

Priscilla Alderson 2001 **Research by children rights and methods.**
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Abstract

This paper draws on an international literature to consider ways in which children work as researchers. Children's and teenagers' activities at various stages of research projects, their levels of participation, and their use of a range of research methods are described, with a review of some of the problems and advantages of children doing research.

Introduction

This review paper draws on a rapidly growing international literature about research by children. There are a few examples from my work with children, but most examples come from the semi-published 'grey literature' of newsletters and reports by voluntary organisations. '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.

For professional researchers to work with child co-researchers poses extra ethical and scientific questions. Can they work together on reasonably equal, informed and unpressured terms? How much should professional researchers intervene to support children or to control the research? How can adults avoid exploiting or manipulating children? Should children be paid? How much must or should their gate keepers - parents or teachers - be involved? And who should have final control over the data and reports?

The idea of seeing the previously 'researched' adult subject as a co-researcher, who helps to produce and analyse data and validate research reports, has long been acknowledged (Bloor, 1976; Acker, 1983), along with the complications for professional researchers who try to work with 'lay' people who have different perspectives and priorities. Arguments proposed by feminist and black researchers for the new insights they can bring when they do research about their own group also apply to children. However, Rhodes (1994) warned about problems of attempting to match black researchers with black subjects. Such efforts risk marginalising and devaluing the researchers, black people and all their concerns. Other dimensions of inequality between researchers and subjects may be more salient than colour, thus limiting the matching attempts and possibly obscuring important inequalities. Rhodes' view that black researchers should be involved at all stages of research and a general range of topics also applies to children.

Smith (1988: 181-205) did not treat her women subjects as co-researchers, but she consciously showed the advantages and difficulties of taking their 'standpoint' as a mother herself like them. She challenged the 'peculiar eclipsing' of women within men's culture, in order to theorise and shed new light on mothers' 'hidden work' which supports their child's schooling. Unconsciously, Smith also showed how adult-centric research can silence children as powerfully as the male-dominated research, which she criticised, silenced women. For example, mothers' contact with children is conceptualised as 'work', such as 'getting the kids off to school' (Smith, 1988:188), not as friendship, companionship, shared enjoyment or reciprocal support. Children then implicitly appear as dependent receivers of adult child-work, and not as competent contributors. In Smith's account, while mothers and teachers 'work' to 'shape' and 'manage' children, children

reactively 'perform' and thereby 'reflect' the quality of mothering or teaching they receive, in a curiously mechanical and non-interactive way. Children's own views, their informed consent, and the effects of the research on them, are not mentioned. Thus, inadvertently, Smith makes a strong case for conducting 'standpoint' research about children and with them, and illustrates how generation can be as vital a dimension for theoretical analysis as gender or ethnicity (Mayall, 1994). Smith and other feminists such as Oakley (1981) advocated research *for* and *by* women, and not simply *about* them. Lay researchers may be adults or children although children are inevitably 'lay'. When they research their own specific sub-groups, they can further develop research methods and theories *with* and *by* seldom-heard groups (Pratt and Loizos, 1992; West, 1997).

Such research is sometimes justified because it addresses power imbalances in the research relationship. Seven 16-year-olds, who did a short training and then tape-recorded interviews about 'my stay in hospital' with children aged 10 to 12 years, discussed these issues during their follow-up meeting. One interviewer commented:

'The boy I talked to was brain damaged, and he kept jumping around and on and off the bench. But he still kept talking and I think it was a good interview. It didn't matter, because I'm only 16, whereas if I'd been an adult I think I would have had to make him behave more quietly, and I don't think he would have told me so much then' (Alderson, 1995:108).

