injustice without support from adult relatives; lack of vocational education. The young researchers dictated, and then had read back to them, three reports in Bangla and English. They were very keen to publish their views for specific international agencies, and they made radio and television broadcasts. They questioned the emphasis in international aid policies on providing health and education services; only two of their points referred to material or economic needs. They clearly wanted social change, justice, and adults to respect and listen to them without violence or abuse, with policy makers rethinking the world from the viewpoints of children.

In a community project in England, children aged 3- to 8-years used cameras and conducted surveys and interviews about children's views on improving their housing estate. They published an illustrated report, which six of them presented and discussed with local authority officers at a 'proper' meeting around a table. Some of their recommendations were used, such as 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. I have attended conferences where they have read poems, created dramas, and used playful audience role play, which have clearly impressed the practitioners and policy makers present. *Youth Policy and Social Inclusion* (Barry 2005) includes critical commentaries after each of the 13 chapters, written by young people in their teens and early twenties, explaining the relevance of the research reports to their own and their friends' experiences. Keogh and Whyte (2005) conducted emancipatory research on student councils, analysing and checking their findings with a young focus group, who also made posters which ranked action for school councils and listed challenges and possible solutions. Their colleague Ruth Emond worked with young authors who produced two reports on their experiences of residential care and school. (Michael et al. 2002; Gerard et al. 2002).

### **Levels of children's involvement**

The term 'child-centred research' loosely covers methods, stages or levels of children's involvement. Although methods involving games may appear child-friendly, a crucial aspect is the level at which adults share or hold back knowledge and control from children. This can be evaluated using the well-known participation ladder (Hart 1992), starting with the pretence of shared work (manipulation, decoration and tokenism), moving to children being assigned to tasks although being informed and consulted, with the top levels of projects more fully initiated and directed by children. Lansdown (2005) reviews how 200 Ugandan children were involved in investigating, hearing and handling child abuse cases within their community, and she offers a matrix for measuring participation, ethics, voluntariness, inclusion, and the impact of projects from 'none' to 'considerable' impact. Drawing on her work with young researchers on war-affected populations, Marie Smyth (2004:156) lists questions to check when 'do the researcher's good intentions slide into colonial smothering'.

Levels of their participation are also affected by children's capacity to understand the relevant matters. Can young children, for example, understand critical analysis, or the politics of racism? A report by a teacher suggests that the 7-year-olds she taught could do so (Butler 1998). She describes how black children in downtown Chicago became conscious of racial, economic and political oppressions, as they discussed their own experiences intensely in class. 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. Hart (2002) investigated poor housing with very disadvantaged children. Through looking beyond local conditions at the history and politics of housing, the children came to question how they had blamed themselves and their families for their condition. Hart considers that, 'The resulting consciousness [may be] more important than the research itself or any direct action it may lead to.'

However, young researchers may be more likely to experience anger, frustration, disillusionment and cynicism. After they have been highly involved throughout their projects, their findings tend to be ignored or forgotten instead of being implemented (Willow 2002). Many reports emphasise how young researchers have learned and benefited from their involvement, but say little about how adults too might have learned, and gained, and implemented young researchers' recommendations to benefit many other people. Kirby and Bryson (2002: 7) warn against such token involvement, and ask 'how systems can change to accommodate young people's participation rather than expecting young people to participate in predefined ways'. Kirby et al. (2003) review how genuine sustainable participation depends on change to many levels and attitudes within organisations to promote respect for children's rights and actions. Working with ten advisers/researchers aged 14-19 years, who attended a residential course on methods, they selected 29 participatory projects, from among an initial 150, aiming to inform and 'move on' future work.

## **Methods used by young researchers**

Children's real involvement relates more to their own informed choosing and using of methods and not to any specific method (Punch 2002; Ennew and Plateau 2004; Nairne et al. in press). Child researchers use many methods, singly or in groups, with or without adults. They select research topics, general questions and methods, specific survey questions or interview topics, and the respondent samples and observation sites. Some conduct pilots and revise their plans for data collection, collation and analysis. After the analysis by hand or computer, they write reports and disseminate the findings, and discuss them with policy makers. Research reports by young groups range from long printed reports to a poster or wall newspaper, an internet message, a video or photographic exhibition, with reports and drawings by the whole team or from smaller groups. School projects have included: producing a video and exhibition on a town's facilities for disabled people, and surveying and proposing new road safety measures which were built. Children have also been involved in projects ranging from improving architectural designs for a new children's hospital in Derby, to working on anti-poverty measures in Greenwich (all in Willow 1997). One group reviewed multi-cultural policies in their school, designed and presented a policy to the student council, and planned in-service training sessions for school governors and staff with a local race relations group (CCSE, nd). Young people are also involved in an ethics committee (NICCY 2007) and in doing evaluations (Save the Children 2007). During school lunch time training sessions with academic researchers, 10 year olds soon become skilled in conducting small projects on topics that matter to them, such as the effect on families when mothers do paid work. They reflexively end their reports with a section on 'if I did this project again I would...' (Kellett 2006).