Peer research is also justified in terms of efficiency in that it encourages closer intimacy and fuller discussion between researchers and researched, and fuller understanding of the data. There is a danger that researchers will over-identify with interviewees and assume they understand too much, they may take replies for granted and lose their 'enquiring outsider' stance. Yet shared knowledge can be an advantage. Another of the 16-year-old interviewers said:

'I found it a great help that I'd been in hospital. I could think of lots more things to ask her about, and I think I know what she meant, such as when she said there weren't any nurses there at night time. We both knew that there were nurses there, but it felt like you were left all alone, and they don't come when you call them, and Sophia was afraid of waking the other children. I know that I might mix up some of her answers with my own experience, but I think on the whole it was helpful to know so much about what she was saying.'

The young interviewers talked extensively about differences between their own position and those of their interviewees however closely they identified with them, and about finding a balance between encouraging interviewees to talk but not being too intrusively probing. They felt some issues could be raised when the children could partly identify with their young interviewers, as when Deena aged ten years emphasised during her taped interview, 'They [adults] didn't listen to me, 'cos I was only a child. They don't listen when you're only a child. They should listen to children' (Alderson, 1995: 109).

Rights and research by children

An explicit and implicit theme within peer research is respect for the researched group and for their own views and abilities. Respect links closely to rights, and Conventions about rights offer a principled yet flexible means of justifying and extending respectful practices (Spencer, 1998). Rights Conventions with 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 took on a new dimension when so-called *participation* rights

were added to traditional rights to *protection* from neglect and abuse and to *provision* of goods and services. Until recently, research about children reflected earlier priorities, by measuring the effects of provision - health or education interventions - in their lives, or exploring children's protection needs as assessed by adults, or by investigating children's gradual development and socialisation towards adult competence. However, children's participation rights, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989's 54 articles, involve moderate versions of adult autonomy rights and concern children taking part more equally, in activities and decisions which affect them. The Convention says that 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). There is also 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' (article 13).

Rights complement yet also conflict with one another (reviewed in Alderson and Goodwin, 1993). Children's rights are qualified in being 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). 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 because rights express everyone's equal entitlement, and affirm 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 has ratified the Convention, undertaking to publicise it 'to adults and children alike', to implement it in law, policy and practice, and to report regularly to the UN on progress in doing so.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in accordance with article 12 are developing research with and by children. Other likely influences on children's greater participation in research include: the aftermath of the English 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 such as the family (Qvortrup et al, 1994; James and Prout, 1997); publicity about the youngest children's competencies in many areas of life (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Alderson, 2000). Recent enquiries in England into mismanagement of children's heart treatment and the removal of deceased babies' organs reemphasise the importance of practitioners and researchers requesting informed consent before they intervene. These medico-legal concerns about children's rights to physical and mental integrity are likely to filter into social research in time, although the British Education Research Association (1992) does not even mention children's consent in its ethical guidelines. (For a comparison of medical and social research ethics see Alderson, 1995.)

Respect for children's participation recognises them as subjects rather than objects of research, who 'speak' in their own right and report valid views and experiences. ('Speaking' may involve sign language and other expressive body language and sounds, such as those made by children with autism and severe learning difficulties (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.

Researchers' over-complicated or poorly explained terms, topics and methods can misleadingly make children (and adults) appear to be ignorant or incapable. Another obstacle in conducting research with children concerns infantilising them, perceiving and treating them as immature and inadvertently 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 are frequently collected from average samples of mainly healthy children (Wilkinson, 1988) who are relatively ignorant, whereas children with chronic illnesses have far greater knowledge; 2-year-olds with cancer can talk with profound understanding (Kendrick 1986). Some young children help adult researchers to set more appropriate levels of talk (Alderson, 1993; Solberg, 1997) and child researchers may be better able to think of appropriate topics, questions and terms for child interviewees. 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. The rest of this paper considers how they can be active researchers.

Children as researchers

Research is part of everyday life in schools I have visited. Five-year-olds makes graphs about pets owned by their classmates, 16-year-olds tape-recorded interviews with their friends about their parents' divorce or research local allotments threatened with closure by checking local authority records and observing council meetings. Ten-year-olds gather materials to design a pond for the school. In such 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, through the Child-to-Child Trust which promotes peer education, 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 on their research 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 (International Save the Children Alliance 1995:236).

A second 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, some children help to plan questions, and collect, analyse or report evidence, or publicise the findings. For example, on an accident-prone housing 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, 1995:34).

The teenagers' initial responses might 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 frequently enquire, scrutinise,

accept unexpected results, revise their ideas, and assume that their knowledge is incomplete and provisional. Pre-school children 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; 1998a, 1998b; PEG, 1998a; Article 12, 1999). 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 et al 1995, 1998). 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 to 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 link the findings into policy and practice to change the world. 'We want to show this to the social workers/ planning officers/ Department for Education/the United Nations,' may be explicit initial aims (West, 1997; PEG, 1998a; Article 12, 1999). 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 (Save the Children, 1995). The following examples illustrate work at various stages of research.

The Participation and Education Group (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. The Group made dramatic presentations about their research to health professionals and to 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 to 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, such as putting 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 the launch at the British Library of a report on pupil democracy in Europe (Davies and Kirkpatrick, 2000), school students from Denmark and Sweden described the rights they enjoyed which are less respected in many British

schools. Then Emma and James from Article 12 sternly told the audience to stand up. 'Sit down all of you who are chewing gum,' ordered Emma. 'And anyone who has not turned off their mobile phone.' An eminent government adviser sat down. 'And anyone wearing jewellery.' After ten commands almost all the audience was seated. 'If you were at school, you would have a detention and might be told not to attend school next day. But this has nothing to do with education, so why do schools keep doing this?' Emma continued. At the end of their presentation, Emma again ordered everyone to stand and then to sit down if they disagreed with any of her ten statements. These were about making schools more democratic and nearly everyone remained standing, except for the government adviser who sat down at the second statement: 'the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be part of the national curriculum.' Article 12 vividly demonstrated how out of touch government policy on citizenship education was with most people attending the conference.

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. A single project may work at several levels. 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 contacting young people and sharing initial planning with them. Even after such costly and time-consuming work, the project proposal has the same low chance of being funded as any other research, and during the months before grants are agreed, children and adults may move on to other interests. Despite their new interest in involving 'users', funders usually still require very detailed plans before they make grants, which allows little scope for children to develop ideas through the project.

Children's participation in research and policy has been extensively reported (Lorenzo, 1992; Hart, 1996; Johnson et al 1995, 1998; 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. When other topics were raised, 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. Their examples suggest that, with help, young children are able to share in the more complex aspects of research like planning and theoretical analysis.

Methods used by young researchers

Child researchers use a wide range of methods, from selecting topics, questions, samples and

observation sites through data collection to analysis and reporting, dissemination and policy discussions (for example, Save the Children 1996, 1997; Johnson et al, 1995, 1998; Ash et al, 1997; Beresford 1997; Kenny and Cockburn, 1997; Wellard et al 1997; PEG 1998a, 1998b; Article 12, 1999). 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, 1995) or to work on anti-poverty or anti-racist measures (Willow, 1997; Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education, n.d.). 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. Twenty-seven 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).

Working with a writer-in-residence (myself) six 10 to 11-year olds worked on a book about their unusual school. They reported and discussed many aspects of the school, surveyed and interviewed pupils and staff, helped to plan the chapter headings and organise the material, and provided much of the text (Cleves, 1999). Research reports involving a range of media and methods have been produced, for example, by a group supported by the National Children's Bureau (Tolley et al 1998), and by Article 12 (1999), a group run for and by people aged up to 18 years. They reviewed how well the UN Convention's article 12, children's rights to express their views, is put into practice across the UK. Their report, to accompany the British government's regular account to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, was intended to let the Committee 'know the truth'. It includes 'research tips for young people', with points such as, 'Don't lose the plot. Debate when an adult is needed to help, if so in what areas?' Rather than assess these reports, I have listed a range of examples so that readers may form their own views about them.