Some children seem to be able to understand complex methods. For example, Emily Rosa, aged 9, designed an elegant randomised trial of 21 therapeutic touch healers who took part in 280 tests. They put their hands through holes in a screen 30 cm apart, and Emily spun a coin to determine whether she would hold her hands just above their left or right hand. The aim was to show whether the healers were aware of the kinds of human energy fields through which they claim to heal. Accuracy would have to be well above 50% to demonstrate sensitivity, but was only 47% in the first trial and 41% in the second. Emily's mother believed that the healers took part because they did not feel threatened by a child, and experts praised this simple and novel way of gaining evidence that casts strong doubt on the healers' claims. Previously, complicated, lengthy and expensive trials had compared patients' healing rates after therapeutic touch and more orthodox treatments (Rosa et al. 1998).

In another project, care leavers aged 16-years and older investigated experiences of young people leaving care in five British cities. This group is highly over-represented among the homeless and prison population. The young researchers chose the research topics and questions during five residential meetings, and interviewed 80 young care leavers and 22 social work staff. They undertook full qualitative analysis of the results and made recommendations based on these. They wrote and launched the report and



talked to the media and to local authorities about the work, besides making a video (West 1997). Another project combined different teams with a central research group, and flexible use of core questions on 12 research sites. A key coordinating worker liaised with one practitioner and two young people on each site, and all of them made up the research group which took overall control over methods and editing of reports. They identified the main themes and 20 questions per theme. They worked mainly in schools, but also with groups of refugees and homeless young people (Kenny and Cockburn 1997). Young people aged 8-18 become skilled investigative reporters and editors, publishing their work in mainstream television and press through Headliners (formerly Children's Express). Their website ([www.headliners.org](http://www.headliners.org)) archives over 1200 reports, including for example, one on Kenyan children's peer-led education on HIV/AIDS (Parry-Davies and Akerbousse 2006).

### **Research and play**

A striking aspect of children's research is the combining of work and play. Young researchers use 'ice-breaking' sessions to help one another to feel confident and relaxed, genuinely included, more willing to listen to one another and to risk sharing ideas with less fear of being dismissed (Tresedar 1997). The UNCRC connects rights to engage in cultural life with the right to play (article 31) resonating with the way play methods can enhance children's research imagination. For example, talking about 'let's pretend' and making maps with drawings and photographs can involve young children in planning improvements in playgrounds and nurseries (Clark and Moss 2001). The play approaches help research teams to enjoy being together as well as working together, and help to sustain the enthusiasm of children who are usually unpaid volunteers. Young children can be good at listening, questioning, challenging, keeping to the point, and helping each other to learn and develop ideas (O'Kane this volume). For example, adults with young children select topics and ideas and note them in words or pictures on large sheets and everyone has coloured sticky dots to put beside the most popular items. This provides an instant relatively anonymous evaluation for everyone to see at a glance. It is one of several democratic, quick and fun ways to assess opinions. Very young or pre-literate children can contribute detailed data through their songs and dreams, by models, drawings or maps about their daily mobility and routines and environment (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Hart 1997).

### **Research and work**

It has been argued that children's work mirrors adults' work, in being mainly either physical or mental labour. European and north American societies tend to identify work, and therefore research, with mental effort. In cultures where the emphasis is more on physical work, the next examples could be seen as action research, because knowledge is gained through learning from difficulties, planning projects, collecting and applying new knowledge, publicising the research products (food and news) and testing public

responses. In one example, during their monthly meetings, street boys in New Delhi realised that they spent 75% of their money on food and they planned their project. Twelve boys, aged 7 to 17, took an intensive ten day course on cooking, nutrition, cleanliness, looking after customers and book-keeping, and they had help with renting a space for a restaurant. They took half pay at first, saying 'you can't expect to be an over-night success in this business, one has to bear losses for a while...and try very hard'. They gave free food to some street children, learned Chinese cooking to expand the menu, and planned to raise money to buy a van to take food to an area where there are many street children, financed by selling snacks in public places (ISCA 1995:239). In a comparable example, 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 local citizens. They conducted polls of children's views and based their programme planning on the results. They had 15 press centres through the city to which children brought news items, and when the phones were working these were phoned through to the radio station. 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.

### **Practical and ethical problems for child researchers**

However, problems and questions arise for child researchers, as they do for adult 'lay' researchers (Pratt and Loizos 1992) and for children who are the subjects of research (Alderson and Morrow 2004). How can young researchers work with adults on reasonably equal, informed and unpressured terms? How much responsibility is it fair to expect children to carry and how much should adults intervene to support them or to control the research? How can adults avoid exploiting or manipulating children, as in the participation ladder 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? There can be further problems with research expenses, and access to research meetings for children who have to have an adult escort. When research is conducted through schools, teachers may need to be, or insist on being, involved and this can set 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? Who should have final control over the data and any reports, the children or adults or both jointly? And even when all the complex arrangements have been made and children arrive to give their thoroughly researched presentations to world summits, they may be silenced and ignored (John 2003:202-8; Children's Express 2001).

### **Losing the plot**

In June 2006, the Government's Every Child Matters and Youth Matters website with the National Youth Agency showcased best examples of 'What's Changed: Making a positive contribution'. One example reported young people's concerns about 'perceived stereotyping' of them by the police. After meeting with the police, the young people agreed to research, plan and present a training day for police officers. The young people said, 'We came up with the idea to get involved with police and break down some barriers between them and the kids and some of the prejudices that some officers may have towards teenagers.' They used role play, discussions and open evaluation recorded on video. Thirteen police community support officers (PCSOs not real police officers) attended the day, but the website report shifted into assuming that the problem was in the young people's misperceptions. 'Outcomes' listed that young people appreciated meeting police 'on a level playing field.' 'It's nice to be talking to a copper and them not taking my details.' The 'what has changed' section recorded that 'young people involved in the project have since met the PCSOs within their community role and feel happy to interact with uniformed officers. Other young people are changing their perceptions and beginning to accept PCSOs as "real people".' The example illustrates how easily young people's research can be twisted into serving the opposite aims to the original ones. Adults' critical reflexivity must be central to research with children (Punch 2002).

I have mentioned just a few from many potential complications to show that working with child researchers does not simply resolve problems of power, exploitation or coercion. Indeed it may amplify them, and so working methods need to be planned, tested, evaluated and developed with the young researchers. One advantage is that there is often more time to talk with child researchers than with child research subjects, and to turn problems into opportunities for children and adults to increase their skill and knowledge.

### **Conclusion: working with child researchers**

The growing literature on children as researchers suggests that they are still 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. When I interview disabled or Black people, I find that although we discuss difficulties that arise from discrimination, we are also partly papering over the cracks of these very differences in order to try to hold equal respectful relationships. In contrast, when Black researchers talk with Black interviewees their common experiences of these differences enable them to explore them much more deeply (Scott 1998) and this shared exploration can apply to children's research about children.

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 strange adult researchers. 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 perhaps determination to overcome their disadvantages than adult researchers working on their behalf could give them. Adult researchers have noted their surprise at child researchers' competence, and their plans to do more complicated work, and to work with younger children in future. Adult researchers frequently emphasise the value of listening to children, and this point is made more effectively when children can express themselves through doing and publicly reporting their own research.

Research sponsors and funders promote research by children when they increasingly adopt policies of consulting 'consumers' of all ages, and when they follow UNCRC guidance that research and services should be 'child-focussed', strongly and directly influenced by children. As more children's research is published, the dangers of ignoring their views, and the benefits of working with them become more obvious, although the dangers of token involvement and of misreporting their views also increase. Funders, from the ESRC to Rowntree, expect researchers to work closely with user groups, from inception to the implementation stages of research, although they may not fully fund these often complicated and expensive stages. Consulting children as the largest 'user group' of research affecting them can redress inter-generation imbalances of power, but critical awareness of continuing structural inequalities and prejudices is vital. As the examples have shown, work by young researchers can open up new directions for research, and respect children's rights, or it can be misrepresented to produce the opposite effects. .

A booklet for young people 'whose sense of adventure and idealism is the only hope for more voluntary action in future against unsavoury acts towards man and Nature' quotes Gandhi: 'My humble occupation has been to show people how they can solve their own difficulties' (Oza 1991). Child researchers can increase understanding of their lives and interests, concerns and capacities, their needs, ingenuity and originality within the contexts of their family, community and environment. Their work can demonstrate how children can have unique and valid perspectives and insights, to inform social policy so that they can share in solving their own difficulties. However, a key question is: how can adults get beyond the power constraints and expose the intricacies of power in relations between adults and children? Research by children with its emphasis on addressing power before, during and after the formal research stages, with its use of potentially partly subversive games, and its expansion beyond thinking into shared doing, can offer useful approaches.

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. Children cannot simply set up restaurants in the UK as they can in New Delhi. The limitations in Europe and north America for research by

children seem to lie less therefore in children's (in)competencies, than in 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 and rights as social actors. This appreciation and respect can be catalysts, expanding adult funding and support for the stages, levels and methods of research in which children and young people can be active.

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