Research and play

A striking aspect of children's research is the combining of work and play. 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, 1995; Tresedar, 1997). To enjoy *being* together as well as *working* together 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' (Save the Children and Kirklees, 1996). 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 transparent, fun ways to assess opinions. Very young or unschooled children can contribute detailed data through their songs and dreams, by making models, drawings or maps about their daily mobility and routines (Johnson et al, 1995, 1998; Boyden and Ennew, 1997) or about their local wild life (Hart, 1997:98). As play is so flexible, and sometimes subversively creative, it enables 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, for example, 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 (International Save the Children Alliance, 1995:239). In Sarajevo in 1993, 18 editors aged 10-to 13-years ran a radio programme, Colourful Wall, with an estimated 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. Children are more likely to be involved in practical research as workers, and to be regarded and respected as workers, in countries with high levels of child labour, and in war torn countries with a shortage of adult workers.

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 whose 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 four 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. Their main concerns are for their human rights and 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 part-time vocational training rather than schooling)

It is rare for intended beneficiaries of international aid programmes to be asked for their views, still rarer for them to present research reports of their peers' views. The Bangladeshi children's answers challenge global aid programmes by their requests for minimal help to make realistic improvements in their daily lives. They also show how adults may not know children's best interests without consulting them. Sometimes, as this research shows, 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 illustrates the importance of listening respectfully to young people's views when planning services intended to help them.

Discussion

I set out to write a paper on ethics and rights in research *about* children, which kept turning into a paper on research *by* children. This paper simply explores key issues in a new area, a prelude to more systematic and extensive evaluations, and does not attempt to provide firm answers to the questions in the introduction, but rather to include them in this early mapping. A brief initial review reveals impressive skill, knowledge and dedication among young researchers, but to avoid presenting too glowing an account, this paper ends with a few points about the problems and advantages of research by children.

Researchers of all ages and experience tend to produce pristine reports which gloss over the numerous inevitable difficulties during the research process, such as matching funding to costs, gaining access, maintaining records, managing teamwork, meeting deadlines and many other complications. Added to these, for young and lay adult researchers, are their inexperienced and

usually unpaid status (Pratt and Loizos, 1992), so that they themselves, their research subjects, and their professional colleagues may doubt that they are adequate to the task. Yet these latter types of difficulties appear to arise through social expectations rather than through any integral inadequacies in young researchers, indeed, their projects reported so far challenge traditional under-estimations. The importance of training and supporting young researchers and helping them to achieve high standards is stressed by one reviewer (Kirby, 1999) who recommends careful training (Worrall, 2000). However, almost all the useful points would apply to novice researchers of any age.

How much professional researchers should intervene to support them or to control the research, and how they can avoid exploiting or manipulating children, as in the participation ladders mentioned earlier, will depend on informed negotiation within each team, with generous time allowed for frank discussions. Adults are concerned about how much to encourage young researchers to analyse their interviewees' responses critically, and to distinguish between rhetoric and reality. An advantage in formally funded NGO projects is that they tend to involve disadvantaged young researchers with practical experience of the services they are investigating. Payment is especially controversial, with uncertainty about how much time children can be expected to give to research beyond the work they may already do at school, at home or outside the home, or begging, whether they should be paid in cash or in kind, and how to meet extra expenses for young researchers, their adult escorts and their assistants if they are disabled. Many professional research teams dispute ownership over data and publication rights; it is helpful to agree these early during a project, ensuring that the young people are properly informed before they decide. Working with child researchers does not simply resolve problems of power, exploitation or coercion. Methods need to be planned, tested, evaluated and developed with them, to turn problems into opportunities for children and adults to increase their skill and knowledge.

To summarise the advantages: 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 (Johnson et al, 1995). 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.

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 increasingly expect researchers to work closely with user groups. This has potential disadvantages when powerful commercial or professional bodies prevent researchers from being adventurous, independent and critical. Working with young researchers to consult children, as the largest 'user group' of research affecting them, can help to redress inter-generation imbalances of power, open up new directions for research, respect their rights, and draw on children's unique perspectives to inform social policy and practice.

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